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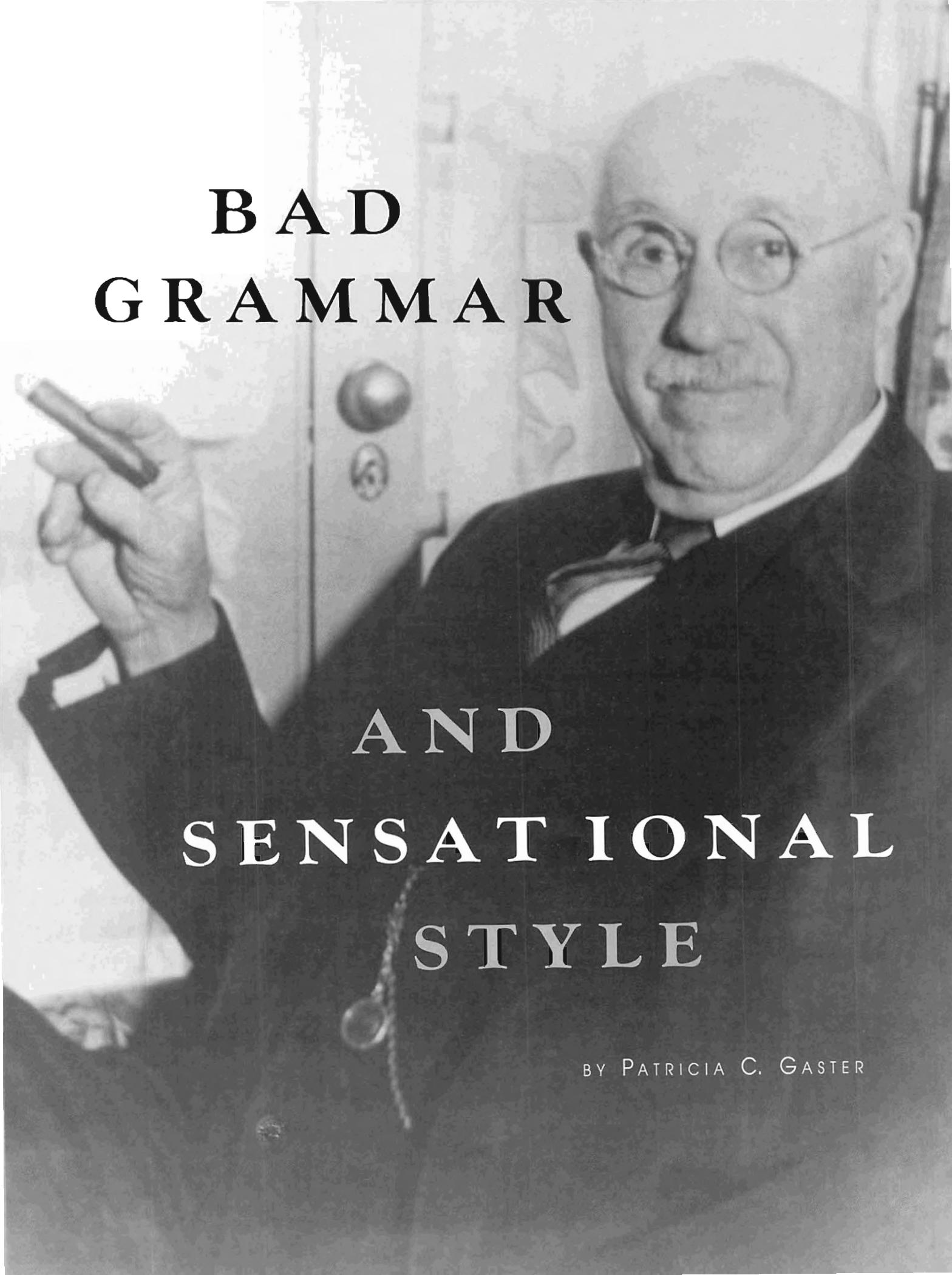
Article Summary: Long before Nebraska ratified the Eighteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, anti-alcohol sentiment was a contentious force in territorial and state politics. The *Daily Bumble Bee* figured prominently in the fight for Prohibition in 1890 in Nebraska, though it survived less than one week. It ceased publication as soon as the results of the 1890 election were definitely known, having provided a last-minute boost to the pro-amendment cause.

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Names: William Eugene Johnson, Edward Rosewater, George Howard Gibson, C V "Con" Gallagher, T S Clarkson, Richard C Cushing, Sam D Cox, T S Clarkson, Bartlett L Paine, J E Miller, James E Boyd, Lucius D Richards, John H Powers, Andrew G Wolfenbarger, Artemis Roberts, Henry C Bittenbender, George W Woodbey, T J Calvin, Addison E Sheldon, Charles Watts, A Fitch, H W Hardy, F P Wigton, C Olson, Mrs Mary R Morgan, Victor Rosewater, John P St John, Charles A Coe, Edward P Roggen, George L Miller, A Lucius Rodman, M L Holt, Q H Shinn, John Yardley, Eddie Richardson, L M Rheem, Lem J Smith, F A McKenzie, George B Skinner, W B Smith, A W Lamar, C E Bentley, Charles Rosewater

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Photographs / Images: William E Johnson, founder of the *Bumble Bee*; *Omaha Leader* and *New Republic* excerpts; Bartlett L Paine, Prohibition candidate for governor; *Omaha Bee* building; printed party ticket for Prohibition Congressional Ticket

A black and white photograph of an older man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a dark suit and tie. He is holding a cigar in his right hand and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is slightly out of focus, showing what appears to be a door or wall with a circular knob.

**BAD
GRAMMAR**

**AND
SENSATIONAL
STYLE**

BY PATRICIA C. GASTER



The *Daily Bumble Bee* was published for less than a week in support of a prohibition amendment to the Nebraska constitution, a proposal that capped a wave of temperance feeling in the 1890s.

The *Daily Bumble Bee* and the Fight for Prohibition in 1890

LONG BEFORE 1919, WHEN NEBRASKA RATIFIED THE Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution establishing national prohibition, Nebraska's anti-alcohol sentiment was a contentious force in territorial and state politics. One of the first acts of the territorial legislature was to outlaw the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Although it was never enforced, the law remained in effect from 1855 to 1858, when a saloon-licensing act became law.

