



William Jennings Bryan

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WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, “The Great Commoner,” was born in Salem, Illinois, on March 19, 1860. After attending public schools and Whipple Academy in Jacksonville, Illinois, he graduated in 1881 from Illinois College in Jacksonville, where he was president of the debating society, and in 1883 from the Union College of Law in Chicago. He practiced law in Jacksonville before moving to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1887. There he continued his law practice and embarked upon a political career.

He served from 1890 to 1894 in the U.S. House of Representatives. Defeated for a Senate seat, he became editor-in-chief of the *Omaha World* and was active on the Chautauqua lecture circuit. His economic views reflected the plight of the post-Civil War agrarian south and middle west. His fiery and eloquent support for the free coinage of silver at the Democratic Convention of 1896 won him the presidential nomination. In 1901 he established a newspaper, *The Commoner*, in Lincoln. He became a pivotal figure in Democratic party politics and was instrumental in obtaining the 1912 presidential nomination for Woodrow Wilson. As Wilson’s secretary of state, he negotiated numerous treaties and used his political influences to carry administration measures through Congress. A pacifist, Bryan resigned before America entered the First World War. A deeply religious man, he was an attorney for the prosecution in the Scopes trial, a controversial evolution case.

Bryan’s death in Dayton, Tennessee, on July 26, 1925, came five days after the trial’s conclusion. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

April 2011



Bronze by Rudolph Evans

Given in 1937; located in National Statuary Hall.