

"Candidate Bryan Visits Carroll in 1900, Part I"

Carroll County Times Article for 22 October 2000

by Jay A. Graybeal

Perennial presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan campaigned in several Carroll County communities on October 23, 1900. The October 27 issue of the Democratic Advocate carried the story and his speech:

"The greatest political gathering in Carroll was that in Westminster on Tuesday last, to see and hear the greatest man of the century, Wm. Jennings Bryan, the great orator, the great statesman and the conspicuously honest man in American politics. Mr. Bryan displayed no oratory in his speech here, but spoke plainly to the people and gave them something to think about.

It was a great day for Democracy. Although Mr. Bryan was not expected until 3:20 o'clock in the afternoon, the sturdy Democracy of Carroll and adjoining counties began to arrive as early as 8 o'clock in the morning. By noon fully 10,000 persons had arrived, including many Republicans, and before Mr. Bryan arrived the throng was immense. The 11:53 a.m. train brought many people from Baltimore and other points east of Westminster and a special train from Hagerstown brought nearly 200 from points west, including the Double Pipe Creek Band. From Freedom district came a delegation in about 50 carriages, headed by about twenty horsemen, and accompanied by the Winfield Band. Besides these hundreds more were here from that strong Democratic district. From Myers' district was a large delegation, headed by the Carroll County Reed Band. From Manchester district, the Gibraltar of Democracy, hosts of sturdy Democrats came, and with them the Alesia Band. From Hampstead and Woolery's districts, whose majorities of over 100 each help to uphold and sustain Democratic ascendancy in Carroll, came hundreds of enthusiastic Democrats. From every district Democrats came in great numbers and many Republicans, too, until the throng in town numbered more than 15,000. The Westminster Band was out in full force and also two Westminster Democratic Drum Corps. The bands and drum corps were continually playing and kept the city lively all the afternoon. About 2:15 the Carroll Guards of Frizellburg arrived, and attracted much attention.

The sky was darkened by threatening clouds all the morning, and shortly after noon rain began falling. It came gently at first, but by 2:30 it came fast, driven by a strong southeast wind, and continued until about 9 o'clock at night.

Mr. Bryan's train was late in arriving, and it was after 4 o'clock when he arrived at the stand. The most of the crowd held their places during the two hours wait, notwithstanding the rain, and with the arrival of Mr. Bryan the throng was increased until more than 12,000 persons were on the grounds. An acre of ground will hold 12,000 people, allowing each person two feet square, and there were more than an acre of people present when Mr. Bryan reached the stand, and those nearest to the stand were so closely packed that they did not occupy two feet square.

Mr. Bryan rode in a carriage drawn by four spirited gray horses, driven by Mr. John W. Sellers, and was escorted by a number of horsemen, with J. Milton Reifsnider, Esq., chief marshal. The escort also included the Carroll Guards, the several bands and drum corps and a host of cheering people on foot. As the procession, turned from Bond street into the lot where the meeting was held, it presented a spirited scene, and a number of people likened it to the picture of the battle of Waterloo.

Mr. Bryan was seated by Comptroller Hering on the back seat of the carriage, and on the front seat were Hon. Murray Vandiver, chairman of the State Central Committee, and T. Herbert Shriver, member of the State Central Committee for Carroll. Cheers greeted Mr. Bryan from the time his train arrived until he reached the stand, and when he appeared there the enthusiasm of the multitude was unbounded. No man ever received a greater ovation, and no such a vast assembly ever waited two hours in the rain for any man. And when Mr. Bryan, near the close of his speech, said he would not detain them much longer in the rain there came from the audience a unanimous cry of "go on." They had come to see and hear the great Tribune of the People, and they would have endured the drenching rain as long as he could have talked.

Mr. Bryan was presented to the people by Chairman Vandiver, but it was some moments before Mr. Bryan could proceed on account of the cheering."

Not surprisingly, the American Sentinel, Westminster's Republican paper, carried a slightly different version of Bryan's visit. The paper disputed the reported size of the crowd who had come to hear the "Democratic Dictator."

The text of Bryan's speech will be printed in next week's column.

Photo caption: Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan's Free Silver monetary policy was criticized in this dollar bill circulated by the McKinley camp. A similar bill praised McKinley's Gold Standard. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.