

900 heard William Jennings Bryan speak

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largest ever in the building and the distinguished orator was given the most courteous and respectful hearing during the two hours that he discussed 'the money question,' as he put it."

Modern history textbooks* may pass quickly over the name of W.J. Bryan, but his name was a household word a couple of generations ago. From the humble origin of country lawyer in Illinois, he stepped into the political spotlight at several national Democratic conventions, where he held trump cards in power plays for his own nominations and that of others. A populist by conviction, he was a vocal advocate of the free coinage of silver, a policy he fervently believed would aid the plight of farmers and industrial workers.

And free silver was indeed the subject of his Bloomington speech. Commented the *Telephone*, "Mr. Bryan evidently came here on a missionary tour as well as to visit his friends, and those who went to hear him last night expecting to hear a grand-eloquent orator, were disappointed, as instead he gave an exposition of bimetalism as he has preached it for the past three years, only dropping enough 'jokes' as he went along to keep the attention of

the audience. The address contained nothing but what he has said many times before; was a thoroughly free silver Democratic speech, and made no pretense of being more or less."

Despite the somewhat blase review in the *Telephone*, Bryan was enough of a politician to know how to leave a favorable impression in Bloomington. After the lecture, IU President Joseph Swain, who had introduced Bryan, read an announcement to the effect that the speaker was donating \$250 to the "University of Indiana" for an annual prize for the best essay on the "principles which underlie our best form of government."

In the chronological list of noteworthy events in Bryan's life, his visit to Bloomington was two years after his famous "You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold" speech at the national Democratic convention in 1896 and 27 years ahead of his passionate espousal of the cause of fundamentalism at the Scopes trial in Tennessee in 1925.

But back in 1898, even his departure from Bloomington was newsworthy. The *Telephone* of April 12 noted, "This morning Mr. Bryan breakfasted with Prof. and Mrs. (Edward) Morton and a few Illinois college friends . . . At 10:55 Mr. Bryan took the train for Lafayette . . ."