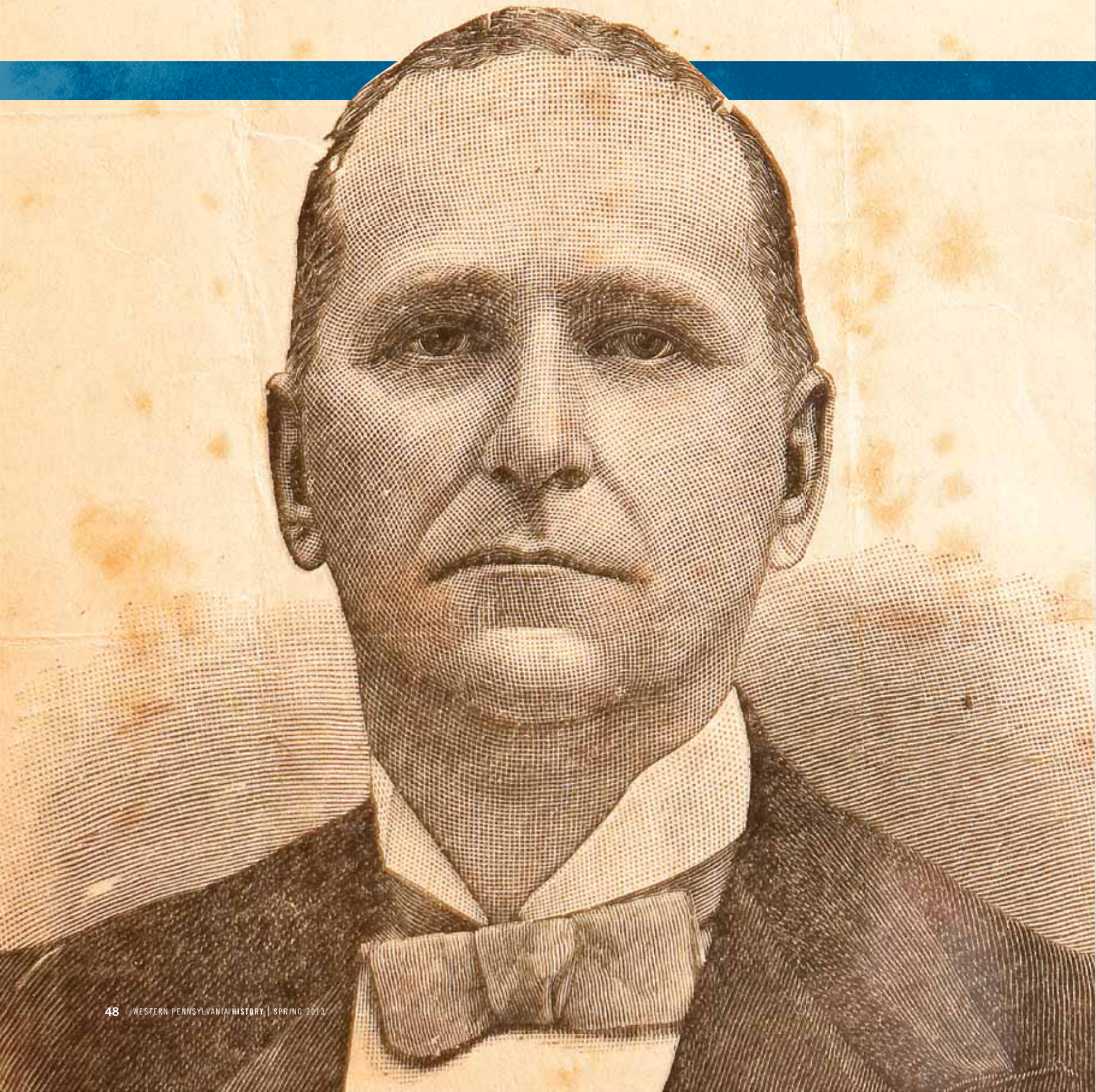


# JOSEPH SIBLEY





# THE KOOTENANY RAM OF POLITICS

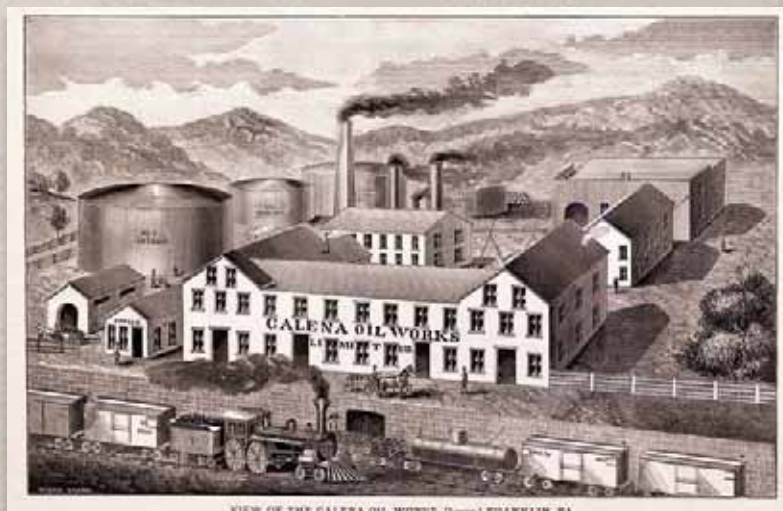
By Lucille Tabler

In the spring of 1895, speculations swirled in the hills of Western Pennsylvania and across the nation about who would be the next president of the United States. Adding to the fervor, an expanding free silver party knocked at the door of oil magnate and ex-Congressman Joseph Crocker Sibley of Franklin, Venango County, and found him willing to accept its presidential nod.<sup>1</sup> Popular locally, questions naturally surfaced outside the region about the qualifications of this dark horse candidate.

No ordinary politician, Sibley was supported and propelled by a vast fortune made in numerous ventures in the region where French Creek flows into the Allegheny River. A dynamic speaker, he was a mover and a shaker, philanthropist, inventor, and tireless entrepreneur who became a kingpin in the transportation sector.<sup>2</sup> Sibley could be described as a renaissance man who experimented with Jerusalem artichokes, held livestock auctions, trotted horses, went on yachting excursions,<sup>3</sup> created Franklin's hospital and opera house, and donated a massive pipe-organ to his First Baptist Church.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest view (1879-1901) of the Galena Oil Works in Franklin, Pa., in which Sibley's Signal Oil Works Company was located.

Ted Green Jr., Private Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.







**During his 1892 bid for the House of Representatives, Sibley's speeches focused on populist causes like overtaxing farmers. Embracing a graduated income tax, he believed wealthy Americans should pay more. In his own words, Sibley was for the working class, the farmer, mechanic, miner, and laborer.**

**Although Sibley ran as a Democrat in his 1892 congressional race, he usually promoted and spoke about Populist ideas, such as "Equal Rights To All."**

Ted Green Jr., Private Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.

Sibley behaved in the political world as he did in business, fearlessly speaking his mind, taking risks, and changing tactics or direction when anything stood in his way. Actively speaking against the sitting president, he worked to deter the leader of his own party from running again and became himself a prime candidate for the presidency. A major player in the burgeoning third party movements of the 1890s,<sup>5</sup> his outspoken demeanor was fodder for political cartoonists such as G.Y. Coffin, who portrayed him in national newspapers as the "Free Silver Moses" of his time.<sup>6</sup>

Despite successes in creating jobs, winning campaigns, and championing progressive policies, his positive achievements are rarely remembered. Instead, rumors abound of a chameleon-like millionaire burdened with legal woes and health issues, a virtual prisoner in his ridge-top mansion.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Sibley's meteoric rise in the late 19th century—and his frequent changes in party affiliation—reveal a complex and captivating story of ability and courage.

Joseph Sibley was the eldest child of Dr. Joseph C. and Lucy Sibley. Born February 18, 1850, in Friendship, New York, Sibley lived there until he was 15. Following the death of his father, Sibley's brother-in-law, Charles Miller, became his guardian and Sibley moved to Franklin.

In the decade that followed, Sibley and Miller went from selling dry goods to cornering the world market on petroleum-based railway lubricants and oils. The newly christened oil barons offered miracle products that did not attract insects, become rancid, or harden in cold weather.<sup>8</sup> In 1878, the industrial giant Standard Oil purchased Miller's Galena Oil Works and Sibley's Signal Oil Works, with both men remaining CEO/shareholders,<sup>9</sup> and reaping "a handsome figure" from the sale.<sup>10</sup>

The funds allowed Sibley to purchase three farms, 250 premium horses, and Senator Leland Stanford's prize trotter, valued at \$75,000. Famous for his horticulture and husbandry, Sibley built Franklin's first silo,<sup>11</sup> raised prize-winning vegetables, goats, and cattle,<sup>12</sup> and paid bounties for toads to control insects.<sup>13</sup> Friend and colleague H.M. Irwin reported: "When free from office cares if not found in the enjoyment of his large and well-selected library, he was pretty certain to be found at the farm [Prospect Hill Stock Farm] outlining numerous improvements and supervising the progress of work."<sup>14</sup> By 1879, his considerable fortune provided young Sibley with a yacht,<sup>15</sup> two vacation homes, and private Pullman rail cars.

