

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 63

“Like a Bull Moose”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

US President William Howard Taft had tried to make tariff reform his signature issue. Unfortunately for him, his efforts have borne little fruit, and the American public is becoming increasingly impatient with Taft’s measured, judicial approach.

The stunning Democratic gains in the 1910 mid-term elections presage a hard fight ahead for Taft’s re-election campaign. Of course, other American presidents have faced equal challenges, but here’s something no president has ever faced, before or since, a challenge to his own party nomination, from his predecessor, and mentor, and the man he once called friend.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 63. Like a Bull Moose.

The United States Presidential election of 1912 is unique in the history of American politics. The closest comparison is to the Presidential election of 1860, which was the only four-way race in American Presidential history, and what came out of *that* was a civil war. What comes out of the election of 1912...well, we’ll just have to see.

The last time we looked in on US Presidential politics, it was the fall of 1911, and the incumbent President, William Howard Taft, was in trouble. America is in a Progressive mood. And although Taft thinks of himself as a progressive, well, a moderate progressive anyway, he is seen by many as having gone back on his pledge to continue the policies of his predecessor and political mentor, Theodore Roosevelt.

Roosevelt is now openly and publicly criticizing his successor, although in Taft’s view, it is Roosevelt, not he, who has changed his positions. During this time, Taft was telling his friends that, yes, he did owe his election to the Presidency to Theodore Roosevelt, but, as Taft put it, he had been elected President, not Theodore Roosevelt’s deputy.

By November 1911, the firebrand Senator from Wisconsin, Fighting Bob La Follette, a hero to the Progressive movement and yet one more Progressive Republican who views Taft as having sold out, was hard at work, organizing his friends and supporters to challenge Taft for the Republican nomination. But the elephant in the room, so to speak, is Theodore Roosevelt. Although Roosevelt was openly critical of his successor, he was evasive when asked whether he might run for President himself. A poll taken in December 1911 showed that three-quarters of Republican voters wanted Roosevelt to enter the race.

But Roosevelt would not declare his intentions. And this forced La Follette to run twice as hard, because it was difficult for him to drum up support among Progressive Republicans. Too many of them were holding out, waiting to see whether Roosevelt might run.

By January 1912, a number of Republican state governors have approached Theodore Roosevelt to ask him to run. It's not only disappointment with Taft that's motivating them; it's also fear of the resurgent Democratic Party. After the debacle of the 1910 midterm elections, many Republicans were worried that Taft couldn't hold the White House, and felt that the still-popular Roosevelt had the better chance.

Roosevelt himself was leaning in that direction, but only privately. He still remembers making that promise not to run again back in 1904, and he fears the voters remember it, too. But if the call to run came to him from Republican Party leaders, rather than originating from Roosevelt himself, well, that would be different, right? So Roosevelt conceived a plan. If these Republican state governors would put together a letter, signed by as many of them as possible, asking him to run, and release it to the public, he would do it.

And so a letter was drafted and circulated among sitting Republican governors. Roosevelt and his people were involved in this process every step of the way behind the scenes, while publicly, he remained noncommittal.

And if you'll bear with me for a moment, I'm going to veer away from the topic of the Presidential election for a moment to take a look at another subject: the admission of New Mexico to the Union as the 47th state. The territory that is today Arizona and New Mexico was part of what was ceded to the United States by Mexico at the end of their war in 1848, and was organized as the New Mexico Territory. New Mexico made a bid to join the Union as early as 1850, and a proposed state constitution was drawn up which would have banned slavery in New Mexico. Understand that slavery was not being practiced in New Mexico, because New Mexico had been under Mexican jurisdiction, and Mexico had already outlawed slavery many years earlier.

But the plan for New Mexico statehood ran afoul of the Compromise of 1850, under which California was admitted to the Union as a free state and Texas ceded its northwestern territorial

claims to the federal government, but in exchange for these concessions, New Mexico was to remain a territory, with the door being kept open to the introduction of slavery.

