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Harry H. Woodring: A Political Biography of FDR's Controversial Secretary of War.
While Governor Woodring's duties kept him extremely busy, they did not prevent him from playing politics. The governorship carried with it many official responsibilities which entailed obligations to the entire state and all its citizens. Because he was a Democratic Governor, however, Woodring also had a number of unofficial duties and obligations to his political party. As the Governor of Kansas, he was traditionally recognized as the titular head of his party, but whether or not he was to become the true leader of that party remained to be seen. That Woodring should emerge as Democratic leader of Kansas in early 1931 was only natural in light of several factors: he was the man most responsible for the creation of the present state organization, feeble though it may have been; he held the highest elective post in the state; and he was the only Democrat to hold a statewide elective office. Under these circumstances, Kansas Democrats expected him to provide the party with leadership, and he did not disappoint them.

As soon as the 1931 legislative session ended, Woodring set out to build a strong party organization. His first and most effective means to that end was the appointment of Guy Helvering as head of the Highway Department. The wearing of two hats, those of Highway Director and State Democratic Chairman, enabled Helvering to utilize patronage to build the state's largest agency into an effective arm of the state Democratic party. With regular contributions, which many called assessments, coming into the campaign fund from those individuals appointed by Helvering, the party
was soon on a sound financial basis. Although there was no doubt that Guy Helvering was the guiding genius of the Democratic organization, he and Woodring worked closely as a team, and the Governor was clearly the captain. Political opponents were to shout time and again that Helvering was running the party and the state; however, responsible newsmen and those close to the Governor maintained, and still maintain, that Woodring was his own man. The Governor relied heavily on the advice of his State Chairman and good friend, but they frequently disagreed over issues, and when they did, there was never a question as to who the decision maker was.

While Helvering was concerned with exerting greater political strength within the state, Woodring became increasingly interested in wielding influence on the national scene. The latter idea does not seem so outlandish when one realizes that at that time only three of the seventeen states west of Missouri had more electoral votes or sent more delegates to the Democratic National Convention than Kansas did; only California, Texas, and Oklahoma exerted more power. This meant that the Sunflower State could provide valuable Western support to any individual seeking the Democratic presidential nomination in 1932. In addition to realizing that his state could play a major role in the making of a nominee, Woodring knew the importance of supporting the right man at an early date. Such a course held certain dangers, for if he backed a particular candidate who fell along the way, he would be out in the political cold; however, the other extreme of waiting and climbing on the bandwagon offered little in return, since a presidential candidate seldom rewards a Johnny-come-lately.

Early in 1931, after careful consideration, Woodring made a fateful decision. He would support Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York as the Democratic nominee for President. This was a gamble, because Roosevelt was maintaining that he was not a candidate. At that particular time the man considered by many to be the Democratic front runner was Governor Albert C. Ritchie of Maryland. Other prominent names that were being mentioned were Roosevelt; the 1928 nominee, Al Smith; the Speaker of the House, John Nance Garner of Texas; industrialist Owen D. Young; Governors William M. (“Alfalfa Bill”) Murray of Oklahoma and George White of Ohio; Chicago businessman Melvin A. Traylor; and several favorite sons. Just who would survive or who would emerge and ultimately win the nomination was a big question mark in the spring of 1931.

Woodring’s interest in and support of Roosevelt for the nomination actually went back to 1929, when he had begun to follow with interest the activities of the newly elected Chief Executive of the Empire State. Although the Neodesha banker had never met Roosevelt, he became convinced that the New York Governor would make a good president. Soon he was telling his
Democratic friends and former servicemen that Roosevelt should be the party's nominee in 1932. After his election in 1930, Woodring busied himself with legislative matters, but less than a month after the 1931 legislative session ended, he publicly predicted that Roosevelt would be "the next Democratic presidential candidate—at least as far as Kansas is concerned." This 13 April 1931 statement made Woodring one of the first public figures to come out openly for FDR; thus, he became one of the original Roosevelt supporters. FDR was pleased when he heard of this unsolicited support, and he immediately asked Woodring to visit him in New York. Less than two weeks later, on 29 April, Woodring, who had gone East to see Henry Doherty concerning gas rates, traveled to Hyde Park to be FDR's dinner guest. This meeting marked the beginning of a long and warm relationship. At such encounters Roosevelt was at his best, and Woodring left Hyde Park more convinced than ever that he was backing the right man. Almost immediately the newspapers were speculating that the prospective presidential nominee was looking for a "strong Middle West Democrat for a running mate" and that Woodring "could well be that man." Upon his return to Topeka, Woodring refused to comment on the possibility that he might be the vice-presidential nominee, but he continued to sing the praises of the New York Governor.

