

Bryan's Partner:
Arthur Sewall and the Campaign of 1896

by
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Arthur Sewall, a wealthy shipbuilder and the Democratic vice-presidential nominee in 1896, was born in Bath, Maine, on November 25, 1835. Following in the tradition of his father, he began a career in shipbuilding in 1854, forming a business with his older brother, Edward. He later added a son and a nephew as partners. The Sewall family specialized in wooden vessels and built a number of ships, such as the *Granger* and *Eric the Red*, that eventually gained recognition. In 1893, the yard was equipped with a steel plant, and from it the first steel sailing ship built in the United States was launched the following year.¹ Sewall's last ship, produced shortly after his death on September 5, 1900, was the *William P. Frye*, which sank on January 28, 1915, making it the first American vessel to fall victim to the Germans during World War I. Although not known for innovative naval architecture, Sewall probably constructed, owned, and operated more sailing vessels during the latter part of the nineteenth century than any other person in the United States.²

In addition to his career in shipbuilding, Sewall engaged in other pursuits that enhanced his economic and social position. He served as a director of railroads, including the Maine Central Railroad, his state's principal railway system. The Maine resident also held stock in several large corporations, and was president of the Bath National Bank for nearly thirty years. Known for his executive

ability and indefatigable energy, he earned a reputation in New England as a shrewd businessman and spokesman for railroad and banking interests.

A Democrat living in a Republican stronghold, Sewall appeared to be a political renegade. First, as an imperialist in foreign policy and a protectionist in tariff legislation, he espoused a philosophy that basically ran counter to that of Grover Cleveland, the Democratic president from 1885 to 1889 and again from 1893 to 1897. Secondly, although he was a person of wealth, he advocated a tax on personal income. Finally, when it came to financial policy, Sewall, unlike most of his conservative cohorts, favored the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the traditional ratio of 16 to 1, a policy designed to encourage inflation. In this respect, he opposed the maintenance of the gold standard, demanded the restoration of silver to its proper place in the monetary system, and criticized Cleveland's economic program in general.³

Sewall played only a small role in Democratic politics prior to his nomination for vice-president of the United States. Elected to minor positions as councilman and alderman in Bath, he never held state or national office. In fact, he ran for the United States Senate in 1893 but lost to Eugene Hale, the Republican incumbent. In spite of his lack of a home base from which to operate politically, Sewall was either a delegate or visitor to his party's national conventions from 1872 to 1896. The Bath politician even served on the executive board of the Democratic National Committee from 1888 to July, 1896, but failed to retain his position when his sound money colleagues from Maine refused to endorse him again because of his sympathy for silver. Sewall thought this defeat meant the end of his political career, but thirty-six hours later, he won his party's nomination for the second highest office in the nation.⁴

The Democrats, divided into factions of goldbugs and silverites, converged on Chicago in July, 1896, to nominate their standard-bearers for that year's campaign. The advocates of free silver captured control of the convention, succeeded in writing a platform favorable to their cause, repudiated the Cleveland administration, and nominated William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska for president. Possessing oratorical skills as well as a magnetic personality, Bryan aroused the enthusiasm of the silverites at the convention with his "cross of gold" speech. They had found a leader at last to fight for their sacred dogma.

On July 11, 1896, at the Coliseum in Chicago, the delegates concluded their last official duty by selecting a vice-presidential candidate. Several aspirants were considered for this position, but the three frontrunners were Sewall, John R. McLean of Ohio, the wealthy publisher of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and proponent of free silver, and Richard Parks Bland, a soft money politician from Missouri.⁵

During the official proceedings, William R. Burk, a delegate from California, placed Sewall in nomination. In a brief address, he urged his colleagues to consider ability for the office as well as geographical distribution in balancing the ticket. Reminding the Democrats of Sewall's loyalty to silver, Burk concluded: "You will make no mistake in nominating him."⁶ Two other delegates, Charles S. Thomas of Colorado and John Scott of Maine, seconded the nomination.

Like Bryan, Sewall obtained the nomination on the fifth ballot. The Bath Democrat captured 100 votes on the first roll call of states, 37 on the second, 97 on the third, 261 on the fourth, and 568 on the final count. His selection was then made unanimous. On all five ballots, the twelve delegates from Maine loyally supported their favorite son, with the exception of the second roll call when four were absent.⁷

Sewall won the Democratic vice-presidential spot on the ticket in 1896 for two basic reasons. The most important consideration was the attempt to balance the ticket geographically. As a New England businessman and banker, Sewall had ties with a region of the nation where none existed for Bryan. When the conservative Democrats from the east bolted the party that year in protest against the nominee and platform, the available supply of possible candidates from whom to select a running mate was reduced considerably. Even though he was identified with New England, Sewall did not command the political support of his home area, for Bourbon Democrats there did not trust him on the vexatious currency issue. In short, hopes that Sewall would pacify and soothe the ruffled feelings of eastern Democrats met with disappointment.