But that had never happened, and, after the Civil War broke out, Congress divided the New Mexico territory into the New Mexico and Arizona Territories. In the years following the Civil War, Democrats in particular pushed for the admission of New Mexico as a state, while many Republicans opposed it, not least because New Mexico was expected to be a Democratic state. Also because of the large population of people of Mexican ancestry in the territory, people whose ancestors had, of course, lived there when it was part of Mexico, which gave rise to concerns about whether these New Mexicans were fully assimilated as new US citizens. By 1912, though, after 50 years of dithering over this, and with New Mexico and Arizona now the only territories left amid 46 contiguous states, the anomaly was getting harder to justify. So with Democrats controlling the House and with the support of President Taft, New Mexico became a state in January 1912. And then Arizona was admitted as the 48th state, just a few weeks later.

Meanwhile, back on the campaign trail, Fighting Bob La Follette was barnstorming the nation. On January 22, he gave an impassioned speech at Carnegie Hall in New York City, before a standing-room-only crowd. The Senator left the hall on a huge emotional high after that speech, only to meet up afterward with Gifford Pinchot, who had come to tell him that he'd met with Theodore Roosevelt earlier that day and was convinced Roosevelt would run. Pinchot would spend the next week trying to persuade La Follette to get out of the race, arguing that a split among Progressives would certainly mean that Taft would win the nomination. The Senator refused, releasing a statement to the press that said Fighting Bob is not now and never was a quitter, and that he was in the race until the convention.

Privately, La Follette was fuming at Roosevelt. To him, this was just one more example of how Roosevelt had always been the most craven of opportunists, content to let men like Fighting Bob do the hard work, and then swoop in afterward and claim the glory.

La Follette continued with his grueling speaking schedule, and it seems he pushed himself too hard. On February 2, La Follette was scheduled to be the featured speaker at the annual banquet of the Periodical Publishers Association in Philadelphia. The association had assembled an impressive list of speakers for the evening, leading lights in the Progressive movement from both parties, including the Republican Governor of California, Hiram Johnson, the Republican Mayor of Philadelphia, Rudolph Blankenburg, and the recently-elected Progressive Democratic Governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson, who gave a short and witty speech most folks remembered as the highlight of the evening.

La Follette had been given the last spot, because he was the biggest name, and it should have been another Carnegie Hall moment, but he arrived late, beginning his 2 ½ hour speech after ten o'clock in the evening. His topic was how corporate corruption threatened the independence of the magazine industry, which might have gone over well enough with this crowd, but he chose to

make his point by contrasting the magazine industry with the newspaper industry, which he said was already thoroughly corrupted by big money and accused today's newspapers of printing only what their corporate advertisers would let them print.

The trouble was, there were a lot of newspaper people in that audience as well, and they became angry. When they began to walk out, La Follette scolded them. On and on he railed, reading from a prepared text, and frequently losing his place and reading the same paragraph over again. (Just as podcasters are known to do.) By midnight, the audience had taken to applauding every other line, hoping Fighting Bob would take the hint and wrap it up already. He did not. By 12:30 in the morning, the *New York Times* reported, he was "denouncing the empty chairs" and "calling the abandoned...cigar stubs minions of the trusts." Rumors spread that La Follette had broken under the strain of his grueling campaign schedule. Some said he was drinking heavily.

Three weeks later, it was Theodore Roosevelt's turn in the spotlight. Progressives in Ohio had managed to call a state constitutional convention to consider Progressive reforms to Ohio's constitution, and Theodore Roosevelt had been invited to speak to the convention. Now, Roosevelt was regarded as the greatest public speaker of his time, and it was widely believed that he would use this forum to lay before the public what his platform might be, should he choose to run for President.

He got off to a good start. "We Progressives believe that human rights are supreme over all other rights; that wealth should be the servant, not the master, of the people." He went on to advocate for a number of Progressive reforms. I won't try to catalogue them, because I think by now you have a pretty good idea of what Roosevelt and the Progressive movement stood for, but there is one aspect of Progressivism I want to emphasize, and that's democratic electoral reforms. Progressives stood for a number of changes to make government more democratic. The direct election of United States Senators was one of these, as opposed to Senators being selected by the state legislatures, as was then the case. Another was the use of primary elections to select the nominee of a political party, as opposed to those choices being made by party bosses or party meetings. Progressives also supported recall mechanisms, where the voters could remove an elected official from office, and initiative and referendum elections, where laws could be enacted or repealed by the public directly, bypassing state legislatures.

In his speech, Roosevelt endorsed all these concepts, but he went a step even further. Frustrated as he was by the *Lochner*-era Supreme Court opposition to the Progressive movement, Roosevelt proposed a mechanism by which court decisions invalidating public laws as unconstitutional could be overturned by referendum.

For a lot of Republicans, even Progressive Republicans, this was a bridge too far. Republican leaders who had supported both Roosevelt and Taft, like Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and New York Senator Elihu Root, who had privately felt torn in their loyalties, now found it easy to choose a side. They went with Taft.

And you can just imagine how lawyer and former judge William Howard Taft felt about Roosevelt's big new idea. Before, he had felt his quarrel with his former friend was something that had been forced on him. When he heard about this, though, Taft was ready to do battle. It also helped that Roosevelt had just handed him an issue he could use to criticize Roosevelt's candidacy without getting personal.

On February 25, Theodore Roosevelt officially announced that he was in the running for the Republican nomination, and cited the quote-unsolicited-unquote letter from the Republican governors. But Roosevelt had all but announced three days earlier when he answered a reporter's question about his intentions by blurting out "my hat is in the ring."

Now, in our time, Americans use this expression routinely to describe someone deciding to run for office, and we don't even think about what it means anymore, but we use it because of this moment in Theodore Roosevelt's comeback campaign. Roosevelt had once been a boxer, remember. Boxing was much bigger in those days than it is now. Back then, boxing rings were actually rings, and there was such a thing as "pick-up" boxing, when a challenger in the crowd could express his intention of being part of the next match by, you know, literally throwing his hat into the ring.

When Roosevelt used this boxing expression to describe his challenge to Taft, it was most definitely a confrontational, even violent, metaphor. Pretty strong stuff.

I mentioned that primary elections were a reform measure many Progressives were supporting at this time, including Theodore Roosevelt. This was also good politics for Roosevelt, who was far and away more popular with rank-and-file Republicans, but in 1912 only a handful of states selected their convention delegates by primary. State and local party conventions made the decision in most states, and those party stalwarts were much more likely to be Taft supporters. It was therefore in Roosevelt's interest to advocate for primaries. As in, right now, this year, let's change the law in your state and have a primary instead. If Roosevelt could get enough states to change their laws and enact primary elections, then he would have a solid chance of taking the nomination.

On the other hand, quite a few states, mostly in the South, had already selected their delegates before Roosevelt announced. So Taft begins this race with a sizeable lead. After Roosevelt entered the race, Taft continued to rack up delegates in non-primary states, but now Roosevelt supporters began to show up in large numbers, shouting and jeering, demanding party leaders yield to the public will. There were reports of violence at conventions in Michigan, Oklahoma, and Missouri. In one Oklahoma party meeting, a Roosevelt supporter drew a pistol on the party chair. Nonetheless, despite this turmoil, these conventions usually bowed to the party leadership and chose Taft delegates.

But Roosevelt's campaign to broaden the use of primaries was picking up steam. Primary election systems were hastily enacted in several key states, including New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Ohio, Illinois, and more. And just like that, there were primary elections being held virtually every week from March to June.

The first one was North Dakota, on March 12. Fighting Bob La Follette saw North Dakota as his home country, and put up a valiant fight to prove he was still relevant. And he made his point, winning the primary 58% to 39% for Roosevelt. Taft, who had not contested the primary, got 3%. La Follette would also win the primary in his home state of Wisconsin, but that would be as far as his campaign would take him.

Next up was the New York primary. Although this was Theodore Roosevelt's home state, we have already seen how disliked he was in the New York Republican Party, and, primary or not, Taft got the New York delegates. Roosevelt just got fired up all the more. He went to Chicago to campaign in the Illinois primary and there accused his opponents of fraud. He made use of a scandal in Illinois, where at that time the US Senate was in the middle of expelling one of Illinois' Senators because he had won his office by bribing the Illinois legislature, as was all too common in those days. On April 9, two days after Easter, Roosevelt won a smashing victory in Illinois, winning all but two of the state's delegates.

