Seymour Smith came of age listening to the speeches of William Jennings Bryan, who, like Smith was an active democrat. Smith held Bryan in high esteem, both because of Bryan’s politics and because of Bryan’s gift at oration. An ardent fan, Smith collected Memorabilia about Bryan for more than two generations and would eventually be recognized as an expert on the statesman. Smith grew up a Nebraska farm boy; he became an Omaha attorney and dedicated member of the Democratic Party as an adult. After matriculating from Bellevue Academy and attending the University Of Nebraska School Of Law, he worked as an attorney in Lincoln briefly, only to move to Omaha, Nebraska in 1926 where he remained for the rest of his life. Smith served as Omaha’s City Attorney from 1933-1939; after which he opened a law practice in the Keeline Building.

William Jennings Bryan’s legacy as a great orator developed over the course of his long career in national politics, but was sealed with his closing remarks in the Scopes “Monkey Trial” proceedings in July of 1925. A candidate for United States President in 1896, 1900, and 1908, Bryan held strong opinions about public policy issues. Bryan’s platforms included Free Silver and Anti-trust. He opposed the teaching of evolution in public schools and was a both a prohibitionist and a progressive. Bryan was also pro-agrarian and supported political reform among farmers. He served as United States Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson, from 1913-1915, and spent two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. Bryan was a delegate from Nebraska to the Democratic National Convention in 1920. Born to Mariah and Silas Bryan in “Little Egypt” Salem, Illinois, (b. March 19, 1860); Bryan married a former student, Mary Elizabeth Baird in 1884. Baird eventually studied law and helped her husband with many of his political speeches. The Bryan’s moved to Lincoln by 1888, and Bryan was elected to Congress from Nebraska’s First District in 1890; Bryan died on July 26, 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee.

A few face-to-face meetings with Bryan, increased Smith’s respect for the down-to-earth politician. Meeting Bryan for the first time at a banquet held in Bryan’s honor, in March of 1913, Smith began journaling about his encounters with the politician. He recalled having seen Bryan during one of the statesman’s trips to Omaha, Nebraska. Bryan’s stop-over was intended to stymie a movement against progressivism that had taken root within the conservative wing of the Democratic Party. A small cadre of local democrats expressed their opposition to Bryan’s representation of the party at the Democratic National Convention. Meanwhile, Smith, along with other Bryan supporters, developed a counter-measure. Smith helped to organize a speaking engagement for Bryan at Blair, Nebraska, and later drove Bryan to Tekamah. Smith also
organized clubs to support Bryan’s brother, Charles W. Bryan, who served for a term as Nebraska’s Governor, and who was a vice presidential candidate in 1924 (4-5). During this period, Smith spent many hours at the office where W. J. Bryan’s publication, *The Commoner*, was printed (5). From 1913-1925, Smith grew close to the Bryan family. William Jennings Bryan, Jr. eventually gave Smith a pair of his father’s eyeglasses, and Smith held as one of his prize possession’s a letter written by the great orator at the time of the Scopes Trial of 1925. Late in life, Smith began giving public lectures about William Jennings Bryan, and was considered a local expert on the statesman. Smith’s contributions to the state as a lay historian, coupled with his public service to the city of Omaha, were noted in the late 1960’s, when the City of Omaha Parks and Recreation Department named a public park after Seymour Smith. Located at 68th and Harrison Street in Omaha, Nebraska, the park is a well known venue to baseball enthusiasts.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

This collection is arranged in two series: 1) Seymour Smith Papers; and 2) William Jennings Bryan Papers and Memorabilia.

Series 1 contains Smith’s correspondence about William Jennings Bryan, articles about Bryan that Smith authored, Newspaper clippings on Bryan which Smith collected and Miscellany.

Series 1 - Seymour Smith Papers

Box 1

Folder 1 holds the correspondence of Seymour Smith, including a letter from Governor Ralph Brooks appointing Smith to the Bryan Centennial Memorial Committee (1960, Jan. 29). There are also multiple letters from William Jennings Bryan, Jr. to Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Smith, from Pecos, New Mexico. One letter contains William Jennings Bryan, Jr.’s, religious tract “This I Believe,” 1976 [unpublished]. The folder also holds Betty (Bryan) Adams’ note relaying news of her father’s death and contains the funeral program of William Jennings Bryan, Jr. (March 1978).