In early June the two Governors met again, this time at the annual governors' conference at French Lick, Indiana, where Woodring addressed the opening session on matters of taxation. In private they talked about the political situation, but in rather vague terms, since Roosevelt was still not an active candidate. In July, FDR sent James A. Farley, his good friend and New York Democratic State Party Chairman, on an eighteen-state tour to sound out and gain support for his nomination. In Topeka, Woodring and Helvering welcomed Farley with open arms and promised their political and financial support to the Roosevelt cause. Farley thanked them for their pledge, and told them to sit tight. Five months later, Woodring, Helvering, and Carl Rice accepted an invitation to spend the weekend at Hyde Park, and so in early December the three Kansans headed East.

The trio went first to Washington, D.C., where the Governor had been asked to address the National Women's Democratic Club. Before that group, on 11 December 1931, Woodring gave his famous "Grandsons of the Wild Jackass" speech, which brought him much favorable publicity and thus did much to lay the basis for national recognition. The following day the Kansans joined one of Woodring's old army friends, Captain Floyd Parks, to attend the Army-Navy football game, and afterward they went to Hyde Park. The most important result of this conference with Roosevelt and Farley was Woodring's promise to see that the state convention pledge
all twenty of its delegate votes to the New York Governor. Six weeks later, on 23 January 1932, Roosevelt declared that he was a candidate, and in the months that followed, Roosevelt, Woodring, Farley, and Helvering were in frequent contact regarding Kansas support at the Democratic National Convention.

Fulfilling his pledge to Roosevelt to deliver all twenty convention votes was not to be an easy task for Woodring, since there was little support among Kansas Democrats for the New York aristocrat. Opposition to Roosevelt was based on geography, his wealth, and the fact that he was considered a wet. As 1932 dawned, John Nance Garner appeared to be the front runner among Democrats in the Sunflower State. Not far behind was former Secretary of War Newton Baker. On down the line came Al Smith, Roosevelt, Ritchie, Murray, and Traylor. Woodring's task was further complicated by the fact that Jouett Shouse, his friend and fellow Kansan who was chairman of the National Democratic Executive Committee, was aligned with the National Democratic Chairman, John J. Raskob, in opposition to Roosevelt. Shouse and Raskob hoped to see Smith get the nomination. To help achieve that goal, Shouse hoped to become Permanent Chairman at the national convention; however, to qualify for that position he had to be a delegate, and this meant that the Kansas state convention would determine whether or not he would be eligible for the convention post.

Rumblings were first heard in Kansas Democratic circles in February and March, when Woodring and Helvering sent word to all county central committees that they should endorse Roosevelt; if that were impossible, they should at least send uninstructed delegates to the state convention in May. Many Democrats fell into line, and a number found that when they did not, "the Woodring faction had to run the steam roller over its opponents." Despite such tactics a large number of anti-Roosevelt delegates were chosen for the state gathering. Nevertheless, Woodring remained optimistic that he could deliver the votes as promised. In late April, after a serious setback in the Massachusetts primary, a somewhat alarmed Roosevelt wrote to Woodring, expressing hope that he would "have the Kansas delegation instructed because . . . the minority opposition will claim that they own or can control any and every uninstructed delegation." The actions to be taken by the state convention were of growing importance to the national picture.

As Kansas Democrats began to gather in Lawrence for their May 16 meeting there was no doubt that a bitter fight would ensue if Woodring tried to push "down the throats" of the anti-Roosevelt forces a resolution endorsing the New York Governor. While most of the 1,760 delegates apparently felt that Woodring had the strength to secure the endorsement, they believed that his doing so would badly split the party. In spite of such a
prospect, Woodring's commitment to Roosevelt remained firm, and he made it clear that he intended to "rise or fall" on that issue. He was, however, willing to make one concession in the interest of party harmony, and that was to accept Jouett Shouse as a delegate-at-large to the national convention. 22

In the stormy sessions that followed, the convention took a strong stand for prohibition; reelected Dudley Doolittle, an anti-Roosevelt man, as national committeeman, but only after he made a speech supporting the New Yorker; selected sixteen delegates with one vote each and eight delegates-at-large with a half vote each to send to the Democratic National Convention; and instructed the delegation to cast all its votes for Roosevelt. It was the last two actions that caused all the difficulty. Opposition first appeared when it came time to approve the eight delegates-at-large, all of whom had been personally appointed by Governor Woodring (among the eight were Woodring, Helvering, and Shouse). The anti-Roosevelt forces tried to block adoption of the slate, but in a voice vote, Convention Chairman Guy Helvering ruled in favor of the Woodring choices. The same voices of protest were again raised upon the introduction of the resolution instructing the delegates to vote for Roosevelt, but after considerable arguing and name-calling, the resolution was adopted. 23 Why the New York Times called it "one of the stormiest political conventions Kansas has seen since the old Populist days" 24 can be understood from the colorful account of a reporter on the scene:

The selection of delegates came after a day of the wildest jockeying and fighting in the history of the party in this state. . . . So loud and long were the protests over being "steam-rolled" by the Woodring administration forces, it appeared for a time that a riot squad would be necessary to adjourn the morning session. Harmony prevailed until Chairman Guy T. Helvering called the meeting to order. Then the storm broke and the "dove of peace" flew to Missouri or Oklahoma and was not in evidence again so long as a Democratic delegate remained in town. 25

Woodring and Helvering had fulfilled their pledge to Roosevelt, but they had done so at the cost of unity in the state party.

With the Kansas convention out of the way, Woodring now looked forward to the Democratic National Convention, which was scheduled to open in Chicago on 27 June. Early that month Farley contacted Woodring and asked him to serve as one of FDR's floor managers; thus, the chairman of the Kansas delegation took on an additional responsibility. Since he had never attended a national political convention before, Woodring traveled to Chicago in mid June and observed the Republicans renominate Herbert Hoover and Charles Curtis, a Kansan. He wanted to familiarize himself
with the convention hall and to receive some instructions from Farley concern­ing his upcoming duties.26

As the opening session of the Democratic Convention neared, three important battles were shaping up: who would be Permanent Chairman of the convention; what stand would the platform take on prohibition; and who would be the party’s nominee. Woodring arrived in Chicago several days before the convention began in order to meet with Farley, Louis Howe, and other Roosevelt strategists.27 While the search for delegates continued, the Roosevelt masterminds, Farley and Howe, centered their attention on the problem of selecting the Permanent Chairman. That contest would pit Al Smith’s choice, Jouett Shouse, against FDR’s choice, Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana. Since this would be the first test of strength between the pro- and anti-Roosevelt forces, it would be of great significance, because a victory for either faction was bound to have a big psychological impact on the convention delegates.28

The Shouse-Walsh fight put Woodring in something of a dilemma, because Shouse was a personal friend who had helped him to secure the gubernatorial nomination just two years before. On the other hand, the Kansas Governor believed that election of Shouse as Permanent Chairman “would result in the defeat of Roosevelt for the nomination.”29 Most Kansas delegates also had mixed emotions about the Shouse situation, a number feeling that they should vote for him for “old time’s sake.”30 Woodring searched for a way out of a difficult situation. A partial solution was found when the delegation decided not to abide by the unit rule in the vote on Shouse. What worried Woodring most about Shouse’s becoming chairman was that he would attack Roosevelt in his keynote address, thereby hurting the New Yorker’s cause. To prevent that from happening, Woodring, on the day before the convention opened, offered Shouse a deal: Kansas would cast all its twenty votes for Shouse if he would assure Woodring that if he were elected chairman, he would not attack Roosevelt in his speech to the convention. The incensed Shouse rejected the offer by telling Woodring to “Go to Hell.”31 Consequently, the Governor got out his “steam roller.” In a closed session on the opening night of the convention, the Kansas delegation, with Shouse absent, voted to cast 13½ votes for Walsh and 6½ for Shouse. The following day the convention cast its votes, and Walsh was elected 626-to-528. Woodring made no secret of his position as he proudly proclaimed, “I voted for Walsh.”32 A number of Kansas Democrats were riled by Woodring’s refusal to back Shouse, some because they felt that he was being disloyal, and others because they felt that the action would further stir the feud that had begun at the state convention.33

On 29 June the members of the Kansas delegation again crossed swords,
this time over the plank in the platform calling for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. On the issue of prohibition, Woodring was free to take any position he wanted, because Roosevelt was maintaining a position of neutrality. In line with his past position, Woodring took a strong stand against the repeal of prohibition, even though he fully expected the convention to support repeal. Although he frequently stated that he felt the Kansas delegation should vote dry, because that would express the majority sentiment of the state, he exerted no pressure on the delegates to do so. Subsequently, the Kansas delegates voted 12-to-8 against repeal, but they were out of step with the rest of the convention, which voted in favor of repeal 935-to-214.

During the convention, Woodring was not only busy with the problems facing the Kansas delegation, but was also deeply involved in working for the Roosevelt cause. As a member of the Roosevelt strategy board, he met with Farley, Howe, and a dozen other strategists twice each day in order to evaluate the situation and update plans. Countless hours were also spent in trying to win the support of uncommitted delegates and in convincing others not to panic but to sit firm if Roosevelt did not win on the first few ballots.

On the afternoon of 30 June the convention finally got down to its primary task of selecting the presidential nominee. During the next twelve hours, Roosevelt, Smith, Garner, Baker, Ritchie, and five others were nominated and seconded with all the hoopla and fanfare that the enthusiastic Democrats could muster. Because of Woodring's work at the convention and his friendship with Roosevelt, the strategy board gave him the honor of making one of the half dozen nominating speeches. Picked to represent the Midwest, the Kansas Governor spoke on the plight of the farmer, called for economic stability and social justice for rural Americans, and gave assurance that the "New Commoner" could provide the leadership necessary for the "rehabilitation of agriculture." The hastily written but well-delivered speech impressed both those in the hall and those listening at home. John W. Davis, the 1924 Democratic presidential nominee, who was a delegate from New York, called it "the most sensible speech that has been made in this convention."

Finally, at four o'clock on the morning of July first, the balloting began. The convention was operating under the two-thirds rule, since a maneuver by the Roosevelt forces to bring about its repeal had caused such an uproar that they were forced to back down. This meant that 766 votes were needed to win the nomination. When the roll call on the first ballot reached Kansas, Woodring proudly cast the state's twenty votes for Roosevelt. But not enough other state delegations followed suit, and the first ballot ended with Roosevelt getting only 666 votes. Although this put him well ahead of
his two closest competitors—Smith with 201 and Garner with 90—he still needed a hundred more votes.

On the second ballot, FDR picked up a mere ten votes as all forces held firm. At this point, with a deadlocked convention a possibility, spokesmen for Governor Ritchie approached Woodring and offered him the vice-presidency if he would switch the Kansas delegation to the Ritchie camp on the third ballot. Ritchie hoped that the defection of several Roosevelt delegations to him at that particular time would cause a number of convention delegates to panic and jump on a "Ritchie Bandwagon." Although Woodring liked and respected Ritchie, his loyalty to Roosevelt and his conviction that the Ritchie plan was unlikely to get anywhere caused him to reject the offer. After the third ballot, which was almost a carbon copy of the second, the convention adjourned until that evening.

During the day, Farley, working through Congressman Sam Rayburn of Texas, offered the vice-presidency to John Garner in return for the release of the California and Texas delegations. Garner accepted, and when California switched its votes on the fourth ballot, the Roosevelt opposition crumbled, and the New York Governor received 945 votes and the nomination. On the following day, Garner received the second spot on the ticket by acclamation. Woodring was somewhat disappointed by the Roosevelt-Garner deal, because in the past year he had frequently been mentioned as a vice-presidential possibility, and even in the early days of the convention he had been one of a dozen men frequently mentioned for the spot. He had even gone so far as to suggest the possibility to Farley, who immediately rejected the proposition. However, any disappointment that he may have felt over the selection of Garner was probably overshadowed by his joy over the nomination of FDR.

Woodring emerged from the Chicago convention with a prestige and respect that he had not expected. According to the *Kansas City Star*, "A new national Democratic leader has arisen on the political horizon of Kansas." While the *Topeka Daily Capital* said, "Whether one likes it or not the fact remains that Woodring made a place for himself among the national Democratic leaders for the part he played both on the convention floor and on the board of strategy." There was no question that the Kansas Governor had played an important role in the nomination of Roosevelt. He had given not only moral, verbal, and political support but financial assistance as well. When Farley had first visited Kansas in July 1931, he had appealed to Woodring and Helvering for monetary support, and they had been able to respond readily, because their control of the state organization had enabled them to channel party funds where they desired. During the convention, Farley again approached the Kansans with a plea to help replenish the
nearly exhausted Roosevelt funds. The Woodring-Helvering organization
had accumulated a rather sizable war chest to be used for the Governor’s
reelection campaign, but Woodring heeded the request and turned over a
large sum of money. These contributions came at times when the Roosevelt
organization was in great financial need, and FDR and Farley were never
to forget that fact.48

