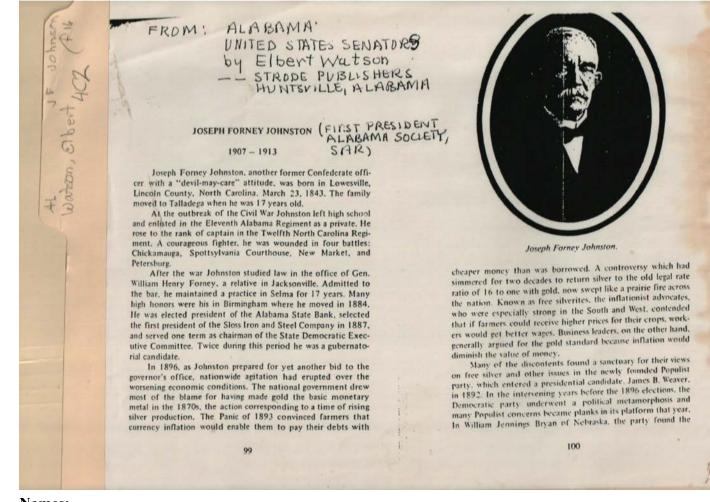
Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 4, Subseries C, Box 2, Folder 16"J. H. Johnson" Article by Elbert WatsonImage 1r04c02-16-000-0164ContentsIndexAbout



Names:

Bryan, William Jennings

Places:

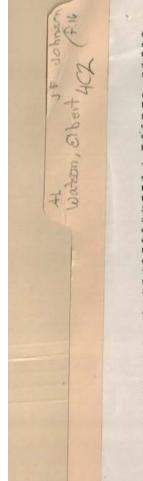
Huntsville, AL

Types:

article

Forney, William Henry, General Johnston, Joseph Forney Watson, Elbert Weaver, James B. Joseph Forney Johnston

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ideal spokesman-standard bearer for the crusade. Bryan did not disappoint his cheering throngs at the national convention in Chicago, when he warned his gold standard adversaries: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."

In Alabama many citizens were suffering from unemployment and low farm prices. Remedial measures were demanded by masses of devoted Democrats, who now regarded silver as providing the most satisfactory remedy. Populism also had become a significant political force in the state and threatened to dislodge the Black Belt's hold on the state government in the person of Gov. William Oates, a gold advocate.

All of this changed in the elections of 1896. Senators John T. Morgan and James L. Pugh and most of Alabama's congressional delegation for several years had advocated free silver. In the fall of 1895 a free silver convention in Birmingham decided to make silver the issue in the fortheoming state elections. Johnston was tapped to run as the silver candidate of the party against Congressman Richard H. Clarke of Mobile, the gold, or conservative choice. Aided by Morgan and Pugh and profusely calling himself "a silver man from tail to snout." Johnston won the nomination and went on to knock off his Populist/Republican opponent. A. T. Goodwyn, in the general election. Progressive Democrats of Johnston's persuasion won six of nine congressional seats and all but 25 seats in the legislature, indicating a political revolution in the state. Ironically, this election saw free silverite Pugh defeated by Pettus, likewise a free silver advocate.

Once in office Johnston was not the zealous crusader many had expected. However, he did adhere diligently to the social philosophy of populism within the party, and proved an astute publicizer of his administration's accomplishments. He was easily reelected in 1898.

Johnston steered a cautious course in his second term, which he used as a springboard in an attempt to unseat Morgan from the Senate in 1900. The campaign was a lively and divisive one, with each man taking the other to task: Morgan attacking Johnston for "boss tactics": Johnston labeling Morgan a member of the "silk-hat aristocraey." Morgan, the old commanding general, was equal to the task and trounced Johnston, the sub-

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ordinate captain, without canvassing the state.

Though chaffed by his defeat, Johnston was not dissuaded to leave the political arena. To keep his name before the people, he joined the opposition to the proposed 1901 constitution, claiming it would disfranchise many white voters. This position became a serious obstacle to his obtaining the Democratic nomination for governor in 1902 against William D. Jelks. Although agreeing to accept the constitution, Johnston had drawn the wrath of Morgan and other party leaders and was easily brushed aside.

But in 1906 Johnston, after giving the political waters time to calm down, was back once more, this time in the "Dead Shoe" primary, from which he emerged as second alternate. Pettus' death gave to Johnston his coveted prize when the legislature unanimously elected him to the vacancy August 1, 1907, to serve until March 4, 1915.

This he did with considerable ability. In Wilson's administration. he served as chairman of the Committee on Military Matters. His sudden death by a heart attack in Washington. on August 8. 1913. came while he was locked in a tight debate over a tariff bill. His passing seriously weakened the slim Democratic majority in that session and affected passage of some significant legislation. Johnston's seat was vacant almost a year, since Gov, Emmet O'Neal was not empowered by the legislature to appoint when such a contingency occurred. O'Neal's attempt to appoint Henry D. Clayton to an interim term was rejected by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, and the decision was not contested.

Johnston quite likely would have been amused at the confusion his passing made from the statehouse to the Congress. Over the years in the public forum he had granted little rest to his opponents, nor had he been granted much from them. But he had moved relentlessly from one political battlefield to another: wounded, he was down for awhile, then up again, finally making it to the top. Symbolically, perhaps, the train carrying his body to Birmingham wrecked near Morris. South Carolina. Possibly that was enough for the old fighter to welcome the tranquility of his permanent encampment in Birmingham's Elmwood Cemetery.

O'Neal, Emmet, Governor Oates, William, Governor Pettus, Pugh, James L. Wilson,

Names:

Bryan, Clarke, Richard H. Clayton, Henry D. Goodwyn, A. T.

Types:

article

Jelks, William D. Johnston, Morgan, John T. Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection:Series 4, Subseries C, Box 2, Folder 16"J. H. Johnson" Article by Elbert WatsonContentsIndexAbout

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Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection

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Collection Scope and Content: The Collection of 114 Linear ft. includes a total of 156 Archival Boxes. The Frances Cabaniss Roberts collection covers the historical records of the Cabaniss Roberts family. This collection contains extensive correspondence records of the Cabaniss Roberts family circa 1830 to 1930.

Archives/Special Collections Access Restrictions: None

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