

= William S. Taylor =

William Sylvester Taylor (October 10 , 1853 ? August 2 , 1928) was the 33rd Governor of Kentucky . He was initially declared the winner of the disputed gubernatorial election of 1899 , but the Kentucky General Assembly , dominated by the Democrats , reversed the election results , giving the victory to his Democratic Party (United States) opponent , William Goebel . Taylor served only 50 days as governor .

A poorly educated but politically astute lawyer , Taylor began climbing the political ladder by holding local offices in his native Butler County . Though he was a Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic state , divisions in the majority party resulted in his election as Attorney General of Kentucky on a ticket with the Commonwealth 's first Republican governor , William O. Bradley . Four years later , Taylor was elected in 1899 to the governorship .

When the General Assembly reversed the election results after a dispute , incensed Republicans armed themselves and descended on Frankfort . Taylor 's Democratic opponent , William Goebel , was shot and died after being sworn in on his deathbed . Taylor exhausted his finances in a legal battle with Goebel 's running mate J. C. W. Beckham over the governorship . Taylor ultimately lost the battle , and was implicated in Goebel 's assassination . He fled to neighboring Indiana . Despite eventually being pardoned for any wrongdoing , he seldom returned to Kentucky . Taylor died in Indianapolis , Indiana in 1928 .

= = Early life = =

William Taylor was born October 10 , 1853 in a log cabin on the Green River , about five miles from Morgantown , Kentucky . He was the first child of Sylvester and Mary G. (Moore) Taylor . He spent his early years working on the family farm , and did not attend school until age fifteen ; thereafter , he attended the public schools of Butler County and studied at home . In 1874 , he began teaching , specializing in mathematics , history , and politics . He taught until 1882 , and later became a successful attorney , but continued to operate a farm .

On February 10 , 1878 , Taylor married Sara (" Sallie ") Belle Tanner . The couple had nine children , including six daughters and a son that survived infancy .

= = Political career = =

Taylor 's political career began in 1878 with an unsuccessful bid to become county clerk of Butler County . In 1880 , he was an assistant presidential elector for Greenback candidate James Weaver . Two years later , he was elected county clerk of Butler County . He was the first person in the history of the county to successfully challenge a Democrat for this position .

Taylor became a member of the Republican Party in 1884 . In 1886 , he was chosen to represent the third district on the Republican state central committee . That same year , the party nominated a full slate of candidates for county offices , including Taylor as the nominee for county judge . In the ensuing elections , the full Republican slate was elected . Taylor was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1888 . He was re @-@ elected as county judge in 1890 .

In 1895 , Taylor was elected Attorney General of Kentucky , and served until 1899 . During his term , state senator William Goebel proposed an election law that created a state Board of Elections which was empowered to appoint all election officers in every county and certify all election results . The Board was to be appointed by the General Assembly , and there were no requirements that its composition be bi @-@ partisan . The law was widely seen as a power play by Goebel , designed to ensure Democratic victories in state elections , including Goebel 's own anticipated run for governor . The law passed the General Assembly , but was vetoed by Republican governor William O. Bradley . The General Assembly promptly overrode the veto . As attorney general , Taylor opined that the bill was unconstitutional . The measure was adjudicated by the Kentucky Court of Appeals and found to be constitutional .

= = = Gubernatorial election of 1899 = = =

Bradley 's election in 1895 had marked the first time in Kentucky 's history that the Commonwealth had elected a Republican governor . Angry Democrats , who had controlled the governorship since the fall of the Whig Party , sought to regain what they had lost . Bitter divisions in the party led to a contentious convention that nominated William Goebel as the party candidate . A faction of the Democratic Party held a second nominating convention and chose former governor John Y. Brown as their nominee .

The Republicans were initially no less divided than the Democrats . Senator William J. Deboe backed Taylor for governor . Governor Bradley backed Judge Clifton J. Pratt of Hopkins County , and the Republicans of Central Kentucky backed state auditor Sam H. Stone . Taylor organized a strong political machine and seemed in a solid position to obtain the nomination . Bradley was incensed that the party would not unite behind his candidate and boycotted the convention . Taylor unsuccessfully tried to woo him back with a promise to make his nephew , Edwin P. Morrow , secretary of state . Because Taylor represented the western part of the state , the so @-@ called " lily white " branch of the Republican Party , black leaders also threatened not to support him ; Taylor responded by hiring one of the black leaders his permanent secretary , and promised to appoint other black leaders to office if he won the election . Seeing that Taylor 's nomination was likely , all the other candidates withdrew , and Taylor won the nomination unanimously .