Now well-established in his adopted hometown, Sibley took his first steps into the political arena that would earn him much

fame. At age 29, he was elected mayor of Franklin. Though Sibley initially registered as a Republican, he changed party affiliations and became a Democrat in 1884.<sup>16</sup> Irwin wrote, "Since that time although he has been classed as a Democrat, he has on many occasions shown that he regarded the duty of patriotism as immeasurably above the duty of party fealty."<sup>17</sup> In early 1892, Sibley set his sights on winning Pennsylvania's 26th Congressional seat.

As Sibley made his foray into national politics, the political discourse in Pennsylvania and around the country focused on free coinage of silver. "A close student of political and social economics,"<sup>18</sup> Sibley understood the debate over metal versus paper currencies, and increasing versus decreasing monies. Unlike either the gold standard Republicans who held the majority in Pennsylvania, or the gold majority in the Pennsylvania Democratic Party, Sibley came to believe that the free silver movement would lead to economic prosperity.

In 1837, the federal government pegged silver to gold at a ratio of 16 to 1. A decade later, however, gold supplies increased, while silver prices rose as mines closed. Silver dollars left circulation and miners stopped selling silver to the government. Reacting to this trend, Congress passed the Demonetization [Coinage] Act in 1873, stopping the minting



of silver dollars. However, with new discoveries of silver deposits, inflation-minded groups rechristened the Demonetization Act as the "Crime of 1873." The tight money supply was blamed for the Panic of 1873, which helped produce periods of economic depression. Over the next two decades, Congress passed laws requiring the minting of silver dollars, but it never tied gold to silver at 16 to 1. As silver prices declined, bimetalists clamored for free coinage of silver with no restrictions.<sup>19</sup>

Sibley supported free silver, but during his 1892 bid for the House of Representatives, his speeches focused on populist causes<sup>20</sup>

like overtaxing farmers.<sup>21</sup> He favored federal election controls to insure universal voting rights.<sup>22</sup> Embracing a graduated income tax, he believed wealthy Americans should pay more.<sup>23</sup> In his own words, Sibley was for the working class, the farmer, mechanic, miner, and laborer.

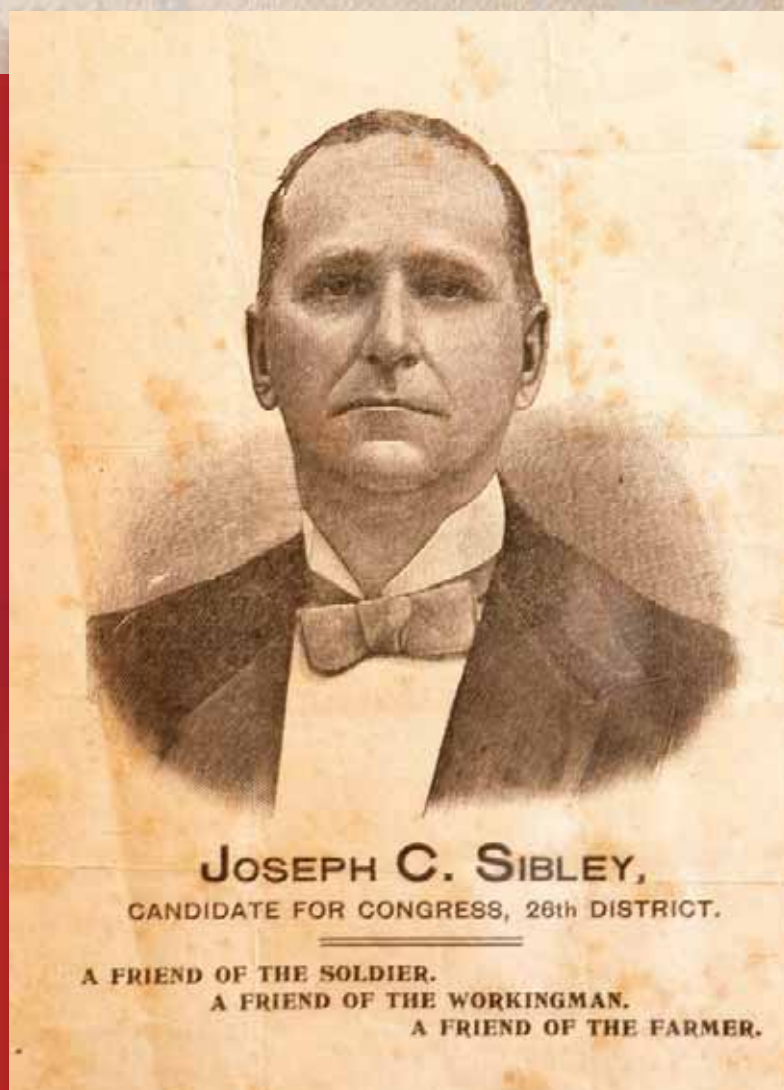
But Sibley's Republican opponents were relentless. *The Titusville Morning Herald* called him Standard Oil's puppet and a carpetbagger because he ran for a seat representing the 26th while living in the 27th District.<sup>24</sup> This prompted Sibley to move to the 26th District, where he set up a kite-shaped horse racing track in Meadville. Opponents sarcastically called

his race the Kite Campaign.<sup>25</sup> To counter the negative press, Sibley testified before a notary that his transactions were legal and above corruption.<sup>26</sup> Rivals also charged him with buying votes. After Sibley correctly predicted the exact number of votes cast for him by precinct, he explained his accuracy flowed from the rabbit's foot he acquired in the dark of the moon in a local cemetery, and not from vote-buying.<sup>27</sup>

Giving six speeches daily in a herculean effort to prevail, Sibley won his first Congressional race.<sup>28</sup> However, in failing to mention in his acceptance speech a single principle of the three parties that nominated him (Democrat, Prohibitionist, or Populist), detractors found Sibley vacillating.<sup>29</sup> Jumping from one party to another, he eventually became known as "The Kootenany Ram of Politics."<sup>30</sup> Sibley nonetheless retained his dedication to helping workers. When asked why, despite his wealth, he was still for the people, Sibley stated: "They still read, write, and think."<sup>31</sup>

Sibley's speaking prowess earned him a reputation in Washington that led to House leadership roles.<sup>32</sup> Responding to Democrat President Grover Cleveland's anti-silver stance,<sup>33</sup> Sibley delivered a scathing three-hour speech on August 18, 1893. According to the *New York Times*, Sibley spoke with malice towards gold Democrats, completely exonerating pro-silver laws from accusations that they deepened the depression.<sup>34</sup> Satirically, Sibley used the Bible, racetracks, and poker against Cleveland, and charged the administration with bribing men to follow its anti-silver cause. Sibley's 32-page speech<sup>35</sup> was requested by nearly two million Americans, making it at the time the most-circulated speech since the Civil War.<sup>36</sup> With newspapers and wire services the only media available<sup>37</sup> and politics a national sport,<sup>38</sup> distributing speeches was a powerful way to form public opinion and affect political change. For Sibley, Cleveland and his administration were prime targets.

University of Oklahoma professor H. Wayne Morgan reported that "Cleveland

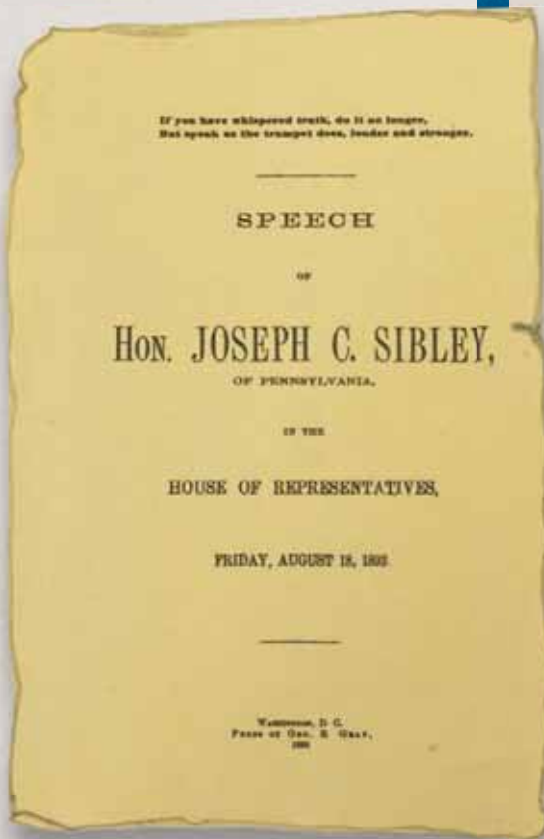


In his 1892 congressional run, Sibley showcased his support for the common man, not his party, in his 26th District Congressional campaign poster.

Ted Green Jr., Private Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.



**Responding to Democrat President Grover Cleveland's anti-silver stance, Sibley delivered a scathing three-hour speech on August 18, 1893. Sibley spoke with malice towards gold Democrats, completely exonerating pro-silver laws from accusations that they deepened the depression.**



Sibley's "Silver Speech of 1893" with the heading "If you have whispered truth; do it no longer, But speak as the trumpet does, louder and stronger" had the largest circulation since the Civil War; nearly two million copies were distributed in America.