In 1867, when Nebraska entered the union, the act of 1858 remained in force. A measure enacted in 1881, the Slocumb "high license" liquor law, raised license fees to \$500 for each saloon in towns under 10,000 population and to \$1,000 in those over 10,000.¹

A wave of temperance feeling during the late 1880s (promoted by "dry" societies, churches, and the Prohibition Party) culminated in 1890 with a popular vote on a prohibition amendment to the state constitution. On October 30, just five days

before the election, pro-amendment (dry) forces in Omaha began publishing a four-column, four-page newspaper called the *Daily Bumble Bee* for free distribution throughout the city. Produced under the auspices of the Nebraska Non-Partisan Amendment League and the state Prohibition Party, the paper was the brainchild of prohibitionist William Eugene (later "Pussyfoot") Johnson. Although his name does not appear on the masthead, contemporary newspaper accounts, as well as Johnson's later autobiographical writings, identify him as the editor of the *Bumble Bee*. Three issues of the *Daily Bumble Bee*—October 30, November 1, and November 3—are on microfilm at the Nebraska State Historical Society Library/Archives.²

Nebraska has a long history of short-lived temperance newspapers that frequently died from lack of financial support, but Johnson's *Bumble Bee* is one of the most unusual. Its turbulent life of less than one week ended as soon as the results of the 1890 election were definitely known. It had fulfilled its purpose—to provide a last-minute boost to the pro-amendment cause.

Opposite: William E. Johnson of Lincoln, founder of the *Bumble Bee*, went on to a colorful career as a U.S. special agent and acquired the colorful nickname "Pussyfoot." NSHS RG2092-1-4

DAILY BUMBLE BEE.

"Truth Crushed to Earth Shall Rise Again."

Opponents dismissed the *Bumble Bee* as prohibitionist sensationalism, but Johnson evidently had fond memories of the little paper. His later recollections and other accounts of the fight for the 1890 prohibition amendment often mention the Omaha "temporary daily," sometimes without naming the paper or noting its very brief duration.³

"Pussyfoot" Johnson, who acquired national renown along with his colorful nickname after 1906 while serving as a special agent for the U.S. Department of the Interior to suppress the illegal sale of liquor to Indians in Oklahoma, was already known in Nebraska temperance circles by 1890. Born in New York State on March 25, 1862, he went West as a young man, settling in Dodge County, Nebraska.

He taught school in rural Dodge County for a time in the early 1880s and attended the University of Nebraska. Although he never graduated, Johnson was active in student affairs. He managed the *Hesperian Student*, the college literary periodical, and engaged in public speaking. After leaving school he went into the real estate business in Lincoln. He was also on the staff of the *Lincoln Daily News* from 1884 to 1886 and worked for the Nebraska News Bureau.⁴

Always a total abstainer, Johnson enthusiastically entered the amendment battle in 1890. Less than thirty years old and with an aggressive demeanor, he developed in Nebraska some of the bold tactics he later used in Oklahoma and elsewhere. Posing as a liquor dealer, he sent an inquiry to several anti-prohibitionists on bogus "Johnson's Pale Ale" letterhead, asking for—and receiving—advice on defeating the prohibitory amendment in Nebraska, thus giving prohibition supporters inside information about the tactics to be expected from anti-prohibition forces.

The name of his little paper was inspired by Edward Rosewater's Republican *Omaha Bee*, a leading anti-amendment influence throughout the state.⁵ The Democratic *World-Herald* and other Omaha newspapers (with the exception of the *Omaha Leader*, edited by George Howard Gibson) opposed the amendment. Omaha, the largest city in the state, was home to several breweries and benefited from the high saloon license fees

collected there, making it the center of anti-amendment feeling.⁶

Among Lincoln and Omaha dailies only the *Lincoln Call* consistently favored the amendment throughout the campaign, advertising itself as the "leading 'for the amendment' paper in the state." Early in the campaign the *Call* had realized that prohibition supporters could not succeed without assistance from temperance organizations outside the state. "Prohibitionists everywhere should regard this campaign as a national rather than a state contest," the paper editorialized on June 13, 1890, "and contribute freely in this emergency."⁷

Posing as a liquor dealer

he sent an inquiry to several anti-prohibitionists on bogus

"Johnson's Pale Ale"

letterhead asking for advice on defeating the amendment.

On October 25, 1890, the *Call* learned that Omaha postmaster C. V. "Con" Gallagher and his soon-to-be-installed replacement, T. S. Clarkson, were holding more than ten thousand copies of that day's issue at the Omaha post office. Copies of the *New York Voice*, a national prohibition weekly that raised funds for and reported the pro-amendment fight in Nebraska, and the *Omaha Leader* also were being held. The *Call* charged that Gallagher had political motives for refusing to allow distribution of the newspapers and blasted a conspiracy of saloon-keepers and their political tools (including Gallagher and Omaha mayor Richard C. Cushing) for sparing no effort to defeat the amendment.⁸

Omaha postal authorities offered several excuses for their delaying action. They described the copies of the *Call* and *Voice* as sample copies that did not demand immediate delivery. Postal

Patricia C. Gaster is assistant editor of Nebraska History.

HAVE YOU SEEN

THE OMAHA LEADER,

THE LEADING REFORM PAPER OF THE WEST?

Strenuously Opposed to Saloons and Saloon Rule, Advocating The Rights of Labor, Determined that Justice Shall Be Secured to all.

It Seeks and Spreads the Truth is Fearlessly Loyal to it, its Mission is to Make it Known. Money or the Lack of Money cannot Swerve it from Principle. Its Aim is to Do Good. A Morally Healthful, Conscience-Enlightening Family Paper, Asking Your Sympathy and Support.

One Dollar per Year.

Address:

**GEO. H. GIBSON,
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER,
OMAHA, NEB.**

**THE
NEW REPUBLIC.**

A Prohibition Weekly Paper.

STATE ORGAN

—OF THE—

PROHIBITION PARTY.

One Dollar per Year.

**Published by
H. W. HARDY, ED.,
LINCOLN, NEB.**

The *Omaha Leader*, a reform newspaper, and the *New Republic*, the official Prohibition Party newspaper that supported the party's entire platform, also supported the 1890 prohibition amendment. From Flora Hamilton Cassel, *White Ribbon Songbook*, 1890

authorities charged the *Leader* with offering premiums to readers who recruited new subscribers for the paper, an alleged violation of a federal anti-lottery law. The *Call* sent staff member Sam D. Cox to Omaha to try to secure delivery of the papers, and prohibitionists threatened legal action. The *Call* appealed to postal authorities in Washington and finally secured a federal order on October 29 instructing Gallagher to deliver the delayed copies of the *Call* and *Voice*. However, Gallagher did not promptly comply.⁹

Attempts to use other methods to get the newspapers into the hands of Omaha voters also failed. Cox tried to hire the American District Telegraph, which regularly delivered advertising material, but the A.D.T. refused his request to deliver the impounded issues of the *Call* or any other prohibitionist literature. Johnson and a prohibition attorney visited the A.D.T. office but failed to persuade the company to relent.¹⁰

Johnson, a correspondent for both the *Call* and *Voice*, was determined to reach the voters of

Omaha with the pro-amendment message. On October 30, 1890, less than a week before election day, he launched the afternoon *Daily Bumble Bee* into battle against its chief opponent, Rosewater's *Bee*. Readers were told that the *Bumble Bee's* mission was to "tell the truth, correct the infamous lies that are scattered by a subsidized press, and give the citizens of Omaha a chance to reach the public in a truthful manner." It charged the *Bee* and the *World-Herald* with treating prohibitionists unfairly and warned, "We do not propose to let Public Censor Gallagher suppress us on account of being sample copies." Johnson hired the Standard Printing Company to print the newspapers, and newsboys throughout the city distributed them free.¹¹

Political opinion in Nebraska regarding prohibition was complex in 1890. The Republican Party was divided on the liquor question. A majority of its members were dry, and Republican state legislators had urged in 1889 that the question of constitutional prohibition be put to the people in



Bartlett L. Paine, Prohibition candidate for governor. Paine's business partnership with J. E. Miller eventually became the Miller and Paine department store in downtown Lincoln. NSHS RG2411-5935a

1890. However, there was an active wet element within the party. Two leading dailies on opposite sides of the amendment issue, the "pro" *Lincoln Call* and the "anti" *Omaha Bee*, were both Republican. Democrats adopted an anti-prohibition plank in their 1890 party platform, with many favoring the existing high-license system, and concentrated on the election of former Omaha mayor James E. Boyd, an outspoken opponent of prohibition, to the governorship. The People's Independent ticket was predominantly dry but tried to sidestep the issue, believing that a formal endorsement of prohibition would detract from its overall economic objectives.¹²



Edward Rosewater's *Omaha Bee*, was a "wet" Republican daily with a magnificent building and statewide influence. NSHS RG2341-182

There were other gubernatorial candidates besides Boyd in the field in 1890: Lucius D. Richards, Republican; John H. Powers, People's Independent; and Bartlett L. Paine, Prohibition. There were two temperance political groups: the Nebraska Non-Partisan Amendment League, formed in June 1889 specifically to work for a prohibition amendment, and the regular state Prohibition Party, with a platform supporting not only the amendment, but the Australian ballot, woman suffrage, direct election of federal officers, and state ownership of railroads.

The Non-Partisan Amendment League sought to organize local pro-amendment leagues in every county, township, city, village, and precinct in Nebraska. The Prohibition Party, under the lead of Andrew G. Wolfenbarger, Artemis Roberts, and Henry C. Bittenbender, nominated a slate of candidates headed by Paine, a prominent Lincoln merchant, for governor and George W. Woodbey, an African American minister of Omaha, for lieutenant governor.¹³

Paine had arrived in Lincoln in 1878, established a homeopathic medical practice, and in 1884 entered business with J. E. Miller to form what later became the Miller and Paine department store. Woodbey, a self-educated native of Tennessee, became an ordained Baptist minister in 1874 and served churches in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. He left the Republican Party because it was "too cowardly to take up this fight for prohibition," serving not only as Nebraska's Prohibition Party candidate for lieutenant governor in 1890, but as the party's candidate for Congress in 1894. He later bolted the party to endorse William Jennings Bryan in his failed 1896 presidential campaign. By 1900 Woodbey had turned to socialism and in 1902 left Nebraska for San Diego.¹⁴

From the beginning the *Bumble Bee* viewed itself as a David against Rosewater's Goliath. When the *Bee* criticized Woodbey as "an Omaha gent of off color, whose zest for the cause can only be measured by the boodle in sight," the *Bumble Bee* leaped to his defense. Calling Woodbey "a credit to his race . . . who can stand on the platform and defend himself at any time against all comers," the paper asked rhetorically, "[W]ill the colored voters of Omaha submit to such indignities?"¹⁵

The effects of prohibition in the neighboring dry states of Iowa and Kansas were discussed in the first issue of the *Bumble Bee*, that of October 30. The paper criticized Charles Conoyer of the Omaha Board of Education for his letter to Nebraska teachers attacking prohibition in Iowa and Kansas. The letter, written on official board

stationery, was signed and circulated by Conoyer without the permission of the board. Letters from George W. Winans and Henry Sibin, state superintendents of public instruction in Kansas and Iowa respectively, refuted allegations in Conoyer's letter by giving a favorable view of prohibition in their states. T. J. Calvin, probate judge of Labette County, Kansas, also deemed prohibition a success there.¹⁶

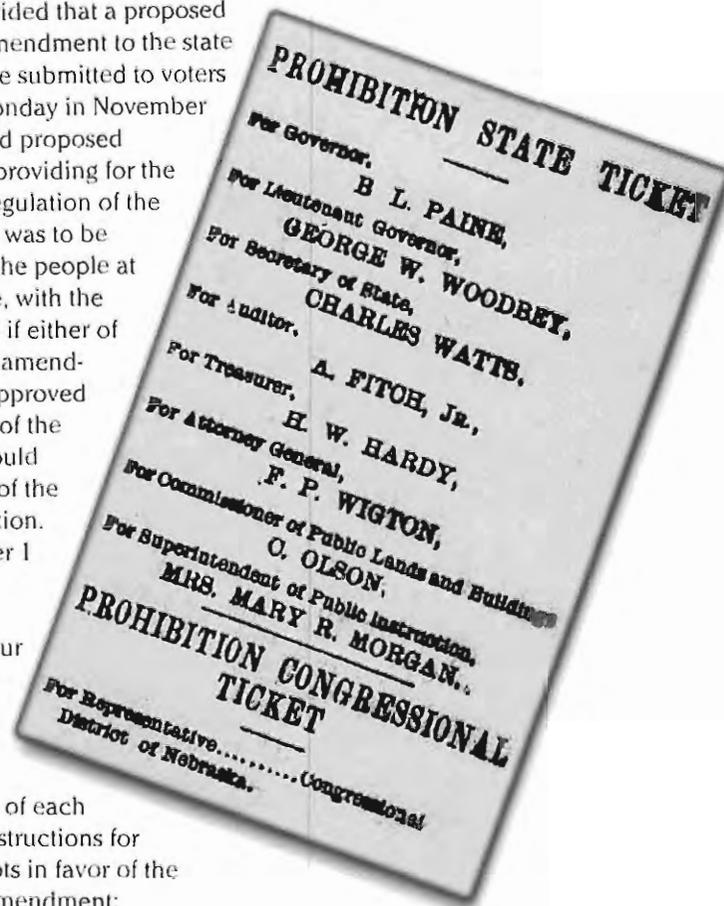
The *Bumble Bee* attacked Rosewater and Omaha attorney John L. Webster, who had recently warned the ministers of Omaha against becoming politically involved in the campaign by promoting prohibition from the pulpit. Webster further infuriated prohibitionists by suggesting that it would be proper to withhold financial support from ministers who publicly supported the amendment.¹⁷

Rosewater, who along with Webster, bore the brunt of statewide speaking engagements against the amendment, was criticized by the *Bumble Bee* for his role in a widely publicized debate at Chadron. Held on Friday evening, October 24, 1890, it pitted the editor of the *Omaha Bee* against Addison E. Sheldon, then editor of the temperance *Chadron Advocate* (later superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society), on the merits of the proposed amendment. Sheldon took the stage as a last-minute substitute for Woodbey, the Prohibition Party candidate for lieutenant governor, because when Rosewater arrived in Chadron and learned the identity of his scheduled opponent, according to the *Call*, he "flatly refused to debate with him saying 'Woodb[e]y was not a big enough man; had no national reputation.' So the [pro-] amendment people were compelled to trot out a local speaker with only ten minutes notice to meet the great Rosewater." Woodbey did take the platform for about twenty-five minutes, but only after Rosewater and Sheldon had spoken. He spent several additional days in Chadron, lecturing on behalf of temperance and the prohibitory amendment.¹⁸

Although the *Bumble Bee* fulminated in print against its enemies, instructions to voters were also an important part of its columns. A century ago, voting was different from today's balloting. Before the passage of the Australian Ballot Act of 1891, Nebraskans voted in general elections using ballots or tickets that were distributed by each party and pre-printed and with the names of that party's candidates. Voters carried their ballots to the polling place. Although voters were urged to vote a straight ticket, any voter was free to alter a party-printed ballot or to make his own. Should a voter oppose a candidate on his ballot, he "scratched"

the ticket by crossing out the unwanted person's name.

The Nebraska State Legislature of 1889 had provided that a proposed prohibitory amendment to the state constitution be submitted to voters on the first Monday in November 1890. A second proposed amendment, providing for the license and regulation of the sale of liquor, was to be submitted to the people at the same time, with the provision that if either of the proposed amendments were approved by a majority of the electors, it would become part of the state constitution. The November 1 issue of the *Bumble Bee* printed the four choices relating to the liquor issue to be offered at the bottom of each ballot, and instructions for marking ballots in favor of the prohibitory amendment:



FOR proposed amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and keeping for sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage.

AGAINST said proposed amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and keeping for sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage.

FOR proposed amendment to the Constitution that the manufacture, sale, and keeping for sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage in this state shall be licensed and regulated by law.

AGAINST said proposed amendment to the Constitution that the manufacture, sale, and keeping for sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage shall be licensed and regulated by law.¹⁹

The intent of the state legislature in placing both amendments on the ballot was to give voters an opportunity to pass one and defeat the other.

Before passage of the Australian Ballot Act of 1890 voters carried printed party tickets to the polling place. They could scratch out and replace candidates if they did not want to vote a straight ticket. The *New Republic*, Oct. 30, 1890

Many voters, however, were confused by the proximity and similar initial wording of the two measures, and many marked ballots didn't reflect the voter's intentions. The *Nebraska State Journal* of Lincoln pointed out that persons desiring to vote for either one of the two amendments must "be careful to see that they vote affirmatively and scratch the negative vote relating to that proposition." No affirmative vote at all—as well as a scratch of all four choices—would be interpreted as a vote against both amendments.²⁰

The *Journal*, which opposed the prohibitory amendment, accused prohibitionists of circulating ballots in which the amendment propositions were illegally altered "in the hope that ignorance or carelessness may increase the number of votes for prohibition," a misdemeanor under state law punishable by a fine of not less than fifty dollars nor more than two hundred dollars and imprisonment for sixty days in the county jail. Victor Rosewater in his biography of his father, Edward, wrote that much of the disorder in Omaha during the November 4, 1890, voting occurred when prohibitionists offering illegally printed ballots to voters were chased from the polls. Prohibitionists, in turn, accused their opponents of circulating illegally altered ballots that did not allow a vote for the amendment.²¹

Besides attempting to get their party's ballots into the hands of Omahans, prohibitionists tried to prevent ineligible voters from casting ballots. They viewed with alarm the report that the number of polling places in Omaha at the end of October had been increased from twenty to forty-one and that about five thousand more names would shortly be added to the eighteen thousand Omaha voters already registered. Prohibitionists scrutinized registration lists and considered stationing party workers at polling places on Election Day to challenge individual voters.²²

The *Bumble Bee* and other prohibitionist papers questioned the accuracy of the 1890 census in Nebraska, particularly in the "tough districts" of Omaha, and charges circulated that names had been added to census lists in a scheme to allow wets to control the ballot box. The *Call* warned of

"doctored" poll books printed by the Republican Printing Company of Omaha that could result in incorrect recording of the amendment vote. In his 1931 history of the state, Addison E. Sheldon, who had personal memories of the 1890 election, asserted his belief that not only had thousands of fraudulent ballots been cast in Douglas County, but that election officials had deliberately held back precinct returns so that they could manufacture enough additional illegal votes to overcome any adverse majority in outstate Nebraska.²³

A curious incident that embarrassed the prohibitionists just prior to the election concerned the "Free Grand Barbecue" advertised by the *Bumble Bee* on October 30 for the afternoon of Sunday, November 2 at prohibition headquarters in Amendment Hall at 1307 Douglas Street in Omaha. According to the *Bumble Bee*, Edward Rosewater was to be "roasted" by John P. St. John. As governor of Kansas (1879–83) St. John had successfully supported a prohibition amendment to the Kansas constitution and had been speaking publicly in Nebraska on behalf of the proposed amendment.²⁴

However, the advertised roast never took place, and the *Bumble Bee*, on November 1, announced that St. John would speak at Amendment Headquarters the following day. There was no mention of Rosewater. The editor of the *Bee* out-maneuvered his opponents by challenging St. John to a debate at the Omaha Coliseum also to be held on November 2, the same afternoon as the proposed roast and the Amendment Hall event.

St. John did not go to the coliseum to meet Rosewater, saying he had not learned of the challenge until he reached Omaha. The suspicious pointed out that St. John must have known of the challenge, since he had told the *Call* the night before in Lincoln that he declined to accept it.²⁵

On November 2 the Kansas ex-governor spoke alone, as he had originally planned, to a crowded house of about seven hundred people in Amendment Hall. A *World-Herald* reporter who attended complained, "Every one who entered the door was treated to a copious dose of *Lincoln Call* and *Bumble Bee* and divers other forms of erratic literature in the bad grammar and sensational style of the imported prohibitionists."

At the coliseum Rosewater spoke alone to more than five thousand people—an event marred only near its conclusion by prohibitionist Charles Watts's unexpected ascent to the stage to read the crowd a telegram from St. John, stating again that he had not known of Rosewater's challenge in time to accept it.

ST. JOHN

AT

Amendment Headquarters,

1307 DOUGLAS ST

**

SUNDAY AT 4 00 P.

Also in the Evening at 7:30.

**

COME EVERYBODY

As Long as there is Standing Room
in the Building!

CAPITAL COMING

**Nebraska Finances All Right—
More Telling Evidence.**

Kansas ex-Governor St. John was to "roast" *Bee* publisher Edward Rosewater at a barbecue, but when Rosewater challenged him to a debate, St. John instead spoke alone at Amendment Headquarters. *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890

“We have the drunkard-makers on the run.”

The *Bumble Bee* on November 3 tried to bury the botched affair, complaining that it had announced the roast in good faith, but “the Ex-Governor absolutely refused to keep the appointment, saying that while he was something of a cannibal, and loved the taste of human flesh, yet he drew the line on Rosewater.”²⁶

The November 1 *Bumble Bee* assailed the anti-amendment State Business Men’s and Bankers’ Association, claiming that the association had been repudiated by 64 percent of Nebraska’s bankers. Headed by Charles A. Coe, with Edward P. Roggen as secretary, the newly formed group sought to defend the commercial and industrial prosperity of the state against a prohibitory amendment driven by what it called “delusive sentimentalism.” Roggen, secretary of state 1883–87, had toured Nebraska seeking signatures for an anti-amendment statement published by Rosewater’s *Bee* on June 21 that also announced to the public the formation of the association.²⁷

The November 1 *Bumble Bee* sought to counter the claims of “Roggen, Rosewater & Co.,” that, should Nebraska adopt prohibition, eastern capitalists would seek other fields in which to invest their wealth. A reprint from the *New York Voice* of excerpts from Dr. George L. Miller’s letters to A. Lucius Rodman, secretary of the New York State Protective Association, seemed to indicate that the Nebraska State Business Men’s and Bankers’ Association was funded and controlled by Omaha liquor dealers.²⁸

M. L. Holt, who had resigned from Omaha’s Park Place Congregational Church to organize the city’s churches on behalf of prohibition, defended the role played by Omaha ministers in the fight for the amendment in the columns of the *Bumble Bee*. Civil War veteran and Universalist minister Q. H. Shimm labeled as obstructionists those who believed prohibition would be impossible to enforce. Lincoln attorney Wolfenbarger, legal representative of the *New York Voice* in Nebraska, predicted success in the rapidly approaching election. “We have the drunkard-makers on the run,” Wolfenbarger told the *Bumble Bee*. “Webster is growing weary and Rosewater is fairly crazy.”²⁹

The November 1 *Bumble Bee* also attempted to counter unfavorable publicity caused by the recent arrest of John Yardley, a clerk employed at Amendment Headquarters. Yardley was suspected of embezzling funds from a previous employer in Montreal and was apprehended and jailed in Omaha, much to the embarrassment of his strait-laced, pro-amendment friends. Rosewater’s *Bee*

reported the incident gleefully, accusing Yardley not only of thievery, but also of drunkenness and “spying” for the prohibitionists.³⁰

The spying charge was one frequently leveled against pro-amendment workers. Johnson himself had been accused of roaming Omaha under the assumed name of Dean, identifying himself as a

Enemies on the Run

Wolfenbarger Says the Amendment Victory is in Sight.

WE ARE GOING TO WIN.

The Prohibitionists Have Out-Generated the Rummies at Every Turn.

The Bumble BEE met A. G. Wolfenbarger, the Lincoln lawyer at the Paxton yesterday and asked about the outlook for prohibition in the state.

“We have the drunkard-makers on the run,” said Mr. Wolfenbarger. “Webster is growing weary and Rosewater is fairly crazy. Even the fat and cool schemer Roggen has about given up the fight. The registration in Omaha shows that the repeaters

Omaha attorney Andrew Wolfenbarger, a Prohibition Party leader, may have fully expected victory or simply predicted victory as an election tactic. *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890



correspondent for Kansas City and St. Louis newspapers while gathering information useful to the prohibitionists. In defense of Yardley, the *Bumble Bee* replied that he had not been spying—he had merely been checking voter registration lists. But the newspaper did concede that he had “monkeyed a little too much with the wine cup” and placed all blame for his alleged misdeeds on the saloon, declaring, “[W]e will continue the fight for its extermination.”³¹

Although prohibitionists sometimes used highly visible methods (such as assembling an “ex-liquor legion” of reformed drunkards in Lincoln to march in a solid phalanx to the polls on November 4), the anti-amendment forces in Omaha were accused of using even more aggressive tactics. On the day before the election, November 3, the *Bumble Bee* regaled its readers with details of an attack on Eddie Richardson, a newsboy distributing copies of the *Call* and *Bumble Bee* on the streets of

Omaha beer drinkers at a saloon on Thirteenth Street between Harney and Farnam, 1886. The prohibition amendment was voted down in Douglas County by 23,918 to 1,555 votes. NSHS RG2341-100



Omaha. When Johnson tried to intervene, said the *Bumble Bee*, the alleged assailants, L. M. Rheem, an A.D.T. manager, and several friends, rushed Johnson. After a scuffle, Johnson and prohibitionist Lem J. Smith, who came to Johnson's aid, were arrested and jailed.³²

The *Call* published Sam Cox's extended account of the incident, noting that both Johnson and Smith were charged by Omaha police with carrying concealed weapons, and Johnson was

also charged with assault. Rheem was not charged. Johnson and Smith were released from jail several hours later, and Johnson eventually paid a fine of \$7.50 in police court. An adulatory biography of Johnson by F. A. McKenzie, published in 1920, depicts a heroic young reformer rescuing the newsboy, hiding his gun up his sleeve when apprehended by slow-witted police, and then scornfully handing it to them at the station.³³

Rosewater's *Bee* and the *World-Herald*, predictably, portrayed Rheem as the innocent victim of an unprovoked attack by Johnson and Smith. Johnson in 1890 was described as rugged and "well built," with a heavy jaw and dark brown mustache. The *Bee*, noting that \$115 had been found on him at the time of his arrest, told readers that he "looked . . . like a disreputable person who had sought to work the prohibitionists and had done it very successfully."³⁴

Other incidents involving "whiskey bullies" attacking distributors of prohibition newspapers appeared in the November 3 *Bumble Bee*. State university students defended their professors from charges of trying to influence the student vote. George B. "Bishop" Skinner, a Lincoln livery stable owner best known for his work with the local Red Ribbon temperance club, contributed to the colorful campaign rhetoric. Readers were urged to "Remember W. B. Smith," a U.S. Circuit Court clerk whose unsolved shooting death in 1881 was thought to have been planned by the Omaha liquor element. Baptist minister A. W. Lamar defended his right to discuss prohibition from the pulpit. Omaha mayor Cushing was denounced for his declaration, "All is fair in war. Let us consider this war and defeat prohibition, if not in one way, then in another."³⁵

Also in the November 3 issue of the *Bumble Bee* was a tongue-in-check "universal directory of mankind," consisting of two classes of society: those who supported the prohibitory amendment and those who didn't. The former included churches, wives, sweethearts, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the "better class" of lawyers, thinking businessmen, and God. The latter included saloons, bums, thugs, the *Bee*, the *World-Herald*, the *Nebraska State Journal*, the Omaha A.D.T., and the State Business Men's and Bankers' Association. A separate plea for passage of the amendment carried the names and occupations of more than one hundred Omahans.³⁶

Newspaper rhetoric from the closing days of the heated amendment campaign of 1890 sounds strident and bigoted to a modern ear. The prohibi-