During the campaign , Taylor was attacked by Democratic opponents because of his party 's support from black voters and its ties to big business , including the Louisville and Nashville Railroad . They also charged that Governor Bradley had run a corrupt administration . Republicans answered with charges of factionalism and use of political machinery by Democrats . In particular , they derided the Goebel Election Law , which Taylor claimed subverted the will of the people .

Ex @-@ Confederates were usually a safe voting bloc for the Democrats , but many of them deserted Goebel because he had , in 1895 , killed former Confederate general John Sanford in a duel . On the other hand , blacks had historically been a safe bloc for the Republicans , but Taylor had alienated many of them by not strongly opposing the Separate Coach Bill , which would have racially segregated railroad facilities . Goebel also risked losing support to minor party candidates . Besides John Y. Brown , the dissenting Democrats ' nominee , the Populist Party nominated a candidate , drawing votes from Goebel 's populist base . To unite his traditional base , Goebel convinced William Jennings Bryan , a hero to most populists and Democrats , to campaign for him . As soon as Bryan finished his tour of the state , Governor Bradley reversed course and began speaking in favor of Taylor . While Bradley insisted that his motives were to defend his administration , journalist Henry Watterson believed Taylor had promised to support Bradley 's senatorial bid if elected .

= = = Governorship and later life = = =

In the general election , Taylor secured just 2 @, @ 383 more votes than Goebel . The Democrat @-@ controlled General Assembly challenged the election results . Under the Goebel Election Law , a three @-@ man Board of Elections (dominated by Democrats) were to review the results and certify the winner in the contest . Two of the members of the board had openly campaigned for Goebel , and all three owed their appointments to him , but in a surprising decision , the Board voted 2 ? 1 to certify Taylor as the winner .

The Board claimed that the Goebel Election Law did not give them the power to hear proof of vote fraud or call witnesses , although the wording of their decision implied that they would have invalidated Taylor votes if they had been empowered to do so . Taylor was inaugurated on December 12 , 1899 . Days later , the Democratic @-@ dominated General Assembly convened in Frankfort . They claimed the power to decide disputed elections , and formed a partisan commission (ten Democrats and one Republican) to examine the election results .

Fearing Democrats in the Assembly would " steal " the election , armed men came to Frankfort from various areas of the state , primarily Eastern Kentucky , which was heavily Republican . On January

30 , Goebel was shot while entering the state capitol building . Taylor declared a state of emergency and called out the militia . He called a special session of the legislature , holding it in heavily Republican London , Kentucky rather than the capital . Democrats refused to heed the call , and met in Democratic @-@ dominated Louisville instead . They certified the election commission 's report that disqualified enough Taylor votes for Goebel to be declared the winner of the election . Shortly after being sworn in as governor , Goebel died from the gunshot wound he had received days earlier .

With Goebel dead , Democrats and Republicans met jointly and drafted a proposal to bring peace . Under terms of the proposal , Taylor and his lieutenant governor , John Marshall , would step down from their offices and be granted immunity from prosecution in the events surrounding the election and Goebel 's assassination . The Goebel Election Law would be repealed , and the militia would disperse from Frankfort . Prominent leaders on both sides signed the agreement , but on February 10 , 1900 , Taylor announced he would not . The legislature convened on February 19 , 1900 and agreed to put the election in the hands of the courts .

On March 10 , 1900 , the circuit court of Jefferson County upheld the General Assembly 's actions that certified Goebel as governor . The case was appealed to the Kentucky Court of Appeals , then the court of last resort in Kentucky . On April 6 , 1900 , the Court of Appeals ruled 6 ? 1 that Taylor had been legally unseated . Taylor appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States , and on May 21 , 1900 , the Court refused to hear the case . Only Kentuckian John Marshall Harlan dissented from this refusal . With Taylor 's legal options exhausted , Goebel 's lieutenant governor , J. C. W. Beckham , ascended to the governorship . During his short term as governor , Taylor had done little beyond making a few appointments and issuing a few pardons .

Taylor was indicted as an accessory in the assassination of Goebel . He fled to Indianapolis , where the governor refused to extradite him . At least one attempt to abduct him by force failed in 1901 . Despite being pardoned in 1909 by Republican Governor Augustus E. Willson , Taylor seldom returned to Kentucky .

Financially strapped by the costs of challenging the election , Taylor became an insurance executive and practiced law . Shortly after arriving in Indiana , his wife died . In 1912 , he briefly returned to Kentucky to marry Nora A. Myers . The couple returned to Indianapolis and had a son together . Taylor died of heart disease on August 2 , 1928 , and was buried at the Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis .