SETH HINSHAW

An Experiment in Democracy

The Richards Primary Law and the 1920 Presidential Campaign in South Dakota

Historians rarely mention South Dakota in studies of presidential elections. The state's small number of electoral votes and reliable support for Republican candidates in general elections render it an afterthought in most campaign analyses. George S. McGovern's role in revamping the national Democratic primary schedule and rules after 1968, followed by his own presidential candidacy in 1972, may have given South Dakota its greatest visibility in the realm of presidential politics.[1] However, the state has had a number of competitive presidential primaries in the past century. Of all the presidential nominating contests in South Dakota, the 1920 primary was the most important because it changed the trajectory of the national campaign.

It is remarkable that scholars have paid so little attention to the 1920 South Dakota presidential primary, which was a landmark event in several senses. Its placement in the primary schedule made it an early test of candidates' strength, and more presidential contenders campaigned in South Dakota than in any other primary state that year. As required under the state's unique Richards Primary Law, the South Dakota Democratic and Republican parties held the first presidential primary debates in American history in 1920. A 1926 study of presidential primaries by Wellesley College professor Louise Overacker mentioned the South Dakota debates, but subsequent historians of presidential elections have mostly forgotten them.[2] The South Dakota primary also

1. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), p. 366; Marty Cohen et al., *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 164–65.

2. Louise Overacker, *The Presidential Primary* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), pp. 83–84.

proved to be a stumbling block for the political aspirations of Major General Leonard Wood, who entered the contest as the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination.

The story of early primaries in South Dakota cannot be recounted adequately without discussing Richard Olsen Richards and his signature legislation, the Richards Primary Law. A Norwegian immigrant who settled in Mitchell and later moved to Huron, Richards made a fortune in banking and land investments. He entered politics in 1903, aligning himself with the progressive wing of the Republican Party. Progressives tended to believe that economic and political power was concentrated in too few hands and that reforms were necessary to make politics more responsive to the public will. After unsuccessfully seeking an appointment as postmaster in Huron, Richards came to believe that the only way for the people to exercise free suffrage was to remove the nomination of candidates for office from party conventions. At the time, popular nomination of candidates through primaries was rare in the United States.[3]

Like some other progressives, Richards believed that machine politicians could dominate old-style nominating conventions, which all too often led to undemocratic results. In the first attempt to use the initiative and referendum process in South Dakota, he drafted a primary election bill, collected over eight thousand signatures in support of the measure, and presented it to the state legislature in 1905. Dominated by the conservative, or "stalwart" faction of the Republican Party, the legislature rejected the initiated bill and instead passed the Honest Caucus Law, which required secret ballots at party caucuses, to regulate nominations. The following year, however, progressive Republican Coe I. Crawford won the governorship and fellow reformists took control of the legislature, which enacted a primary law in 1907. The legislation mandated primaries to nominate party candidates for Congress, governor, and other statewide offices but did not apply to the presidential race. Although Richards had helped to organize Crawford's campaign, the 1907 primary law failed to satisfy him as it did not

3. Richmond L. Clow, "In Search of the People's Voice: Richard Olsen Richards and Progressive Reform," *South Dakota History* 10 (Spring 1979): 40–42.

scrap party conventions entirely. After Crawford declined to support Richards's call for additional legislation to check the practice of political patronage, Richards broke with the governor.[4]

South Dakota voters adopted the first Richards Primary Law in 1912. Richards had submitted the text to the legislature in 1911, and that body placed the measure on the ballot for the November 1912 general election. The proposal included provisions for the recognition of factions in political parties and a mechanism for primary voters to influence party platforms. The legislation also established primaries to identify voters' choices to fill vacant postmaster positions. These latter primaries were merely advisory, however. Because post offices were under federal control, no state law could compel federal authorities to appoint the winning candidates as postmasters.[5]

South Dakota held its first presidential preference primary under the 1907 law. Theodore Roosevelt won a three-way race on the Republican ballot, defeating incumbent President William Howard Taft and United States Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin; on the Democratic side, Speaker of the House James B. ("Champ") Clark of Missouri bested New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson. In the general election, the presidential contest had three major national candidates (Taft, Roosevelt, and Wilson). Only the latter two contended for electoral votes in South Dakota because Roosevelt, the nominee of the new Progressive Party, had won the South Dakota Republican primary. In November, Roosevelt's slate of electors carried South Dakota, and voters approved the Richards Primary Law with 58,139 in favor to 33,256 opposed.[6]

As it turned out, the story of the Richards Primary Law was just beginning. In 1913, the legislature placed the Coffey Bill on the ballot for the next year's general election. This proposal would have repealed key provisions of the Richards Primary Law, such as the recognition of minority factions within political parties. However, voters rejected the

4. Ibid., pp. 42–44; Clarence A. Berdahl, "The Richards Primary," *American Political Science Review* 14 (1920): 93–94.

5. Berdahl, "Richards Primary," pp. 94, 103.

6. Clow, "In Search of the People's Voice," pp. 51–52; Berdahl, "Richards Primary," p. 94; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1921), pp. 264–66.

_____ Party Official Primary Ballot

_____ County, South Dakota

Primary Election, March _____, 19___

To vote for a person whose name is printed on the ballot mark a cross (X) in the (☐) to the left of the candidate for whom you desire to vote.

NAME OF OFFICE (AND NUMBER TO VOTE FOR)	INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES (Proposed by Individual) (Petitions)	CANDIDATES PROPOSED by REPRESENTATIVE PRIMARY COMMITTEE State Summary of Principles (not more than 16 words) County Motto (not more than 8 words)	CANDIDATES PROPOSED by REPRESENTATIVE PRIMARY COMMITTEE State Summary of Principles (not more than 16 words) County Motto (not more than 8 words)
Vote for two for JUDGE OF SUPREME COURT	John Doe		
" "	John Doe		
Vote for one for CIRCUIT JUDGE..... JUDICIAL DISTRICT.	John Doe		
Vote for one for STATE MINORITY PROPOSAL COMMITTEEMAN	John Doe	John Doe	
Vote for one for STATE MAJORITY PROL COMMITTEEMAN	John Doe		John Doe
for PARTY STATE COMMITTEEMAN	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for PARTY STATE CHAIRMAN	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for NATIONAL COMMITTEEMAN	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for four for PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
" "	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
" "	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
" "	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
" "	John Doe		
Vote for one for U. S. SENATOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
" "	John Doe		
Vote for two for REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
" "	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for GOVERNOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for SEC'Y OF STATE	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for ATT'Y GENERAL	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for STATE AUDITOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for STATE TREASURER	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for COMMISSIONER SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LANDS	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for SUPERINTENDENT PUBLIC INSTRUCTION	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for RAILROAD COM..... DISTRICT	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for STATE SENATOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for two for REPRESENTATIVES	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for two for REPRESENTATIVES	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for COUNTY TREASURER	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for COUNTY AUDITOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one SHERIFF	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for REGISTER OF DEEDS	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for CLERK OF COURTS	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for STATE'S ATTORNEY	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for COUNTY JUDGE	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for SURVEYOR	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for CORONER	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for....for JUSTICE OF THE PEACE	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for....for CONSTABLE	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for one for COUNTY COMMISSIONER .....COM. DIST.	John Doe	John Doe	John Doe
Vote for.....DELEGATES TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION	DELEGATE John Doe / ALTERNATE John Doe	DELEGATE John Doe / ALTERNATE John Doe	DELEGATE John Doe / ALTERNATE John Doe
" "	John Doe / John Doe	John Doe / John Doe	John Doe / John Doe
" "	John Doe / John Doe	John Doe / John Doe	John Doe / John Doe

new legislation in November 1914, leaving the Richards primary system intact. Only four months later, the implacable legislature repealed the Richards measure. In its place, legislators passed the Norbeck Primary Law, which scrapped the Richards machinery for the recognition of minority factions and voter approval of party platforms. The legislature enacted its new primary law with an emergency clause, which prevented its referral to voters in the 1916 general election. Richards unsuccessfully challenged the legislation in court. As a result, the Norbeck Law, as amended by a special legislative session in early 1916, governed that year's South Dakota presidential primary. The balloting generated little excitement because neither major party had a contested presidential race in South Dakota.[7]

Meanwhile, Richards had organized a successful petition drive that placed a new version of his primary bill on the 1916 general election ballot. However, the electorate defeated his proposal by only 323 votes out of over one hundred thousand ballots cast. Undaunted, Richards led another initiative campaign that won a place on the 1918 general election ballot for his primary election proposal. This time, Richards and his allies emerged victorious. South Dakotans adopted the measure with 47,981 votes in favor to 34,705 opposed. The victory was noteworthy because as political scientist Clarence Berdahl noted in 1920, the Richards Primary Laws of 1912 and 1918 were the only measures passed under the initiative and referendum system in the first two decades after the state constitution was amended to allow for the process in 1898.[8]

7. Clow, "In Search of the People's Voice," pp. 52–54; Berdahl, "Richards Primary," pp. 94–95; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1921), pp. 272–78; South Dakota, *The Laws Passed at the Special Session of the Fourteenth Legislature of the State of South Dakota* (1916), chap. 3.