IN 1890
THE AVERAGE
PER CAPITA
CONSUMPTION
OF ALL LIQUOR,
INCLUDING BEER
WAS
13.21
GALLONS.

tionists were well aware that Nebraska's heavy ethnic vote would work against them. "It is horrible to think that so many saloon keepers are of foreign birth," said the November 3 *Bumble Bee*, noting in a separate article that of the 129 names of anti-amendment ministers published by Rosewater, "only two Americans [were] in the whole lot."³⁷

Rosewater, in turn, complained in his November 2 speech at the Omaha Coliseum that he had received numerous threatening letters and read to his audience a recent one postmarked Nelson, Nebraska:

If prohibition is defeated, four of us have decided that you must die, and Webster, too. It will take time, but we will not let you slip, nor him, either. . . . We thought we would give you and him one chance for your worthless carcasses, and only one.³⁸

Despite all the effort and invective the prohibitionists could muster, the amendment drive failed. The statewide vote on prohibition was 82,292 for the amendment and 111,728 against it. In Douglas County the vote was 1,555 for and 23,918 against. The amendment to make the licensing of saloons a constitutional measure also failed to pass. With both amendments defeated, the state was left with the existing high license regulation. James E. Boyd, the successful Democratic nominee for governor, received 71,331 votes. Powers, the People's Independent candidate, received 70,187, and Richards, the Republican candidate, 68,878.³⁹

B. L. Paine of the Prohibition Party waged a vigorous campaign to the end, receiving 3,676 votes. Considerable excitement was caused by the last-minute discovery that a number of Prohibition Party tickets had been sent out with the name of gubernatorial nominee Paine scratched and that of Republican candidate Richards written in. Paine denied forcefully that he had withdrawn in favor of the Republican candidate, and told the press he would continue in the race until the polls were closed.⁴⁰

Anti-prohibitionists, especially in Omaha, were jubilant when the results of the election became known, although some were surprised by the landslide vote against the amendment. They had predicted that, if passed, it would discourage new settlement in Nebraska, drive out capital, cause property values to decline, and throw laborers out of work as businesses failed. The *State Journal* welcomed the decisive defeat of prohibition, noting that the people of Nebraska seemed to prefer regulating the liquor traffic by the existing high

"The whole city is given over to the whisky mob. There is riot and bloodshed in nearly every ward."



The "wet" *Omaha World-Herald* celebrated election results with a cartoon showing Nebraska Democracy sweeping prohibitionists out of the state. *Morning World-Herald*, Nov. 5, 1890

license statutes.⁴¹

However, many pro-amendment campaigners seemed stunned. The *Call* had claimed in August that four hundred of the six hundred Nebraska newspapers favored the amendment. As late as November 1 Wolfenbarger, ever optimistic, predicted in the *Bumble Bee* a sweeping majority for the amendment, boasting, "The Prohibitionists have outgeneraled the rummies at every turn." More than thirty-five years after the election Johnson still insisted that in the late 1880s public opinion in Nebraska had been "overwhelmingly" in favor of prohibition, as evidenced by the growth of the Prohibition Party and the favorable declarations of church bodies and other organizations.⁴²

A notice of contest was filed almost immediately amid denunciations of conditions surrounding the voting in Omaha and accusations of a conspiracy by wet politicians to defeat the will of the people. Sheldon recalled an election day in which prohibition workers at the polls were beaten and driven away. The *New York Voice* said in a dispatch from Omaha, "The whole city is given entirely over to the whisky mob. There is riot and bloodshed in nearly every ward." Post-election complaints by

the *Call* (which prohibitionist C. E. Bentley praised as the “only daily in Lincoln and Omaha that championed our cause firmly and effectively to the close”) accused anti-amendment forces of attacking prohibitionists with fists, rocks, tin cans, and eggs.¹⁷

However, Victor Rosewater, who with his father had lived through the 1890 amendment campaign, later railed against the “base fabrications concocted and published by imported prohibition campaigners,” who he believed had impugned his father’s good name and motives in opposing the prohibitory amendment. The younger Rosewater accused them of harping on “Rum, Roggen and Rosewater” and of wiring sensational stories to eastern newspapers, especially the *New York Voice*. Most of the problems with the election in Omaha precincts, he wrote, resulted from the driving away from the polls of peddlers of bogus party ballots intended to increase the vote for prohibition.¹⁸

The taking of testimony in the case of the

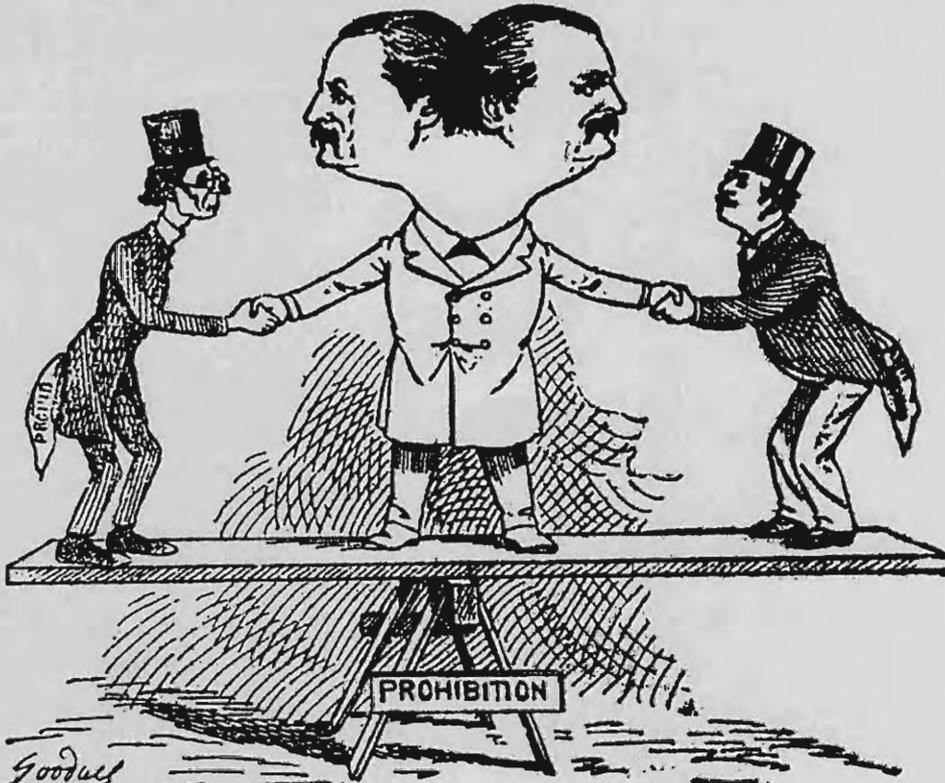
contested election commenced at Lincoln on December 4, 1890, and the last two weeks of December were devoted to taking testimony in Omaha. It revealed that there was considerable irregularity at the polls, but the large amount of conflicting information collected in each city did not result in any action that invalidated the election.¹⁵

Nebraska voters did adopt a prohibitory amendment to the state constitution twenty-six years later in 1916—a complete reversal of sentiment since 1890—and it took effect in May 1917, two years before the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawed liquor nationwide.