Several weeks after the convention, Woodring wrote to Roosevelt and
explained the importance of having a concrete proposal for farm relief if he
were to carry Kansas or any other farm state. At that time Roosevelt, who
had already decided to travel West in quest of farm votes, decided that, in
view of his friendship with Woodring and the importance of Kansas as a
farm state, he would make his views on farm policy known in a speech at
Topeka.49 On 14 September, Woodring sat on a platform with a host of
leading Democrats, including John Nance Garner, as Roosevelt gave one of
his major campaign addresses. Roosevelt’s speech, which included a num­
er of ideas from Woodring, promised a reorganization of the Department of
Agriculture, along with tax relief and easy credit for farmers, and it hinted
at a kind of voluntary domestic allotment plan to handle the surplus prob­
lem.60 After the speech Roosevelt openly acknowledged Woodring’s assis­
tance, saying, “He [Woodring] has been of very great assistance to me,
because I have felt—I think very rightly—that he understands the whole
agricultural problem of the country about as well as anybody in the United
States.”61 While in Topeka, FDR was the personal guest of Woodring, who
took him to the State Fair, showed him around town, and honored him with
a state dinner at the executive mansion. This visit left no doubt about the
respect and warm friendship that existed between the two men.52

For the remainder of the 1932 presidential campaign, Woodring was a
leader of the Roosevelt forces in the Midwest, and since he was a Democratic
Governor in a normally Republican state, his words continued to carry con­
siderable weight with Farley, Howe, and other party strategists. Although
Woodring was deeply concerned with the presidential campaign, his par­
ticipation and his role in it were practically nil, because he was seeking re­
election, and therefore had a contest of his own to conduct.

In looking at Woodring’s gubernatorial record in the fall of 1932, one could
find many positive accomplishments. He had been quite successful in get­
ting his legislative program enacted: he had lowered taxes, balanced the
budget, found markets for stripper oil, and brought about reductions in util­
ity rates in most Kansas towns. He had some other factors that would aid
in a bid for reelection. These included a growing national reputation; con­
John Nance Garner and Franklin D. Roosevelt, with Governor Harry H. Woodring (left to right), on their 1932 campaign visit to Topeka.
Harry H. Woodring being sworn in as Assistant Secretary of War by Assistant Chief Clerk Frank Hoadley, April 1933; Secretary of War George H. Dern on the left, and Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur on the right.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the proclamation establishing the government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines; standing, left to right: Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Chief of Staff Malin Craig, and Acting Secretary of War Harry H. Woodring.
control of an effective state party organization; the opportunity to use his position to obtain publicity; a reputation as a hard-working, competent, yet likable individual.

With such an array of assets, it would seem that reelection would not be difficult; however, the path to a second term was strewn with obstacles. First, there was considerable bitterness and division within the Democratic party. This anger stemmed from various factors, such as Woodring's refusal to heed the requests of Jonathan Davis and Donald Muir for a special legislative session, his "steam roller" tactics in getting the Roosevelt endorsement through the state convention, and his refusal to support Shouse at the national convention. Second, the Republican split of 1930 was rapidly healing as the party began to rally behind the candidacy of the affable and capable Alf M. Landon. Furthermore, the Republicans could now attack Woodring's record as he had attacked theirs two years before. The third obstacle was the old bugaboo of the last election, the candidacy of John R. Brinkley. Finally, there was the deepening Depression, with its accompanying suffering and growing discontent. To the citizens of the Sunflower State, "the bottom of the cycle was only too evident when corn became cheaper to burn than coal and a barrel of crude oil cost less than five gallons of purified drinking water." Economically, things were much worse than they had been two years before.

From the time that Woodring entered the governorship in January 1931 there had never seemed to be any doubt that he would seek reelection. Although he was in office more than a year before he officially made his intentions known, he continually acted like a candidate and made no effort to refute those who said he would run again. In the fall of 1931 it appeared that the bad blood developing between Harry Woodring and Jonathan Davis over the calling of a special session would lead to a fight in the 1932 primary election. In early December, however, another critic of Woodring, Donald Muir, announced that he would seek the Democratic nomination for Governor. This pleased Woodring, because Muir and Davis appealed to the same group of disgruntled party members; should they both enter the primary, the Governor's opposition would be badly divided. Things did not work out that way, because in late December, Davis, who was a widower, remarried, and for the next few months his interest was in his new bride rather than in the governorship. Davis's temporary loss of interest in politics caused his supporters to rally behind Muir.

