

Bryan Birthday Banquet, March 20, 1911

The Lincoln-Bryan Club gave a Bryan birthday banquet at Lincoln, Neb., on the evening of Monday, March 20th. The Lincoln (Neb.) Journal gives an extended report of the affair from which report the following is taken:

"Thirteen hundred enthusiastic democratic banqueters celebrated the fifty-first birthday of W. J. Bryan at the Lincoln auditorium. Enthusiasm was at a high pitch throughout the long program. No one minded the hot, stuffy hall, but listened intently to the principles advocated by the speakers, without an exception progressive in tendency. No effort was made to hide the fact, by Nebraska speakers, that the democratic party is divided between progressives and standpatters, just as much as the republican party is divided. The applause showed plenty of sympathy for the sentiment advocated.

"It was an open secret that the big banquet had been planned to show to the majority of the democratic party of the state that Bryan was not the dethroned leader he is fondly hoped to be by the men now in the saddle guiding the democratic party. It was planned to make the affair state-wide in order to indicate that all democrats had not severed allegiance to the 'Sage of Fairview' because of his attitude on the liquor question last fall. As the plan grew the managers became more optimistic, speakers of national prominence readily agreed to be present and the demand for reservations at the 'dollar dinner' came in thick and fast.

"The managers arranged for the largest hall of the city and ordered that all plates possible be laid. Republicans and democrats alike asked permission to attend. Delegations from many outside towns came in to be on hand to pay tribute to the leader. Legislators who had said bitter things against him at times caught the spirit and were on hand at least to listen.

"The result was that not in its history has Lincoln seen a greater gathering of banqueters for any purpose, and seldom has such wild enthusiasm been invoked as at times responded to the clear-cut convincing declarations of the speakers.

"The managers of the celebration had arranged that nine of the thirteen speakers should be Nebraska men, all identified closely with the party in Nebraska. And in these speakers the managers found men who were able to handle political conditions in Nebraska without gloves. Senator Skiles, representing the upper house of the state legislature, charged that there were two divisions in the democratic party, progressive and standpat, just as much as there were in the republican party. The democrats had, through the leadership of Mr. Bryan, advanced many principles in behalf of the people. In 1907 it took democrats to help progressive republicans enact needed reforms. In 1911 on every vital lineup in the initiative and referendum, candor compelled the speaker to admit, it took all the republican progressives to win victory.

"Dr. P. L. Hall, of Lincoln, vice chairman of the democratic national committee was toastmaster. Speakers living in the state were first on the program and all responded except W. H. Thompson of Grand Island and ex-Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger, who sent regrets. The toastmaster read telegrams from Norman Mack of Buffalo, democratic national chairman, and from Governor Eugene Foss of Massachusetts.

"In the audience were Congressmen Lobeck of Omaha, Latta of Tekamah, Sloan of Geneva, and Maguire of Lincoln. Governor Aldrich sat on the platform.

"The beginning of the dinner was delayed through a plan of the managers to have the speakers all seated before throwing open the doors. Hence the jam on the outside grew to enormous proportions, more and more impatient as time elapsed. The crowd without began gathering at 6 o'clock. By 7 o'clock the waiting ticket holders spread north and south for half a block and out into the street. They sang songs, twitted the guardian police, broke the glass doors, all in utmost good-humor that had something of impatience in it.

"Inside thirteen long tables stretched the length of the main floor of the auditorium."

Prayer was offered by Rev. Rudolph Caughey, of Lincoln.

PRESIDENT MEIER'S SPEECH

O. W. Meier, president of the club, in introducing the toastmaster, said: "Fellow Citizens and Friends—It has become an annual feature of the Lincoln Bryan Club to celebrate the birthday of our great leader. From year to year these festivities have grown, until tonight the

only regret we have is that we are unable to accommodate as we would like all who have come. This magnificent hall is not large enough for this gathering. I wish that this spread might have been arranged out doors under the canopy of heaven. In planning for this banquet, it soon became apparent that this year's celebration in honor of Mr. Bryan would again attract state-wide interest and might have national significance. It was therefore considered fitting and proper to have our national committeeman preside at this feast. I now have the honor to present to you one who needs no introduction to a Nebraska audience, the vice president of the national committee, Dr. Phillip L. Hall, your toastmaster."

TOASTMASTER HALL'S ADDRESS

In calling the great gathering to order, Dr. P. L. Hall, national committeeman from Nebraska, and vice chairman of the democratic national committee, spoke as follows: "It has been the custom for many years for the Lincoln Bryan Club to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the guest of the evening, Mr. Bryan, and on this, the fifty-first anniversary of that event, we have gathered here once more to greet him and honor him. We feel grateful to the other distinguished guests present who have come from their distant homes to join us in this event, and the magnificent audience that fills to overflowing this auditorium speaks the love and esteem that exists in this, his home, for our honored patron."

MR. SKILES' SPEECH

Senator C. M. Skiles, of the Nebraska state senate, said: "I am a democrat by birth, education and choice, and up until the present session of the legislature I always supposed I was in good standing. I began the battle for democracy in the presidential campaign of 1876, when a boy a little older than myself shouted into my ears 'Hurrah for Hayes, Tilden's no good.' My democratic enthusiasm was in no way suppressed by the fact that in the personal encounter that followed, I came out second best. Close observation of democracy's struggles since that time have convinced me that I was simply the victim of the general democratic rule.