Johnson went on after 1890 to other temperance and prohibition battles. From 1891 to 1895 he lived in Kansas City, where he worked as a

Republican candidate for governor Lucius D. Richards finished third, losing both wet and dry votes by refusing to take a stand on prohibition. *Morning World-Herald*, Nov. 5, 1890

MR. RICHARDS—“THE TWO FACED MAN.”



“You Know How I Stand on Prohibition.”

newspaperman and reformer. In 1896 he moved to New York City, where he joined the staff of the *Voice* (after 1900 the *New Voice*). He became a prominent member of the Anti-Saloon League, established in 1893, working with their American Issue Publishing Company, and his efforts as a "dry" campaigner in dozens of state and local elections were often a determining factor in their success. His career as a special agent in Oklahoma

for the U.S. Department of the Interior to suppress the illegal sale of liquor to Indians from 1906 to 1911 made the name of "Pussyfoot" Johnson, a household word in America.⁴⁶

After the Eighteenth Amendment establishing national prohibition was ratified in January 1919, Johnson went on the lecture circuit. By the time of his death in 1945 he was also a familiar figure in foreign countries, where he joined forces with organizations trying to control intoxicants. During his career he made three trips around the world as a lecturer and worker for the temperance cause.⁴⁷

Johnson spent his retirement years in reading, writing occasional prohibition articles, and compiling a Johnson family history.

He spoke in Lincoln in October 1927, and visited old temperance friends there. One of his last visits to Nebraska was in November 1933 to assist in an unsuccessful campaign to retain statewide prohibition after the national law was scheduled to end in December. Nebraska was not one of the thirty-six states (out of a total of forty-eight then) that voted to ratify the twenty-first amendment to repeal national prohibition, but in November 1934, Nebraskans did vote to repeal the state's constitutional prohibition by a 60- to 40-percent margin.⁴⁸

Near the end of his life Johnson seemed resigned to these defeats. He made no apologies for the dries, confessing that he had been as zealous as the rest in pursuing their agenda, even when it had ceased to be supported by the rest of the country. "It will return some day," he said after

the repeal of national prohibition, "but not in our time."⁴⁹

NOTES

¹ Ernest Hurst Cherrington, Albert Porter, William E. Johnson, and Cora Frances Stoddard, eds., *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem* (Westerville, Ohio: American Issue Publishing Company, 1925–30), 4:1870; Joe A. Fisher, "The Liquor Question in Nebraska, 1880–1890" (master's thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, April 1952), 6. For more information on early anti-alcohol efforts in Nebraska, see "Nebraska Prohibits Alcohol, 1916," *Nebraska Studies* <http://www.nebraskastudies.org/>

² *Standard Encyclopedia*, 3:1410, 4:1874; Fred A. McKenzie, "Pussyfoot" Johnson, *Crusader-Reformer—A Man Among Men* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1920), 41; "A Colonel in Hard Luck," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; "A Prohibition Slugger," *Omaha Sunday Bee*, Nov. 2, 1890. The *Bumble Bee* of November 3 noted that there would be no issue on November 4, election day.

³ *Standard Encyclopedia*, 3:1410; McKenzie, "Pussyfoot" Johnson, 41; "A Mighty Man of Water," *Morning World-Herald* (Omaha), Nov. 3, 1890; *Mr. W. E. Johnson, A Life-Sketch by an Indian* (Madras: India Printing Works, n.d.), 6; "William E. Johnson," The Anti-Saloon League http://www.wpl.lib.oh.us/AntiSaloon/Leaders/william_johnson.html.

⁴ *Standard Encyclopedia*, 3:1408. John W. Flenner was said to have bestowed the nickname "Pussyfoot" on Johnson while a reporter for the *Muskogee* (Oklahoma) *Times-Democrat*. William E. Johnson to George W. Simpson, July 29, 1942, T. F. A. Williams Papers, RG2824, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter Williams Papers); "Necrology—John Winthrode Flenner (1875–1933)," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 12 (March 1934):117.

⁵ John G. Woolley and William E. Johnson, *Temperance Progress in the Century* (London, Toronto, Philadelphia: The Linscott Publishing Company, 1903), 156–64; *Standard Encyclopedia*, 3:1408–10, 4:1873; McKenzie, "Pussyfoot" Johnson, 36–37; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska the Land and the People* (Chicago/New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), 1:690–91.

⁶ S. D. Fitchie, "The Fight for Prohibition in Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, 6 (Lincoln: July–September 1921): 84; "Campaign Reviewed," *The New Republic* (Lincoln), Nov. 20, 1890; Flora Hamilton Cassel, *White Ribbon Vibrations* (Hastings: W.C.T.U. Song Book Publishing Association, 1890). For information on the later career of journalist-reformer Gibson, see Samuel Walker, "George Howard Gibson, Christian Socialist Among the Populists," *Nebraska History* 55 (Lincoln: Winter 1974): 553–72.

⁷ Sheldon, *Nebraska*, 1:692; "The Temperance Campaign in Nebraska," *Lincoln Daily Call*, June 13, 1890; "The Daily Call" advertisement, *Lincoln Daily Call*, July 19, 1890.

⁸ Robert E. Wenger, "The Anti-saloon League in Nebraska Politics, 1898–1910," *Nebraska History* 52 (Lincoln: Fall 1971): 268; "Anarchy Reigns in Omaha!" *Sunday Morning Call*, Nov. 2, 1890; "The Omaha Conspiracy," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Oct. 28, 1890; "More Suppression," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Oct. 29, 1890; "Riots in Omaha," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Nov. 4, 1890.

⁹ *Ibid.*; "The Papers Released," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Oct. 30, 1890.

¹⁰ "Anarchy Reigns in Omaha," *Sunday Morning Call*, Nov. 2, 1890; "By Hired Thugs," *Sunday World-Herald*, Nov. 2, 1890.

¹¹ *Daily Bumble Bee* (Omaha), Oct. 30, 1890; McKenzie, "Pussyfoot" Johnson, 41.

¹² Sheldon, *Nebraska*, 1:687–88; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Western Pub-



Anti-prohibition forces won, but Victor Rosewater (seated, right, with his father Edward, left, and brother Charles, standing) believed prohibitionists maligned his father with "base fabrications concocted and published by imported...campaigners." *The Life and Times of Edward Rosewater*

lishing and Engraving Co., 1913), 3C: 228–29; Fisher, "Liquor Question," 112.

¹³ *Standard Encyclopedia*, 1:349, 4:1871, 5:2290, 5:2890; Fisher, "Liquor Question," 97, 103–104; Prohibition Party sample ticket, *The New Republic*, Oct. 30, 1890; "The Jim-Jam Brigade," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, 1890.