The 1932 Democratic primary was to be the young crowd-old crowd contest of 1930 all over again, except that Muir rather than Bowman was the leader of the opposition. Although Woodring waited until Friday, 13 May 1932, to file for candidacy (he considered Friday the thirteenth to be
a lucky day), he and Muir started campaigning months before that time. The two Democrats took opposite views on nearly every major issue, thus giving the voters a clear-cut choice. Whereas Woodring favored the income tax and tax limitation amendments, Muir opposed them both, claiming that more economy rather than more taxation was the way to solve the state's economic ills. On the matter of forcing reductions in utility rates, Muir attacked the Governor for “‘persecuting’ that great and good man, Henry L. Doherty.” Muir also lashed out at the power and influence of Guy Helvering, being especially critical of his practice of assessing state employees 5 percent of their salaries for political purposes. Both Woodring and Helvering openly acknowledged that “voluntary contributions” were being collected, but they maintained that it was better to finance a campaign with a large number of small donations than with a few large gifts from persons or corporations who would expect something in return. They also pointed out that in collecting funds as they were, they were merely following a precedent established years before by the Republicans. Muir likewise criticized the work of the Woodring “steam roller” at the state convention and the abandoning of Shouse at Chicago. While the Democratic challenger continually lashed out at Woodring, the latter did not do the same to his opponent, because he was afraid that such action might antagonize the Muir supporters and ultimately drive them to Brinkley.

Muir conducted a vigorous campaign, traveling around the state making numerous personal appearances, and using the radio extensively. Woodring, on the other hand, exerted little effort in the primary. He did not hit the campaign trail; instead he remained in Topeka and utilized the radio as his major weapon. In early July he initiated a daily radio program. Each day at 12:20 P.M., when businessmen and farmers were supposedly home for dinner, the strains of Woodring’s campaign theme song, “Let Me Call You Sweetheart,” would usher in a thirty-minute program entitled “Under the State House Dome.” While the purpose of the privately financed broadcasts originating from the Governor’s office was ostensibly to keep Kansans informed on state affairs, Woodring used them primarily as a campaign tool.

As the primary contest progressed, the Governor acknowledged that he was not campaigning very hard. He justified his inaction by saying the people were fed up with politics and were not interested in hearing a lot of campaign rhetoric. Actually, Woodring saw no reason to spend valuable time and money on a contest that he was sure he would win. He had defeated the old crowd two years before, and since then his organization had been greatly strengthened, while theirs had grown weaker. Another Democrat, Walter Eggers of Bird City, was campaigning for the nomination in western Kansas, but he was doing it more as a lark, and no one took him
seriously. All in all, the primary was an extremely dull affair, and in the voting on 2 August, Woodring won a clear and decisive victory over Muir, 91,037-to-42,786. With the primary out of the way, the Governor prepared to square off against his two opponents in the general election, Alf M. Landon and John R. Brinkley.

The August primary that witnessed Woodring triumph also saw Republican Alf M. Landon win a clear-cut victory over his conservative opponent, Lacey Simpson. Two years before, no one would have expected Landon to emerge as a gubernatorial candidate, for it was in the 1930 primary, when he was Republican State Chairman, that his candidate, Governor Clyde M. Reed, had been defeated. At that point it had appeared that Landon was "politically dead," because there did not seem to be much demand for "a politician who could not win renomination for his governor." Early in 1931, when friends suggested that he seek the governorship, Landon expressed no desire to do so. This attitude extended into the spring and was in part attributable to his belief that "Woodring has given pretty general satisfaction and I am afraid will be a hard man to beat."

In the months that followed, more and more representatives of the progressive wing of the Republican party began to put Landon forth as a possible nominee. By fall, Landon, who was continually calling for party unity, sounded more and more like a candidate, and on 20 January 1932 he finally announced that he would seek the nomination. Several days later the conservatives put forth their candidate, Lacey Simpson, a farmer from McPherson. No major issue divided the two men; both were for efficiency, economy, economic recovery, lower taxes, and an oil tariff. Although the two candidates conducted a vigorous campaign, they failed to create any enthusiasm among the voters. Landon, however, was successful in convincing a number of conservative leaders that he was the man who could best unite the party; consequently, he handily defeated Simpson, 160,345-to-59,326. The man from Independence had won the nomination, and he had done so without splitting the party.

