

10-1965

"Alfalfa Bill" Murray: The Formative Years in Texas

Keith L. Bryant Jr

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Tell us how this article helped you.

Recommended Citation

Bryant, Keith L. Jr (1965) "'Alfalfa Bill' Murray: The Formative Years in Texas," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol3/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized administrator of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu.

**"ALFALFA BILL" MURRAY:
THE FORMATIVE YEARS IN TEXAS**

KEITH LYNN BRYANT, JR.

If William Henry David Murray had been given a choice as to the place and time of his birth, it is unlikely that he would have selected either the small Texas frontier village called Toadsuck Community or the Reconstruction year of 1869. But such was the fate of the man who would bear the sobriquet "Alfalfa Bill" during most of his adult life. This third son of Uriah Dow Thomas Murray and Bertha Elizabeth Jones Murray became a major force in the political life of his adopted state of Oklahoma. He served as president of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention and was one of the principal authors of the resulting document. Desiring to guarantee the fulfillment of this instrument, he became Speaker of the House of Representatives during the first state legislative session. During the administration of Woodrow Wilson, Oklahoma voters twice sent Murray to Congress. A candidate for governor four times, Murray was elected in 1930. The political machinations of "Alfalfa Bill," including an abortive race for the presidential nomination in 1932, became familiar to the nation at large, which often laughed at this product of the Texas frontier and his anachronistic behavior.

In the 1870's and 1880's north central Texas developed as an agricultural region of small farmers. Primarily a prairie region, there were also stands of timber along the Red River and the upper reaches of the Trinity River. Land prices remained low as improved land sold for ten to twenty-five dollars an acre.¹ That the area was still frontier in nature is illustrated by the Kiowa and Comanche Indian raid of May 17, 1871, on the town of Jacksboro, west of "Alfalfa Bill's" birthplace.²

At the time of William Henry David's birth on November 21, 1869, the Murray family lived in a crude, one-room, slab-sided house of undressed pine.³ Uriah Murray worked in a grist mill owned by his father-in-law in the town of Collinsville, near Toadsuck. A Scotsman, Uriah was born in Tennessee in 1839, and had moved to Texas in 1852.⁴ His wife, Elizabeth, had borne two sons, John Shade in 1862, and George Thomas in 1867, and a daughter who died in infancy. When William was only two years old his mother gave birth to another son, Robert. Tragedy stalked the Murray family for both mother and baby soon died.⁵ After the death of Elizabeth Murray, the boys were taken to the Collinsville home of their maternal grandparents, the Jones family, where they lived for two years.⁶

On February 9, 1873, Uriah remarried, and the Murray brothers found that their lives had taken a new turn. Their new mother, the widow Mollie Green of Montague, Texas, had a daughter, Etta, by her previous marriage and seems to have been a deeply religious woman. The Murray brothers disliked their foster mother and resented the work she required them to do.⁷ The enlarged Murray family moved to Montague, a small town west

of Collinsville, where Uriah worked in a mill and tilled a few acres of ground.⁸ Apparently Uriah Murray found it difficult to make a financial success in the mill for he also worked as a sawyer and then opened a small butcher shop and grocery.⁹

Mollie Murray, a large corpulent woman, spent many hours pouring forth her religious faith to her family. Mollie and Uriah had seven children of their own, and this large brood aided their father in his butcher shop. Mollie's religious proclivities severely restricted the activities of young William and his brothers. "Alfalfa Bil" would remember his childhood as an unhappy time of hiding, pretending to be lost, of having "stomach worms," and of looking forward to visits with his grandparents in Collinsville.¹⁰ Uriah Murray often spent time with the boys, trying to teach them their numbers and to read, for they rarely attended school.

At the age of seventeen the eldest son, John Shade, left home. When he returned eighteen months later, he found the younger brothers very unhappy about the strict rules of their stepmother. William Henry had been working in the local brickyard and desired to go with his older brother when John Shade again departed. On September 18, 1881, the three boys told their parents they were going to church, but then ran away.¹¹

The twelve-year-old William Henry David Murray, or Henry as he was generally known, found running away a great adventure. Riding a pony and an old horse, the three boys went to Wise county where they picked cotton and cut wood. After wandering from one job to another they found work with the Loper family at seven and a half dollars per month.¹² Ed Loper and his wife took young Henry into their home, and Murray would later refer to Mrs. Loper as the only mother he ever knew.¹³ Henry left the comforts of the Loper home to work in a brickyard in Aurora. Finding that his fellow workers were horse thieves, he went to Keeter and got a job cutting wood to fuel the furnace of a cotton gin.