8. Clow, "In Search of the People's Voice," p. 55; Berdahl, "Richards Primary," p. 95; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1921), pp. 329, 374.

Opposite page

The Richards Primary Law instituted a three-column ballot that included room for minority-faction and "independent" candidates.

The 1918 Richards Primary Law, which governed the 1920 South Dakota primary election, established a complicated process to select party nominees for elective office and to formulate party platforms. The first few stages of the 1920 primary actually took place in late 1919. The first step, known as the precinct initiatory election, occurred on 11 November. Voters chose three proposalmen to represent their precinct at their party's county proposal meeting, which began one week after the precinct elections. Voters could only participate in the precinct election for their own party.[9]

County proposal meetings convened in the county seats on 18 November. Each party's proposalmen met separately. They cast weighted ballots, with each precinct representative's influence made directly proportional to the number of votes the party's nominee for governor received in the precinct at the last general election. After organizing and electing three representatives to their party's state proposal meeting, the county meetings adjourned until 23 December.[10]

State proposal meetings took place at the capitol in Pierre on 2 December. As in the county proposal meetings, representatives cast weighted ballots, which gave the most influence to proposalmen from populous counties and/or counties where a given party was strong. The Richards Primary Law mandated that the sessions be open to spectators and that each plank of the party platform be acted upon by the whole body rather than by committees. The law further required the state proposalmen to identify a paramount national issue and a paramount state-level issue. The meetings also proposed party candidates for president, vice president, Congress, and state constitutional offices. A proposed candidate's name would appear on the primary election ballot only if the person filed an acceptance of the proposalmen's endorsement with the secretary of state.[11]

An unusual feature of the Richards Primary Law was its provision for minority representation. If a group of five or more proposalmen (at either the county or state level) disagreed with the majority's pro-

9. Berdahl, "Richards Primary," p. 96.

10. Ibid.; Clarence A. Berdahl, "The Operation of the Richards Primary," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 106 (1923): 161.

11. Berdahl, "Richards Primary," pp. 96–97.

posed candidates or paramount issues, the dissenters could formulate their own statement of issues and endorse a separate slate of candidates to appear on the primary ballot. If there were two or more such dissenting factions, only the first group to file the necessary paperwork with election officials could grant endorsements. Minority-choice aspirants for office would have to accept their endorsements in much the same manner as majority-choice contenders. Moreover, candidates who wished to run for their party's nomination for a particular office but had not received either the majority or minority endorsement could file for a so-called "independent" slot on the primary ballot after the proposal meetings concluded.[12]

Three weeks after the state proposal meetings adjourned, the county meetings reassembled. County proposalmen proceeded to review the platform approved at the state meetings and to endorse candidates for county offices and the state legislature. As was true at the state level, there could be one majority endorsement and one minority endorsement for each office. Independent candidates could file for a ballot position after the proposal meetings ended.[13]

Another key provision of the Richards Primary Law was its mandate for debates during the primary campaign. The statute obliged each party to hold at least one presidential debate and no less than sixteen gubernatorial debates. Not all contenders would have to appear, however. The law specified which candidates were required to issue debate challenges. Candidates receiving a challenge were to choose the date and place for the event. Any candidate who failed to issue a mandatory debate challenge or to accept such a challenge would lose his place on the ballot. Presidential candidates could satisfy the debate requirement by appearing in person or by proxy, while gubernatorial contenders had to debate in person. In accord with its author's belief that issues should be the focus of any political campaign, the law required the state to publish a publicity pamphlet that included photographs of the gubernatorial and presidential candidates and their statements of principles.[14]

12. Ibid., pp. 97–98.
13. Ibid., pp. 98–99.
14. Ibid., pp. 99–101.

The primary election itself took place on 23 March 1920. The state furnished polling places with ballots printed on a different color of paper for each party. Voters then chose final nominees from among their party's majority-endorsed, minority-endorsed, and independent candidates for each office. The March election also chose national party convention delegates, who were bound to support the winner of the South Dakota presidential primary on the first three nominating ballots at their respective gatherings.[15]

Richard O. Richards intended his complex primary law to shift political power toward voters rather than party leaders. He believed that vested interests exercised too much influence in party organizations, and his strained relationship with the South Dakota Republican Party leadership fed this opinion. Richards maintained that the debate requirement was "the fundamental principle of his system for the selection of party candidates."[16] He was familiar with the nineteenth-century campaign technique in which a candidate would usually remain out of the limelight and allow local party leaders to tailor promises on his behalf to different voting blocs. Because the candidate was not making the promises personally, he could later ignore them. In a debate, Richards thought, contenders would need to outline consistent policy positions. The typical debate format used in the early twentieth century provided each candidate an extended time to speak, in contrast with the brief answers demanded in contemporary televised debates. Oratorical skills expected of politicians in the age before television and radio included the ability to organize a sound argument that would hold an audience's attention. Richards believed that extended debates required knowledge of policy specifics; platitudes alone could not easily fill a half-hour speech. The reform leader wanted citizens to vote based on candidates' policy statements, not their personalities, an idea he often described as "principles, not people."[17]

The 1920 presidential campaign took place during a difficult period for President Woodrow Wilson's administration. World War I had ended in November 1918. In an unprecedented move, Wilson spent

15. Ibid., p. 99.
16. *Huron Daily Plainsman*, 12 May 1930.
17. *Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times*, 29 May 1918.

several months in Europe helping to draft peace agreements, especially the Treaty of Versailles, the proposed settlement with Germany. Most American troops returned to civilian life in 1919. However, the government did a poor job of planning for demobilization. As military contracts gradually expired, the demand for industrial labor subsided while the supply increased due to the return of discharged soldiers. The cost of living rose throughout 1919, while wages fell, precipitating some thirty-six hundred strikes involving over four million workers.[18]

When Wilson, a Democrat, submitted the Treaty of Versailles to the United States Senate for ratification in July 1919, progressive Republicans led the opposition. The president embarked upon a speaking trip to the western states in September, hoping to influence the Senate to ratify the treaty, which would permit the United States to join a new international organization, the League of Nations. Wilson suffered a minor stroke in Pueblo, Colorado, on 25 September 1919. Cancelling his remaining speeches, Wilson returned to Washington, where he had a major stroke on 2 October. The president was incapacitated for months and never fully recovered. Largely because he was unwilling to agree to amendments to the treaty in the Senate, Wilson failed to persuade that body to ratify the accord.[19]

Political, economic, and social changes in the United States after the war effectively crippled the progressive movement in American politics. Prewar progressive support for industrial workers evaporated due to postwar strikes. In the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and violent political clashes in Germany, many Americans became fearful of socialism at home. Much of the public became tired of pleas from farmers for price supports. Other than the efforts of Herbert Hoover, director of the American Relief Administration, to encourage increased European purchase of American foodstuffs, progressives had no plans to help American farmers deal with falling crop prices. Anarchist groups set off bombs in various cities in the spring of 1919, including one in the Manhattan financial district. They also targeted certain public officials, including United States Attorney General

18. Kendrick A. Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), pp. 206–8.

19. Ibid., pp. 194–200.

After suffering two strokes in 1919, President Woodrow Wilson relied heavily on his wife, Edith (right), for the remainder of his time in office.

A. Mitchell Palmer, who escaped serious injury when a bomb demolished his home in June. That fall, Palmer secured authorization from Congress to arrest anarchists. He used various methods of identifying them and deported many foreign-born persons the government suspected of radicalism. In late 1919, Palmer organized two major waves

of raids against alleged radical cells. Politicians of the two main parties initially acclaimed the Palmer Raids as a necessity.[20]

The presidential primary campaign of 1920 began in the midst of all these societal changes. On the Democratic side, President Wilson's status complicated all political calculations. He deeply desired a third term, but after his 1919 stroke it was unclear if he would be able to complete his second term. In fact, his personal physician urged him to resign from office. Wilson took no action as the initial primary filing deadlines approached. By waiting for his party to call upon him for a third term, Wilson hampered other potential candidacies. Attorney General Palmer, former Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo, United States Representative Champ Clark, and Governor James M. Cox of Ohio all held off announcing their candidacies while awaiting word of Wilson's intentions.[21]

The first Democrat to announce his entry into the presidential race was James W. Gerard, who has received little attention in most histories of the 1920 campaign. Gerard had served as a judge in New York before Wilson appointed him ambassador to Germany in 1913. He represented American interests as relations between the two countries deteriorated before the United States entered World War I. In 1914, while he was still in Germany, Gerard was a candidate for a United States Senate seat representing New York. Although he defeated a young Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Democratic primary, the ambassador lost the general election. In 1917, Gerard won the admiration of the American press for delivering strongly worded messages to the German government prior to American entry into the war. He then returned home, worked to sell United States war bonds, and wrote two books about his experiences in Europe, one of which became the basis for a silent film entitled *My Four Years in Germany*.[22]

20. Ibid., pp. 211–12; *New York Times*, 3 June 1919, p. 1.

21. Wesley M. Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), pp. 54–59.

22. For biographical information on James W. Gerard, *see* www.electionsinfo.net/candidates.php?CandidateID=19547. No book-length biography of Gerard has been published. The ambassador's own books were *My Four Years in Germany* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1917) and *Face to Face with Kaiserism* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918).

