

Time Out for Politics

William Gibbs McAdoo, one of Woodrow Wilson's leading cabinet members, emerged as a strong presidential candidate prior to the San Francisco convention of June, 1920. Other names in the headlines were James Cox of Ohio, Mitchell Palmer of Pennsylvania, William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska, John W. Davis of West Virginia, and Vice President Thomas Marshall.

During the pre-convention period the *Literary Digest* poll measured Democratic sentiment which showed 102,000 for McAdoo, 67,000 for the reelection of Wilson; 46,448 for Bryan; 11,600 for Marshall, and a scattering for others. As the time for the convention approached, newspaper headlines reflected the fact that it was McAdoo against the field.

Daniel C. Roper, Commissioner of Internal Revenue, managed McAdoo's cause. I was with D. W. Griffith in New York when Mr. Roper asked me if I would go to San Francisco at once to pave the way for the battle. I went west by way of Seattle, where I received a telegram from Mr. McAdoo saying that he had decided not to permit his name to go before the convention. I showed the telegram to several McAdoo

boosters who were shocked. The same confusion among McAdoo's supporters existed in San Francisco. Their general opinion, however, was that McAdoo would accept if nominated. By that time newspaper headlines had played up McAdoo's withdrawal. At San Francisco I received a message from Roper saying he was not coming west because of McAdoo's decision. He asked me to get in touch with Carter Glass, who was chairman of the platform committee, and see if I could be of help.

In spite of the fact that McAdoo was not formally presented he got 266 votes on the opening ballot against 134 for Cox, 256 for Palmer, 32 for Davis, and 35 for Marshall. Succeeding ballots showed gains for McAdoo. On the thirtieth ballot he received 403 against 400 for Cox. McAdoo reached his peak strength on the fortieth ballot with 467, when the strength of minor candidates began swinging to Cox. By this time the continuous day and night sessions had exhausted the delegates. Many of them had overexpended their budgets and wanted to get home. The Democratic conventions at that time required a two-thirds vote to nominate, which was probably the most important factor in McAdoo's defeat. The other was the sentiment for a repeal of prohibition, which made it easy for Tammany, Tom Taggart of Indiana, and the Ohio delegation, which supported Cox, to get together. The "Church

crowd" was for McAdoo. Early one morning the convention broke down and nominated Cox for President and Franklin D. Roosevelt for Vice President.

During this convention one afternoon was devoted to speeches by four of America's greatest orators. I have never heard such oratory at any one time in my life as was displayed by Bainbridge Colby, Secretary of State; Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War; Carter Glass of Virginia, and William Jennings Bryan.

Shortly after the convention McAdoo told me that his decision to withdraw was not a political trick, but that it was dictated by his financial condition. He had had only a little more than a year in private business since he left the government and had not been able to recoup the personal deficit he had accumulated.

Later I received a long letter from Mr. McAdoo, the first paragraph of which follows:

I wish I had the power to express adequately the depth of my gratitude for the support that you and my other loyal friends gave me at San Francisco. You and they paid me a tribute and gave me evidence of a friendship which I can never forget and which I value more than the Presidency itself.

Four years later, at the Madison Square Garden convention in New York, the same situation developed. This was the longest convention in history — 103 ballots. Many can yet remember