The delegates obviously were determined to nominate a silverite in whom they had confidence rather than a supporter of the gold standard for second place on the ticket. With this idea in mind, they probably would have done better had they selected Vice-President Adlai E. Stevenson, a moderate bimetallist from Illinois, who enjoyed the attention of both the conservatives and liberals in the Democratic party. A coalition Democrat who preached the politics of accommodation, Stevenson, vice-president under Cleveland, could have acted as a bridge between the old guard and the new in 1896. Because he was a political moderate who proposed solutions to heal internal wounds and because he strongly endorsed both Cleveland and Bryan, he emerged as the Democratic Talleyrand and political rarity of his generation.⁸ Although the Democrats in 1900 finally recognized Stevenson's qualities as a compromise candidate to run with Bryan, they should have employed that tactic in 1896, thereby creating a more unified party structure. By nominating Sewall, the Bryan delegates offered the Clevelandites practically nothing and suc-

ceeded only in antagonizing the agrarian elements within their own organization and the People's party.

A second basic reason for Sewall's nomination was to equalize the ticket in terms of age. Bryan, thirty-six years old in 1896, was viewed by many as a youthful newcomer who lacked experience. Indeed, he had served only four years in the national House of Representatives, lost a bid in 1894 to become senator, and occupied no elective office at the time of his nomination. Although Sewall's political training was far less, he was sixty-one years old in 1896 and could act as an elder statesman.

Once again the delegates erred in choosing Sewall to fulfill this role in the campaign. Holding no elective office such as governor or senator, and coming from a state with few electoral votes, Sewall did not add strength to the ticket in the way that Stevenson could have done in 1896. The vice-president was also sixty-one, but unlike the Maine Democrat, he held an important office and lived in a populous state. Moreover, Stevenson was politically stronger in Illinois than Sewall was in Maine, although both were Republican states.

Because the majority of Maine Democrats supported the Cleveland administration on economic policy and believed that free coinage was unwise, Sewall's nomination seemed more incongruous than expedient. Nevertheless, Bryan, who took no part in the vice-presidential contest, accepted the final choice. Although he had not been personally acquainted with the New England Democrat prior to the time of the convention, Bryan knew that Sewall had favored him for the presidency on a free silver platform. The Nebraskan came to appreciate Sewall's "sterling qualities," "the depth of his convictions and his possession of moral courage," and his loyalty in being "a thorough Democrat."⁹

Upon the conclusion of the Chicago convention, Sewall returned to New England to begin preparations for the

fall campaign. In a speech at Boston on July 15, he remarked:

The serious condition of the country demands free silver, and the voters in New England are beginning to find it out. We ought to have a new State Convention in Maine, and a new free silver platform for . . . some . . . good man to stand on. It is not right to have a State campaign there not in harmony with the National platform.¹⁰

Sewall arrived in Bath on July 15, where he received the cheers of his friends, attended receptions, and was escorted to his mansion. Recognizing the honor and duty which his unexpected nomination had conferred upon him, the politician from Maine encouraged his neighbors to comprehend the significance of the Democratic convention. It represented a new beginning that would lead to a better day for Americans. In replying to a welcoming address from the citizens of Bath, Sewall said:

We have had a convention, and it is of that I would speak to you. It was a great convention, yet it did not seem to me to be a partisan one. It seemed more like the uprising of the people, and they seemed to be controlled by one idea, and that idea has filled me for years. They knew that this country is in deep distress, that it has been in distress for years, and that the great trouble is with our monetary system, and they believed, as I believe, that there is but one remedy.¹¹

Two weeks after his return to Maine, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee renewed his attack on the gold standard. Maintaining that the only issue of the campaign was the currency question, he claimed that “the silver ranks [were] growing daily stronger in Maine.”¹² Because the tariff had not relieved economic difficulties or ended the paralysis of business conditions brought on by the Panic of 1893, the only remedy, according to Sewall, was the remonetization of silver. “What the people want is right and cannot be otherwise,” he asserted.¹³