On Wednesday, April 10, the man who was perhaps President Taft's closest aide and advisor and friend, Archibald Butt was vacationing in Paris with his longtime companion, Frank Millet. You may remember I've already mentioned Archie and Frank back in episode 53. They had received the news of Taft's crushing defeat in the Illinois primary, and Archie decided that his President needed him. So he and Frank made the fateful decision to cut short their vacation trip and return to Washington. They hopped the train for Cherbourg, on the Normandy coast, and got two tickets aboard the next ocean liner headed for the United States. The name of the next ocean liner headed for the United States was *Titanic*.

[music: "Scott Joplin's New Rag"]

President Taft, meanwhile, was feeling gloomy following the loss in Illinois, but he had hoped to bounce back in next Saturday's Pennsylvania primary. But it was not to be. By Sunday morning, April 14, when all the results were in, it turned out that Roosevelt had collected 68 of Pennsylvania's 76 Republican delegates.

Much, much worse, and as I'm sure you already know, later in the evening of that same day, Sunday, April 14, 1912, just before midnight, *Titanic* struck an iceberg and sank rapidly into the frigid waters of the North Atlantic. Early news reports in the United States erroneously claimed that the ship had been merely damaged, and was making her way under her own power toward New York. It was not until 11 PM on Monday that a representative of the White Star Line contacted the White House to inform the President that *Titanic* had sunk, taking with her almost

two-thirds of the approximately 2200 passengers and crew aboard her, including Archie Butt and Frank Millet. Butt was 46 years old; Millet was 64. Frank Millet's body was recovered at sea and he was buried in Massachusetts. Archie's body was never found. In 1913, a memorial fountain will be built in Washington, just off the Ellipse, dedicated to the memory of these two men.

Taft wept when he received the news, telling his family and the White House staff that Archie Butt had been like a brother to him. You'll recall that Archie had also worked with Theodore Roosevelt when he was President, and was also close to the Roosevelt family. Theodore Roosevelt said, "I and my family loved him sincerely." His daughter, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, wrote in her diary simply, "I can't believe it. I can't believe it."

That awful news, especially coming, as it did, just after back-to-back primary defeats at the hands of the President's former friend, Theodore Roosevelt, had to have been devastating to Taft.

Two years earlier, on April 14, 1910, William Howard Taft had become the first US President to throw out the first pitch at a baseball game on opening day, a game between the Washington Nationals and the Philadelphia Athletics. Archie Butt had accompanied him on that outing. Taft (and Archie) did it again on Opening Day, 1911. But in 1912, with Opening Day coming just after the *Titanic* disaster, the close association of the ceremony with Archie Butt was just too much for the President, and he did not attend that year. He sent Vice President Sherman in his place.

Later that month, Roosevelt would take the Nebraska and Oregon primaries. Next up, on April 30, was the Massachusetts primary. At this time, New England was the most Republican region in America, and many newspapers declared ahead of time that if Taft could not win in Massachusetts, the contest would be effectively over. Taft broke with Presidential custom and traveled to Boston to give a speech answering Roosevelt's criticisms of him and his administration, and accusing his predecessor of political opportunism, of abandoning his long-held views to cater to the passions of 1912. It was enough to win him a narrow victory and keep his campaign alive, although in the next two weeks, Roosevelt edged out Taft in Maryland and then won a convincing victory in California.

Next up was Ohio, President Taft's home state. Both men campaigned vigorously there, as did Fighting Bob, who directed most of his attacks on Roosevelt. The campaign took an ugly turn when Roosevelt began calling Taft names like "fathead" and "puzzlewit," but the crowds loved it, and it must have worked, since Roosevelt won Ohio easily. Ouch. Roosevelt would go on to win the last two contests of the season as well, New Jersey and South Dakota.

And that was the end of the primary season. Before we take stock of where the Republican race stands, I want to stop for a moment and take note of the fact that in May 1912, the Congress of

the United States approved a proposed constitutional amendment providing for the direct election of United States Senators and sent the amendment to the states for ratification.

Here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, we've already seen the problems of bribery and corruption associated with the Senate, which was plagued repeatedly by accusations that Senators had purchased their seats. There were multiple instances of the Senate voting to expel a member for gaining his seat by corrupt means, most recently just a few weeks ago in Illinois, and as a result the Senate was held in pretty low esteem.