Although he initially supported Attorney General Palmer's activities against alleged radical groups, Gerard later commented that one factor in his decision to run was to prevent Palmer from claiming the support of the New York delegation at the next party convention. Gerard decided in mid-1919 to concentrate his initial efforts on South Dakota, perhaps due to the state's relatively early position on the primary calendar. He wrote a friend named A. H. Oleson, who had just moved to South Dakota, to inquire into the political situation there. Oleson replied that Palmer was the only Democratic presidential candidate who had done any groundwork in the state. Oleson later reported that Palmer's contacts were instructed to work for President Wilson while keeping Palmer in mind as a second choice. Under the circumstances,

Pictured here in his Berlin embassy office, James W. Gerard served as ambassador to Germany from 1913 to 1917.

Oleson believed that Gerard had a chance to win the majority endorsement at the upcoming state proposal meeting.[23]

While less complicated than the Democratic contest, the Republican presidential primary campaign was not a simple matter. At the end of 1919, Major General Leonard Wood was the leader of the pack both in terms of support and finances. Two other first-tier candidates were United States Senator Hiram W. Johnson of California and Governor Frank O. Lowden of Illinois. All three contenders were in the "boom," or undeclared, phase of their candidacies in late 1919. None had formally announced their intentions to run yet, but all three nonetheless had positioned themselves to do so and were the subjects of press speculation. Second-tier candidates included Senator Warren G. Harding of Ohio (the eventual nominee), Senator Howard Sutherland of West Virginia, and Governor Calvin Coolidge of Massachusetts.[24]

Wood dominated the news at the end of 1919. As the Wilson administration floundered, the general looked and acted presidential. Believing that soldiers would benefit from a program to help them readjust to civilian life after World War I, he enrolled some twenty-seven thousand men under his command in courses offered by the Kansas State Agricultural College. The general spread his presidential "boom" by addressing political gatherings in uniform, an act that would violate present-day military regulations. While giving a speech in North Dakota on 29 September, Wood received orders to handle mob violence in Omaha. He sent instructions for one thousand troops to meet him in Nebraska and restored order within a day. A week later, the governor of Indiana asked for federal troops to handle a steelworkers' strike in Gary. In meetings with steel-industry management and representatives of the thirty-five thousand striking workers, Wood helped forge an agreement between the two sides. His two key issues were ratifica-

23. *New York Tribune*, 12 Nov. 1919, p. 7; *New York Sun*, 17 Dec. 1919, p. 4; A. H. Oleson to James W. Gerard, 24 Nov. 1919, and Oleson to Gerard, n.d. (ca. 24 Nov.–2 Dec. 1919), Folder 6, Box 45, Series II: Correspondence, 1893–1955, James Watson Gerard Papers (hereafter cited as Gerard Papers), Archives and Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula.

24. Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, pp. 25–49.

tion of the Treaty of Versailles with amendments and universal military training.[25]

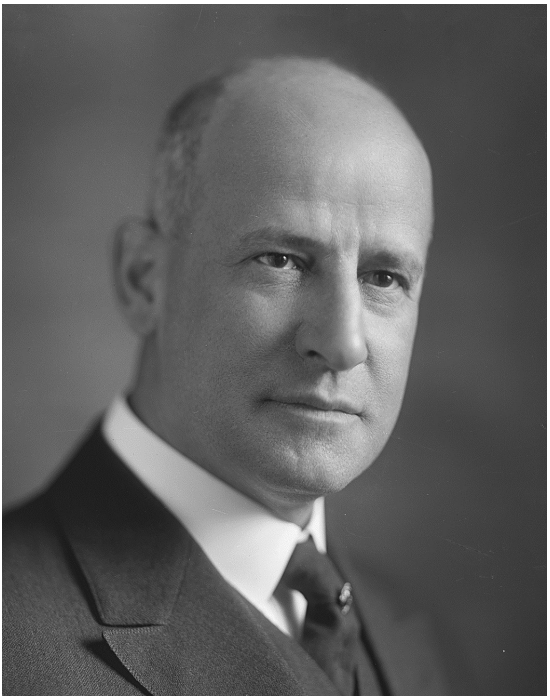
The first Republican to announce his candidacy for the 1920 presidential nomination was United States Senator Miles Poindexter of Washington. During his twelve years in the Senate (1911–1923), Poindexter was one of the most prominent progressive Republicans in the chamber. With an eye on the upcoming South Dakota primary, Poindexter visited the state in September 1919 and gave a speech that denounced President Wilson. The senator surprised the political world when he announced his presidential candidacy on 26 October. It was the first time in American political history that a candidate had made such an announcement without first having a "boom," or unofficial candidacy period.[26] In his announcement speech, Poindexter called on the government to "cease officious meddling with other people's affairs." He demanded a new peace treaty with Germany "stripped of the extraneous incumbrances" (meaning the League of Nations), promised to bring American troops home from foreign lands, and proposed an extensive program to build macadamized roads.[27]

Poindexter's early announcement of his presidential candidacy may have been due to the importance of primaries in the nominating process. Although two states had repealed their presidential primary laws since 1916, a large proportion of the delegates to the national party conventions were either chosen in primaries or bound to the winner of their state's contest. Twenty-one states held Republican presidential primaries that either selected or bound their national convention delegates; these states represented 593 of the 984 delegates available nationwide. Democratic primaries in nineteen states chose 556 of the party's 1,094 national convention delegates. Although South Dakota had only ten Republican and ten Democratic delegates, the state's

25. Jack McCallum, *Leonard Wood: Rough Rider, Surgeon, Architect of American Imperialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), pp. 275–78; Jack C. Lane, *Armed Progressive: General Leonard Wood* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 235–36; *Bisbee* (Ariz.) *Daily Review*, 31 Dec. 1919.

26. Howard W. Allen, *Poindexter of Washington: A Study in Progressive Politics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), pp. 218–21; *Bisbee Daily Review*, 28 Sept. 1919.

27. *New York Tribune*, 27 Oct. 1919, p. 10.



Miles Poindexter, a United States senator from Washington, was the first Republican to enter the 1920 presidential race.

early date on the primary calendar magnified its importance. While South Dakota was not the first state to hold a presidential primary in 1920, the only serious contest before it was the Minnesota Republican primary on 15 March. South Dakota thus provided one of the first real tests of the contenders' strength in 1920.[28]

The South Dakota state proposal meetings on 2 December 1919 marked the first skirmish of the 1920 presidential campaign. Poindexter campaigned in the state a week prior to the meeting. Speaking in Mitchell on 26 November, the senator formally announced that he would seek the Republican majority endorsement. Just prior to the state proposal

28. Overacker, *Presidential Primary*, pp. 238–39; Richard C. Bain and Judith H. Parris, *Convention Decisions and Voting Records* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1973), pp. 401, 458.

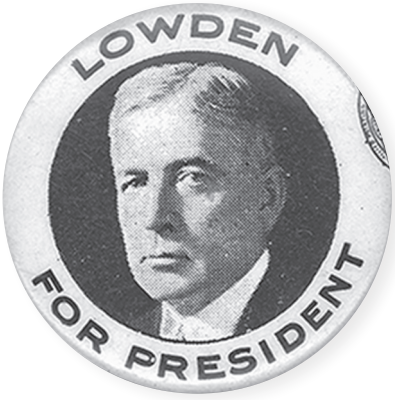
meeting, Poindexter gave an impassioned speech to hundreds of Republicans in Pierre in which he suggested that Wood might maintain a quarter of a million American troops overseas. Poindexter also proposed questions that could be the basis for a future debate with the general. The senator further claimed that Wood's supporters, including Governor Peter Norbeck, planned to force the general's endorsement "by gag law and steamroller methods," as the *New York Times* put it.[29]

Meeting in the state senate chamber on 2 December 1919, Republican state proposalmen adopted a platform that supported the Treaty of Versailles with reservations. During a roll call on the question of endorsing a presidential contender, it became apparent that Wood had a majority of the proposalmen. After the anti-Wood delegates failed to pass a resolution to endorse no candidate at all, most of the dissenters agreed to support Lowden as a minority choice. Peter Dougherty of Webster placed Wood in nomination, followed by twenty seconding speeches focusing on the general's military record and his activities to quell uprisings. Joseph R. Cash of Bonesteel, who spoke for Lowden, claimed that the Illinois governor was a more capable executive than Wood. Several war veterans seconded Lowden's nomination, stating that returning soldiers did not want a general in the White House. Wood carried the weighted vote easily and took the majority endorsement, leaving Lowden as the minority choice. Coolidge was the majority choice for vice president with little opposition. With the national endorsements made, the proposalmen then turned to the state ticket. Ironically, but unsurprisingly, Richard O. Richards failed to obtain the Republican majority endorsement for governor. He would later enter the race as an independent Republican candidate.[30]

The Democratic proposalmen met in the state house chamber. United States Senator Edwin S. Johnson submitted a resolution supporting President Wilson if he chose to run for a third term. The group adopted this proposal unanimously. After the meeting chose Wilson for a majority endorsement, one delegate raised the possibility of nominat-

29. *Bisbee Daily Review*, 27 Nov. 1919; *Ogden* (Utah) *Standard*, 2 Dec. 1919; *New York Times*, 2 Dec. 1919, p. 1.

30. Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," p. 161; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 3 Dec. 1919.



Illinois Governor Frank O. Lowden secured a minority endorsement for president from the Republican state proposal meeting of December 1919.

ing William McAdoo in case Wilson declined to run. The proposal was ruled out of order, and the delegates made no minority choice. The Democrats endorsed Vice President Thomas R. Marshall for a third term, again naming no minority choice. The meeting endorsed the League of Nations as its paramount issue.[31]

Proposalmen for the Nonpartisan League (NPL) also met in Pierre. This agrarian party, formed in North Dakota in 1915, had outpolled the Democrats in the 1918 South Dakota gubernatorial election. In North Dakota, Lynn J. Frazier took the leadership of the Republican Party and won the 1916, 1918, and 1920 gubernatorial contests with NPL backing. The 1920 state proposal meeting of the South Dakota NPL approved a platform calling for public ownership of agriculture-related businesses, an eight-hour work day, and restoration of freedom of the press and assembly—the latter a reaction to wartime restrictions. The NPL proposalmen endorsed Frazier for president. Most delegates wanted to endorse Senator La Follette, a progressive Republican, for vice president but recognized that he likely would not accept and thus made no selection. They then chose a full state ticket.[32]

31. *Lincoln* (Nebr.) *Evening State Journal*, 3 Dec. 1919; *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 1919, pp. 8, 16; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 3 Dec. 1919; *Reno* (Nev.) *Evening Gazette*, 31 Dec. 1919; Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," pp. 161, 164. Berdahl states incorrectly that the full Democratic proposal meeting selected Gerard as a minority choice for president.

32. *Sioux Falls Press*, 3 Dec. 1919; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 266–67.

With the state proposal meetings finished, potential office seekers in South Dakota had until 31 December 1919 to accept majority endorsements or to file for independent candidate status, as appropriate. Minority-choice candidates had only until 16 December to accept their endorsements. Senator Poindexter's campaign team collected the requisite signatures on his nominating petitions, and he filed as an independent Republican candidate for president on 8 December. Because he was the first to file, Poindexter's name would appear in the first column of the ballot.[33]

Ambassador Gerard announced his presidential candidacy on 16 December, stating that he would withdraw if President Wilson decided to run. Otherwise, Gerard said, he expected to win the South Dakota Democratic primary and its national convention delegates. He advocated prompt ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, entry into the League of Nations, "immediate reduction of war taxes, [and] prompt restoration of normal labor and trade conditions by proper legislation." The former diplomat's petition reportedly listed "Make and keep the country safe for democracy" as his paramount issue.[34] Gerard's announcement came on the last day to file for his party's minority endorsement. Because his campaign staff filed a petition with his signature and the names of six supporters who had attended the state proposal meeting, Gerard received the minority-choice position on the ballot.[35]

The only Democratic presidential contender other than Ambassador Gerard to enter the South Dakota primary was James O. Monroe of suburban Chicago, who filed his papers in Pierre on 29 December and recorded his paramount issue as "Prevent coal, oil, and transportation monopoly by taxation."[36] Monroe has escaped notice in most accounts of the 1920 campaign. An attorney, he had been a Democratic candidate for the United States House of Representatives in 1902 and 1904. He later served as editor of the *Northern Illinois Democrat*, a weekly party newspaper, but resigned to take the only political office of his ca-

33. *New York Tribune*, 9 Dec. 1919, p. 15.

34. Ibid., 17 Dec. 1919, p. 14.

35. Ibid.; *Tulsa* (Okla.) *Daily World*, 4 Jan. 1920; *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, 16 Dec. 1919; *Iowa City Citizen*, 17 Dec. 1919.

36. *New York Sun*, 30 Dec. 1919, p. 5.

reer, that of secretary to Illinois Secretary of State Henry Woods (1913–1914). A frequent minor candidate in Democratic primaries, Monroe ran for governor in 1908, Congress in 1914, and Illinois secretary of state in 1916. His share of the vote in the contests ranged from 2 percent to 8 percent. In 1918, he challenged incumbent United States Senator J. Hamilton Lewis in the Democratic primary and lost in a landslide, garnering only 10 percent of the vote.[37]

Frank Lowden, who was finishing his first term as governor of Illinois, accepted the Republican minority endorsement for president on 16 December. His remarkable rags-to-riches story was surpassed only by his success in finding bipartisan solutions to his state's challenges. Lowden's "boom" had started on 7 November when his supporters held a mass gathering in Springfield, Illinois. On the day that his papers were filed in Pierre, Lowden held a conference of Illinois government officials and civic organizations to consider ways to handle postwar inflation. Lowden supported the League of Nations, with reservations, as well as the Palmer Raids. His position on the raids had crystallized after he received a threatening letter, which he handed over to postal inspectors. Afterward, he reluctantly accepted Secret Service protection. Lowden was not a particularly strong orator.[38] In his South Dakota nomination papers, the candidate listed his paramount issue as "Economy, Efficiency, Protection, Peace, Agriculture promoted, One Flag."[39]

Perhaps the most interesting presidential filing was that of one Abbie Whistler, whose papers arrived in Pierre by mail on 29 December. She filed as an independent Republican and gave her address simply as Chicago. As the first woman to file for ballot status in a major-party presidential primary, Whistler was a short-lived sensation. However, no politicians or woman suffrage leaders in Chicago knew who she was, leading many to believe that her filing was a hoax. Newspapers reported that no such person existed, and when she failed to step for-

37. Ibid.; *Bemidji* (Minn.) *Daily Pioneer*, 29 Dec. 1919. For Monroe's electoral history, *see* www.electionsinfo.net/candidates.php?CandidateID=158870.

38. Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, pp. 33–36; Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," p. 164; *New York Tribune*, 17 Dec. 1919, p. 14; *New York Sun*, 8 Nov. 1919, p. 6; *El Paso* (Tex.) *Herald*, 17 Dec. 1919.

39. Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," p. 164.

ward to file the required signatures on a nominating petition, South Dakota authorities eliminated her name from the primary ballot.[40]

Unlike Whistler, Senator Johnson of California was a real presence in the 1920 Republican presidential primaries. A leading progressive Republican, he had served as governor of his state before his successful run for the Senate in 1916. He had been Theodore Roosevelt's running mate on the Progressive Party ticket in the 1912 campaign. Johnson's boom began in San Francisco on 14 June. As a leader of a group of senators irreconcilably opposed to the Treaty of Versailles, he had followed President Wilson's western tour to give rebuttal speeches to crowds numbering in the thousands. Johnson's presidential campaign won support from progressives with agricultural backgrounds and from those who opposed the Palmer Raids. He officially entered the race on 13 December, announcing that he would campaign in every state and not allow party conventions to choose the Republican presidential nominee.[41]

Soon after the senator's announcement, his private secretary traveled to South Dakota to collect signatures on his nominating petitions and to distribute campaign literature. In a leaflet circulated by his secretary, Johnson stated his belief that "the government belongs to all the people, not a favored few; that the farmer and the toiler have the same rights and the same privileges as the banker and capitalist."[42] The Californian campaigned almost nonstop from 29 December until the Republican National Convention in June.[43] In his South Dakota nominating papers, filed on 30 December, Johnson listed "American Freedom of Speech and of the Press, and Justice with Law and Order" as his paramount issue. Because he was an independent Republican contender, his issue was not printed on the ballot.[44]

Leonard Wood was one of the last candidates to file a declaration of intent. Although he had been the majority choice for president at the

40. *Washington* (D.C.) *Herald*, 30 Dec. 1919, p. 1; *Reno Gazette-Journal*, 30 Dec. 1919.

41. Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, pp. 31–33; *New York Times,* 7 June 1919, p. 4; *New York Tribune*, 14 Dec. 1919, p. 1; *El Paso Herald*, 30 Dec. 1919.

42. *New York Tribune*, 25 Dec. 1919, p. 15.