Ten days following this statement, Sewall held an interview at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City and fielded a number of questions. He implied that the gold Democrats would not change matters in his state. “Maine is

hopelessly Republican," he said, "for the Republicans there have a good organization, and they keep their fences in good order all the year around."¹⁴ Admitting that the Democrats would not concentrate as much time in Maine as they had done in 1892, Sewall observed that the dominant issue had been made in the west rather than in the east. Because of this, the effect of the early election returns in Maine on other states would not be as influential as in the past. In making this remark, Sewall obviously wanted to protect himself against the potentially embarrassing loss to the Republicans of his own state during the campaign.¹⁵

On August 12, 1896, Bryan and Sewall were officially notified at Madison Square Garden of their nominations for president and vice-president, respectively. Bryan's long, dull speech disappointed many who had anticipated an inspirational and rousing address. Even Sewall, having a palm leaf fan, endeavored to make himself as comfortable as possible during Bryan's boring performance. Ultimately the people began to disperse. When Governor William J. Stone of Missouri introduced Sewall, the beleaguered running mate had the misfortune of speaking to nearly empty galleries. One newspaper correspondent described the situation when he reported: "Vice Presidential candidate Sewall made a short speech of acceptance, but the crowd was on its feet going from the hall when he did it, and no one heard anything that he said. Had he declined the nomination no one would have been the wiser."¹⁶

In his acceptance speech Sewall pointed out that the Coinage Act of 1873, which had demonetized silver, was a great wrong inflicted upon the American people. Advocating a return to the traditional monetary system of bimetallism, the vice-presidential contender urged that the United States not wait for other nations to cooperate in this venture. Rather, he asked for immediate action on the

sole initiative of the Democratic leaders to eradicate poverty and bankruptcy and safeguard American institutions. Sewall explained:

The demonetization of silver has thrown the whole primary money function on gold, appreciating its value and purchasing power. Restore the money function to silver and silver will appreciate and its purchasing power increase. Take from gold its monopoly, its value will be reduced and in due course the parity of the two metals will again obtain under natural causes. We shall then have a broad and unlimited foundation for a monetary system, commensurate with our country's needs and future development, not the unsafe basis of today reduced by half by the removal of silver and continually undermined by foreigners carrying from us our gold.¹⁷

The Democratic party split openly in 1896 between the followers of Bryan, on the one hand, and the proponents of a sound money policy, on the other. The latter group, consisting of such political leaders as President Cleveland, members of his cabinet, and Senator William F. Vilas of Wisconsin, vehemently rejected the Chicago platform and Bryanism. "Who ever dreamed," queried Postmaster General William L. Wilson, "that the day would come when Bryan would be the Presidential nominee of the great Democratic Party? What a degradation to that old organization and what a humiliating cheapening of the Presidency!"¹⁸ A conservative Democrat in Kentucky complained that there was not "the first iota of Democracy" in the Chicago platform and that it represented a populist document.¹⁹ "You can never placate nor win over the free silver Democrats. Nothing can be expected from them. . . .The situation is deplorable, but the path of duty is plain," wrote another exponent of Bourbon philosophy to Senator William Lindsay of Kentucky, a sound money Democrat.²⁰

Viewing with alarm the direction in which their party was moving, nearly a thousand disgruntled conservatives convened in Indianapolis in September. There they adopted a platform that called for the maintenance of the

gold standard and selected the venerable John M. Palmer of Illinois and Simon B. Buckner of Kentucky as the nominees of the new National Democratic party for president and vice-president, respectively. "A strong ticket put up at Indianapolis," professed an enthusiastic gold Democrat to Henry Watterson, editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, "will settle the fate of Bryan and Sewall and doom them to certain defeat."²¹

While these Democrats clearly realized that they could not capture the White House in 1896, they proposed a separate ticket with the hope that it would provide incensed Bourbons with a place to rally and indirectly aid William McKinley of Ohio, the conservative Republican nominee for president.²² For those gold Democrats who could not support the Republican candidate because of principle, the appearance of the Palmer ticket would permit them "to exercise their suffrage in a becoming manner."²³ Cleveland was especially pleased with this political alternative to Bryan and McKinley. In a letter to Vilas, he revealed:

I am delighted with the outcome of the Indianapolis Convention and as a democrat I feel very grateful to those who have relieved the bad political atmosphere with such a delicious infusion of fresh air. Every democrat after reading the platform ought to thank God that the glorious principles of our party have found defenders who will not permit them to be polluted by impure hands.²⁴