And there was another problem. Most US states have bicameral legislatures, and in some states, Senate seats went vacant for a long time because the two chambers of the state legislature couldn't agree on whom to appoint. The state of Delaware, for example, had recently had a Senate vacancy for four years for just this reason.

Direct election of Senators was a longstanding Progressive reform proposal, and, of course, it fits right in with other Progressive proposals such as recalls and primary elections and ballot initiatives. The states would swiftly approve direct election of senators, and the Seventeenth Amendment would be ratified within a year.

But back to the Presidential campaign. If you tally together all Republican votes from all the Republican primaries, Roosevelt had won just a hair over 50% of the primary vote to Taft's 36% and La Follette's 14%. In terms of delegates, it was 290 for Roosevelt, 124 for Taft, and 36 for La Follette.

But here's the thing. Most of the states had *not* selected their delegates by primary. The non-primary delegate total looks like this: Taft 442, Roosevelt 176, giving Taft the advantage in the delegate count overall.

Roosevelt and his supporters naturally argued that Republican voters had shown a clear preference, and the convention should abide by it. Particularly galling to the Roosevelt camp were the delegations from the Southern states. No state of the former Confederacy had voted Republican in a Presidential election since Reconstruction, but their delegations were overwhelmingly for Taft. Roosevelt supporters questioned why the Republican nomination should be decided by delegations from states that were certain to vote Democratic in November. And so, Roosevelt's supporters challenged the credentials of many of the Taft delegations. Taft supporters then challenged Roosevelt delegates. These challenges would have to be resolved by the Republican National Committee, which decided virtually every one of them in Taft's favor, although these decisions could still be appealed at the convention.

The Republican National Convention was held in Chicago that year, in June. It was the custom of the time for candidates to wait at home until their party called for them, but an outraged

Theodore Roosevelt broke with tradition and took the unprecedented step of traveling to the convention himself to fight for his own nomination.

Neither Taft nor Roosevelt went into this convention feeling confident of the outcome. In the end, though, Taft's strength with the party regulars won the day. A key vote was to name Elihu Root as convention chair. You'll recall Root was Secretary of War for McKinley and then Roosevelt, and later Secretary of State for Roosevelt, and was now a Senator from New York. Root and Roosevelt had been close politically, but Root was more conservative, and was backing Taft. Roosevelt's supporters shrewdly nominated Francis McGovern, the governor of Fighting Bob La Follette's home state of Wisconsin, for convention chair. The idea being that La Follette and his small band of delegates would support McGovern, and possibly tip the balance.

But it didn't work. By this time, the rift between La Follette and Roosevelt was too wide. La Follette would not even make this small gesture to help Roosevelt out, and announced as much to the convention. In the end, Root won the chair by a narrow margin, and after a few days of heated debate, Taft's people won the contested seats.

Roosevelt released a statement that was read out at the convention: "The convention has now declined to purge the roll of the fraudulent delegates. This action makes the convention in no proper sense any longer a Republican convention, representing the real Republican party, therefore I hope that the men elected as Roosevelt delegates will now decline to vote on any matter before the convention... Any man nominated by the convention as now constituted would be merely the beneficiary of this successful fraud." Roosevelt's statement provoked violence on the convention floor, but the convention would nominate Taft on the first ballot. Vice President Sherman was also nominated for a second term, which, oddly enough, makes him the first sitting Vice President to be nominated for a second term since 1828.

Even as the official Republican convention was renominating Taft, Roosevelt was calling for his own delegates to walk out of the convention and into their own competing convention across town. There, they would reorganize as the Progressive Party, and nominate Theodore Roosevelt for President, and the Governor of California, Hiram Johnson, as Vice President.

The mood at the Progressive Party convention was optimistic, and no one was more upbeat than Roosevelt himself. When a reporter asked him if he was ready for the race, Roosevelt declared "I'm feeling like a bull moose." Actually, it was a line Roosevelt had been using since he first ran for Vice President all the way back in 1900, but the press still loved it. The newspapers began to refer to the Progressive Party as the Bull Moose Party, and many historians still do today, because there will be two more Progressive Parties to come in the twentieth century, and calling this one the Bull Moose Party helps keep them straight.

William Howard Taft saw that this split in the Republican Party would make it unlikely that he would be re-elected, but he was philosophical about the race. In his view, he had fought the good

fight to keep the Republican Party out of the hands of the radicals, and that was the more important battle.

It was left to retired Republican Senator Chauncey Depew to say out loud what many were thinking privately. “The only question now is, which corpse gets the most flowers.”

[music: “Scott Joplin’s New Rag”]

The Democratic Party had begun its own convention in Baltimore just days after the Roosevelt delegates had walked out of the Republican convention in Chicago. The Democratic convention would prove to be almost as dramatic. The front runner for the Democratic nomination was James Beauchamp Clark, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, whom we have met before on this podcast, back when he was hard at work inadvertently alienating Canada. Clark was a well-connected politician, with a lot of support in the Democratic Party establishment, but in this age of public revulsion with traditional politics and calls for Progressive reforms, this was not necessarily an advantage.

His principal competition was Oscar Underwood, the House Majority Leader, who hailed from Alabama, and the new Governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson, who, as you may recall, had been a political science professor and president of Princeton University. The New Jersey Democratic Party had recruited him to run for governor in 1910, and he had won an upset victory in a Republican-leaning state as part of the Democratic mid-term wave that I mentioned at the top of the episode. You might wonder how exciting can this guy be, given that he was a college professor, a profession not especially noted for charisma, but in the gubernatorial election, Wilson had proved to be a dynamic speaker. He always spoke off the cuff, without notes, and knew how to tell a good joke, and he was a fresh face in a time when the voters were tired of machine politicians.

Wilson was a committed Progressive and he loathed the Democratic Party machines in the big cities. The Progressive movement was bi-partisan, and as soon as he was sworn in as governor, Wilson became the face of Progressivism in the Democratic Party. I’ll get into his background more deeply in a future episode, but for now I’ll just note that Wilson was born in Virginia and raised in Georgia and South Carolina. No Southerner has been elected President since Zachary Taylor in 1848. In the run-up to the Civil War, the Northern majority would not support a President from a slave state, and for fifty years after the war, “Southern Democrat” was synonymous with “traitor” in the minds of most of the rest of the country.

But Woodrow Wilson was a native Southerner with unimpeachable Progressive credentials. That made him appealing to the two biggest factions in his party. No sooner had he been sworn in as Governor of New Jersey than he began reaching out to Democratic Party leaders about a possible Presidential run.

One of those he reached out to was William Jennings Bryan, the three-time presidential loser who nonetheless remained popular within the party. Bryan, you may recall, ran for President twice against McKinley in 1896 and 1900 and came across as pretty radical for the time. Then came President Roosevelt and the Progressive movement, and by 1908, when Bryan made his third run, against Taft, his campaign slogan could have been “*I was a Progressive before it was cool.*” Bryan also shared Wilson’s loathing of the Democratic Party machines, and the two men hit it off.

And so the Democratic Party meetings and primaries in 1912 were contentious battles between conservatives on the one side and Progressives on the other, paralleling what was happening on the Republican side. Clark went into the convention with more delegates than Wilson, but not enough to win on the first ballot.

The two factions would fight over the chair of the convention, just as the Republicans had. “Doesn’t it remind you of Chicago?” Theodore Roosevelt asked a newspaper reporter.

Roosevelt would not comment publicly on the Democratic nomination process, saying only, “Whatever the Democrats do will make no difference with me,” although privately, he acknowledged he would much rather run against Clark.

On the first ballot at the Democratic convention, the top five vote-getters were Champ Clark, Woodrow Wilson, Judson Harmon, Oscar Underwood, and Thomas Marshall. No one had drawn a majority. Judson Harmon was the Democratic Governor of Ohio, and had run as a favorite son candidate. As for Thomas Marshall, he was the very much Progressive Governor of Indiana. He had had no plan to run for President, but a group of Indiana delegates saw an opportunity in the deadlocked convention and put the name of their governor into the running, just in case.

After the first ballot failed to produce a nominee, the Democrats went on to a second, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, and an eighth, and a ninth, with little change in the numbers. But something happened on the tenth ballot. A hundred votes suddenly switched from one of the minor candidates to Clark, giving him a majority.