43. Michael A. Weatherson and Hal W. Bochin, *Hiram Johnson: Political Revivalist* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995), pp. 114–21.

44. Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," p. 164.

The 1912 Progressive Party ticket consisted of Theodore Roosevelt (left) for president and Hiram Johnson (right) for vice president.

Republican state proposal meeting in early December, he had not been ready to announce his candidacy formally. The general and his advisers thought that voters might react negatively if they saw an active-duty army officer pursuing the presidency too aggressively. Wood decided to run a low-key campaign for the Republican nomination rather than resign from the army.[45]

The general hired John T. King, a political professional who had previously worked with Theodore Roosevelt, to serve as his campaign manager. The Roosevelt connection was no accident. Wood and Roosevelt had served together in the First United States Volunteer Cavalry Regiment (better known as the "Rough Riders") during the Spanish-American War of 1898, and the two men remained friends until Roosevelt's death in January 1919. The former president's family had reportedly encouraged Wood to enter politics as an heir to the Roosevelt legacy.[46]

King contacted prominent Republicans around the country to lobby for delegates through the convention system in states that did not select delegates in primaries. The Richards Primary Law may have forced Wood to declare his hand, however. On 15 December, the South Dakota attorney general reportedly announced that Wood needed to accept the Republican majority endorsement if he wanted to appear on the ballot in the upcoming primary.[47] When the general arrived in Denver the following day to address a gathering of Colorado Republicans, a reporter asked him about the ruling. Wood replied, "I can't answer that . . . . I can not talk politics."[48] According to a newspaper report, Wood's campaign consulted attorneys whose opinion was that he did not need to resign from the army in order to run. On 22 December, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, who had already faced criticism for not appointing Wood to lead the American army in Europe during the

45. Lane, *Armed Progressive*, pp. 232–33; McCallum, *Leonard Wood*, pp. 278–79.

46. James W. Davis, *Presidential Primaries: Road to the White House* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967), p. 48; Lane, *Armed Progressive*, pp. 232–33, 240–41; McCallum, *Leonard Wood*, pp. 59–60, 275–76, 278–79.

47. McCallum, *Leonard Wood*, p. 278–79; Lane, *Armed Progressive*, p. 241; *El Paso Herald*, 16 Dec. 1919.

48. *Tulsa Daily World*, 17 Dec. 1919.

recent war, stated that the general was free to run for president without resigning his commission.[49]

Baker's ruling, along with a new addition to the Wood campaign staff, marked a new phase of the general's White House run. The candidate seemed to be well on track to become the next president, and many Republicans were eager to participate and contribute to his cause. In the fall of 1919, William C. Procter volunteered to organize what historian James W. Davis called Wood's "neophytes."[50] Chief executive of Procter & Gamble and grandson of the Cincinnati company's cofounder, Procter offered his skills to the Wood campaign and asked for authority to organize "Leonard Wood Leagues" throughout the nation. Procter and King held a day-long meeting on 15 December 1919 to discuss campaign strategy. Procter wanted Wood to run in every primary to demonstrate his popularity and to knock the other Republican contenders out before the national convention. If the Wood campaign intended to contest all primaries, the general needed to accept the majority Republican presidential endorsement in South Dakota. Accordingly, Procter wired state Republican leaders on 23 December that Wood would file the necessary papers. On New Year's Eve, the final day for candidates to file for the South Dakota primary ballot, Wood officially ended his boom period by accepting the Republican proposal meeting's endorsement.[51] The candidate's filing listed his paramount issue as "Patriotism, Progress, Prosperity, Honesty, Economy, Law, and Order."[52]

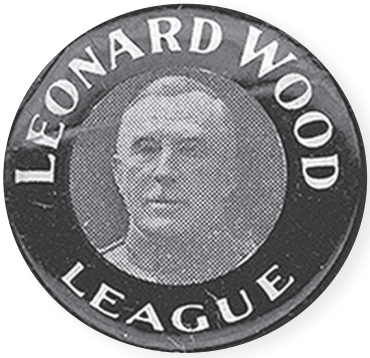
The list of presidential primary contenders became complete when the filing deadline passed at the end of 1919. South Dakota Secretary of State C. A. Burkhart's office remained open until midnight on 31 December. Candidates who failed to accept party proposal meeting endorsements would not appear on the primary ballot, which eliminated President Wilson's name from the Democratic ballot. Governor

49. *New York Tribune*, 18 Dec. 1919, p. 4; *New York Sun*, 23 Dec. 1919, p. 1.

50. Davis, *Presidential Primaries*, p. 48.

51. Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, p. 27; *New York Sun*, 16 Dec. 1919, p. 7; *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 20, 24 Dec. 1919; *El Paso Herald*, 31 Dec. 1919.

52. Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," p. 164.



Cincinnati businessman William C. Procter organized the Leonard Wood League to boost the general's presidential campaign in late 1919.

Coolidge of Massachusetts wired the secretary of state to decline the Republican vice-presidential endorsement, perhaps hoping to keep his options open for a dark-horse presidential run in other states' primaries. Governor Frazier of North Dakota failed to accept the NPL endorsement for president, while incumbent Thomas R. Marshall did not enter the Democratic vice-presidential primary. The 1920 South Dakota Republican primary ballot would feature Wood, Johnson, Lowden, and Poindexter as candidates for president. Gerard and Monroe were the only Democratic presidential contenders on the ballot. As the sole qualifying candidate, William Grant Webster of Illinois automatically won the Republican primary for vice president. Uncontested races, such as all three vice-presidential primaries, would not appear on the ballot.[53]

The principal significance of the 1920 South Dakota Democratic presidential primary is that the party's two contenders probably held the first presidential primary debate in American history. Monroe discovered a flaw in the Richards Primary Law—as an independent contender, he was required to challenge the state proposal meeting's majority choice. In this case, however, the majority choice was Wilson, who had not accepted his position on the ballot (a possibility that Richards had not foreseen). On 8 January 1920, Monroe filed notice of his debate challenge to President Wilson.[54]

53. *New York Tribune*, 1 Jan. 1920, p. 1; *Tulsa Daily World*, 2 Jan. 1920; *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 1920, p. 1.

54. *El Paso Herald*, 8 Jan. 1920.

Monroe's action set off a discussion of the intricacies of the Richards Primary Law. The president was neither willing nor able to debate Monroe due to his poor health. An anonymous Democrat queried the office of Secretary of State Burkhart, asking whether the debate was necessary given that Wilson had lost his place on the ballot. Staff attorneys reviewed the law and gave their opinion that the debate was mandatory, although the president could be represented by proxy. The White House, however, gave no attention to Monroe's challenge. The need to allow candidates who had withdrawn to decline debate challenges became obvious.[55]

Undaunted, Monroe challenged Gerard with a note that read in part, "I challenge James W. Gerard, who is also a candidate according to press reports." Amused that Monroe's challenge note did not specifically mention a *debate*, the ambassador's campaign manager joked, "We must know a little more about Mr. Monroe, however, before we commit ourselves to wrestling, swimming, hurdling, broad or high jumping, hopping and skipping or shot putting, for Mr. Monroe might be of that youthful, lithe, and muscular build which would require a long course of intense training on the part of Judge Gerard." Careful to fulfill the requirements of the Richards Primary Law, Gerard filed a written acceptance of the challenge with the secretary of state, stating, "I accept Mr. Monroe's challenge, whether to a joint debate or to any other contest, at Sioux Falls, S.D., March 2, 1920."[56] Although he did not know Monroe, Gerard told a reporter that he planned to "forensically flatten" his opponent.[57]

In the early weeks of 1920, Gerard decided to concentrate his campaign in the Northern Great Plains states. His agent A. H. Oleson traveled to North Dakota and Wyoming to lay the groundwork, and on 20 January, Gerard opened his national campaign headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa. An estimate of the former ambassador's strength came in early February. An Iowa newspaper poll showed Gerard in fifth place in that state, ahead of Palmer and the eventual nominee, Gover-

55. *Ogden Standard*, 14 Jan. 1920.