Although the action of the gold Democrats distressed Sewall, he found himself in an unusual predicament in 1896 because of the appearance of another organization on the political scene, the Populists. This party, appealing especially to farmers and debtors in the western and southern states, had nominated James B. Weaver of Iowa for president in 1892, and won some electoral votes. Favoring a number of economic, social, and political reforms, including free coinage, the Populists assembled in Saint Louis in late July, 1896, to choose their presidential

and vice-presidential team. In fact, Bryan had earlier encouraged them to postpone their decision until after the Democratic and Republican conventions had completed their work so that the Populists could “take advantage of the errors of the old parties.”²⁵

When the Populists met, they were confronted with an immediate political dilemma. To nominate Bryan as their candidate would consolidate their party with the Democrats and Silver Republicans on the issue of currency reform, and together they could oppose the sound money Republican ticket. On the other hand, if the Populists united with the Democrats to obtain victory, they might lose their own separate identity in the process. For this reason, the Populist organization split between the middle-of-the-roaders who wished to preserve their distinct existence, and the fusionists who favored assimilation with others. A leading Minnesota Populist delineated this perplexing problem when he confided to his diary: “Shall we or shall we not endorse Bryan for president? I like Bryan, but I do not feel that we can safely adopt the Dem. candidates. I fear it will be the end of our party.”²⁶

To resolve this quandary, the Populists compromised in 1896 by nominating Bryan for president on a free silver platform but chose a radical exponent of populism, Thomas E. Watson of Georgia, for vice-president. In doing this, they even took the unprecedented step of naming Watson before making the presidential choice.²⁷ This decision left Bryan with two running mates and complicated the political situation considerably.

Although Weaver, an influential fusionist, favored the nomination of Sewall, most Populists absolutely refused to consider the Maine businessman for second place on their ticket.²⁸ For one thing, he came from the wrong region of the nation. Moreover, they distrusted his wealth and

business connections. In other words, orthodox Populists had nothing in common with him except support for the white metal. When the Populists selected their vice-presidential candidate on July 25, they voted 539 for Watson and 257 for Sewall. A stampede then began, resulting in the Georgian's unanimous nomination.²⁹

The alliance that Bryan wanted to cement with the Populist party was endangered by the continuation of Sewall on the Democratic slate. Bryan had mistakenly hoped that the Populists would temporarily subordinate their goals and select Sewall, thereby unifying all organizations in support of one ticket. When this did not occur, the Nebraskan, pledging to do nothing "unfair" to Sewall, refused to drop his running mate and basically ignored Watson during the campaign.³⁰ His stand immediately antagonized many leaders of the People's party. For example, Senator Marion Butler of North Carolina, who directed a campaign of fusion with the Democrats, inveighed against the retention of the Maine politician. "The Populist Party cannot and will not swallow Sewall," he warned.³¹

Watson also demanded the removal of his counterpart. Describing Sewall as "a wart on the party" and "a dead weight to the ticket," the southern radical conducted a determined campaign to eliminate the New England Democrat from further political consideration.³² On July 29, Watson wired the editor of a Democratic newspaper in Atlanta that the

Democratic managers must not demand that the Populists do all the yielding. You must do some of it yourselves. Sewall can come off the ticket without hurting his party. My withdrawal would kill mine. Our people cannot be led to the support of Bryan and Sewall. Unless Sewall retires, the masses of our party will, in my judgment, demand a straight Populist ticket.³³

The action of the Populists in choosing Watson placed Sewall in a ticklish political situation. On July 25, the very

day that the Georgian obtained the vice-presidential nomination, Sewall mailed a letter to Bryan outlining his thoughts on the results of the Saint Louis convention. Writing from Bath, he expressed concern with published reports indicating Bryan was undecided whether to accept or decline the Populist presidential nomination. Sewall candidly urged the Nebraskan not to allow any personal consideration for his partner from Maine influence his ultimate decision. He added:

I desire that you will do just what you believe is best for the success of the head of our ticket. The principles we are fighting for are so paramount of any personal relations that the latter should not have any weight or influence whatever with your action. I cannot for a moment allow myself to be a factor in any action on your part that would in the slightest degree hazard an electoral vote for you. I will write you later in regard to the conditions in this State, which are, I am happy to say, improving.³⁴

Stories circulated freely throughout the campaign that Sewall would be persuaded to withdraw in favor of Watson. Newspapers followed the events quite closely and reported on a variety of matters relating to Sewall's possible resignation from the ticket. On July 28, John A. Breidenthal, a member of the Populist Executive Committee, stated that the Democratic and Populist committees planned to arrange a solution so that Bryan's first running mate could be withdrawn.³⁵ Two days later, in an interview with reporters at his home, Sewall responded to this report: "Any man who for a minute would entertain such an idea is not worthy of being answered."³⁶ On August 10, when asked about Watson's intentions, the Maine Democrat calmly admitted that he did not think the southern Populist had any plans to resign from the ticket.³⁷