At Keeter he attended the local school and lived with the teacher, a Mr. Merrill, and his family. William Henry took part in the literary society and its debates, but his early education was extremely limited. He skipped McGuffey's *First Reader* and never finished the *Second* or the *Third*. Between crops, or in the summer, the Murray boys attended rural one-room schools for sessions of two or three weeks. Henry learned the alphabet in Sunday School where the *Blueback Speller* or *McGuffey's Reader* served as text.¹⁴ Henry returned occasionally to the home of Ed Loper, who admonished him to pay his debts, drink his whiskey straight, and vote the Democratic ticket.¹⁵

While attending school in Keeter, Murray heard of a new school at Springtown in Park County, ten miles away. His thirst for knowledge was such that he sold the few possessions he had been able to accumulate and left for Springtown.

College Hill Institute had been founded in 1884 by John W. McCracken and D. P. Hurley. Built by donations of money and labor, the Institute had been started as a private secondary school, but soon claimed the title

of college. By present standards it was only a country high school.¹⁶ For "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, the time spent at College Hill represented the longest phase of his formal education. John McCracken allowed young Murray to live in his home while attending school. An awkward backwoods boy, the rugged scholar failed to impress his classmates during his first year at College Hill.¹⁷

Following this year of formal training, William Henry Murray worked for Talty and Wiley of Dallas, selling books and atlases. The young salesman thus repaid his debts at Springtown, and, because his older brother John also was selling books, they managed to save a small amount of money.¹⁸ Returning to the Loper home, now at Buffalo, Murray spent most of his time reading. It would be two and a half years before he would return to College Hill.

While residing with the Loper family, William received his first education in practical politics. He attended meetings of the Farmers' Alliance, which was becoming a large protest movement in Texas.¹⁹ Angry farmers were fighting what they considered unjust railroad rates, high interest rates, and low prices for farm commodities. All over Texas in 1888, the Farmers' Alliance was attempting to oust the incumbent Democratic party hierarchy which was ignoring their protests. At Buffalo in Leon county an Alliance group was endeavoring to unseat the local Democratic machine.²⁰ The Leon county Alliance, being non-partisan, formed the Farmer's Political Club, and Murray attended its first meeting at the Sand Hill Church. He was elected, with two others, to guide the activities of the group. Although only nineteen years old and ineligible to vote in the election, Murray was chosen by the Democratic caucus of Buffalo as a delegate to the Leon County Democratic convention.²¹

After this excursion into politics, Murray sold books again to obtain funds to re-enter College Hill Institute, where he was joined by his brothers George and John. During this stay at College Hill he became deeply impressed with two of his instructors, Hurley and McCracken. The former taught mathematics and the latter languages and the sciences.²² In later years Murray said that McCracken taught him how to think, but it was to Hurley that he owed his deepest debt, for this man taught him all that he had learned.²³ While in Springtown, Murray wrote articles for *The Fort Worth Gazette* and the local newspaper. He had by this time dropped "David" from his name and used either W. H. Murray or William Henry Murray.²⁴

Following the school term he returned to selling books, took the teacher's examination at College Hill, and obtained a teaching job at Millsap, in western Parker county.²⁵ His first-grade teaching certificate, issued to him by I. N. Rouch, County Judge of Parker county on July 10, 1889, gave him the right to preside over the rough one-room school.²⁶ He continued to teach at Millsap the following year, and helped to put his brother George through College Hill.²⁷ While teaching at Millsap, Murray accompanied McCracken and Hurley to the state teachers meeting in Galveston.²⁸ In the fall, Murray moved back to Springtown and began writing articles for the local newspaper. The district Democratic convention at Weatherford elected him as one of the Parker county delegates to the state Demo-

cratic convention at San Antonio. Although only twenty years old, Murray received at least minor attention at the convention by nominating his mentor, D. P. Hurley, for State Superintendent of Schools at the session on August 14, 1890.²⁹ According to *The San Antonio Daily Express*, "N. [sic] H. G. [sic] Murray of Springtown" in nominating Hurley said:

. . . Prof. Hurley was given to putting his views on every subject in all the papers that would publish them. But that THE SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS not only refused to publish his articles, but did not even notice him when he came to this city. It was an injustice to him, for he wanted people to know he was for Hogg and the commission [the railroad commission]. As he was for Hogg and the commission he ought to be nominated.³⁰

The *Dallas Morning News* also reported that Murray's speech stressed Hurley's principles and that his views were available in the press.³¹ Hurley received only a small vote at the convention and was defeated. Of greater significance was the meeting which took place at San Antonio between Murray and the man who became his idol, James Stephen Hogg.

Following the convention, Murray returned briefly to the home of the Loper family. He declined an opportunity to become superintendent of schools at Pearsall in Frio county,³² preferring instead a teaching position at the County Line School at Cade on the Navarro-Limestone county line. Certified by the County Superintendent of Schools, the young schoolmaster began to preside over another one-room rural school.³³ Murray began to acquire a reputation as a teacher and to express his views on education in one of the small town newspapers. He wrote a lead editorial in *The Messenger* of Jewett, called "Education—What Is It?" in which he claimed that the basis of all teaching was the answer to this one question.³⁴ While at Cade, Murray also joined the church of Christ but never participated actively in any organized church thereafter.

Murray gained a reputation among the local people as a "talker" through his debates with Populist orators in Navarro county,³⁵ where the Populists were strongly organized and ably led.³⁶ The first People's Party ticket in Texas was nominated in Navarro county and the county was carried by the Populists in 1892 and 1894.³⁷

Murray disliked the Populist sub-treasury plan, which proposed that the Federal government eliminate certain banks as depositories of Federal funds, and, in lieu of these, to create a sub-treasury office in every agricultural county of the nation. This office would store farm products, and issue legal tender equal to 80 per cent of their value to the depositors of such commodities. The produce could be redeemed by the farmer within a year, but otherwise was to be sold by the government.³⁸ In this manner the Populists hoped to obtain farm credit without interest charges, to lower elevator and warehouse costs, to gain price supports for farm commodities, and to stimulate currency inflation. Murray debated the merits of the scheme with Harry Tracy, the local Populist orator.

The Murray-Tracy debates became a focal point of Democratic and Populist contention in the county. A local newspaper reported one of the debates in this way:

**"MURRAY AND TRACY
LOCK HORNS OVER THE SUB-TREASURY
THE ALLIANCE PICNIC**

Thursday June 30th, Birdston

... and for two long hours he [Murray] held the audience spellbound, frequently bringing forth an avalanche of applause."³⁹

The paper referred to Murray as "Roger Q. No. 2," comparing him with the hero of local Democrats, Roger Q. Mills. The "kid statesman" had put Tracy down at the picnic, according to the report, by endorsing abolition of national banks, free and unlimited coinage of gold and silver, reduction of governmental expenditures, and tariff reforms. Another editor commented, "Mr. Murry [*sic*] is a talented young man and is a fluent speaker, and is, I think about the best material the opposition could get up."⁴⁰ And still another editor wrote, "If Mr. Murray were not too young he would be good timber out of which to construct a state senator."⁴¹

The young orator's speaking engagements began to extend beyond the smaller communities. At the city park in Corsicana, the Navarro county seat, he attacked the sub-treasury plan and warned of third party schemes.⁴²

Although he devoted a great deal of time to politics, his teaching career seems not to have been harmed. One editor wrote:

Prof. Murry's [*sic*] school closed for a while on account of the busy season. We have a fine school generally running about eight months in the year. Mr. Murry [*sic*] has made us a good teacher, his head is level on all leading issues and we bespeak for him a bright future.⁴³

His mentor, John McCracken, also continued to admire Murray's forensic skill and teaching ability, and wanted him to speak at a graduation exercise at College Hill Institute.⁴⁴ After a fire destroyed College Hill in May of 1891, McCracken established a new school at Mineral Wells which awarded Murray his bachelor's degree.⁴⁵ Despite his success in the classroom, politics seems to have fascinated young Murray still more, causing him to shift from that vocation into the robust personal politics of the 1890's.

During the long, hot summer of 1891, the state of Texas witnessed a bitter battle among its farmers. The Texas Farmer's Alliance and the Democratic party were both torn asunder by the sub-treasury question. Reform-minded Democrats, led by Jim Hogg, fought bitterly against the entrenched Democratic oligarchy, which opposed reforms desired by the insurgents.⁴⁶ William Murray stood solidly with the Hogg forces against the Populists on one side and the anti-reform Democrats on the other. Speaking at Thornton, Texas, on June 23, 1891, to the "Grand Rally" of the Farmer's Alliance, he defended his position. The twenty-one-year-old exhorter's speech at this all-day picnic and political meeting was reported by a friendly newspaper, *The Farmer's World*. Murray addressed the audience at length, arguing that he could be both an Alliance man and an opponent of the sub-treasury plan. He and others had been denounced as

traitors to the Alliance because of their opposition to the sub-treasury, and threats of expulsion from the order had been made against them. Under its constitution the Alliance was non-political, and Murray argued that he had the right to support the course he deemed best on all political questions.⁴⁷

An anti-sub-treasury Farmer's Alliance convention met in Fort Worth on July 10, 1891. *The Fort Worth Gazette* of that date carried a front-page article about the convention and included nine biographical sketches of the state Alliance leaders, including one of Murray. Murray was described as a self-made man who had left home at twelve years of age, penniless and illiterate. A staunch Democrat, "He is true as steel to his convictions and has the reputation of being a fine speaker, who always 'hits the nail on the head,' and is always ready to support any parliamentary position he takes on any question." Although a faithful and fearless friend of the Farmer's Alliance, he urged both it and the Democratic party to "Let their successes be achieved only under the shield of honor."⁴⁸ The convention elected Murray its secretary and he served ably.⁴⁹

During the remainder of the year Murray worked for Sam Dickson, publisher of *The Farmer's World* in Dallas. The August 1, 1891, edition of the *World* contained a front-page editorial, six columns wide, written by Murray,⁵⁰ entitled "Democracy Defined." This lengthy piece outlined the political and economic beliefs of the young political journalist. Murray focused on the sub-treasury plan and again defended his opposition to it. He asserted that he was "a strict party man" and a believer in representative party government. "Parties, like governments and taxes are necessary evils," he stated, and men join parties out of principles. Parties serve as a vehicle for action and only through them can a group of people accomplish anything. "He that [sic] opposes political parties is a confirmed anarchist," according to Murray. Instead of the Alliance becoming a political party, it should seize control of the Democratic party, for the true sphere of the Alliance lay in education and industrial amelioration. It should not be changed into a political body.

He belonged to the Democratic party because it favored industrial liberty, local self-government, constitutional government, and strict adherence to the Constitution. The Democratic party had held these principles since the days of Jefferson. It stood for the preservation of personal rights, the reserved rights of the states, and the supremacy of the Federal government within the limits of the Constitution. He further argued that the sub-treasury scheme could not be supported by Democrats because it was unconstitutional.

Since the Federal government was the result of a compact between the states, Murray insisted it had limited power, with the states possessing all powers not specifically granted. Murray opposed the abolition of the electoral college, pensions for retired generals and federal judges, and the ownership of land by aliens. He favored cutting governmental expenditures, lower executive salaries, lower taxes, reduction of the public debt, no standing army in time of peace, a tariff for revenue only, and the protection of Americans and their property in foreign countries. He favored

an immigration law to exclude non-white immigrants and "pauper labor even of Aryan countries of Europe." He opposed Federal bounties and subsidies, and favored free ships, free seas, and free trade. He advocated unlimited coinage of gold and silver and the abolition of national banks. The Federal government should not loan money to anyone or any corporation and should not operate the railroads, the telegraph companies or the steamship lines; however, anti-monopoly legislation should be enforced and taxes for all men should be made equitable. In abolishing the Federal banking system, Murray hoped to divorce government from finance. He closed his lengthy article with a typical Murray flourish, "Hurrah for democracy!" Most of the positions taken by him in this article in 1891 would in the 1940's dominate the thinking of a declining man whose world had changed while he had not.

Murray did not confine himself to journalism that fall. He spoke at Franklin, in the Robertson county courthouse. In a crowded room his speech was well received as he denounced the sub-treasury and the Populists. One observer reported, "All who heard it pronounced it an unanswerable argument against all visionary schemes, and the sub-treasury fallacy in particular."⁵¹ He spoke in Tyler and Palestine during the same week and at Fairfield in Freestone county on the fifth of September.

During the same month the Interstate Convention of the Anti-Sub-Treasury Farmer's Alliance met in Saint Louis, Missouri. There, in Addington Hall, the four hundred delegates adopted resolutions against the sub-treasury plans and government ownership of the railroads; resolutions similar to those endorsed at the Fort Worth convention. The Saint Louis meeting was called by V. S. Hall of Missouri, and the leaders of the Southern Alliance were invited to attend. On the fifteenth of September temporary officers were selected and William H. Murray was named temporary secretary.⁵² After serving in this capacity, Murray was made permanent secretary. During one session:

Secretary Murray then made a speech beginning it by complimenting Roger R. Mills. He alluded to the sub-treasury proposition as a 'lightening scheme.' The honest farmers of the county would meet the advocates of the scheme 'from Cape Cod to Kalamazoo, and from hell to breakfast,' and would 'snow them so deep that hell couldn't melt it in forty generations.'⁵³

Returning to Texas, Murray arranged for the hotels and other facilities for the anti-sub-treasury Alliance meeting set for Corsicana on the twenty-sixth of November.⁵⁴ Before the convention, Murray faced a test of support in his home county. The Cade County Line Alliance was forced to take a stand when the state Alliance, which had approved the sub-treasury idea, moved to oust Murray because of his anti-sub-treasury activities and his connection with *The Farmer's World*. At a meeting of the Cade Alliance a committee reported on the charges against Murray and denied that his activities constituted grounds for dismissal. The local Alliance voted unanimously to acquit Murray of all charges.

With this threat removed, he attended the Corsicana meeting and reported it for *The Farmer's World*. "God bless the farmers, they need no

eulogy," he wrote. This meeting formed the Farmer's Grand Alliance. Murray was active in creating the constitution of this new group, which severed all ties with the pro-sub-treasury Farmer's Alliance. As chairman of the constitution committee, Murray refused to give the resulting charter to anyone at the meeting except the newly-elected president on the grounds that this was the correct procedure. This zeal to protect a constitution was to be repeated later in his career. Murray also was appointed state organizer for the Grand Alliance and elected its librarian.⁵⁵

His activities for the Grand Alliance ended on March 14, 1892, when Murray became a correspondent for *The Fort Worth Gazette* to cover a special thirty-day session of the state legislature in Austin. During this assignment Murray developed a great admiration for Governor Hogg.⁵⁶ Following the special session of the legislature Murray sold books for the Benbrooke School and Office Supply Company of Dallas until that firm went bankrupt and then he drifted back to Navarro county.

Murray reached the age of 23 in the election year 1892, and could enter the Texas political arena as a candidate for the first time. He spoke on a variety of issues to a large crowd in neighboring Henderson county in April of 1892, advocating free and unlimited coinage of silver, the Wilson tariff, adherence to the Democratic platform, and the election of Horace Chilton to the United States Senate. A Henderson County newspaper commented, "Mr. Murray is an eloquent and fluent speaker, and his speech was well received."⁵⁷ In June, Murray formally announced as a candidate for the state senate from the district comprising Navarro, Kaufman and Henderson counties.⁵⁸ Murray received the endorsement of his friends and neighbors in rural Navarro county. The Richland community instructed its delegates to the county convention to vote for him,⁵⁹ and the people of Cade also endorsed him with a resolution stating, "We recognize him as a safe exponent of pure democracy, handed down to us by our fathers."⁶⁰ A letter in the *Mexia Democrat* from an "Old Soldier" urged Murray's nomination by the Democratic party, and added, "If it is necessary we can get up a petition signed by all the people except the republicans and sub-treasuryites [*sic*] in this section requesting him [Murray] to run."⁶¹ A political broadside used by Murray in the campaign contained letters from John W. McCracken, H. Monte Walker and Tom Gilbert. McCracken, then at Mineral Wells College, wrote highly of Murray as a student while Walker, an old friend from Buffalo extolled Murray's appearance at the Leon county Democratic convention. A Cade farmer, Gilbert, called for Murray's nomination in order to keep the young men of Navarro county from becoming Populists.⁶²

The convention system of nominating candidates was in use in 1892, and the senatorial district meeting would decide the three-way contest and select either Murray, O. B. Colquitt or George Jester. Both Colquitt and Jester would later serve the state of Texas in high office, one as Governor, the other as Lieutenant Governor. At the county conventions Murray ran a poor third. Both Jester and Murray addressed the Navarro County Convention but Jester won 175 of the 206 votes of the county.⁶³ Colquitt carried Kaufman county 349 votes to 203 for Jester.⁶⁴ Thus, when the senatorial convention met in Corsicana on July 26, the contest was

between Colquitt and Jester, and the latter was selected by acclamation on the 136th ballot.⁶⁵ The severity of his defeat jolted young Murray, who later stated that he was a spoiled boy who should never have run.⁶⁶

His defeat for the state senate failed to dampen his ardor for politics and the Jim Hogg campaign for re-election as governor in particular. The State Democratic convention was to meet in Houston during the month of August, and Murray asked Senator Horace Chilton to help him obtain the secretaryship of that body.⁶⁷ The convention was deeply divided between the supporters of Hogg and those of the conservative, George Clark. The Hogg caucus met on August 15, and Murray received the nomination for temporary secretary.⁶⁸ When the convention met, a break occurred and the Clark forces bolted the gathering. Meeting in a car-shed, the Hogg convention elected Murray as permanent secretary.⁶⁹ The Hogg forces were in absolute control of the convention and so adopted Murray's resolution of August 18, to create a committee of fifteen to inquire into the circumstances of the bolt.⁷⁰ Following the sensational "Car-shed Convention" Murray campaigned ardently for Hogg, who now had the Democrat Clark as an opponent as well as the Populist Thomas Nugent.

Murray's ardor jeopardized his own political future and the re-election of Hogg, since he managed to embarrass both Hogg and the Democratic presidential candidate, Grover Cleveland. Murray wrote to the former president on August 31, 1892, and reported the Hogg position in the campaign. Cleveland responded on September 18, 1892, saying only that he appreciated Murray's efforts and zeal for democratic causes.⁷¹ Murray publicly claimed that he had a letter from Cleveland endorsing Hogg against the bolter Clark in the race for governor, but Cleveland denied this in a letter to J. D. Burch, saying that he would not engage himself in a factional fight.⁷² Hogg's opponents seized upon Murray's impropriety to attack Hogg.⁷³ When Cleveland sent another letter to Texas denying that he knew of Murray's role in the party split,⁷⁴ Murray defended his action in a long letter to the editor of *The Fort Worth Gazette*. Writing from "the headquarters of the Democratic Campaign Committee of Navarro county at Richland," Murray stated that after the Houston convention he decided to write to Cleveland concerning the Hogg-Clark split, and to obtain his opinion concerning the use of the ex-president's name in connection with the Clark bolters. Since Cleveland had complimented his efforts on behalf of the party, Murray had construed this as an endorsement of Hogg.⁷⁵ With the end of the political campaign in November, highlighted by the victories of both Hogg and Cleveland, the young politician returned to teaching.

He accepted the Prairie Hill school near Mexia and began to teach another group of farm children.⁷⁶ A constant joiner and organizer, Murray served as temporary chairman of the "Camp Stonewall Jackson" chapter of the United Sons of the Confederate Veterans, and also presided over the Navarro Educator's Library Association.⁷⁷

Despite the "Cleveland letter" controversy, Governor Hogg appears to have continued his friendship with Murray. The Prairie Hill teacher received an invitation to the inaugural ball at Austin,⁷⁸ and Murray felt

close enough to Hogg to suggest the name of a Corsicana man for a position in the Cleveland administration.⁷⁹

During the summer of 1893, Murray lived with the Tom Gilbert family at Cade before accepting the Midway school near Mexia that fall. The school term ended earlier than he had anticipated and he moved on to Mount Nebo to finish the school year.⁸⁰

Having tasted the excitement of politics, Murray decided to broaden his political experience. In August, he wrote to Governor Hogg requesting an appointment as delegate from Texas to the bi-metallic congress to meet in Saint Louis, Missouri, on October 3, 1893.⁸¹ Hogg replied that he would be pleased to send Murray, and a certificate appointing him was issued.⁸² This meeting was held to encourage the use of silver, though it was not a free silver meeting, and to further trade with Latin America. Present at the convention were Governor Ben Tillman of South Carolina; the Populist Governor of Kansas, James Lewelling; Mrs. Mary E. Lease; and General James B. Weaver, the Populist candidate for President in 1892.⁸³ It is probable that meeting with such a group as this re-enforced Murray's belief in the free and unlimited coinage of gold and silver.

When the school year ended, Murray once again returned to Corsicana. He persuaded his brother George, now residing there, to join him in publishing a newspaper⁸⁴. The brothers purchased a hand press and type and rented the rear of Foster Nelson's barbershop. Nelson was a Negro. Jim Garrity, a local businessman, loaned them some money. The Murray papers were named *The Corsicana Daily News* and *The Navarro County News*. The latter, a weekly, circulated mainly among the farm population. With William as the editor and George as the business manager and advertising solicitor, the papers became moderately successful. Local small businessmen bought advertising in the papers, but the larger merchants boycotted them.⁸⁵ The papers apparently carried local news along with stories and editorials written by William.⁸⁶

Naturally the two papers became involved in local politics. Because of the strength of the Populist party in the county, Murray argued through the *News* that the Democrats should use the primary system instead of the convention to nominate their candidates. Adoption of the primary would result in the nomination of the popular choice rather than the hand-picked candidate of a few who might control the convention. When the primary system was adopted in the county, Murray claimed to have authored the rules for it.⁸⁷ Murray wrote to Governor Hogg in March of 1894, asking for his opinion of the leading issues in the summer campaign. He especially wanted to know what questions would be faced by the state government.⁸⁸ The letter was not written merely to secure general information, for Murray had decided to try for the state senate again.

His major opponent for the office of state senator was O. B. Colquitt, a rival Corsicana editor and a future governor of Texas. The campaign was conducted at a high level and Murray offered Colquitt a serious challenge in the senatorial district, which now comprised only Navarro county. Murray put on a spirited campaign. He borrowed five hundred dollars from the City National Bank to finance his canvass.⁸⁹ Although Murray had

an ally within Corsicana in Foster Nelson, the Negro barber, who controlled the local Negro vote,⁹⁰ he carried only the rural precincts of Spring Hill, Dawson, Richland, Cade, Rabbit Hill, and Piggah. He lost the city of Corsicana to Colquitt, who won the nomination with 1441 votes to Murray's 1232.⁹¹

In order to pay back the money borrowed for the campaign, Murray returned to County Line school at Cade. After an altercation with one of the older boys he resigned and moved to Mount Calm school in Hill county not far from Corsicana.⁹² When the term closed there he returned to Corsicana.

The Murray newspapers continued to battle the Populists as well as the Gold Democrats. One of the Populists often attacked by Murray was Thomas Pryor Gore, a Mississippian who had moved to Corsicana. Although Gore was blind, he later served as United States Senator from Oklahoma, and he and Murray led the forces of Woodrow Wilson in their adopted state in 1912. Murray used his newspapers to support Jim Garrity for congress, but Garrity refused to accept the draft. When O. B. Colquitt announced for congress, Murray ardently opposed his recent political rival.⁹³ The Democratic sweep of 1896 eliminated the Populists from most of the offices in central Texas. Murray had made a fateful step in the campaign by endorsing a Populist candidate for district judge over a Gold Democrat. Corsicana Democrats attacked him for this defection and his newspapers suffered a loss of advertising.⁹⁴ Murray defended his action, saying he was a Democrat, and had always been a Democrat, but that the Gold Democrats were not representative of his party.⁹⁵

While editing the newspapers, Murray had also been studying law at night. Judge John H. Rice directed his course of reading.⁹⁶ When he appeared for his bar examination, the committee included Judge McClelland, Ed Call of Callicut & Call, and one other lawyer, but the examination, by Murray's own admission, was a farce.⁹⁷ After passing the examination on April 10, 1897, Murray decided to sell the newspapers and go to Fort Worth to practice law. His brother George concurred, the equipment was sold, and Murray left Corsicana.

From the vantage point of Corsicana, Fort Worth looked like a large metropolis, but in reality it was a city of only some 25,000.⁹⁸ Primarily a livestock and trading center, it seemed to offer better opportunities to a fledgling lawyer. Murray's law practice, however, proved even less successful than had his flirtation with journalism.

After arriving in the robust cowtown, Murray formed a law partnership with two former College Hill classmates, Albert Baskin and Less L. Hudson. Baskin soon left the firm, which then became Murray and Hudson, with Murray practicing general civil law and Hudson land law.⁹⁹ The practice was very small and less than lucrative, forcing Murray to become an installment collector as well as a lawyer. In an attempt to expand his meager knowledge, he studied municipal law under District Judge W. D. Harris. One case provided him with a significant financial reward when he sued to recover some land for a Negro widow. Gaining a reputation among Fort Worth Negroes, he filed suits for them against the Texas and Pacific Railroad for losses of their livestock on the right-of-way.¹⁰⁰

In August of 1897 Murray went north to visit his father, who had moved to Marlow in the Indian Territory. He decided that there was a better future for lawyers in that area and returned to Fort Worth determined to move again. This necessitated borrowing one hundred and fifty dollars from an old friend, A. L. Matlock, an attorney for the Cattle Raisers Association of Texas.

Armed with personal recommendations from Matlock and Judge Harris, the determined lawyer left Fort Worth in March of 1898, to seek a new career in the Indian Territory.¹⁰¹ In the Indian Territory and his adopted state of Oklahoma, Murray became a major political figure. As governor, congressman, presidential candidate, and author of constitutions, "Alfalfa Bill's" life reflected the experiences of his formative years in Texas.

FOOTNOTES

¹James L. Rock and W. I. Smith, *Southern and Western Guide for 1878* (Saint Louis, 1878), 63-64.

²Carl Coke Rister, *The Southwestern Frontier: 1865-1881* (Cleveland, 1928), 127-146.

³Gordon Hines, *Alfalfa Bill An Intimate Biography* (Oklahoma City, 1932), 8.

⁴*Ibid.*, 2.

⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

⁶In his declining years, "Alfalfa Bill" became extremely interested in his genealogy, and his memoirs contain long passages concerning his ancestors. See: William H. Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray and True History of Oklahoma* (3 vols.; Boston, 1945), I, 64-104.

⁷*Ibid.*, I, 125-126.

⁸Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 15.

⁹Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 123-124.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, I, 135-136.

¹¹*Ibid.*, I, 147.

¹²*Ibid.*, I, 153.

¹³Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 36.

¹⁴Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, III, 283-284; I, 134.

¹⁵Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 45.

¹⁶John W. Nix, *A Tale of Two Schools and Springtown, Parker County* (Fort Worth, 1945), 61-65.

¹⁷Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 51.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 168.

²⁰Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 59.

²¹Political Broadside, "Murray on Cause of Defeat" (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

²²Nix, *A Tale of Two Schools*, 75-76.

²³William H. Murray, *The Finished Scholar* (Philadelphia, 1941), 12.

²⁴Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 62.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶Teaching Certificate (William H. Murray Papers, Oklahoma State Historical Society Library).

²⁷Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 68.

²⁸Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 140-141.

²⁹*Austin Statesman*, August 15, 1890.

³⁰*San Antonio Daily Express*, August 15, 1890.

³¹*Dallas Morning News*, August 15, 1890.

³²Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 169.

³³Teaching Certificate (William H. Murray Papers, Oklahoma State Historical Society Library).

³⁴*The Messenger* (Jewett), June 6, 1890, clipping (William H. Murray Papers. Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

³⁵Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 72-73.

³⁶Roscoe C. Martin, *The People's Party in Texas: A Study in Third Party Politics* (Austin, 1933); *The University of Texas Bulletin*, Bureau of Research in The Social Sciences, Study No. 4), 61.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

³⁸John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, 1931). Bison Book edition (Lincoln, 1961), 186-204.

⁴¹Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁴⁰Newspaper clipping dated June 29, ...?... (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁴¹Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁴²*Corsicana Light*, clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁴³Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁴⁴John W. McCracken to William H. Murray, n.d. (MS., William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁴⁵Bachelor of Science Diploma, Mineral Wells College, May 19, 1893 (William H. Murray Papers, Oklahoma State Historical Society Library).

⁴⁶For detail of this political strife see Robert C. Cotner, *James Stephen Hogg A Biography* (Austin, 1959), *passim*.

⁴⁷*The Farmer's World* (Dallas), July 4, 1891.

⁴⁸*Fort Worth Gazette*, July 10, 1891.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, July 11-12, 1891.

⁵⁰*The Farmer's World* (Dallas), August 1, 1891.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, August 8, 1891.

⁵²*Saint Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, September 16, 1891.

⁵³*Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 15, 1891.

⁵⁴*The Farmer's World* (Dallas), October 31, 1891.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, December 5, 1891.

⁵⁶Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 74.

⁵⁷*The Henderson County Times*, April 28, 1892, clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁵⁸*Dallas Morning News*, June 26, 1892.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, July 17, 1892.

⁶⁰Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁶¹*Mexia Democrat*, clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁶²Political broadside (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁶³*Dallas Morning News*, July 19, 1892.

⁶⁴Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁶⁵*Dallas Morning News*, July 23 and July 27, 1892.

⁶⁶Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 188.

⁶⁷Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 79-80.

⁶⁸*Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 1892.

⁶⁹*Houston Daily Post*, August 18, 1892.

⁷⁰Austin *Statesman*, August 19, 1892.

⁷¹Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³Political broadside, "A Campaign Lie Nailed" (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁷⁴Grover Cleveland to Thomas Finley, Jr., September 27, 1892, reprinted in the broadside, "A Campaign Lie Nailed" (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁷⁵Fort Worth *Gazette*, September 30, 1892.

⁷⁶Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 83; Teaching Certificate (William H. Murray Papers, Oklahoma State Historical Library).

⁷⁷Undated newspaper clipping (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library); William H. Murray to Governor James S. Hogg, March 27, 1894 (MS., James Stephen Hogg Collection, Archives, University of Texas Library).

⁷⁸Ticket (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁷⁹William H. Murray to Governor James S. Hogg, February 21, 1893 (MS., James Stephen Hogg Collection, Archives, University of Texas Library).

⁸⁰Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 83-84.

⁸¹William H. Murray to Governor James S. Hogg, August 19, 1893 (MS., James Stephen Hogg Collection, Archives, University of Texas Library).

⁸²Governor James S. Hogg to William H. Murray, September 6, 1893 (MS., James Stephen Hogg Collection, Archives, University of Texas Library); Certificate of appointment (William H. Murray Papers, Oklahoma State Historical Society Library).

⁸³Saint Louis *Post-Dispatch*, October 1-3, 1893.

⁸⁴Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 183-184; Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 81-91.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶Mrs. George Jester to William H. Murray, March 25, 1894 (MS., William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

⁸⁷Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 188.

⁸⁸William H. Murray to Governor James S. Hogg, March 27, 1894 (MS., James Stephen Hogg Collection, Archives, University of Texas Library).

⁸⁹Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 85.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 90.

⁹¹Dallas *Morning News*, June 17, 18 and 21, 1894.

⁹²Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 87.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 92-93.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 98.

⁹⁵Newspaper fragment (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library). This is the only evidence of either of the two papers published by Murray that the author was able to locate.

⁹⁶Hines, *Alfalfa Bill*, 93.

⁹⁸Robert A. Talbert, *Cowtown-Metropolis* (Fort Worth, 1956), 4.

⁹⁹Letterhead (William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).

¹⁰⁰Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray*, I, 197-198.

¹⁰¹Judge W. D. Harris to "To Whom It May Concern," March 16, 1898, and A. L. Matlock to "To Whom It May Concern," March 19, 1898 (MSS., William H. Murray Papers, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library).