Fraser, The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Collection.  
Photo by Jerry Sowden, The Derrick.

used to call 1894 his year of troubles and well he might, surrounded by economic depression and social unrest, facing formidable Republican opposition at his front while fellow Democrats sniped behind him.<sup>39</sup> Cartoonist G.Y. Coffin showcased the sniping by drawing five bandits, one labeled "Sibley," holding up a train identified as "business revival" with Cleveland as the engineer looking down from the locomotive cab.<sup>40</sup>

Actively encouraging a split in the Democrat Party, Sibley battled against the gold standard Democrats' refusal to support free silver. He vigorously opposed the administration's monetary policies that included the Cleveland-Carlisle Currency Bill and the Gold Bond Resolution.<sup>41</sup> As Congressional issuance of new bonds seemed unlikely and gold reserves continued to fall, Cleveland turned to J.P. Morgan's syndicate to provide a private bond offering. The economy was saved; however, the fact that private banks were enriched by selling bonds to the government in exchange for European gold prompted a political fire storm against Cleveland.<sup>42</sup>

Sibley whipped the flames in his last attack as an anti-Cleveland congressional "Wild Horse"<sup>43</sup> on January 8, 1895:

Mr. Chairman: As I recall a little couplet from the Hosea Biglow Papers, it runs about this way. *Concernin' the Gov'nment, there's no denyin' We're all out of money and most out of lyin'.*<sup>44</sup>

He then announced that it was time for him to cease his silence about Cleveland's policies. When the chairman asked who had locked his lips, the audience responded with laughter. Representative Outhwaite of Ohio interrupted next, asking if Dionysius had locked Sibley's lips. Sibley replied that he had no time to debate Outhwaite, who, Sibley charged, would rather go to hell than to walk to heaven in honesty.<sup>45</sup>

Sibley then called his two years with Cleveland a Democratic disaster. They were so bad that he threatened to resign.<sup>46</sup> Sibley said of Cleveland, "We have reached a time

when the government of this people requires more than a combination of brains, belly, and brass."<sup>47</sup> People flocked around Sibley, giving him applause while castigating Cleveland.<sup>48</sup> Knowing with this final, blatant blast that he could accomplish little if reelected, Sibley quit local politics.<sup>49</sup> He said nothing, however, about a higher position.

In early spring 1895, the American Bimetallic League met in Washington, D.C., to propose a silver party, platform, and leader. True to his reputation, the sure-footed ram unabashedly agreed to head the controversial third party, which could split the Democrats down the middle and out of the White House. Venango County's citizens awoke on March 7 to the news that their native son had officially agreed to be that leader.<sup>50</sup>

Almost immediately, the proposed Sibley ticket received mixed reviews. The March 13, 1895, *Salt Lake Herald* noted:

The gentleman prematurely nominated for President of the United States by the new so-called Silver Party ... may be a strong silver man, but he is not known to the masses of the people and there is nothing so very mighty about the man to elevate him as the coming leader."<sup>51</sup>

A month later, the *Princeton Union* gave a more positive spin to the campaign: "As an advocate of free silver it is suggested that Representative Sibley of Pennsylvania, would make an excellent presidential candidate to represent the interests of the eastern silverites."<sup>52</sup>

As the silver movement moved along, good news arrived. By mid-April, a Cleveland run was looking more doubtful.<sup>53</sup> Even an international newspaper reported that President Cleveland "has declined to allow himself to be nominated by the democratic caucus for a third term of office."<sup>54</sup> The field for the nomination appeared to be narrowing.

Sibley toured the country after his nomination with General A.J. Warner, chairman of the Bimetallic Party's executive committee.<sup>56</sup> The two attended Pacific coast silver receptions<sup>57</sup>



and the May 10, 1895, *Los Angeles Herald* reported that, "Over 1,000 people assembled last night in Hazard's pavilion to hear those two staunch warriors for the cause."<sup>58</sup> Sibley was "greeted with prolonged and vociferous applause as he stepped to the front of the stage. His delivery is earnest and his discourse full of statistics that were convincing."<sup>59</sup>

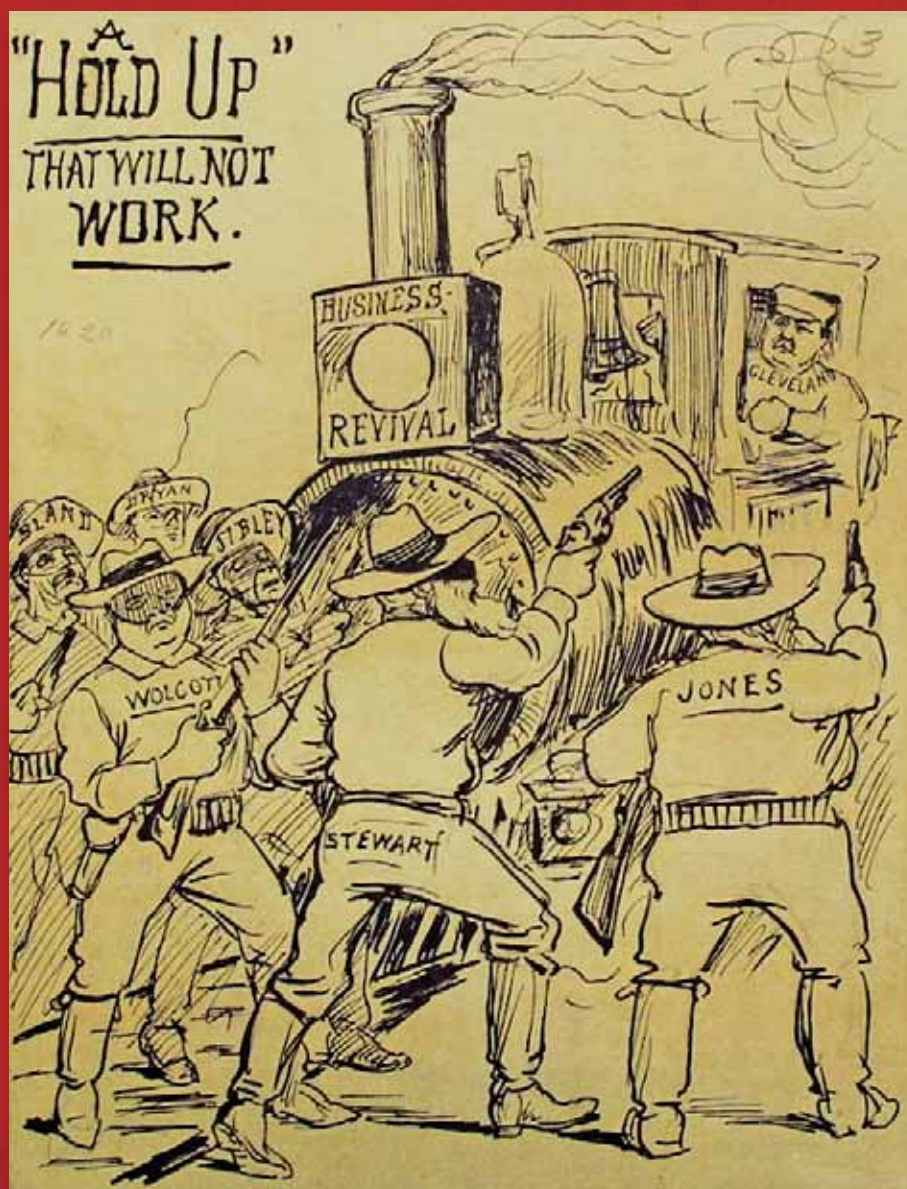
Despite his efforts, Sibley immediately ran into roadblocks. The May 16, 1895, *Evening Dispatch* of Provo City observed:

Instead of the great results for free coinage aimed at, the visit to California ... has apparently been productive of the opposite effect. The effect is the flat secession of the state [California] silver league from General Warner's national organization.<sup>60</sup>

The California Silver League denounced the Warner-Sibley movement "as an attempt to dictate a presidential nomination in advance." It asked sister states "to protest against the caucus method" and labeled Warner a "self-styled national executive committee" who was "establishing rival organizations in this and other states to force the favorite of the condemned caucus upon the American people."<sup>61</sup>

After five weeks on the road, Sibley was back home in Franklin, speaking to friendlier audiences like the local Nursery Club.<sup>62</sup> But storm clouds were brewing—as 1,500 Great Silver Convention delegates met in Memphis, Tennessee, in mid-June, the *Salt Lake Herald* suggested southern Democrats and western Republicans be vigilant:

The first warning of the approaching encounter was heard last night in the bold utterances of Congressman Joseph Sibley of Pennsylvania in favor of a Silver Party, an aggressive campaign for the remonetization of the white metal without regard to previous party ties. Today, all disguises were thrown off. The men who favor a silver party with one purpose and one idea under the leadership of Sibley ... told of their plans without reserve and asked their hearers to decide between party and nation.<sup>63</sup>



Created between 1892 and 1895, political cartoonist G. Y. Coffin included Sibley as one of several bandits stopping his party's leader, President Cleveland, who was trying to bring recovery to America's business sector.

Library of Congress. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.

**"Cleveland used to call 1894 his year of troubles and well he might, surrounded by economic depression and social unrest, facing formidable Republican opposition at his front while fellow Democrats sniped behind him."**

**~ H. Wayne Morgan, University of Oklahoma**



Fiscal conservatives who controlled the conference adjourned the meeting with members being severely divided. Specifically, “One faction advocates the Sibley ‘idea’ and the capture of the Democratic convention, and, failing in that, in independent political action, while others were citing the issue strictly within party lines.”<sup>64</sup>

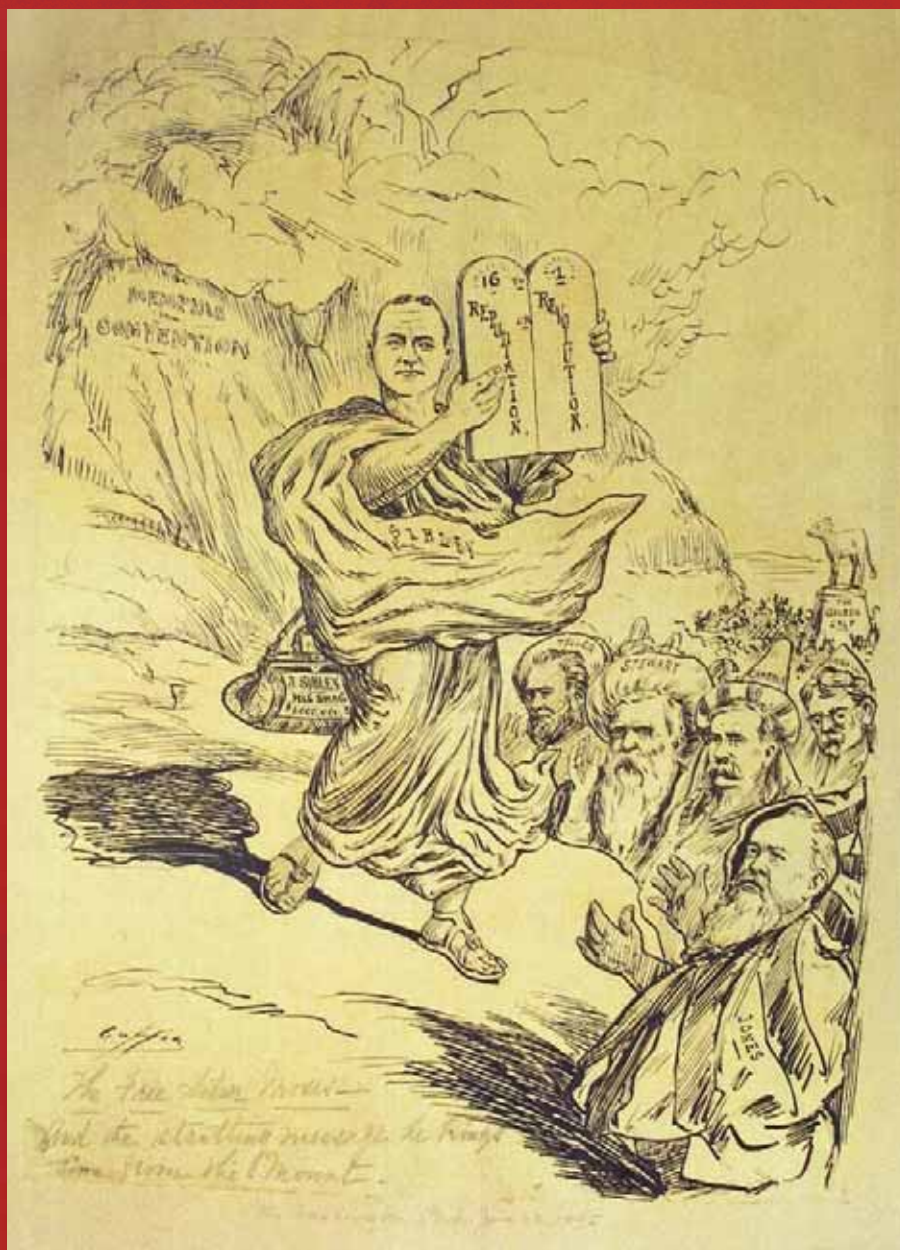
More ominous news arrived six weeks later: the southern silverites decided to work for free silver within the Democrat Party. A serious blow for Warner, it was especially troubling for Joseph Sibley.<sup>65</sup> Undaunted, Sibley spoke on August 15 at the State Farmers Alliance in North Carolina.<sup>66</sup> The *New York Times* printed his remarks: “We [Silver Party] have nine million votes, but partisanship weakens us. We must win in 1896 or we will never win.”<sup>67</sup> However, questioning the severe criticism Sibley leveled at anti-silver Congressmen (specifically Senator John Sherman, whom he likened to Judas Iscariot), the paper asked: “Was this the sort of stuff he would put in his Presidential message if the impossible should happen?”<sup>68</sup>

The *Citizen Press* reported no engagements for Sibley from August 1895 through April 1896.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps as winter slowed his travel, he realized silver Democrats would never support a separate Silver Party. However, with the arrival of spring, the *Citizen Press* announced that Sibley would resume his campaign activities by speaking at the nearby Titusville Opera House.<sup>70</sup>

Spring brought Pennsylvania Democrats together to prepare for a raucous national convention. On April 29, 1896, delegates at the planning meeting were bombarded with cuff links, Silver Party pins,<sup>71</sup> and Sibley’s speeches.<sup>72</sup> Immediately, the powerful William Harrity, chairman of both the Pennsylvania and National Democratic parties, saw that his gold men endorsed the gold standard<sup>73</sup> and chose pro-gold former Governor Robert E. Pattison as Pennsylvania’s nominee for president. In defiance of Harrity and hoping to give their votes

**“Today, all disguises were thrown off. The men who favor a silver party with one purpose and one idea under the leadership of Sibley ... told of their plans without reserve and asked their hearers to decide between party and nation.”**

**~ Salt Lake Herald, June 14, 1895**



In “The Free Silver Moses and the Startling Message He Brings Down From The Mount,” political cartoon, G. Y. Coffin notes that Sibley is bringing a strong message from the Memphis Silver Convention. Politicians, including the gold supporters at his feet, are warned to listen carefully to his 16 to 1 commandment. Sibley is also shown to have the power of the purse.

Library of Congress. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.



to Sibley, Pennsylvania's silver delegates tried through day three of the national convention to nullify the "voting as a block" Unit Rule.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the Unit Rule roadblock, Sibley arrived in Chicago via his plush railcar on July 6, a day before the convention began. A jaunty dresser, he strode into the auditorium of the Chicago Coliseum in a white suit and hat and announced his free silver candidacy.<sup>75</sup> The *Oil City Derrick* reported his friends energetically canvassed delegates, receiving promises of support if Pattison released his delegates.<sup>76</sup>

The Democratic National Convention convened July 7, rife with strife between the gold and silver factions. Pennsylvania's delegates,

seated in the first six rows, carried flags and wore red banners emblazoned with "Pattison" across their chests.

Silver won several decisive victories soon after the convention was called to order. When David B. Hill, the national committee's gold man, was rejected for the position of temporary chairman, a confused and angry Harrity, instead of ringing the bell for order, mistakenly rang for the band to play. Chaos reigned.<sup>77</sup> As the shouting diminished, Stephen M. White, a bimetallist, was eventually chosen permanent chairman and the silver Democrats celebrated.<sup>78</sup>

With free silver leadership in place, Sibley's chances of becoming the Democratic free silver

presidential nominee were bolstered and more good news would arrive with the approval of a party platform. The final Democratic platform was a true free silver document that rebuked Republican trickle-down economic theory and supported legislation "to make the masses prosperous [so] their prosperity will find its way up and through every class."<sup>79</sup> It denounced the Demonitization Act of 1873, encouraged free silver, condemned the national bank, criticized the McKinley Tariff, protested the immigration of paupers, promoted an income tax, and supported presidential term limits. The bimetallists and populists who sponsored all of these planks<sup>80</sup> also supported Sibley; secure in his record, he focused on the presidential contest.

Sibley's real battle for the presidential nomination began the morning of July 9, when Pennsylvania's delegates met in caucus and agreed to abandon their efforts to overthrow the Unit Rule and give Pattison their 64 votes. Later that day, with tensions rising, state leaders began to nominate candidates. Sibley's name was noticeably absent from the list.

The next day, Harrity nominated Pattison,<sup>81</sup> and on the first ballot, Pattison received 96 votes, including Pennsylvania's 64.<sup>82</sup> However, Sibley remained hopeful, encouraged by the July 9 *Citizen Press* prediction that "after a few ballots, Pattison would give his votes to Sibley."<sup>83</sup> Sadly for Sibley, Harrity disagreed with the paper, steadfastly supported Pattison, and dashed Sibley's chances with an entrenched refusal to release Pennsylvania's delegation.<sup>84</sup> Finally, on the fifth ballot, Nebraska Representative William Jennings Bryan became the Democratic presidential nominee.<sup>85</sup>



**The *Judge* magazine cover (June 29, 1895) "It's Fun For Them, But Death To Their Party!" predicted that the silver issue would overtake and engulf the Democrat Party and lead to its defeat in 1896.**

Fraser, The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Collection.  
Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.



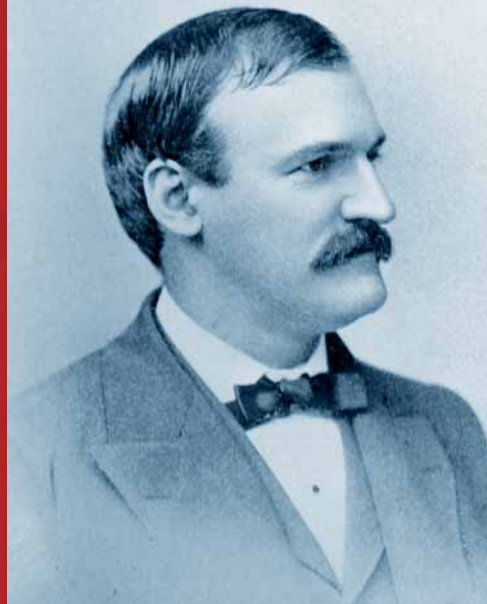
Now out of the race for the presidential nomination, Sibley's name cropped up with several others for the vice-presidential nod and a confusing mix of events unfolded. Choices were debated, and Bryan asked the convention to name his running mate. However, he threatened to withdraw if John McLean of Ohio were chosen. Nominations would come the next day.

Only four men were truly in contention for the position: McLean, Richard Bland, Arthur Sewall, and Joseph Sibley.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately for Sibley, 90 percent of Pennsylvania's delegates went home following Bryan's nomination.<sup>87</sup> When J.D. Shewalter of Missouri nominated Sibley, the *New York Times* reported there was so much applause that opponents were unnerved.<sup>88</sup> Shewalter said:

I now go to the East and produce a name known to every delegate present for his distinguished services in the cause of humanity and Democracy ... indeed a man who, seizing the banner of the people in the people's righteous cause, threw it in the face of aggregated power and challenged it to the conflict. I name for the second place upon this ticket a man who will add strength to it.... I nominate Joseph C. Sibley, of the grand Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.<sup>89</sup>

Morris of Illinois seconded Sibley's nomination, citing "wide business experience and capacity."<sup>90</sup>

An hour later, on the first ballot, Sibley received the highest vote, with 163 affirmations.<sup>91</sup> At Bryan's direction, his home state of Nebraska "was not willing to take any part in the Vice-President contest."<sup>92</sup> The second ballot found Sibley receiving the second highest vote, at 113. Suddenly word spread that Sibley had personally asked Shewalter not



**The powerful William Harrity, chairman of both the Pennsylvania and National Democratic parties, saw that his gold men endorsed the gold standard and chose pro-gold former Governor Robert E. Pattison as Pennsylvania's nominee for president.**

to nominate him and immediately delegate support for Sibley dissolved. Just as the third balloting began, proof of the rumor arrived with a telegram to the convention: "Meadville, PA, July 11, Amos Cummings: Please do not permit my name to be presented. I so instructed my friends yesterday. Joseph C. Sibley."<sup>93</sup> Quietly and unbeknownst to delegates, Sibley had left Chicago following Bryan's nomination. In transit to Franklin, Sibley learned Arthur Sewall of Maine was nominated on the fifth ballot,<sup>94</sup> with Nebraska finally giving 16 votes to Sewall when it was clear he had won.<sup>95</sup>

Sibley's refusal was puzzling at best. The *Marietta Daily* helped to solve the mystery by reporting that various state delegation representatives called upon Sibley, offered him their support for Vice President, and assured him with his consent there would be no contest against him. Not willing, however, to play second fiddle, Sibley told a representative of

**Bryan included in his book, *The First Battle*, a portrait of Pennsylvania's former governor, Robert Pattison, who became the commonwealth's presidential nominee at the 1896 Democratic Convention.**

Lucy Tabler Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.

the United Press, "I felt I could not do the same good services for the cause at the foot of the ticket as at the head, or as a private in the ranks and declined to permit my name to be used."<sup>96</sup> In the end, his refusal to run was shrewd. It freed Sibley to pursue other options, eventually moving him to the other side of the political aisle. However, in late July 1896, he was reduced to being only a spectator to the unfolding political events.<sup>97</sup>

The convention was over and the fallout was immediate. Sewall's suitability was instantly questioned,<sup>98</sup> with critics claiming he concocted

his silver ideas merely to get nominated. At the Populists' convention in late July, Bryan was selected for the top of their ticket while Sewall was replaced for the vice presidency by Senator Thomas E. Watson.<sup>99</sup> In Pennsylvania, Democratic delegates reconvened after the national convention and, in criticism of the first Pennsylvania Convention, threw out Harrity's gold standard and adopted the Democratic Party's free silver platform.<sup>100</sup>

More criticism was leveled at Harrity, who, the *Citizen Press* argued, had denied Pennsylvania the honor of having the presidential nominee.<sup>101</sup> When the *New York Times* reported that Harrity had not actually wanted to nominate Pattison,<sup>102</sup> people wondered who was pulling his strings. The *Citizen Press* responded that Harrity had carried out Cleveland's wishes.<sup>103</sup> Clearly, Sibley's past tirades in Congress against President Cleveland thwarted his own presidential aspirations, and both men were now out of the contest.



Sibley, however, was still engaged in the national debate, and began a correspondence with Bryan. Marian Silveus, history professor and former librarian of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, noted, "A week or so later, recovered from his disappointments to the presidency, [Sibley] wrote a note of congratulation to Bryan. He frankly told him that he had been for Teller ... but that of all others who were considered, he preferred Bryan."<sup>104</sup> Bryan lost the election to William McKinley, both nationally and in Pennsylvania, as state voters stuck to their traditional Republican leanings and rejected the Democratic silver campaign. McKinley's pro-gold slogan, "Good money never made times hard," cemented his win.<sup>105</sup>

Sibley's sister-in-law Galena Harrington confirmed Sibley's and Bryan's friendship, even though Bryan had refused to openly support Sibley as his running mate. "Through the years to his death in 1926, Sibley never mentioned it."<sup>106</sup> Bryan also valued their friendship, and even traveled to Erie in August 1896 to give a stump speech for his silverite ally during Sibley's campaign for Congress.<sup>107</sup>

In spite of (or perhaps because of) Bryan's endorsement, Sibley lost the election. Running again as a Democrat in 1898, rumors surfaced that "Sibley was wavering from his 'silver Democrat' position."<sup>108</sup> Bryan visited Franklin in April, hoping to shore-up Sibley and local silverite efforts. However, in a speech given at

the Opera House, Bryan caused "some of the faithful brethren to squirm a little" with his "attacks on corporations and trusts."<sup>109</sup>

In November, there was a noticeable change in Sibley's tone. Two new Republican groups with "Standard Oil and railroad connections" held Sibley rallies in Oil City. Upon his reelection, Sibley cited "good times" for his philosophical change.<sup>110</sup> While Republicans applauded Sibley for this shift in thinking, he received nothing but disgust from House Democrats.<sup>111</sup>

A December 12, 1899, *New York Times* headline read, "Pennsylvania Democratic Congressman Abandons 16 to 1." Sibley admitted he wrongly believed free silver was the only answer for prosperity. He had feared gold



The Chicago Coliseum, site of the 1896 Democratic Convention, covered five and a half acres, seated 20,000 people, had poor acoustics, offered the services of 16 doctors to delegates, and provided seats "that a three hundred pound man could jump on all day without weakening it." The picture was included in Bryan's *The First Battle*.

Lucy Tabler Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*. Narrative, R Hal Williams.



would bring bad times; instead, increases in the gold supply and McKinley's policies had industry booming. He stated, "I was a pessimist, now I am an optimist."<sup>112</sup> Praising McKinley's monetary and expansionist agenda, it was clear that Sibley had deserted the free silver cause.<sup>113</sup>

Never acknowledging that his efforts in favor of free silver could have "had a disturbing effect on business and postponed recovery from the hard times,"<sup>114</sup> the former silver man from Franklin went on to win reelection in 1900, 1902, and 1904 as a Republican. As Congress's wealthiest<sup>115</sup> man, Sibley was emboldened to change his position, which his constituents tolerated and even celebrated:

They recognized his right to change his party name as a common privilege exercised by men in all ranks of public life. This could not change his disposition and the tendencies of his life. As they had known him, so he would continue, in favor of the general welfare.... Men bound by party ties or herded in party tents beyond escape, do not see principles more readily than others.<sup>116</sup>

As Sibley altered his tone, his attitude and actions changed as well. By 1900, Sibley possessed an enviable political reputation of doing what he wanted. That would eventually change, however—there was a fine line between confidence and arrogance. After being called Standard Oil's spy in Congress<sup>117</sup> and officially charged with buying votes,<sup>118</sup> Sibley quietly withdrew from a 1910 primary race. Too frail to attend legal hearings, Sibley retired to his mansion with a cloud of unresolved legal issues hanging over his head.<sup>119</sup> The October 6, 1910, *McCook Tribune* in Nebraska wrote as part of Sibley's brief political epitaph:

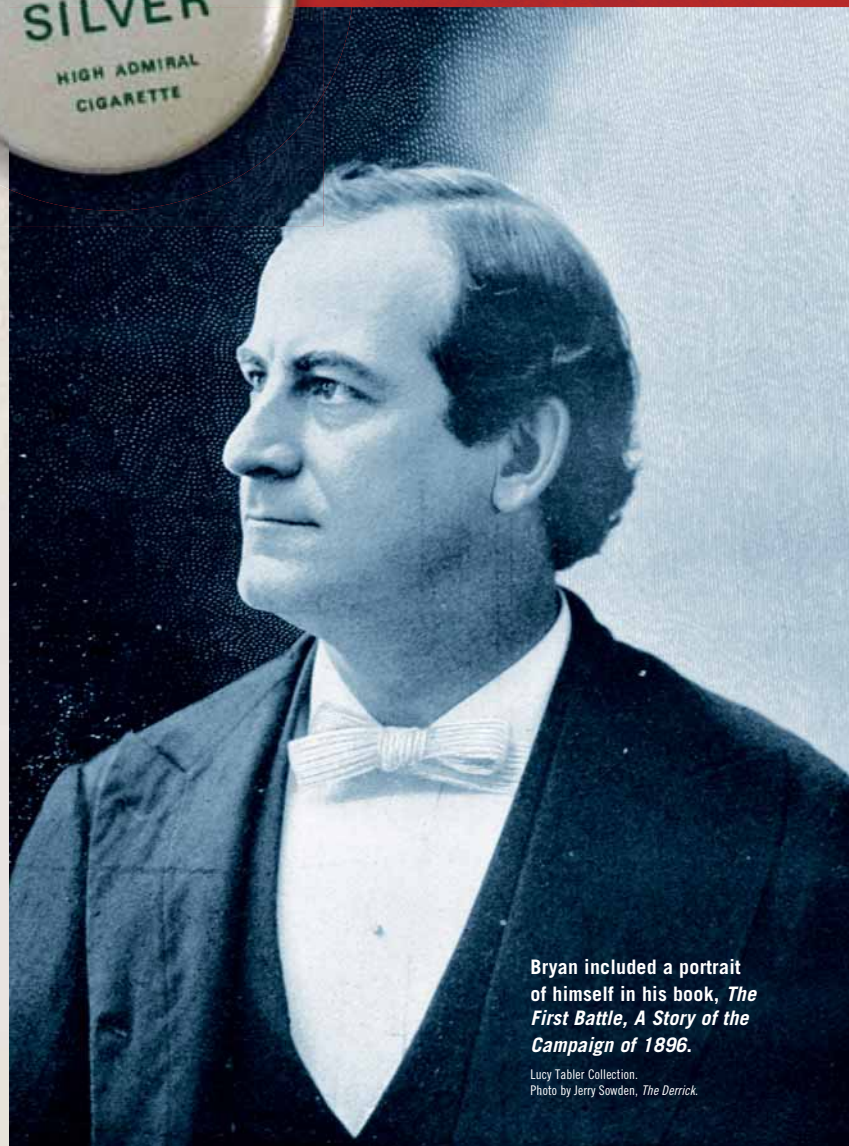
Voters recall the career of a man who probably holds the record for frequent changes of politics. He has at different times been known as a Democrat, a Populist, a Prohibitionist, [Bimetallist], and a Republican. On account of his nimble changes from one political eminence to another he has been called "the Kootenany Ram" of Politics.<sup>120</sup>

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A 1970s replica of William Jennings Bryan's 1896 campaign button given out at gas stations with the purchase of gasoline as part of the American Oil Company sweepstakes entitled "Hats Off To The Past."

Lucy Tabler Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.



Bryan included a portrait of himself in his book, *The First Battle, A Story of the Campaign of 1896*.

Lucy Tabler Collection.  
Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.

**"A week or so later, recovered from his disappointments to the presidency, [Sibley] wrote a note of congratulation to Bryan. He frankly told him that he had been for Teller ... but that of all others who were considered, he preferred Bryan."**

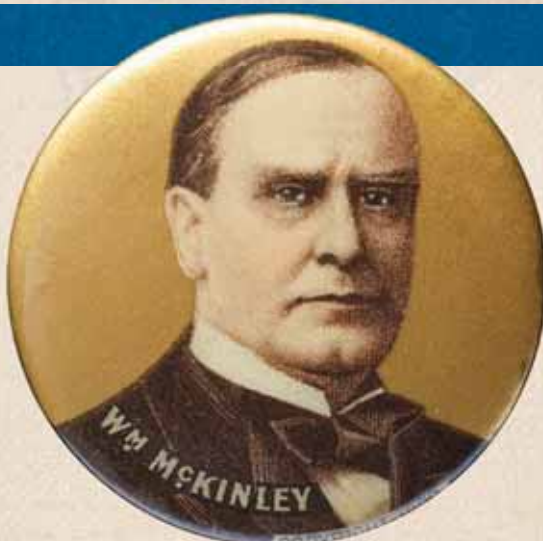
**~ Marian Silveus  
Historical Society of  
Western Pennsylvania**



- <sup>1</sup> *Citizen Press*, March 7, 1895, 1.
- <sup>2</sup> John J. McLaurin, *Sketches in Crude Oil* (Harrisburg: Published by the author, 1896), 94-99.
- <sup>3</sup> *Oil City Derrick*, November 13, 1968, 9. Sibley conducted and published scientific research with Jerusalem artichokes as livestock food [see *Experiments indicating that the economic food and forage value of the Mammoth French White Jerusalem artichoke may greatly modify if not change present day methods of animal husbandry* (1922) and *Observations and Experiments with the Mammoth French White Artichoke to Date of April 1, 1924*]. Remnants of the plant remain today at his River Ridge farm.
- <sup>4</sup> McLaurin, *Sketches in Crude Oil*, 97.
- <sup>5</sup> *Derrick*, November 13, 1968, 9.
- <sup>6</sup> George Yost Coffin, "The Free Silver Moses," June 22, 1895, #224, Library of Congress, accessed April, 29, 2012, <http://www.loc.gov>.
- <sup>7</sup> *Derrick*, November 13, 1968, 9. Sibley's retirement mansion, completed in 1913, was the site of his second marriage (to his niece). The mansion and its 760 acres became a gathering place for illustrious visitors, agricultural experiments, and large community events. Under a cloud of unresolved legal issues stemming from charges of voter fraud in 1908 and in failing health, Sibley retired to his mansion in 1910. To this day, unsubstantiated rumors abound that he was legally remanded to his home.
- <sup>8</sup> E. P. Boyle, *The Derrick's Hand-Book of Petroleum* (Oil City, PA: Derrick Publishing Co., 1898), 999. After many experiments, Sibley produced a signal oil superior in light, safety, and cold test to any previously used. He then perfected a valve oil from petroleum stocks that was free from the bad qualities of the animal oils previously used. In 1898 it was said that four-fifths of the railroads used the product.
- <sup>9</sup> Carolee K. Michener, *Franklin – A Place In History* (Franklin, PA: Franklin Bicentennial Committee-Derrick Publishing Co., 1995), 76. In 1901, the two companies were joined into Galena-Signal Oil with a value of \$10 million. In 1909 the courts found Standard Oil in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and it was broken up. Galena-Signal Oil became an independent company.
- <sup>10</sup> Boyle, *The Derrick's Hand-Book of Petroleum*, 999.
- <sup>11</sup> McLaurin, *Sketches in Crude Oil*, 99.
- <sup>12</sup> *Derrick*, Nov. 13, 1968, 9.
- <sup>13</sup> Joseph Sibley, *Views of River Ridge Farm—Franklin, PA* (1925; reprint, Margaret A. Mong, ed., Oil City, PA: Published by the editor, 1999), vi. See also William L. Passauer, [www.OilCityPa.net](http://www.OilCityPa.net).
- <sup>14</sup> H. M. Irwin, "Presidential Possibilities: Hon. Joseph C. Sibley," *American Magazine of Civics* VI (June 1895): 618.
- <sup>15</sup> Lake Champlain Tercentenary Celebration, July 4-9, 1909: Joseph C. Sibley's yacht VALCOUR, 1909, #Lot 3182, Library of Congress, accessed February 21, 2012, <http://www.loc.gov>.
- <sup>16</sup> *Derrick*, Nov. 13, 1968, 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Irwin, "Presidential Possibilities," 618.
- <sup>18</sup> McLaurin, *Sketches in Crude Oil*, 98.
- <sup>19</sup> For the development of the Free Silver Movement, see Joseph R. Conlin, *A History of the United States* (Chicago: Coronado Publishers, 1985), passim.
- <sup>20</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, June to November 1892.
- <sup>21</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, Oct. 18, 1892, 1.
- <sup>22</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, Nov. 3, 1892, 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Lewis W. Rathgeber, "Joseph C. Sibley, Democratic Presidential Aspirant in 1896," *Western Pennsylvania History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1954), 111, accessed February 24, 2012, <http://libraries.psu.edu/psu/digital/wph.html>.
- <sup>24</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, Oct. 31, 1892, 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Michener, *Franklin – A Place In History*, 165.
- <sup>26</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, Oct. 10, 1892, 2.
- <sup>27</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, Nov. 11, 1892, 4.
- <sup>28</sup> John W. Jordan, *Genealogical and Personal History of the Allegheny Valley*, Pennsylvania (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1913), I, 315.
- <sup>29</sup> *Titusville Morning Herald*, Oct. 8, 1892, 1.
- <sup>30</sup> Bela James Porter, *The Historical Register: A Biographical Record of the Men of Our Time Who Have Contributed to the Making of America* (New York: Published by the author, 1928), 185.
- <sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, August 19, 1893, 1.
- <sup>32</sup> Charles A. Babcock, *Venango County Pennsylvania Her Pioneers and People I* (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1919), 85.
- <sup>33</sup> Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 44.
- <sup>34</sup> *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 1893, 1.
- <sup>35</sup> *If You Have Whispered the Truth... Speech of Hon. Joseph C. Sibley In the House of Representatives, August 18, 1893* (Washington, D.C.: Press of Government, R. Gray, 1893), accessed March 5, 2012, [http://fraser.stlouisfed.org/docs/publications/mg53c/mg53c\\_v5hr\\_0061.pdf](http://fraser.stlouisfed.org/docs/publications/mg53c/mg53c_v5hr_0061.pdf).
- <sup>36</sup> Irwin, "Presidential Possibilities," 619.
- <sup>37</sup> William D. Harpine, *From the Front Porch to the Front Page: McKinley and Bryan in the 1896 Presidential Campaign* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2005), 39.
- <sup>38</sup> Ryan S. Walters, *The Last Jeffersonian: Grover Cleveland and the Path to Restoring the Republic* (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2012), 18. Most presidential elections saw heavy voter turnout, with an average of 70 percent throughout the Gilded Age. Turnout jumped to 80 percent for the crucial election of 1896, with five states reporting 95 percent of eligible voters going to the polls.
- <sup>39</sup> H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), 134.
- <sup>40</sup> George Yost Coffin, "A Hold Up That Will Not Work," 1895 - 1896, #205, Library of Congress, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.loc.gov>.
- <sup>41</sup> Irwin, "Presidential Possibilities," 619.
- <sup>42</sup> Roy Kreitner, "Money in the 1890s: The Circulation of Politics, Economics, and Law," *UCLA Law Review* 1, no. 3 (February 22, 2012): 980, accessed December 7, 2012, <http://www.UCL.edu/lawreview/Vol1No3Articles/Kreitner.pdf> The Morgan deal created a political fire storm, with charges of corruption surrounding Cleveland guaranteeing it would be a focal point in the 1896 election.
- <sup>43</sup> Harry Thurston Peck, "Twenty Years of the Republic 1885-1905 Part XI The Rising of the West," *The Bookman* XXII (November 1905), 251.
- <sup>44</sup> *Appendix to Congressional Record, Fifty-third Congress, Third Session* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 114.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.
- <sup>47</sup> Nevins, *Grover Cleveland* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1932), 675.
- <sup>48</sup> *Citizen Press*, January 10, 1895, 2.
- <sup>49</sup> Irwin, "Presidential Possibilities," 619.

In 1896, McKinley used the new celluloid pin-back button with slogans such as "A Full Dinner Pail." Pins without slogans had a ruffled ribbon around the button and a flowing fabric bow in the background, which is missing from this pin.

Ted Green Jr., Private Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.

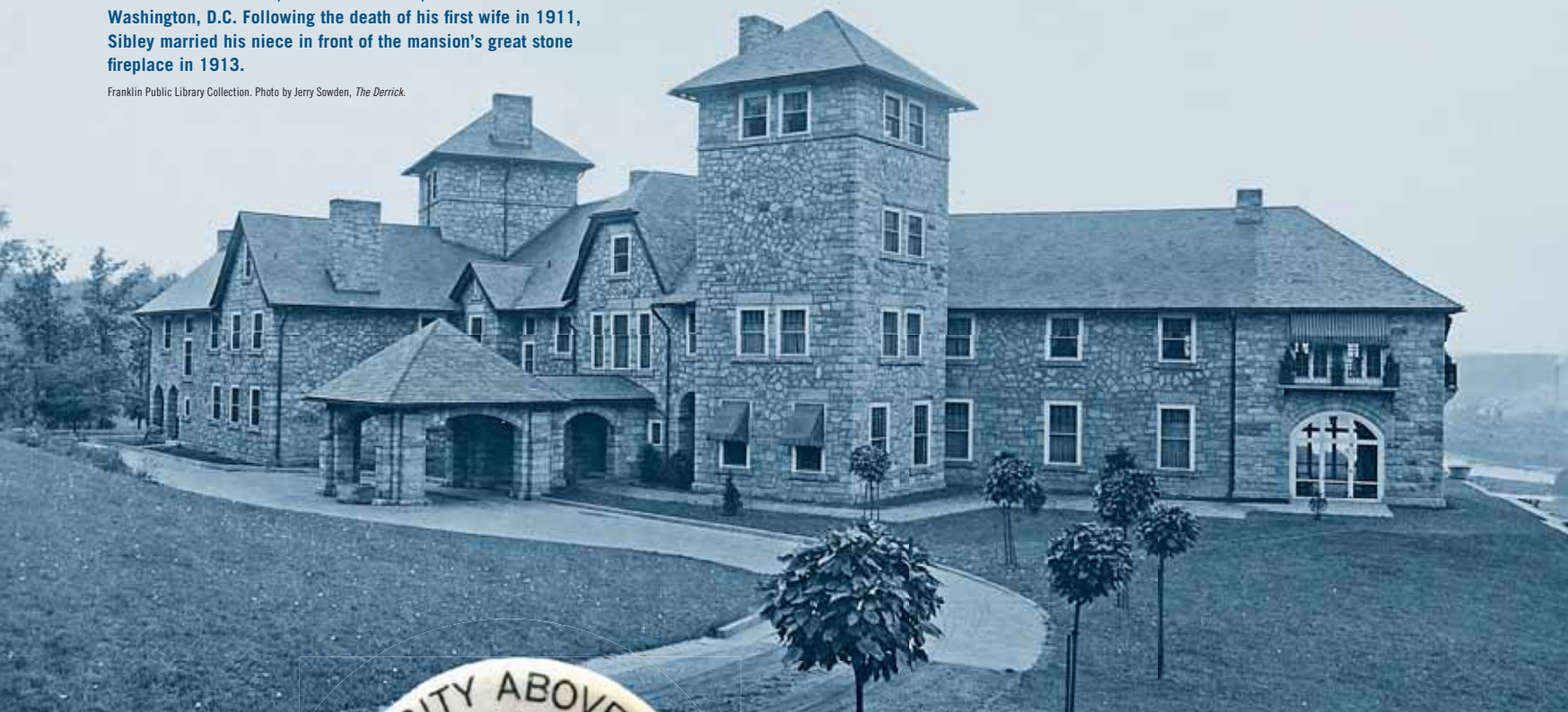


Bryan lost the election to William McKinley, both nationally and in Pennsylvania, as state voters stuck to their traditional Republican leanings and rejected the Democratic silver campaign. McKinley's pro-gold slogan, "Good money never made times hard," cemented his win.



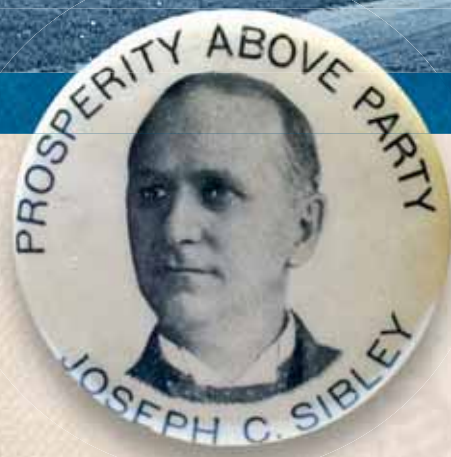
(Here and below) River Ridge Farm was built by Sibley as a retirement retreat in 1913 near Franklin, Pa. The mansion was the size of three homes, filled with mementoes from Sibley's previous residences in Franklin, on Valcour Island, and a townhouse in Washington, D.C. Following the death of his first wife in 1911, Sibley married his niece in front of the mansion's great stone fireplace in 1913.

Franklin Public Library Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.

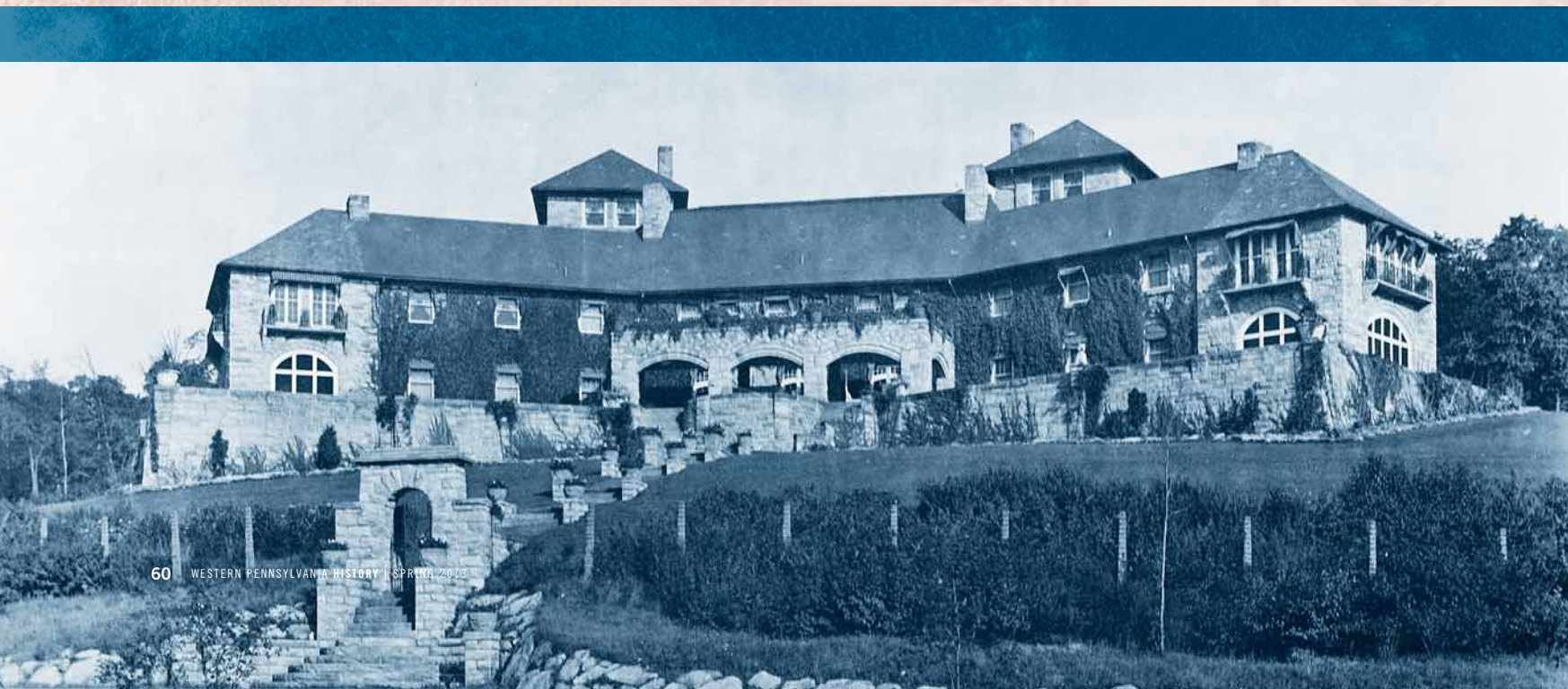


Sibley's celluloid campaign buttons visibly announced his lack of party fealty by stating, "Prosperity Above Party."

Ted Green Jr., Private Collection. Photo by Jerry Sowden, *The Derrick*.



After being called Standard Oil's spy in Congress and officially charged with buying votes, Sibley quietly withdrew from a 1910 primary race. Too frail to attend legal hearings, Sibley retired to his mansion with a cloud of unresolved legal issues hanging over his head.





- <sup>50</sup> *Citizen Press*, March 7, 1895, 1.
- <sup>51</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, March 13, 1895, 4, accessed July 7, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>52</sup> *Princeton Union*, April 11, 1895, 7, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>53</sup> *Iola Register* (Iola, Kansas), May 31, 1895, 6, accessed December 6, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>54</sup> *Advertiser* (Adelaide, Australia), April 9, 1895, 5, accessed December 5, 2012, <http://trove.nla.gov>.
- <sup>55</sup> Irwin, "Presidential Possibilities," 620.
- <sup>56</sup> Paul W. Glad, *McKinley, Bryan, and The People* (New York: F.B. Lippincott Co., 1964), 120.
- <sup>57</sup> *Citizen Press*, May 2, 1895, 5.
- <sup>58</sup> *Herald* (Los Angeles), May 10, 1895, 1, accessed July 5, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> *Evening Dispatch* (Provo City, Utah), May 16, 1895, 1, accessed July 7, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> *Citizen Press*, June 6, 1895, 5.  
The Nursery Club [the Nursery of Great Men], a group of single young business and professional men, was formed for social activities. It purchased a residence in 1889, became "The Franklin Club," and admitted male community leaders (not just bachelors) in 1913. It admitted women in the mid-1980s, with this author being the first female member, and finally became "The Commons," a private business, in 2009. Untitled document, Franklin Club Ornament, Venango County Historical Society, accessed February 24, 2012, [http://franklin.preservation.org/web\\_ornament.html](http://franklin.preservation.org/web_ornament.html).
- <sup>63</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, June 14, 1895, 1, accessed July 7, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> *Citizen Press*, June 25, 1895, 4.
- <sup>66</sup> *Citizen Press*, August 15, 1895, 5.
- <sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, August 16, 1895, 2.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup> *Citizen Press*, August 1895 through April 1896.
- <sup>70</sup> *Citizen Press*, May 14, 1896, 5.
- <sup>71</sup> J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 38.
- <sup>72</sup> R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 4. "In 1896, an innovation that reflected the county's commitment to public politics arrived in the form of the celluloid pin back button, which spread more rapidly than any single item in the history of American politics. They were cheap (about one cent), durable, and attachable to clothing."
- <sup>73</sup> A. K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1905), II, 608.
- <sup>74</sup> Marian Silveus, "The Election of 1896 in Western Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* XVI (May 1933), 108, 111.
- <sup>75</sup> Rathgeber, "Joseph C. Sibley, Democratic Presidential Aspirant in 1896," 114.
- <sup>76</sup> *Derrick*, July 6, 1896, 1.
- <sup>77</sup> Lawrence F. Prescott, *The Great Campaign or Political Struggles of Parties, Leaders, and Issues* (Loyal Publishing Co, 1896), 111-114.
- <sup>78</sup> Harold U. Faulhner, *Politics, Reform, and Expansion 1890-1900* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 193.
- <sup>79</sup> R. L. Metcalf, *The Great Fight for Free Silver* (Edgewood Publishing Co., 1897), 329. Bryan presented the Democrats' position on trickle-down economics as part of his Cross of Gold Speech at the convention, saying they opposed Republican legislation "to make the well-to-do prosper so their prosperity will leak through on those below."
- <sup>80</sup> Prescott, *Great Campaign*, 130-132, 134, 137.
- <sup>81</sup> Jones, *Presidential Election*, 231-232.
- <sup>82</sup> *Derrick*, July 11, 1896, 1.
- <sup>83</sup> *Citizen Press*, July 9, 1896, 1.
- <sup>84</sup> *Citizen Press*, July 16, 1896, 1.
- <sup>85</sup> *Derrick*, July 11, 1896, 1.
- <sup>86</sup> Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 150.
- <sup>87</sup> Silveus, "Election of 1896," 112.
- <sup>88</sup> *New York Times*, July 12, 1896, 2.
- <sup>89</sup> *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention [1896]*, 343.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.
- <sup>91</sup> *New York Times*, July 12, 1896, 2.
- <sup>92</sup> W. J. Bryan, *The First Battle – A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Co., 1896), 228, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://archive.org/details/firstbattleasto00bryagoog>.
- <sup>93</sup> *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention [1896]*, 359.
- <sup>94</sup> Silveus, "Election of 1896," 112.
- <sup>95</sup> Bryan, *The First Battle*, 228.
- <sup>96</sup> *Marietta Daily* (Marietta, Ohio), July 13, 1896, 1, accessed December 6, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.
- <sup>97</sup> *Derrick*, November 13, 1968, 9. Sibley won in 1900, 1902, and 1904 as a Republican. He won the Pennsylvania primary in 1910 but was forced to retire from politics, July 1910, because of voter fraud. After 1896, he became an industrialist, focusing on keeping the gold standard, high tariffs, and favors for Standard Oil. Accused of being Standard's spy in Congress, his correspondence with the company's executives gave the government ammunition to proceed and win conviction on anti-trust charges.
- <sup>98</sup> Glad, *McKinley, Bryan*, 141.
- <sup>99</sup> Faulhner, *Politics, Reform*, 196.
- <sup>100</sup> McClure, *Old Time Notes*, 609.
- <sup>101</sup> *Citizen Press*, July 16, 1896, 4.
- <sup>102</sup> *New York Times*, July 11, 1896, 2.
- <sup>103</sup> *Citizen Press*, July 16, 1896, 4.
- <sup>104</sup> Silveus, "Election of 1896," 112.
- <sup>105</sup> H. W. Brands, *The Reckless Decade: America in the 1890s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 274.
- <sup>106</sup> Galena Rew Harrington, interview with author, Franklin, PA, October 19, 1968.
- <sup>107</sup> Bryan, *The First Battle*, 352.
- <sup>108</sup> Michener, *Franklin – A Place In History*, 166.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>112</sup> *New York Times*, December 13, 1899, 2.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>114</sup> Silveus, "Election of 1896," 108.
- <sup>115</sup> Michener, *Franklin – A Place In History*, 167. In 1904, he was reported to be the wealthiest man in the House with an estimated \$15 million.
- <sup>116</sup> Babcock, *Venango County Pennsylvania History*, 85.
- <sup>117</sup> *New York Times*, September 25, 1912. The paper reported that Sibley was called to testify before the Clapp Committee regarding a letter published in Hearst's magazine indicating he acted as agent for John D. Archbold of the Standard Oil Company in winning over President Roosevelt and various senators and representatives to a favorable attitude toward the oil trust. Senator Clapp was determined to find out who besides President Roosevelt was referred to in the letter as "Weak Members," a term used by Mr. Sibley about men with whom he kept steadily in touch. The article identified Sibley's ill health as a problem for travel to Washington and indicated that a sub-committee could travel to Franklin to question him.
- <sup>118</sup> *New York Times*, August 24, 1910. The article's main headline and sub-titles included "SIBLEY IS ARRESTED ON BRIBERY CHARGES," "Accuse Millionaire, Secretary, and Campaign Manager of Conspiracy to Debauch Voters," and "HE AND HIS WIFE ARE ILL." The article noted that Sibley withdrew from the primary contest, was under arrest for conspiring to debauch voters, and had earlier been accused of being a Standard Oil candidate for Congress. Sibley was not only ill himself from heart trouble but his wife was seriously ill too. Sibley made a statement that, "I don't know what they are talking about and I do not see how a man lying on his back sick in Franklin...could commit a crime in Warren County, where this conspiracy is alleged to have occurred." The paper identified much of Sibley's opposition was due to exposure two years prior of his close relations with John. D. Archbold of the Standard Oil Company. Letters were published which showed Sibley reported to Archbold on proceedings in Congress of interest to Standard Oil and gave aid to Archbold in plans to influence legislation.
- <sup>119</sup> Michener, *Franklin – A Place In History*, 167-168.
- <sup>120</sup> *McCook Tribune* (McCook, Nebraska), October 6, 1910, 2, accessed July 5, 2012, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.