On September 1, 1896, Sewall sent another message to Bryan. Once again he urged that personal commitments not be permitted to imperil the cause for which they were

fighting, for the program was of vital importance to the nation. The Bath Democrat also wrote:

We are now in the heat of our Campaign and conditions, I think, confirm my first view, that if we had carried out our original plans we would have made a great success. Of course, I can give you no reliable estimate of the result now. We are doing all we can with our own resources, and hope for fair results. We can hardly expect, however, to reduce the plurality of '92. If we can keep it under fifteen to eighteen thousand, I shall consider it a great victory for silver.³⁸

Events involving the vice-presidential question moved rather swiftly in September. Due to the fact that many Democrats objected to fusion with the Populists for fear of appearing to be disloyal to Sewall, party leaders often found themselves in a tenuous position. Senator James K. Jones of Arkansas, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, was caught in the middle of the debate, but he defended Sewall's nomination. "The talk about the retirement of our candidate for Vice-President," he assured his colleagues, "is too absurd to be seriously considered."³⁹ On September 3, Jones, somewhat indignant with the widespread reports of alleged deals, said:

He [Sewall] sees no embarrassment whatever in Mr. Bryan's nomination for President by another party and upon another ticket, but believes it to be an important step toward certain victory for the silver cause. It is a complete answer to efforts of the gold Democrats to create the impression that Mr. Sewall will retire in any circumstances to say that the Democratic Party and its National organization are just as loyal to Mr. Sewall as he himself is to Mr. Bryan and the great cause of the common people.⁴⁰

Following the reassurances of support from Jones and Bryan, Sewall accelerated the verbal attacks on his opponents. He issued a statement from Bath on September 5: "Any statements or inferences that I propose to withdraw from the ticket are without foundation. I never had, and have not now, the remotest intention of doing so."⁴¹ A week later, when a persistent reporter asked if he planned to resign, Sewall, losing his

temper, snapped: "I've answered that question time and time again. I don't propose to answer it again. The answer I already have given stands, and that's all I have to say."⁴²

In spite of these denials, stories continued to surface that Sewall would resign. Maintaining that Sewall's nomination had been "a great mistake," Marion Butler, chairman of the Populist National Committee, pleaded with the New England politician to withdraw.⁴³ The *New York Times* eagerly reported on September 16, that Sewall's political star was surely sinking, for the nominee had become a burden on the Democratic party and was regarded as an eastern plutocrat by the Populist organization.⁴⁴ To add to the suspense of the moment, another uncorroborated report revealed that Democratic Senator Arthur P. Gorman of Maryland had been appointed to persuade his friend in Maine to remove himself from the Chicago ticket. Moreover, the rumor contained the scintillating idea that Watson would also be retired, and both politicians would then be replaced with a less aggressive Populist or a more convenient Democrat who could harmonize contending factions.⁴⁵

The potential problems that a double-tailed ticket posed for Bryan and Sewall were indeed enormous. Certainly the most dangerous one concerned the matter of fusion electoral tickets in twenty-eight states. Under this arrangement, Ohio Democrats, for example, could concede five or more of their twenty-three vice-presidential electors to the Populists while California Democrats might relinquish four out of nine electors. In a letter to Chairman Jones on August 31, Sewall clearly pointed out that he was cognizant of the repercussions of electoral combinations, but he authorized fusion on electors. The vice-presidential candidate wrote:

In all states where fusions seem to you desirable and important for the election of Mr. Bryan, I want my personal consideration to be entirely disregarded to that end. I believe success is secure for our ticket if you

can unite the silver forces of the country and all personal interests should be subordinate to that. As nominee of the Democratic party, I desire that any combination, or fusion, in the several states where the straight Democratic ticket may be uncertain of success, shall be made that will more certainly secure the electoral votes for the head of our ticket.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the feasibility of this plan left unanswered what would happen to Sewall should a chain of circumstances combine to deny him an election victory to which he was entitled. In other words, while Bryan would receive all the electoral votes of the states he carried, the fusion plan would split the electoral count between Sewall and Watson. The possibility existed, barring a great silver victory and landslide vote for the Nebraskan, that Bryan could win the presidency but that Sewall could lose the vice-presidency. Moreover, should neither Sewall nor Watson obtain a majority of electoral votes in a close election, the United States Senate, under the provisions of the Constitution, would have the responsibility to elect a new vice-president. Because Republicans nominally controlled the upper chamber, they would have been in a position to vote for Garret A. Hobart of New Jersey, the vice-presidential nominee of their party, rather than for Sewall. A Bryan-Hobart administration, ironically enough, was one possible outcome of the presidential election of 1896.⁴⁷