Oh, have I mentioned that the Democratic Party requires a two-thirds vote for the presidential nominations? So it ain’t over yet.

But these delegates who switched came from New York and were loyal to Tammany Hall, the New York City Democratic political machine. The decision to wait until the tenth ballot to come out for Clark was strategic. The idea was to create a sense of movement toward Clark in the hope that other delegates weary of deadlocked votes would feel ready to jump on the bandwagon.

This sort of thing *usually* works, but in 1912, nothing in American politics is working the way it *usually* works. The Tammany switch backfired, because it riled up William Jennings Bryan, still

a party leader, still a reformer, still hostile to the machines. It was the last straw that made Bryan into a Wilson supporter. He began quietly working the convention delegates. By the fourteenth ballot, Bryan *publicly* endorsed Wilson and lashed out at Clark as the candidate of Wall Street.

The voting continued, ballot after ballot, and after each ballot, Wilson had a few more votes, and Clark a few less. On the thirtieth ballot—yes, I said thirtieth ballot—Wilson took the lead. And, on the 46th ballot, Wilson became the nominee. The last time the Democratic Party had needed this many ballots to settle on a nominee was in 1860.

Wilson chose as his running mate the Progressive governor of Indiana, Thomas Marshall, who hadn't expected this any more than he'd expected his name to come up for the Presidential nomination in the first place.

The Democratic Party nomination immediately put a crimp in Roosevelt's campaign strategy. He had been counting on running against Taft and Clark, whom he could lump together as collectively representing the failed politics of the old-time politicians of both parties. But instead, the Democrats had thrown him a curve ball, presenting him with a rising Progressive star with a spotless reputation.

Almost at once the Republican governor of Michigan, Chase Osborn, who was one of those Republican governors who had pressed Roosevelt to run back at the beginning of the year—remember that?—he endorsed Wilson. With a Progressive Democrat running, Osborn said, there was “no necessity of a third party.” The Wilson campaign soon announced that it had received over 2,000 letters from Republican voters pledging their support. And Fighting Bob La Follette endorsed Wilson, too, and undertook a speaking tour through the Western states, where he was most popular, campaigning for the Democrat. Even Roosevelt himself privately admitted that had he known the Democrats were going to nominate Wilson, he might have quit after losing the Republican nomination. But having begun his Bull Moose campaign, Roosevelt felt determined to see it through.

President Taft campaigned very little in the general election. Taft had never liked campaigning, and in 1912 there were still many who thought an incumbent President campaigning openly for re-election was tacky. With an air of resignation, Taft spoke up for the things he believed in, and waited for the chips to fall where they might. He got a pleasant surprise in September, when the state of Vermont, which in those days held its Presidential elections seven weeks before the other states, gave Taft its four electoral votes. The Taft campaign publicly expressed optimism that many other states would follow suit, but privately, they doubted it.

Roosevelt embarked on his campaign with his usual boundless energy. He traveled the nation, giving speech after speech. The bands played “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” and his campaign banner read “We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord.” He traveled through forty states by train, making hundreds of whistle-stop speeches in

small towns across the country. But he knew that the split in the Republican Party meant he was climbing a steep slope.

As for Wilson, he had hoped to get by with a few well-written speeches, made at a few well-placed campaign appearances. Wilson guessed early on that Taft would run third, and that the real campaign was between him and Roosevelt. But he did not have the stomach for an extended whistle-stop tour like the one Roosevelt was doing. “I haven’t a bull moose’s strength,” he admitted. Comparing himself to Roosevelt, Wilson said, “He appeals to their imagination; I do not. He is a real, vivid person, whom they have seen and shouted themselves hoarse over and voted for, millions strong; I am a vague, conjectural personality, more made up of opinions and academic prepossessions than of human traits and red corpuscles.”

And then there was the fact that Wilson was still Governor of New Jersey. Back in those days, most people, including Wilson, believed that one of the responsibilities of a Governor of New Jersey was to govern New Jersey. Even if he *was* running for President.