"The rank and file of the democratic party is now, and for many years has been, distinctively progressive. They believed that the republican party was being used as a shield behind which the vested and special interests were sapping the income, resources, and life-blood of the people. They saw great and gigantic campaign funds used for the purpose of perpetuating this party in power in consideration of special grants and privileges given in return. They saw this party win elections on platform planks, pledges never meant to be fulfilled. They recently saw a great presidential contest made on the issue of tariff revision, and then witnessed the spectacle of a president of the United States, for the sake of party regularity, attempting to make the American people believe that a revision upward was a substantial compliance with the platform pledge. We common, everyday democrats have honestly and conscientiously believed that the democratic party was always right and the republican party most always wrong. During the last few years, however, the rank and file have been watching, not only the party record and the party platforms, but have carefully noted the roll calls in congress and the individual votes of their representatives, and they are familiar with the fact today that had the democrats in congress stood solidly with the insurgent republicans, that the tariff would have been revised downward in many instances, instead of upward. They know that some of the so-called democrats supported Aldrich and Cannon with the same loyalty as did their most partisan republican followers. In short the truth is at last forced upon them. The cat is out of the bag, so to speak; that there are two kinds of democrats in congress, as well as two kinds of republicans—the stand-patter and the progressive.

"And, gentlemen, fifty days in the Nebraska legislature will convince any student of politics, or any fair-minded man, or even the most bitter partisan, that what is true in the national legislature is true, to a great extent, in the state legislature. For nearly a quarter of a century in this state, the railroads, stockyards, breweries and churches gave their united support to the nominees of the republican party. One legislature after another met and adjourned without giving relief to the people, refusing

to abolish the pass evil, refusing to reduce freight, passenger or express rates, or to compel the special interests of the state to bear their just share of the burdens of taxation. The democratic party demanded these reforms year after year, and the individual members of the party spent their own time and money to advocate these reforms and to point out the evils that existed. The public conscience was finally awakened by these efforts and enough insurgent republicans elected, who, by joining with the democratic minority, were able to reduce freight, passenger and express rates and abolish the railroad pass—the fountain head of political corruption. Thus encouraged, the democratic party secured a majority in both branches of the next legislature and enacted the bank guarantee law as promised in their platform, but it was still difficult to secure needed legislation along many lines, and special interests were still accused of dictating to a large extent to the organization and policy of the legislature. The legislature was not always responsive to the demands of the people, refusing to submit amendments to the constitution, refusing the people the right to vote upon questions of great public interest, and the democratic party said, we will give the people direct legislation, or the initiative and referendum. We will place the tools of government in the hands of the people where they have always belonged, and we will give the people themselves the right to amend their constitution, to pass good laws, and to veto bad ones. And thus direct legislation was written into the platform of the democratic party and a solemn pledge given to the people that this pledge would be kept in case the legislature was democratic. The republicans also, were forced to adopt it. The present legislature is democratic, according to party label, and the first bill introduced in both houses of the legislature was the initiative and referendum, containing provisions along the lines of the bill introduced in the Nebraska legislature two years ago and in accordance with the provisions in other states, where the principle was in practical operation.

"Few doubted but what this measure would receive the unanimous support of every member of the legislature, but again it was found that there were two kinds of democrats as well as two kinds of republicans in the Nebraska legislature, as well as in the national legislature. Why, do you know that some of the members were so conservative when this bill came up, that they spoke about the constitution in a whisper. The constitution of this state, adopted thirty-six years ago, when we had a few thousand population, suddenly became so sacred that to allow the people to change it was equal to allowing an infidel to enter the holies of holies or the sanctum sanctorum. They said the people once given the power to amend their own constitution, the bill of rights, free speech, free schools and the right to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience might be abolished. Some were so conservative that they no doubt actually believed that the people once given the right to change their constitution or enact any laws they saw fit, would repeal the law of gravitation and the Ten Commandments. After fifty-three days of almost continuous fighting, the bill was finally passed, and while in some respects, is unduly restrictive, and unnecessarily expensive to the people, is on the whole a workable and progressive measure, and is a substantial compliance with the platform pledge. Candor compels me to say that on every critical vote in committee of the whole on proposed amendments, on parliamentary procedure, and the appointment of important committees, it required the combined vote of the progressive democrats and the progressive republicans to overcome the combined opposition of the stand-patters of both parties and to save the bill from amendments that would have made the law practically inoperative.

"Abraham Lincoln once said, 'This government cannot exist half slave and half free,' and gentlemen, I know, and you know, from the intensive fight and irrespressible conflict that is going on in this nation and in this state neither the republican or the democratic party can continue to exist half stand-pat and half progressive. There is little or no difference today between the stand-patters in the republican party and the stand-patters in the democratic party. There is little or no difference today between the progressives in the democratic party and the progressives in the republican party. There is little or no difference today between the democratic party and the republican party, for there are two kinds of democrats