In late August, when Landon and Woodring were preparing their strategy for the campaign ahead, their attention was not centered so much on each other as it was on the independent candidate, John Brinkley. Less than three months after his defeat in the 1930 gubernatorial contest, Brinkley, who had continued broadcasting over KFKB pending the outcome of his suspension appeal, sold his station and relocated at Del Rio, Texas. Securing authority from Mexican officials, he built a powerful 50,000-watt transmitter right across the Rio Grande River at Villa Acuna; and in March 1931 he began to broadcast over station XER. He soon had thousands of listeners throughout the Middle Western states, including Kansas. Although Brink-
ley spent considerable time in Texas, he maintained his legal residence in Kansas, which made him eligible to hold public office in that state.

From the time of his November 1930 defeat, Brinkley never left any doubt that he would run again in 1932. Throughout 1931 Brinkleyism was quite evident in Kansas as hundreds of Brinkley Platform Clubs, Brinkley Good Government Clubs, and Brinkley Cowboy and Cowgirl Ranch Clubs sang the praises of the goat-gland doctor and everything that he stood for. An official newspaper, *Publicity*, which was edited by Elmer J. Garner of Wichita, kept the supporters informed of the activities of their illustrious leader and presented a biased account of what was happening in state politics. Occasionally “Doc” would address a Brinkley rally, and when he did, there was always a large gathering—one such event at Milford in February 1931 drew a crowd estimated at twenty thousand.66

In January 1932 Brinkley made his formal announcement of candidacy. He explained that he was taking such action not so much because he wanted to but because it was his duty to come to the aid of his fellow Kansans. As an independent candidate, he was not subject to the primary; consequently, he was able to get a jump on the opposition. On 4 June he came out with a twenty-five-point platform that promised something for everyone: free schoolbooks, medical care for the poor, aid to the aged, more and better roads, a state hospital for Negroes, and an artificial lake for every county. To top it all off, he would do all this and more while still providing economy in government. He never really explained how he would accomplish this fantastic feat, and his trusting followers never asked. Brinkley also continued to play his old role of the martyr as he continually reminded his listeners how he had been persecuted by Kansas authorities.67 When the campaign began in earnest in September of 1932, Brinkley had a large statewide following, and this time his name would be on the ballot; thus, there was no question that he was a power to be reckoned with.

Woodring’s strategy for the general-election campaign was quite simple: he would stand on his record of the past two years, fight for the income tax and tax limitation amendments, and promise to provide the same sound leadership in the future that he had in the past. Beyond that, he decided to wait and see what course the opposition followed. In late August the Democratic State Committee, meeting in Topeka, reelected Guy Helvering as State Chairman and adopted a platform calling for reorganization of state and county government (so as to effect economy by avoiding duplication of efforts), passage of the two tax amendments, cheaper textbooks, curbing of public utilities, continuation of the highway program, development of industry, and the placing of public welfare on a high plane. The platform,
which was drawn up by Woodring, Helvering, and Rice, was more an endorsement of past actions than a "promise of things to come."

Woodring was now ready to try to accomplish what no previous Democratic Governor of Kansas had been able to do—get reelected. On 12 September he opened his second campaign, as he had his first, with a speech in Ottawa. In this keynote address he touched on the issues that he was to dwell on throughout the contest. Economy and lower taxes received the most attention. He pointed out that his program to reduce expenditures had been so successful that "for the first time in history, the governor of Kansas spent less than the amount appropriated by the legislature." He told how he had saved the state $1 million dollars during his first year in office and would save it $2 million during the second. Such savings, Woodring maintained, had made it possible to reduce the state levy, but the tax burden was still "intolerable," and relief could be provided only by the passage of the proposed tax amendments which would distribute the burden in an equitable manner. He called attention to the reductions in utility rates that had already been brought about, and he vowed to continue his fight against the Doherty interests. He also cited accomplishments in highway surfacing and in aid to crippled children.

In closing, he chided the Republicans for refusing to support the tax limitation amendment, and he criticized the independent candidate who "promises of free this and free that" and then says he will reduce taxes.