FAMILY PORTRAITS



Mr. and Mrs. Milton R. Wilson



Frank R. Wilson

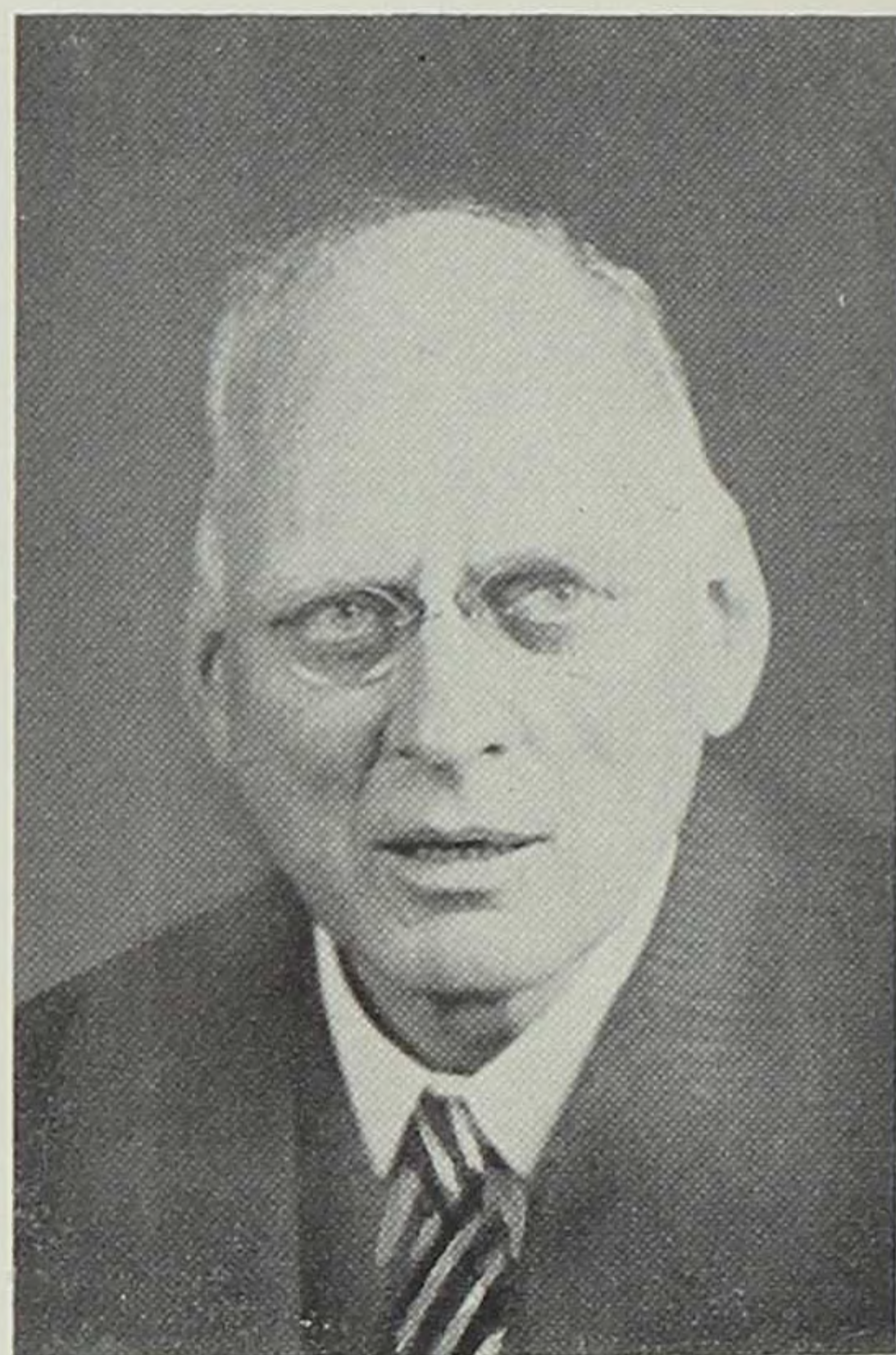


Frank and Philena Wilson on their farm in Dutchess County, New York

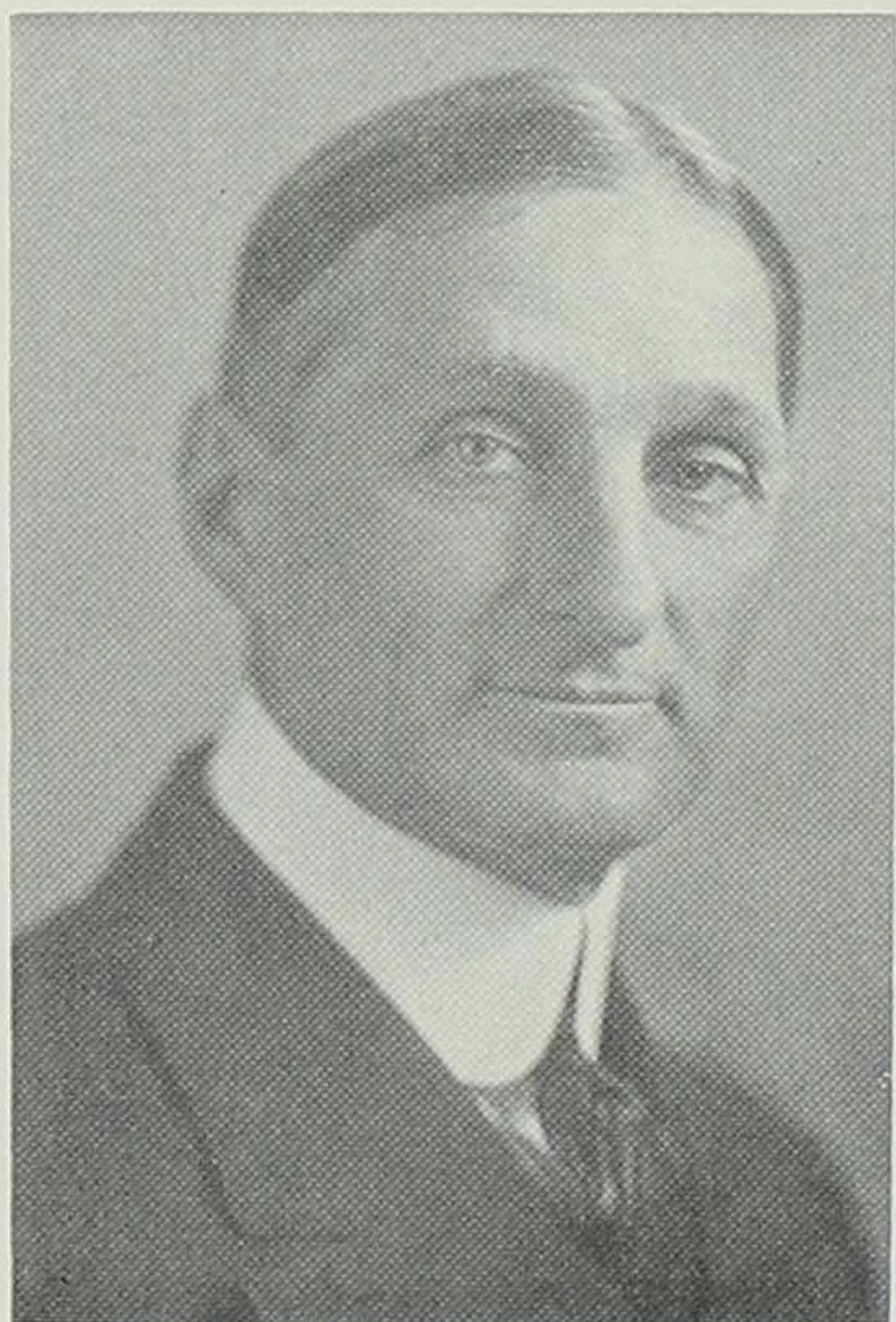
ASSOCIATES THROUGH THE YEARS



John W. Carey



Herbert Quick



William G. McAdoo



Carter Glass

the response of the Alabama delegation at the beginning of each roll call — "TWENTY-FOUR VOTES FOR UNDERWOOD." McAdoo and Al Smith were the leading contenders, and it is agreed that no nominating convention has ever matched this one for interest and excitement. The convention was being held on Tammany's own ground, and every pressure in behalf of Al Smith was put on the delegates. I was assigned to handle the demonstration for McAdoo following his presentation.

By that time McAdoo had moved his residence to southern California, so I used the California delegation to lead the parade in the Garden. The McAdoo uproar continued for an hour, but we never could make quite as much noise as the Tammany marchers did with their bells, guns, and other instruments.

Across the street from Madison Square was an office building from which could be seen the operations on the convention floor. From that point one night McAdoo, Baruch, and I watched the show. Like the San Francisco convention, this one turned out to be a draw, and finally, when the delegates' energy and money were exhausted, they nominated John W. Davis of West Virginia.

It was the two-thirds requirement again that beat McAdoo, in addition to the Ku Klux Klan and prohibition issues. McAdoo's friends tried to get the two-thirds clause eliminated, but the con-

vention defeated it by thirty votes. McAdoo started with 431 and built up to 506 on the forty-second ballot. The highest vote for Al Smith was 368.

If McAdoo had been nominated and elected he would have been a spectacular president. He had great imagination and vigor. He was the first to propose putting traffic under the Hudson River. He raised the capital and executed the completion of the first tube, which for years was known as the McAdoo Tube.

FRANK R. WILSON