¹⁴ A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: The Western Historical Co., 1882), 1075; *Dedication of the Bartlett L. Paine Memorial Parlor, and the Unveiling of the Historical Plaques* (Lincoln: St. Paul Methodist Church, 1967); "Paine the Man," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Aug. 28, 1890; "The One Great Issue," *Daily Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), Oct. 29, 1890; Robert Fikes, Jr., *African American History Vignette: George Washington Woodbey (1854–?)* http://faculty.washington.edu/rtaylor/aa_vignettes/woodbey_george.htm; Gail Madyun and Larry Malone, "Black Pioneers in San Diego, 1880–1920," *Journal of San Diego History*, 27.2 (1981) <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/81spring/blacks.htm>.

¹⁵ "The Jim-Jam Brigade," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, 1890.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, "Lies Nailed," "Evidence of Kansas Judges."

¹⁷ James W. Savage and John T. Bell, *History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska, and South Omaha* (New York and Chicago: Munsell and Company, 1894), 180; Victor Rosewater, "The Life and Times of Edward Rosewater" (Omaha: typescript), 165–66; "O Consistency Thou Art a Jewel," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, 1890.

¹⁸ "They Were Disgusted," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, 1890; "Rosey Squirms," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Oct. 29, 1890; "The Colored Orator," *Chadron Advocate*, Oct. 31, 1890; "The Great Debate," *Chadron Democrat*, Oct. 30, 1890. Sheldon's recollection of the event in his 1931 history of Nebraska doesn't mention Woodbey's name or his presence in Chadron during the debate. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, 1:691.

¹⁹ "This Should Appear on Every Ticket," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 178.

²⁰ "Watch the Tickets," *Sunday State Journal*, Nov. 2, 1890; *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, Nov. 3, 1890; Fisher, "Liquor Question," 106, 112–13; Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 178.

²¹ Rosewater, "Life and Times," 169–70; Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 185; "Watch the Tickets," *Sunday State Journal*, Nov. 2, 1890; "The Roorbacks are Ready," *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 4, 1890; "Look to Your Tickets," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890.

²² "The One Great Issue," *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, Oct. 29, 1890.

²³ *Ibid.*; "The Jim-Jam Brigade," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, 1890; "Outrageous Fraud," *The New Republic*, Oct. 16, 1890; "The Omaha Conspiracy!," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Oct. 28, 1890; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, 1:692. For more information on the 1890 census in Nebraska, see Dr. Edgar Z. Palmer, "The Correctness of the 1890 Census of Population for Nebraska Cities," *Nebraska History* 32 (Lincoln: December 1951): 259–67.

²⁴ Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 180–81; "Free Grand Barbecue" advertisement, *Daily Bumble Bee*, Oct. 30, 1890.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; "St. John at Amendment Headquarters" advertisement, *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; "An Apt Reply," *Sunday Morning Call*, Nov. 2, 1890; "A Monster Meeting," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890.

²⁶ Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 180–81; "At the Coliseum," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890; "A Mighty Man of Water," *Morning World-Herald*, Nov. 3, 1890; "A Monster Meeting," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890. The *Bumble Bee* of November 3 claimed that after reading the telegram Watts had been chased

from the coliseum by the angry anti-amendment crowd.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, "Nebraska Bankers," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; "Farmers Are Almost Solid for Prohibition," *The New West* (Grand Island), July 2, 1890; "A Sober Appeal to Thinking Men," *Omaha Daily Bee*, June 21, 1890; Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 181.

²⁸ "Hideous Hypocrisy," "Capital Coming," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 180, 327–28, 336.

²⁹ "Rev. Holt's Defense," "Men Who Say Can't," "Enemies on the Run," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890.

³⁰ "Find a Mares Nest," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; "A Colonel in Hard Luck," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890.

³¹ *Ibid.*; "Adding Insult to Injury," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Oct. 31, 1890. The Yardley "expose" in the November 1 issue of the *Daily Bee* also reported that Johnson refused to bail Yardley out of an Omaha jail after his arrest.

³² "The Ex-Liquor Legion," *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, Oct. 25, 1890; "A Dastardly Brute," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890.

³³ "More Outlawry," *Sunday Morning Call*, Nov. 2, 1890; "By Hired Thugs," *Sunday World-Herald*, Nov. 2, 1890; McKenzie, "Pussyfoot" Johnson, 42–45; Andreas, *History*, 793.

³⁴ "By Hired Thugs" *Sunday World-Herald*, Nov. 2, 1890; "A Prohibition Slugger," *Omaha Sunday Bee*, Nov. 2, 1890; "A Dastardly Brute," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890.

³⁵ "Whiskey Bullies," "Roasting the Bee," "Suppressed by the Bee," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890; *Standard Encyclopedia*, 4:1870; Andreas, *History*, 711–12.

³⁶ "Universal Directory of Mankind," "An Omaha Appeal," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890.

³⁷ "Blame the Law Makers," "What Nationality?" *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 3, 1890.

³⁸ Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 182; Rosewater, "Life and Times," 168.

³⁹ Morton-Watkins, *History*, 3C: 230–31.

⁴⁰ "Gossip From the Ranks," *Morning World-Herald*, Nov. 4, 1890; "The Roorbacks Are Ready," *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 4, 1890.

⁴¹ "The Defeat of Prohibition," *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 8, 1890; "The Prohibitory Amendment," *Lincoln Weekly News*, Nov. 6, 1890.

⁴² "Some Startling Facts for the Farmers," *The New West*, June 18, 1890; "Enemies on the Run," *Daily Bumble Bee*, Nov. 1, 1890; *Standard Encyclopedia*, 4:1872.

⁴³ Sheldon, *Nebraska*, 1:691; *New York Voice* quoted in Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 184; "The Omaha Plan," *Lincoln Daily Call*, Nov. 5, 1890; "Campaign Reviewed," *The New Republic*, Nov. 20, 1890; George Talbot Hunt, *Control of the Liquor Traffic in Nebraska, 1855–1890* (Lincoln, 1932), 155.

⁴⁴ Rosewater, "Life and Times," 167–69.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 169–70; Savage and Bell, *City of Omaha*, 183–84; Fisher, "Liquor Question," 3–4.

⁴⁶ *Standard Encyclopedia*, 3:1410–12, 4:1875.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:1412–13. In the early 1940s Johnson donated memorabilia from his foreign travels to the Nebraska State Historical Society. Correspondence to and information about Johnson are also found in the Williams Papers.

⁴⁸ "Pussyfoot" Johnson Spends a Day at His Old Home in Lincoln," *Sunday State Journal*, Oct. 23, 1927; "The Noble Experiment," *Nebraska Studies*, <http://www.nebraskastudies.org/>

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; "Pussyfoot" Johnson, Early Dry Crusader, Ex-Nebraskan, Dead," *Lincoln Star*, Feb. 3, 1945.