So Wilson went on two campaign tours of the nation, one in September and one in October, and lo and behold, it turned out he could give a good speech, too. Perhaps he was not a five-star orator like Roosevelt, but he was a solid four stars. And with all the bombast and venom the public had seen on the Republican side, Wilson’s plain and thoughtful style made a refreshing contrast.

On Monday, October 14, Theodore Roosevelt was in Milwaukee. He was scheduled to give a speech that evening. As he departed his hotel, he climbed into a touring car before a cheering crowd. In the front of the crowd stood a 36-year old man named John Schrank. As Roosevelt waved his top hat at the crowd, Schrank raised a pistol and fired one shot, point blank, into Roosevelt’s chest.

Roosevelt fell backward onto the car seat. The crowd grabbed Schrank and might have killed him right there, except that Roosevelt pulled himself back to his feet and called out, “Don’t hurt him.” Schrank was turned over to the police. Naturally, everyone wanted Roosevelt to go to the nearest hospital, but he insisted on proceeding to where he was scheduled to give his speech. Only when he arrived at the auditorium would he permit a doctor to examine him. The bullet had entered the left side of his chest, and he had a bloodstain on his shirt the size of his hand.

He also had a fifty page speech in his inside jacket pocket, folded in half. The bullet had slowed as it passed through the hundred-page bundle, and then been deflected by Roosevelt’s eyeglass case, also in his pocket, just enough that it struck a rib and broke it, but did nothing worse. Had his pocket been empty, the bullet would have pierced his heart.

Roosevelt announced to the assembled audience that he had just been shot, and the crowd rose in an uproar. But he calmed them, saying, “It takes more than that to kill a bull moose.” He insisted

on delivering his entire 50-page speech before he would go to the hospital. It was, perhaps, not Roosevelt's finest speech, but under the circumstances, it was amazing he had managed it at all.

His assailant, John Schrank, as it turned out, had been shadowing Roosevelt across the country, waiting for his chance. Schrank was apparently mentally ill. He had had a dream, in which the ghost of William McKinley had told him that Roosevelt was responsible for McKinley's death, and Schrank meant to avenge him.

Theodore Roosevelt remained hospitalized for a week, but when his condition improved, the doctors determined there was no infection and therefore it was safer to leave the bullet where it was, and so they did. He carried it in his body for the rest of his life.

The shooting forced a two-week suspension in Roosevelt's campaign at the worst possible time, but it garnered him a lot of sympathy and wall-to-wall newspaper coverage, leaving political observers across America to ponder what effect it might have on the election. One nervous Democratic politician lamented that "the bullet in Roosevelt's chest has killed Wilson's Presidency."

All three candidates returned to their homes for election night, and that evening the telegrams with the vote counts began to pour in. By 10 PM that evening, Woodrow Wilson knew that he had been elected President. Only one additional state, Utah, had gone for Taft, bringing his electoral vote total to eight, the worst showing for an incumbent President in US history. Theodore Roosevelt carried California, Washington, South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, for a total of 88 electoral votes. The other 435 electoral votes went to Woodrow Wilson. In popular vote totals, the numbers were less stark. Wilson had won 42% of the votes to Roosevelt's 27% and Taft's 23%. The Socialist Party candidate, Eugene Debs, making his fourth run for the presidency, earned 6% of the vote, and Eugene Chafin, the Prohibition Party candidate, got 1%.

And so, Woodrow Wilson would become the 28th President of the United States, just the first Southerner and the second Democrat to win the White House since the Civil War, and the first Democratic President of the twentieth century.

We'll have to stop there for today. I'd like to thank all of you for listening, and I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we go back to that fateful night of April 14, 1912, and take a closer look at the most famous maritime disaster in history, the sinking of *Titanic*. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The new Vice-President, Thomas Marshall, is one of my favorite figures in American politics, for his biting wit, and his honest assessment of the vice-presidency. One of Woodrow Wilson's advisers would later say of Marshall that "an unfriendly fairy godmother presented him with a keen sense of humor. Nothing is more fatal in politics." When

Marshall first heard the news that Wilson wanted him for his Vice-Presidential candidate, Marshall had remarked that this was not surprising, since Indiana was “the mother of Vice Presidents, home of more second-class men than any other state.”

[music: Closing Theme]

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