Because of Watson's nomination, Sewall did not take an active part in the presidential campaign. Rather, he devoted most of his attention to New England politics. He also managed to write letters, greet visitors, hold interviews, and deny reports that he planned to withdraw from the Democratic ticket. In a speech on the Boston Common, in the presence of Bryan, on September 25, the beleaguered running mate served notice on his Populist detractors as well as his sound money opponents in the Democratic and Republican parties that he was not about to quit. "We are in this fight to stay," he emphatically

declared.⁴⁸ It was a crucial battle between the people, on the one side, against the moneyed powers, on the other. For Sewall, who stood with the patroits of 1896 in opposing evil and injustice, the cause was too great to warrant other considerations.⁴⁹

When Bryan toured New England during the final days of September, 1896, Sewall accompanied the presidential nominee on that political sojourn. The two Democrats, for example, visited Portland, Maine, on September 26, and spoke at the Union Station Square. Then they departed for Bath to visit the home town of the vice-presidential contender. Local Democrats and members of the free silver clubs paraded through the streets and escorted the candidates to the Custom House where Bryan delivered a brief address on September 26. The model of a ship built by Sewall's company was a feature of this procession. Upon the conclusion of the speeches, Bryan spent Saturday night and the following day at Sewall's home.⁵⁰

On October 6, from his home in Bath, Sewall wrote his official letter accepting the Democratic vice-presidential nomination. Referring to the "deadly evil of the gold standard," he charged that the greatest monopoly of all was the monopoly of the power of gold and that its control had created class distinctions.⁵¹ Sewall reiterated his belief that free coinage provided the remedy with which to check current wrongs and undo the ruin of the past. The candidate further elaborated that his nomination had not been a personal tribute but a guarantee that the Democratic party was a national rather than a sectional organization. He also observed:

We have rescued our party from those who, under the influence of the money power, have controlled and debased it. Our mission now is to rescue from this same power, and its foreign allies, our own beloved country. . . . We know well the nature of the struggle in which we are engaged. We are anxious only that the people of the land shall understand it, and then our battle is won.⁵²

Upon the conclusion of the campaign of 1896, Sewall, quite naturally, predicted victory for the Bryan-Sewall team. On election day, November 3, he voted early, spent the rest of the day quietly in Bath, and then received the returns at his home in the library over a private wire.⁵³ The results were disastrous for the Democratic standard-bearers. McKinley was elected president by a handsome majority, receiving 7,104,779 popular votes to 6,502,925 for Bryan. The People's party polled a vote of 222,583 while the gold Democrats won only 133,148. In terms of the electoral count, McKinley obtained 271 votes by winning 23 states. Bryan, on the other hand, captured 176 votes while carrying 22 states. For the vice-presidency, the electoral vote was divided between three contenders. Hobart won 271 votes to 149 for Sewall. Watson received 27 electoral votes.⁵⁴ "What a relief the result is to all business men," wrote a delighted supporter of McKinley to Republican Senator Stephen B. Elkins of West Virginia.⁵⁵

New England went solidly for McKinley, a predictable result that still must have been difficult for Sewall to contemplate. His own state served as an illustration of the trend throughout the northeast. The Republicans gained a larger plurality in Maine than four years earlier. In fact, Sewall's home city and ward went against him. McKinley carried Bath, receiving 1,234 votes to 472 for Bryan. The ward vote showed a final tally of 167 for the Ohio Republican to 66 for the Nebraskan.⁵⁶ In conceding defeat, Sewall said in part: "We are in for four years of government by injunction."⁵⁷

Nearly two weeks after the election, Sewall reflected on events that had contributed to Republican success. Convinced that a large proportion of the people favored silver, the defeated candidate blamed the press, church leaders, and businessmen for their stubborn opposition to Bryan. He also stated that only time would tell about the

wisdom of the decision rendered by the electorate on November 3. Should business improve and prosperity return under the gold standard, then it would mean that the silver patriots of 1896 had been wrong. On the other hand, if their theories were correct, there would be no permanent prosperity without the restoration of bimetallism. Sewall further promised the American people that

the cause of free silver will go on just the same as if the election had not gone against us. The fight will be kept up. Considering the influences which were against us, we achieved what is in a sense a victory.⁵⁸