56. Gerard campaign press release, 31 Jan. 1920, Folder 8, Box 446, Series VII: Ephemera, 1901–1955, Gerard Papers.

57. *New York Sun*, 24 Jan. 1920, p. 5.

nor James M. Cox of Ohio. However, when Palmer formally announced his candidacy on 1 March, Gerard's status as a dark-horse candidate quickly became apparent.[58]

On the evening of 2 March, Gerard and Monroe met in the Sioux Falls city auditorium for what appears to have been the first presidential debate in American history. The nation's newspapers, however, were not impressed. The scant newspaper coverage tended to quote Gerard only in brief. The debate followed a format described in the Richards Primary Law. The challenger, Monroe, began with a twenty-minute presentation of his paramount issue. Gerard then had thirty minutes to respond, after which Monroe received ten minutes for rebuttal. The roles then reversed. A Gerard campaign press release reported that some three thousand people attended the debate. There were not enough chairs, so about six hundred of the crowd stood for two hours. Another one thousand people could not fit into the auditorium and stood outside. United States Attorney Edmund W. Fiske introduced the candidates, and the crowd cheered as the two men walked onto the stage. While local newspapers complained that the event was not much of a debate because both candidates focused on their own messages rather than criticizing their opponent's positions, journalists reported that both men performed well and used humor to good effect.[59]

According to newspaper reports, the audience was curious about Monroe, who mixed stories and poetry with his policy positions. Monroe opened his remarks by saying, "The Richards Primary Law is a fitting contribution to the real temple of levity. I am for principles rather than men, because principle is everything and men are nothing. Principle is God."[60] The *Sioux Falls Press* reported that the unknown from Illinois "frequently mentioned what he called political graft and governmental favoritism" and condemned the "great combinations of

58. Oleson to Gerard, 3 Jan. 1920, Folder 6, Box 45, Series II, Gerard Papers; *Milford* (Iowa) *Mail*, 19 Feb. 1920; *Klamath Falls* (Ore.) *Evening Herald*, 24 Jan. 1920; *New York Tribune*, 13 Feb. 1920, p. 5, and 2 Mar. 1920, p. 1; *Ogden Standard*, 27 Feb. 1920.

59. Berdahl, "Richards Primary," p. 102; Gerard campaign press release, n.d. (ca. 6 Mar. 1920), Folder 8, Box 446, Series VII, Gerard Papers; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 3 Mar. 1920.

60. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 3 Mar. 1920.

capital." He advocated taxation as a means for government to "abolish special privileges" favored corporations enjoyed, declaring, "Governmental favoritism is the reason why the persons who do the most in this world receive the least." Monroe opposed the League of Nations, arguing that it would "make the world safe for plutocracy and not for democracy."[61]

Gerard, the more polished of the two speakers, opened with the comment, "I am glad to see so many Democrats in Sioux Falls." Referring to the nationwide climate of fear over the spread of radical political ideas, Gerard said, "We must permit free speech. . . . If people are not given the right to express their ideas through the ballot, they will do it with bullets."[62] In foreign policy, the former diplomat supported the League of Nations and called for the restoration of a strong and stable Germany in order to contain radicalism in Europe. Most of Gerard's reported debate statements are consistent with the contents of a position leaflet distributed by his campaign. In it, the candidate commended William Jennings Bryan's prewar service as secretary of state in Wilson's cabinet, suggesting that Bryan's proposals for peace could have prevented World War I if other nations had implemented them.[63]

After the debate, Gerard began a campaign swing through South Dakota with Ulysses S. G. Cherry of Sioux Falls, a Democratic contender for the United States Senate. A blizzard hit while the former ambassador traveled to Yankton. He braved twelve inches of snow to give two speeches in Yankton and then proceeded to Mitchell. Due to the adverse weather conditions, Gerard's train took eight hours longer than expected to reach its destination. On 4 March, the candidate addressed the Mitchell Rotary Club, the local high school, Dakota Wesleyan University, and the League of Women Voters. That evening, Gerard gave an impassioned speech defending the Treaty of Versailles at city hall.[64] He then traveled to Aberdeen, where he made three more

61. *Sioux Falls Press*, 3 Mar. 1920.

62. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 3 Mar. 1920.

63. Ibid.; "James W. Gerard: Democratic Candidate for President on America's Vital Problems," Folder 8, Box 446, Series VII, Gerard Papers.

64. Gerard campaign press release, n.d. (ca. 6 Mar. 1920), Folder 8, Box 446, Series VII, Gerard Papers; *El Paso Herald*, 5 Mar. 1920.

appearances. In his final Aberdeen speech, delivered outside to a large crowd despite a temperature of fifteen degrees below zero, Gerard pleaded, "Don't let peace, so dearly bought by our blood sacrifices, become the plaything of mere personal politics and ambition."[65] Two days later, Gerard suffered a severe attack of lumbago. He cancelled his remaining South Dakota engagements and returned to the East. Later, the candidate traveled to Florida to recuperate. He did not enter any more primaries. Continued poor health in the spring and summer severely limited his campaign thereafter.[66]

Four major Republican presidential contenders campaigned in South Dakota before the primary, more than in any other state. The year 1920 was the first in which two presidential candidates ran display advertisements in newspapers. Prior to 1920, the only presidential primary contender to run such advertisements was Henry O. Estabrook, a minor Republican candidate in 1916. Political scientist Louise Overacker commented on this shift in advertising as follows: "In 1920 the campaign managers resorted to all of the arts known to the commercial world in their efforts to 'sell' their candidates to the voters. . . . The most strenuous advertising battle was that engaged in by Wood and Lowden in South Dakota, when two Sioux Falls papers (the *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader* and the *Sioux Falls Press*) carried some fifteen full-page advertisements for each of these candidates."[67] The Wood campaign's advertising strategy can almost certainly be attributed to Procter.[68]

Frank Lowden was the only candidate who attempted to match the Wood campaign's expenditures in South Dakota. Newspaper advertising and a mid-February campaign visit accounted for most of the Illinois governor's expenses. Arriving on 18 February, Lowden was the first presidential contender to campaign in the state in 1920. His first speech at Sioux Falls called for reorganization of the federal government and reform of the federal budget process. At Aberdeen, Lowden called for a reduction in the number of federal commissions. The candidate also spoke at Pierre, Watertown, Deadwood, and Lead during

65. *Ogden Standard*, 6 Mar. 1920.
66. *Sun and New York Herald*, 6 Mar. 1920, p. 2.; *New York Tribune*, 20 Mar. 1920, p. 11.
67. Overacker, *Presidential Primary*, pp. 124–25.
68. Lane, *Armed Progressive*, p. 241.

Frank Lowden was the first Republican presidential contender to visit South Dakota in 1920.

his three-day visit. Like other Republican contenders, Lowden sought to publicize his connections with Theodore Roosevelt. The Illinois governor's campaign released a 1916 letter in which the former president had complimented him.[69]

Hiram Johnson campaigned for four days in South Dakota during the first week of March. He had worked for some time to distinguish himself in a field of progressive Republican contenders, each of whom claimed to be the true heir to Theodore Roosevelt's legacy. Johnson had emphasized "Americanism" for months. Just after New Year's Day 1920, however, he began to speak out against the Palmer Raids, describing them as infringements on free speech and liberty. While campaign-

69. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 18 Feb. 1920; *Ogden Standard*, 20 Feb., 1 Mar. 1920; *Bisbee Daily Review*, 20 Feb. 1920; *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, 19 Feb. 1920.

ing in Missouri and Nebraska, the senator contracted a mild case of influenza, which threw him off the campaign trail for part of February. Near the end of the month, Johnson, like Lowden, released Roosevelt correspondence to stake his own claim to the late president's legacy. On 1 March, the senator arrived in Aberdeen, where he stated that preventing American membership in the League of Nations was the most important issue of the year. While in Mitchell, Johnson became aware that the Wood and Lowden campaigns had spent large sums of money in the state and warned farmers about the business interests funding his opponents.[70] In Sioux Falls on 4 March, Johnson spoke in support of "free speech, free press, and just pure Americanism."[71] Johnson's train from Yankton to Watertown derailed; while no one was injured, he had to rearrange his travel schedule. The senator's trip through South Dakota ended three weeks before the primary.[72]

Miles Poindexter faced an uphill battle in his campaign. He challenged General Wood to a debate as the law required. Wood selected 20 March, three days prior to the primary, as the date for the contest. Poindexter departed Washington, D.C., on 11 March and made speeches in Chicago and Buffalo, New York, on his way west. He intended to campaign in South Dakota until primary day. However, the Senate resumed consideration of the Treaty of Versailles, and Poindexter returned to Washington. He cast his vote against the treaty on 19 March and then took the first train west so that he would arrive in Pierre in time to debate Wood.[73]

Leonard Wood's campaign floundered in early 1920. Campaign manager John King resigned on 8 January due to his frustration with Procter. In late January, the Wood campaign, now led by the Cincinnati businessman, held a national strategizing session in Chicago and reshuffled its staff. Wood also accepted Poindexter's challenge to debate

70. *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 22 Jan. 1920; *Washington Herald*, 3 Feb. 1920, p. 5; 9 Feb. 1920, p. 2; *Columbia Evening Missourian*, 25 Feb., 3 Mar. 1920; *Ogden Standard*, 2 Mar. 1920.

71. *El Paso Herald,* 4 Mar. 1920.