Folder 2 is comprised of manuscripts authored by Seymour Smith about William Jennings Bryan. In his essays, Smith recalls Bryan’s humorous and philosophical sides.

Folder 3, newspaper clippings, includes news articles on the controversial treatment of W.J. Bryan’s statue in Washington D.C. and efforts by Nebraskans to ensure that the statue be preserved. A similar controversy arose in Nebraska when a group proposed moving the Bryan statue from its place on the West side of the Nebraska Statehouse to another location. In part due to the activism of Smith, a bill was written requiring that the Unicameral approve relocation of any statue on state capitol grounds (*Lincoln Journal*, 1953, Feb. 12)

Folder 4, miscellany, [n.d.] holds clippings and sketches of early buildings in Nebraska.
Series Two holds a letter written by Williams Jennings Bryan, speeches delivered by Congressman Bryan in the U.S. House of Representatives, a eulogy by Congress which was published as a memorial to the late congressman, military records, scholarly articles on Bryan, programs, pamphlets and newsletters in regard to the statesman, political advertisements, newspaper clippings, and prints of photographs.

Series 2 - William Jennings Bryan Papers and Memorabilia

Folder 5 holds a letter from William Jennings Bryan to his [un-named] sister regarding the progress of the Scopes Trial.

Folder 6, Speeches/Floor Debate U.S. Congress, includes the Speeches of Congressman Bryan in the House of Representatives during the 52 and 53rd Congresses, (1891-1895).


Folder 8, military records, holds discharge papers of a soldier in the U.S. Army and signed by William J. Bryan in 1898.

Folder 9 contains scholarly articles on William J. Bryan, including Paul Y. Anderson’s the “Sad Death of a Hero,” *The American Mercury* (1936 March); Paola E. Coletta’s “The Morning Star of the Reformation: William Jennings Bryan’s First Congressional Campaign,” *Nebraska History* (June 1956); and James Creelman’s “Mr. Bryan Explained,” *Pearson’s*, New York, (April 1908).

Folder 10, Programs, Pamphlets, & Newsletters, holds the dedication ceremony program announcing the opening of the William Jennings Bryan School in Omaha Nebraska (1965, Nov. 14). Also in this folder is a William Jennings Bryan College Founders’ Day Banquet program with Seymour Smith listed as a presenter (1963, Mar. 9).

Folder 11, political advertisements, includes calling cards featuring Bryan likeness.

Folder 12 contains numerous newspaper clippings, including: “William Jennings Bryan: Democratic Nominee for President,” (*World Herald* July 12, 1896); an original copy of *The Commoner*, (1923, April); and reports on Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan’s association during Wilson’s campaign stop in Nebraska in October of 1912. The folder also holds clippings describing the Bryan’s donation of their Fairview home (4848 Sumner in Lincoln, Neb.) to Bryan Memorial Hospital (*World Herald* 1962, July 1). Other clippings note William Jennings Bryan’s addition to the Nebraska Hall of Fame (*Omaha World Herald*, 1994, Mar. 20).

Folder 13 Contains photographs of William Jennings Bryan from 1906-1912.
DESCRIPTION

Series 1 - Seymour Smith Papers

Box 1
Folder

1. Correspondence, Seymour Smith, 1960, Feb. 7-1978, Apr. 7
2. Manuscripts, 1976, Aug. 6
4. Miscellany, [n.d.]

Series 2 - William Jennings Bryan Papers and Memorabilia

5. Correspondence 1909, Jan. 2-1925 [July ?]
9. Scholarly articles on William J. Bryan, 1908, Apr. -1956, June
11. Political advertisements, 1908, Oct. 29-1960
13. Photographs, 1906, Aug. 30-1934, Apr. 15

ADDED ENTRIES

Agrarian reform
Bryan, William Jennings
Bryan, William Jennings, Jr.
Creationism
Democratic Party -- Nebraska
Evolution
Progressivism
Scopes Trial
The Commoner

TJ/tmm 10-15-2009