

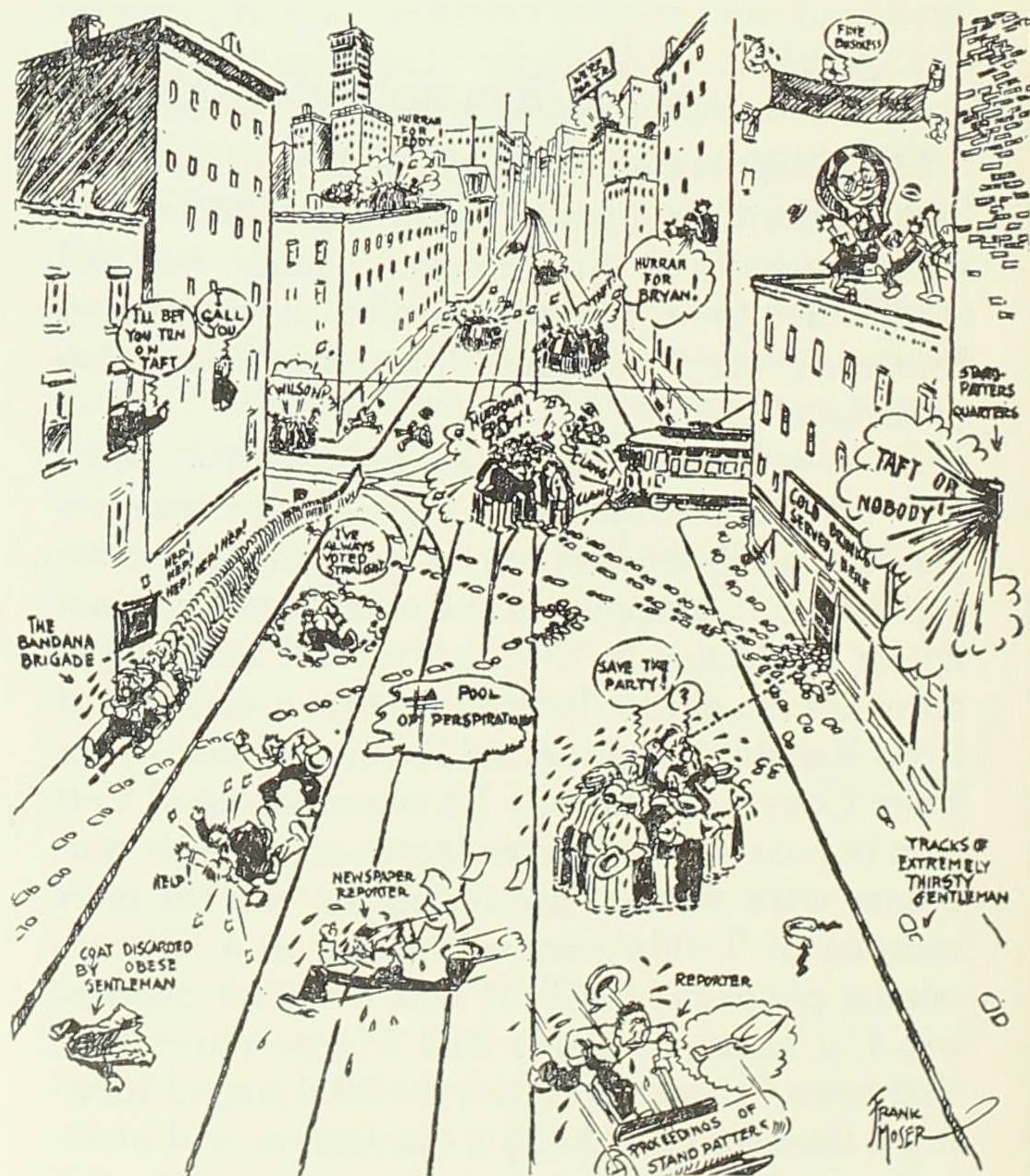
## Iowa and the Election of 1912

Iowa Republicans were sadly divided in 1912. Some defiantly supported Taft, others went over wholeheartedly to the Roosevelt banner, and still others tried to be all things to all men, supporting Roosevelt nationally and the state Republican ticket locally.

Senator Kenyon faced the most difficult problem, since his re-election to the Senate was dependent upon the election of a Republican state legislature. Cummins, on the other hand, was not up for re-election in 1912, but he still hesitated to renounce his party. Indications that a majority of Iowa Republicans preferred Roosevelt came at the State Convention on July 10, when efforts of Taft men to push through an endorsement of their candidate were shouted down angrily, and the mere mention of Teddy's name brought on a "fifteen-minute pandemonium." It was not until September 4, a month after the Bull Moose convention, that Iowa Progressives took the fatal step of forming a third party, holding a convention, and nominating a ticket.

Iowa Democrats, on the other hand, were united and happy. It was evident that the Republican split would put Iowa in the Democratic column in





"As Des Moines Looked Yesterday"

(From the Des Moines Register and Leader, July 11, 1912)



November, nationally at least, and many had hopes that the state offices would follow suit.