72. Ibid., 5 Mar. 1920.

73. *Reno Evening Gazette,* 15 Mar. 1920; *Philadelphia Public Ledger,* 11 Mar. 1920; *Washington Herald,* 11 Mar. 1920, p. 4; *New York Tribune,* 15 Mar. 1920, p. 7.

in South Dakota. At first, the general's campaign said that he would consider sending a proxy to debate Poindexter. The obvious implication was that Wood considered the Washington senator to be a minor candidate. Poindexter's complaints about his opponent's refusal to debate in person struck a chord with Republicans concerned about ongoing problems in the Wood campaign. Bowing to the pressure, Wood agreed to debate Poindexter on 14 February. The general made the first of two campaign visits to South Dakota in late February. Traveling through the southeastern corner of the state from 24 to 27 February, he spoke at Yankton, Lennox, Canton, Sioux Falls, and Dell Rapids.[74]

Wood's second South Dakota campaign trip took place just before the primary. The candidate arrived in Watertown for a speaking engagement on 15 March during one of the strongest blizzards to hit the state since 1888. The inclement weather reportedly forced him to use a railroad handcar for part of the journey. That evening, Wood spoke on his proposed agricultural policies, which included encouraging tenant farmers to purchase their own farms. Some two thousand people were said to have braved eighty-mile-per-hour winds to hear the speech.[75]

Wood's hundred-mile trip from Watertown to Aberdeen on 16 March took twelve hours due to adverse weather conditions. When he arrived, local Republicans told the candidate that he had won the Minnesota primary the night before. That same day, Secretary of War Baker approved the general's request for two months' leave from the army to pursue his campaign. So many people showed up to see Wood in Huron on 18 March that local organizers arranged for him to give the same speech in two different venues. Over three thousand people came to hear him speak at Redfield, hometown of Governor Peter Norbeck. On 19 March, Wood spoke in Howard, Madison, Lake Preston, and Brookings, discussing agricultural policies and his ideas for universal military training.[76]

74. *New York Times,* 1 Feb. 1920, p. 20, 15 Feb. 1920, p. 3, 24 Feb. 1920, p. 13; *San Antonio* (Tex.) *Evening News,* 31 Jan. 1920.

75. *New York Times,* 16 Mar. 1920, pp. 1, 17.

76. Ibid., 17 Mar. 1920, pp. 1, 17; 18 Mar. 1920, pp. 10, 17; 19 Mar. 1920, p. 17; 20 Mar. 1920, p. 8.

The Wood-Poindexter debate took place in the city auditorium in Pierre on 20 March 1920. Judge James H. McCoy of the South Dakota Supreme Court presided and introduced the contenders. The *Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times* reported, somewhat incorrectly, that "the debate, so called, was the first one between genuine presidential [contenders] ever held in the United States."[77] As a sitting legislator, Senator Poindexter was a more experienced debater than Wood. His first major issue was "internationalism," as he termed the idea of the League of Nations. Poindexter criticized Wood's conditional support for American membership in the League: "Internationalism proposes that the control of all international affairs shall be vested in a league of nations. . . . The war was fought to preserve the principle of nationality. . . . Having won the war, the president [Wilson] would surrender that [principle] for which it was fought."[78]

The senator's second major issue was what he called "industrial independence." He denounced striking industrial workers in no uncertain terms: "The right to work and the right to own property are among the rights of man and are so designated in all the great charters of liberty. . . . Strikes, intended to enforce economic demands by stopping industry and cutting off from the people their supplies of the necessities of life, mean rule by force instead of by law. . . . Economic independence can only exist when a man is free to work or to quit work whether he belongs to a union or not."[79]

Poindexter went on to criticize the Wilson administration for allegedly neglecting domestic needs and for what he described as wasteful federal spending: "The crying need of the hour is to Americanize the American government. Little attention has been presented recently by the chief executive to American needs: to land reclamation, to land settlement for soldiers, to a national system of wagon roads, to the weeding out of extravagance and inefficiency in the executive departments. These things should have attention in preference to Europe."[80] Poindexter's chief example of wasteful government spending won him

77. *Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times*, 21 Mar. 1920.
78. *Billings* (Mont.) *Gazette,* 21 Mar. 1920.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.

a standing ovation but gave his opponent an opportunity for an effective counterargument. The senator objected to a proposal to spend one hundred million dollars for emergency food and reconstruction aid in Europe, while blasting the current Democratic administration's failure to initiate such projects as "building roads . . . irrigating dry prairies . . . finishing the Alaskan railroad . . . building schools, [and] providing farms for returning soldiers."[81]

Wood entered the proceeding as something of an underdog, having not previously debated. The *Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times* reported that he spoke "straight from the shoulders, without gestures."[82] His practice of speaking while standing at attention, though understandable for a military man, left the audience underwhelmed. Wood took the offensive immediately by countering Poindexter's complaint about American assistance for Europe. "I refuse to believe that you are expressing disapproval of a Christian act," he said. "If you are, you are not fit to be an American. Are you people going to deny food and clothing to starving Europe? If you are, you are unfit to live under the American flag." According to the *New York Tribune*, "the audience broke into a tense and prolonged applause."[83] The general's statement about European aid was the high point of the evening and the first of many memorable moments in the history of presidential debates.

Wood defined his paramount issue as "Americanism," stating, "The platform of Americanism is America first . . . through justice and fair dealing, government under the constitution . . . no autocracy of wealth, no autocracy of labor, but a real democracy for both; no class domination or legislation; [and] an untrammeled and fearless judiciary free from every taint of political influence or control." He outlined his program in broad terms, with a few specific proposals. The general advocated "an intense spirit of national solidarity" at home and "a strong but not quarrelsome foreign policy." Borrowing a phrase coined by his friend Theodore Roosevelt, he promised "a square deal for both labor and capital." Wood supported woman suffrage, pledged to regulate immigration, promised tariffs to protect American industry from foreign

81. *New York Tribune,* 24 Mar. 1920, p. 12.
82. *Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times*, 21 Mar. 1920.
83. *New York Tribune,* 24 Mar. 1920, p. 12.

This photograph of Wood probably dates from his service as army chief of staff in 1910–1914.

competition, and proposed a "small but highly efficient" peacetime army backed by a system of universal military training. He supported American membership in the League of Nations on the condition that the United States would not give up any of its sovereignty in the process. He summed up his concept of Americanism by calling for a "government of all the people, for all the people, and by all the people; one flag, and an undivided loyalty to the American people."[84]

The general was apparently pleased with his debate performance. In his diary entry for that night, he described his opponent as "hunting trouble" and remarked, "I think he got it before we were through."[85]

84. *Billings Gazette,* 21 Mar. 1920.

85. Hermann Hagedorn, *Leonard Wood: A Biography*, 2 vols. (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 2:349.

Wood gave a Memorial Day address in Deadwood on Sunday afternoon, 21 March. The largest crowd in the history of the city welcomed him at the train station. Wood was scheduled to appear in Rapid City on the day before the primary but apparently cancelled the speech.[86]

On 23 March, primary day, the polls were open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The day was warm and sunny, and melting snow made the roads muddy for those going to the polls. Voter turnout set a record, with just under ninety-five thousand ballots cast overall. That number could have been much higher, however, as South Dakota women participated in presidential balloting for the first time in 1920. Eighty-six thousand people voted in the Republican primary, which more than doubled the 1918 figure and exceeded the previous record of seventy-five thousand in 1912. On the Democratic side, turnout was seventy-five hundred, a decrease of about a thousand from 1918 and much lower than the record turnout of almost thirteen thousand in 1912.[87]

Leonard Wood won a pyrrhic victory in the Republican presidential primary. He garnered just 36.5 percent of the statewide vote, far less than his backers had expected. The general carried thirty-two counties, mostly in the western and northern portions of the state, but won a majority in only seven. Wood held events in thirteen counties, and many thousands of voters had attended. Those counties that Wood visited personally or were immediately adjacent to one that hosted a Wood event (a total of forty-two counties) gave him 35.7 percent of their vote. In the remaining counties, he took 39.4 percent. While the difference seemed small, it did tend to confirm news reports that Republicans who heard Wood speak were not overly impressed. For example, he carried Hughes County, where hundreds of Republicans heard him debate Poindexter, with just 32.5 percent of the vote. Lowden and Johnson, who had not been present at the debate, tied for second with just seven fewer votes than the general received. Western

86. *Deadwood Daily Pioneer-Times*, 23 Mar. 1920; *Sun and New York Herald,* 23 Mar. 1920.