The long-range effects of the presidential election of 1896 were far greater than Sewall had imagined in his summation of the campaign. The election with which he was involved turned out to be one of the most important contests in American history. All the political protest, economic discontent, and social tension of the previous thirty years climaxed in that decisive campaign and led to a realignment of political forces and a new governing coalition that dominated the nation, for the most part, until the Democratic displacement of the Republican majority in 1932.⁵⁹ It was Bryan, founder of the modern Democratic party, who provided the transition between the conservative program of President Cleveland and the progressive package developed later by the administrations of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Although Bryan and Sewall were quite opposite in terms of style, charisma, and background, they shared in common a vision for their nation and party. In fact, they were somewhat ahead of their time with regard to the political, economic, and social reforms that they advocated in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, both Democrats were enigmatical leaders from different regions of the nation who turned a political relationship in 1896 into a personal friendship of lasting value.

The most outstanding characteristic of Sewall's conduct during the campaign of 1896 was his willingness to sacrifice his own ambition for the good of the cause. Even though he announced publicly his determination to remain on the ticket, the businessman-politician wrote private letters to Bryan promising to resign in order to enhance the prospects for victory. The Nebraskan refused to consider dropping his political partner and later concluded that, under the existing circumstances, two running mates were better than one.⁶⁰

Sewall retired from political endeavors after his defeat in 1896, but continued to maintain an active interest in party affairs. He attended the Democratic National Convention in July, 1900, and hoped to celebrate Bryan's victory over McKinley that autumn. He did not live to witness the conclusion of the campaign and Bryan's second defeat. Suffering a fatal stroke of apoplexy at his summer home at Small Point, Maine, he died on September 5, 1900, leaving behind a memory that quickly faded into political obscurity.

— NOTES —

¹ William J. Bryan, *The First Battle: A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1896), p. 230.

² *New York Times*, July 12, 1896, p. 2.

³ *Ibid*, September 6, 1900, p. 7 Also, Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 149.

⁴ Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 232.

⁵ *New York Times*, July 12, 1896, pp. 1-2. Also, Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 206.

⁶ Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 222.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-27.

⁸ Adlai E. Stevenson (1835-1914), vice-president of the United States from 1893 to 1897, was the grandfather of Adlai E. Stevenson II (1900-1965), the late ambassador to the United Nations, and the great-grandfather of Adlai E. Stevenson III, United States Senator from Illinois.

⁹ William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago: John C. Winston Company, 1925), p. 117. Also, Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 229.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, July 16, 1896, p. 2. Sewall had earlier attended the Maine State Convention but not as a delegate. He was a delegate, however, to the Democratic National Convention. See *The Review of Reviews*, XIV (August, 1896), p. 140.

¹¹ Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 232.

¹² *New York Times*, August 1, 1896, p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, August 11, 1896, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, August 13, 1896, p. 1.

¹⁷ Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 437.

¹⁸ William L. Wilson to Isidor Straus, July 11, 1896, quoted in Festus P. Summers, *William L. Wilson and Tariff Reform* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953), p. 242. Also, George D. Wise to Wilson, October 17, 1896, William L. Wilson Papers, West Virginia University Library, Morgantown.

¹⁹ John Stites to William Lindsay, August 1, 1896, William Lindsay Papers, University of Kentucky Library, Lexington.

²⁰ Wilbur F. Browder to Lindsay, August 1, 1896, *ibid.*

²¹ W. B. Haldeman to Henry Watterson, August 22, 1896, Henry Watterson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²² John M. Palmer, *Personal Recollections of John M. Palmer: The Story of an Earnest Life* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Company, 1901), pp. 594-95, 619. For additional information on the presidential election of 1896, see the appropriate sections in Horace Samuel Merrill, *Bourbon Democracy of the Middle West, 1865-1896* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967); Harold U. Faulkner, *Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1963); Paul W. Glad, *The Trumpet Soundeth: William Jennings Bryan and His Democracy, 1896-1912* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,

1960); Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963); and Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1933). Also, see Horace Samuel Merrill, *Bourbon Leader: Grover Cleveland and the Democratic Party* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957), pp. 44, 207.

²³ Fred Heinz and L. M. Fisher to William C. Whitney, June 19, 1896, William Collins Whitney Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁴ Grover Cleveland to William F. Vilas, September 5, 1896, William Freeman Vilas Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. Also, Wilson to John M. Palmer, September 30, 1896, John McAuley Palmer Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

²⁵ William Jennings Bryan to Ignatius Donnelly, January 1, 1896, Ignatius Donnelly Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

²⁶ Ignatius Donnelly, Diary, July 18, 1896, Ignatius Donnelly Papers.

²⁷ C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 299.

²⁸ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), pp. 362-65.

²⁹ Woodward, *Tom Watson*, p. 300. Also, Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), *passim*.

³⁰ Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*, p. 117. Also, Woodward, *Tom Watson*, p. 309.

³¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 316. Also, Koenig, *Bryan*, pp. 243-45.

³² Quoted in H. Wayne Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p. 514. Also, Thomas E. Watson to Marion Butler, July 28, 1896, Marion Butler Papers, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill. also, Butler to Watson, September 14, 1896, Thomas E. Watson Papers, University of North Carolina Library.

³³ *New York Times*, July 30, 1896, p. 1.

³⁴ Arthur Sewall to Bryan, July 25, 1896, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Library of Congress. Bryan accepted the Populist nomination.

³⁵ *New York Times*, July 29, 1896, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1896, p. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, August 11, 1896, p. 1.

³⁸ Sewall to Bryan, September 1, 1896, Bryan Papers.

³⁹ *New York Times*, September 4, 1896, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, September 6, 1896, p. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, September 14, 1896, p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, September 9, 1896, p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1896, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1896, p. 1. Vice-President Stevenson vigorously denied reports that he had been asked to serve as the compromise vice-presidential choice. See *The Daily Bulletin* (Bloomington, Illinois), October 4, 1896, p. 6. Stevenson loyally supported the Bryan-Sewall ticket. See William M. Springer to Bryan, August 12, 1896, William McKendree Springer Papers, Chicago Historical Society Library, Chicago.

⁴⁶ Sewall to James K. Jones, August 31, 1896, Bryan Papers.

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, August 31, 1896, p. 2. To avoid a repeat performance of the debacle of 1896, the fusionist Populists in 1900 endorsed Stevenson, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, for second place on their ticket.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1896, p. 2.

⁴⁹ See H. C. Bell to William Lochren, July 14, 1896, William Lochren Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. Also, James Manahan to Mrs. James Manahan, September 12, 1896, James Manahan Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

⁵⁰ *New York Times*, September 27, 1896, p. 5. Bryan assured the citizens of Bath that he and Sewall had "no hostile designs against the people of the east." See Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 504.

⁵¹ *New York Times*, October 7, 1896, p. 1.

⁵² Bryan, *The First Battle*, pp. 437-39.

⁵³ *New York Times*, November 3, 1896, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Joseph Nathan Kane, *Facts About the Presidents: A Compilation of Biographical and Historical Data* (2d ed.; New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1968), p. 164.

⁵⁵ Russell B. Harrison to Stephen B. Elkins, November 10, 1896, Stephen B. Elkins Papers, West Virginia University Library. Also, John Hay to Whitelaw Reid, November 7, 1896, Whitelaw Reid Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, November 4, 1896, p. 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* There have been a few presidential and vice-presidential candidates, of both major parties, who were residents of Maine. The list includes Hannibal Hamlin, James G. Blaine, Arthur Sewall, and Edmund S. Muskie. Interestingly enough, of these four leaders, only Sewall lost his home state on election day. The Lincoln-Hamlin ticket in 1860, the Blaine-Logan ticket in 1884, and the Humphrey-Muskie ticket in 1968 all won the popular and electoral vote of Maine.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1896, p. 16. In a letter to Bryan dated one month after the election results, Sewall emphasized that silver should be the issue again in 1900. See Sewall to Bryan, December 3, 1896, Bryan Papers. Probably the most embarrassing personal incident for Sewall during the campaign of 1896 involved the intense opposition of his son, Harold Marsh Sewall, to the Democratic ticket headed by Bryan. Young Sewall had been appointed consul general at Samoa by President Cleveland during his first administration but was recalled from that position. Harold was later reappointed to the same position by President Harrison. During this process, young Sewall renounced Democratic principles and turned Republican partly out of revenge. He served as a delegate-at-large from Maine to the G. O. P. convention in 1896, strongly supported McKinley throughout the campaign, and ultimately was sent as United States Agent to Honolulu by the new Republican president to represent the administration there. In other words, the son of a vice-presidential candidate worked against his own father's ticket in 1896. See *New York Times*, September 6, 1900, p. 7.

⁵⁹ V. O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (5th ed.; New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), pp. 170-71, 535-36. Also, Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 1-10.

⁶⁰ Bryan, *The First Battle*, p. 298. Also, Gilbert C. Fite, "William Jennings Bryan and the Campaign of 1896: Some Views and Problems," *Nebraska History*, XLVII (September, 1966), pp. 247-64.

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