Iowa's strongest Republican newspaper, the *Des Moines Register*, waited until August 27 before announcing its choice. On the one hand, Editor Harvey Ingham could not condone the methods of the Taft forces at Chicago; on the other, he could not approve Roosevelt's third party, even though he was strongly Progressive himself. Never had so many Iowans faced such a difficult political choice. The solution of the *Register* was based on an amazing if not revolutionary bit of political reasoning. Since the contest was between Roosevelt and Wilson, wrote the editor, and since there was no doubt that the next Congress would have a Democratic majority, then it would be best to elect Roosevelt to the presidency so that he could block the too-radical actions of the Congress. Thus the *Register* had solved its problem by advocating a stalemate — an indication of the vast political confusion in 1912.

A few days after its decision, the *Register* carried a banner headline: SENATOR CUMMINS IS FOR ROOSEVELT. Iowa's senior Senator had at last made his choice: he repudiated the Taft nomination; he promised to vote for Roosevelt; but he still opposed the formation of a third party and urged Iowans to vote the regular state Republican ticket. Senator Kenyon remained, unhappily and uneasily, in the Taft ranks.



Meanwhile, campaign trains shuttled back and forth across Iowa, carrying candidates of every persuasion. Roosevelt was in the state on September 4, making several speeches and many platform talks. In all, about 25,000 enthusiastic people saw and heard him, as he traveled from Keokuk, through Ottumwa, Eddyville, and Oskaloosa to Des Moines. At the latter city he spoke to 12,000 Progressives gathered at their party convention, where they had just nominated Judge John L. Stevens as their gubernatorial candidate.

Teddy, energetic as ever, wasted no time during his "whistle stops." At Ottumwa he began speaking before the train had come to a full stop, emphasizing his remarks with waves of his black fedora, and he was still speaking when the train pulled out five minutes later. His tour of Iowa was considered a great success.

The Taft Republican campaign was neither satisfactory nor a success. Traditionally, Iowa opened Republican campaigns with a banquet for the party faithful at the Tippecanoe Club in Des Moines, but in 1912 the club secretary found all the available orators "too busy" to attend, and the project was dropped. Taft campaign literature, sent to party headquarters, was left forgotten in a corner. When, on October 8, the Taft campaign was finally opened by "a public speaker," later identified as Warren G. Harding, a scant 1,000 bothered to attend.



Woodrow Wilson, who had visited Iowa during his spring campaign for the nomination, made a run through Iowa, but few people saw him since his train crossed the state at night. He spoke twice at Sioux City on September 17. His running mate, Thomas Marshall, spoke at Clinton on October 8. This was scant attention to pay to a state where many were predicting a Democratic victory; perhaps even the Democrats could not realize that at last they were going to crack Iowa's long Republican record.

More important for Democratic victory than speeches by the candidates themselves was the appearance of one of Iowa's favorite orators, William Jennings Bryan, at Des Moines on October 12. When he entered the hall, late and tired, 5,000 people rose and cheered. His voice husky from long campaigning, Bryan spoke for two hours.

Two days later the papers carried great headlines: COLONEL ROOSEVELT SHOT BY ANARCHIST. Just before departing from his Milwaukee hotel for a scheduled speech, Roosevelt had been shot at point-blank range by a fanatic who said he did not approve of third-term candidates. Fortunately, the bullet was deflected by a thick bundle of the manuscript of his speech, which Roosevelt carried in his breast pocket. In spite of a bullet in his lung, the stubborn Colonel insisted on going ahead with his speech, talking for over an hour,



although growing noticeably weaker as he neared the end. This accident curtailed his speaking engagements, but the campaign rolled on toward election day without loss of momentum.

On the eve of election, each party claimed victory, although both wings of Republicanism in Iowa knew they were whistling in the dark. As the votes were counted, on November 4, it quickly became evident that Wilson had won, although the combined popular vote of Taft and Roosevelt totaled more than that for Wilson. But in the electoral college Wilson had triumphed overwhelmingly, with 435 votes against 88 for Roosevelt, who carried three states, and 8 for Taft, who won the votes of only Utah and Vermont.

Iowa citizens gave 185,325 votes to Wilson, 161,819 to Roosevelt, and 119,805 to Taft. Of the state offices, all remained safely in the Republican column, however, indicating a good many "scratched" ballots. George W. Clarke, Republican candidate for governor, ran well ahead of Roosevelt, defeating both the Democratic and Progressive candidates. Of Iowa's eleven Representatives in Congress, three Democrats were elected, in contrast to only one in 1910. The state legislature had a Republican majority, so that Kenyon's seat in the Senate was safe. Thus, although Iowa had voted for a Democrat for president, her representation in Congress was still largely Republican.



Iowa and the nation had elected Wilson in 1912 because, in the words of an historian of the progressive era, "his seemed the one serene voice." The people believed in the sincerity of his progressivism. "Unembarrassed by the vituperations of his two opponents, he was free to confine himself exclusively to the discussion of principles and policies." In the last analysis, however, and on the basis of the figures, Wilson won because of the split in the Republican party. The combined vote for Roosevelt and Taft was 1,323,728 more than the Democratic vote, while Wilson's Democratic vote was actually 122,892 less than that polled by Bryan in 1908. Thus, if the Republican ranks had not been split, 1912 might very well have been a victory for the GOP.

By 1916 Europe was blazing with war, and the United States was clinging to a weakening neutrality. Foreign affairs had entered the American political scene. The platforms of 1912 were perhaps the last which would emphasize purely domestic issues and ignore the larger world in presenting a program to the American voter.

MILDRED THRONE