87. *El Paso Herald*, 23 Mar. 1920; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1921), pp. 263–64, 338, 389. Turnout figures for both parties in 1920 and for the Republicans in 1912 are calculated from the presidential vote returns, while the 1918 count for both parties and for the Democrats in 1912 are derived from the gubernatorial election returns.

counties Wood visited after the debate gave him 53 percent of their ballots.[88]

Frank Lowden took second place in the Republican contest with a respectable 31.5 percent of the vote. He won seventeen counties and finished second in thirty-one more. The Illinois governor, like Wood, actually won a higher vote percentage in counties where he did not hold events. Although Hiram Johnson came in third with 30.7 percent of the vote, he carried fifteen counties. He won four of the eleven jurisdictions that cast over two thousand votes and placed second in seven. The California senator won eight counties in the southeastern corner of the state, including Minnehaha County, which contains the city of Sioux Falls. Johnson won a majority of the vote in Hutchinson, Lincoln, and Yankton counties along with pluralities in five counties surrounding Watertown and two more on the North Dakota border. The senator placed first with 35.8 percent of the vote in counties he visited or that were adjacent to a county where he spoke. Elsewhere, Johnson finished third with 23.5 percent support. This performance is remarkable given that Wood's campaign later reported expenditures of nearly seventy thousand dollars in South Dakota while Johnson reportedly spent only about thirty-five hundred dollars in the state.[89]

Miles Poindexter finished last in the Republican presidential primary with just 1.3 percent of the vote. He placed fourth among Republicans in every county. Monroe, the loser on the Democratic side, got more votes than the Washington senator did in forty-six counties. Poindexter's two best counties were Bennett and Jones, where he garnered 10.5 percent and 4 percent of the GOP vote respectively, although he did not campaign in either jurisdiction. Poindexter's vote total was so small that few early newspaper reports of the election returns even mentioned it.

James Gerard won the South Dakota Democratic presidential primary. The party's returns came in slowly. As the *Reno Evening Gazette*

88. The statistical analysis of the 1920 primary results here and in the next several paragraphs is based on county election returns in South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1921), p. 389.

89. Weatherson and Bochin, *Hiram Johnson*, p. 115; Overacker, *Presidential Primary*, p. 156.

Although Hiram Johnson finished third in the South Dakota primary, he outpolled his rivals in counties where he campaigned in person.

explained, turnout was so low that "no attempt was made to tabulate the Democratic primary results."[90] The total Democratic vote exceeded two hundred in just four counties, whereas only two counties had less than that number of GOP votes cast. The poor turnout disappointed the party faithful. Although sixteen hundred people had attended the Democratic debate, only 675 Democratic votes were cast in Minnehaha County and the five counties adjacent to it. Gerard won the statewide contest with 4,706 votes (71.2 percent) to just 1,906 for Monroe. He carried sixty-one of the sixty-four counties then existing, while Monroe won two. The candidates tied in Campbell County. In the four counties where Gerard gave public speeches, he won 81 percent of the vote. While the former diplomat's percentage margin was enormous, the light turnout indicated that Democratic voters were not enthusiastic and many had stayed home.

The South Dakota Republican primary had an immediate impact on the 1920 presidential campaign. Wood's aura of inevitability disappeared, and he went on to lose every contested primary in the following month. Johnson won victories in Michigan, Nebraska, and Montana, while Lowden unsurprisingly carried Illinois. After these defeats, Wood rebounded to win four of the last eight primaries. Johnson's campaign continued to perform well. The senator placed a close second in New Jersey, defeated Herbert Hoover in California, and bested Wood in Oregon and North Carolina. Lowden curtailed his campaign-

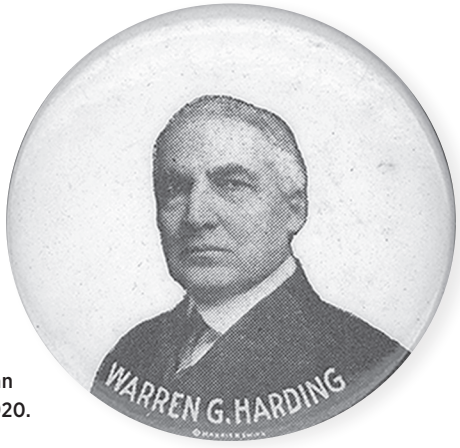
90. *Reno Evening Gazette*, 24 Mar. 1920.

ing in primary states after South Dakota. Even so, the governor easily defeated Wood in Illinois. Poindexter's campaign never gained serious traction.[91]

The 1920 Republican National Convention met in Chicago from 8 to 12 June. Although Wood had more pledged delegates than any other candidate when the meeting convened, he did not command a majority. As it happened, the convention's early rounds of balloting for the presidential nomination largely mirrored the South Dakota primary results. Wood took the lead, followed by Lowden and then Johnson. However, none of the three major contenders could secure the necessary majority. The convention deadlocked. Seeking a compromise candidate, party leaders turned to Senator Warren Harding of Ohio, who won the nomination on the tenth ballot. Harding went on to win the presidency that November.[92]

The two Democratic presidential contenders in the South Dakota primary fared poorly afterward. Monroe's campaign disintegrated. He attempted to enter the Ohio primary but failed because he could not get five signatures on a nominating petition. Gerard's declining health soon ended his active campaign, though he managed to win delegates in Montana. At the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco,

91. Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, pp. 50–52.
92. Ibid., pp. 79–96.



Senator Warren G. Harding of Ohio, who had not competed in the South Dakota primary, secured the Republican nomination—and the presidency—in 1920.

U. S. G. Cherry, the party's nominee for a Senate seat from South Dakota, placed Gerard's name in nomination. The former ambassador received twenty-one votes on the first presidential ballot, all from Montana and South Dakota. The Montana delegation abandoned him on the second ballot. The Richards Primary Law bound the South Dakota delegates to Gerard until the third ballot was taken. After that, they supported other candidates. The eventual nominee on the forty-fourth ballot, Governor Cox of Ohio, had just entered the race when South Dakota held its primary in March.[93]

The Richards Primary Law did not survive intact after the 1920 election. In 1921, the state legislature repealed its provisions for mandatory debates and postmaster primaries. Primary debates remained popular, however, and the candidates for governor in 1922 held voluntary contests. A 1923 law required voters to register their party affiliation in advance of the primary and to cast their ballots in their own party's contests. The legislature repealed the remainder of the Richards system in 1929, thus scrapping county and state proposal meetings. His signature primary legislation having become a part of history, Richards died the following year.[94]

After South Dakota ended its mandatory debate system in 1921, there were no further presidential primary debates until 1948, when Republicans Thomas E. Dewey and Harold E. Stassen met in Oregon. Dewey and Stassen used a different format than the 1920 South Dakota debates, allowing each candidate twenty minutes to make his own case and eight minutes to rebut his opponent's argument.[95] On 1 May

93. *Tulsa Daily World*, 28 Feb. 1920; *New York Tribune*, 28 Feb. 1920, p. 3; *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in San Francisco, California, June 28 to July 6, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Hon. James M. Cox (of Ohio) for President and Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt (of New York) for Vice President* (Indianapolis: Bookwalter-Ball Printing Co., 1920), pp. 268, 272, 280, 284.

94. Clow, "In Search of the People's Voice," pp. 57–58; Berdahl, "Operation of the Richards Primary," p. 167; South Dakota, *The Laws Passed at the Eighteenth Session of the Legislature of the State of South Dakota* (1923), chap. 182; *The Laws Passed at the Twenty-First Session of the Legislature of the State of South Dakota* (1929), chap. 118.

95. William L. Benoit, *The Primary Decision: A Functional Analysis of Debates in Presidential Primaries* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), p. 133; *New York Times*, 18 May 1948, pp. 1, 16.

1952, three Democratic presidential candidates and two Republican contenders met in Cincinnati, Ohio, for an event the *New York Times* described as a "forum discussion of 1952 campaign issues." The League of Women Voters organized the proceedings, and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) provided radio and television coverage.[96] The 1960 general-election contest between Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard M. Nixon cemented the current form of televised political debates in which reporters ask questions and the candidates have a short time to respond.[97]

In retrospect, one can see why the 1920 South Dakota presidential primary has not received its due attention. The winners of the South Dakota contest did not secure their respective party nominations; the debates featured candidates who are not remembered today; and the state legislature repealed the key features of the unique primary law that governed the election soon thereafter. Nonetheless, it was the most important primary of the year in certain respects. The South Dakota primary introduced the concept of debates among presidential candidates and changed the course of the campaign. Richard O. Richards and his primary law helped to make these events possible.

96. *New York Times*, 2 May 1952, p. 13.

97. Alan Schroeder, *Presidential Debates: Risky Business on the Campaign Trail*, 3d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 9–10, 81–83.

Picture Credits: All illustrations in this issue are property of the South Dakota State Historical Society except for those on the following pages: p. 188, from South Dakota, *Enabling Act and Constitution and the Laws Passed at the Twelfth Session of the Legislature of the State of South Dakota* (1911), chap. 201; front cover (upper right) and pp. 194, 196, 199, 205, 213, 218, 253, 262, 263, 273, from Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; p. 227, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 15 Mar. 1884; pp. 230, 233, from *The Pine Ridge Reservation: A Pictorial Description* ([Pine Ridge, S.Dak.]: Ralph H. Ross, 1909).

On the covers: In this issue, Seth Hinshaw reveals how the 1920 South Dakota primary was a turning point in that year's presidential campaign (front). Birgit Hans examines the role of housekeepers such as Della R. Bratley (lower back) in the federal day schools on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian reservations at the turn of the twentieth century.