By the middle of September the three gubernatorial candidates were campaigning in earnest. The contrasting personalities and styles of Woodring, Landon, and Brinkley made for a most interesting contest. Woodring, accompanied by his driver, a county chairman, and one or two people from state headquarters, usually traveled from town to town in the Governor’s black 12-cylinder Cadillac. Upon arrival, the Governors’ companions would start passing out “Win with Woodring” windshield stickers, campaign buttons, and thimbles as the jovial, smiling candidate would walk down the main street, shaking hands, patting backs, and kissing babies. This was the part of campaigning that he liked most: he enjoyed meeting the people, and they seemed to enjoy meeting him. Returning to the town square, he would mount a platform and give one of his rousing political speeches. Then he would be off to the next town; and this sequence would usually be repeated four or five times a day.

If Woodring’s pace seemed hectic, it was nothing compared to that of Landon, who generally visited from eight to ten towns daily. Arriving in town with little or no fanfare, the shy, retiring Republican would stroll the streets, exchanging pleasantries with everyone he met. His warm, folksy manner impressed those he stopped to chat with, but Alf never seemed to
enjoy this aspect of campaigning as much as his Democratic counterpart did. When it came to making a speech, Landon was at his worst; he was no public speaker. But while he may have stumbled through his speech in a low monotone, his points were well taken, and he left no doubts about his position on a particular issue.\footnote{71}

The most aloof, yet the most exciting and colorful of the three candidates, was Brinkley. Displaying a flair for political showmanship the likes of which had never been seen, the independent candidate attracted some of the largest crowds in the political history of Kansas—frequently between ten thousand and fifteen thousand people. Everyone knew when Brinkley was coming to town, because station XER had been announcing it almost hourly the week before. Not only did they know he was coming, but they knew when he arrived, because the event was heralded by a mighty blast on the “five-mile horn” located atop “Ammunition Train No. 1,” a wildly painted truck with a sound system and speaker’s platform, which was used to carry his entourage. Brinkley then arrived in one of his airplanes or in his custom-built 16-cylinder Cadillac. After several songs, including a rendition by the cowboy singing star Roy Faulkner of Brinkley’s theme, “He’s the Man,” the red-bearded demagogue would appear and say a few prayers, reiterate his numerous promises, and lambaste his opponents and their respective parties. After his speech, he would quickly disappear; he never ventured into a crowd or walked the streets greeting people.\footnote{72} A \emph{New York Times} editorial cited an account in which a reporter called Brinkley a man “without personal contact with the common people, a man of mystery.”\footnote{73} This aloofness was probably the result of his fear that he might be the victim of an assassin’s bullet.\footnote{74} In terms of activity, his pace compared to that of Woodring, for he visited four or five towns daily. While his newspaper advertising was about the same as that of his opponents, his billboard advertising was considerably more, and his radio time was several times greater, because he was able to utilize his own station at no cost.

Until the campaign was well under way, Woodring aimed his attack primarily at Brinkley. This decision was based in part on his desire to keep the discontent vote from going to the rabble-rousing redhead, but the major reason seems to have been that anger over certain statements made by Brinkley caused him to turn the contest into a personal feud. The memories of the 1930 campaign had planted the seeds of hate. When Brinkley called Woodring a dog; referred to Thurman Hill, Democratic member of the P.S.C., as “‘a pup’—presumably the son of the dog”; and criticized the Chief Executive for buying new silverware for the governor’s mansion when Kansans were going hungry, Woodring became furious and began to retaliate. He accused Brinkley of opposing the income tax amendment because he
“probably has one million dollars worth of bonds and securities put away” on which he did not have to pay tax under the current laws. The Governor also claimed that in spite of the “Doctor’s” tremendous property holdings, he did not pay a cent of real-estate taxes. The two men argued continually over such matters, as well as over the question of whether the state should provide free schoolbooks.  

Unfortunately, the angry personal exchanges that took place did nothing to shed light on the major issues.

Not all the Woodring-Brinkley charges and countercharges were over petty matters, for on 21 October the Governor exploded a major bombshell. In a speech at Pittsburg he presented “evidence” to back up his previous allegations that Brinkley’s campaign was receiving financial support from Henry L. Doherty, who was determined to bring about Woodring’s defeat because of his fight over gas rates. After pointing out that Doherty had purchased a major interest in the *Kansas City Journal-Post* the year before in order to fight him and the *Kansas City Star*—a fact already known by most Kansans—Woodring claimed that Doherty had put an “experienced politician” in charge of an operation to channel funds from a mysterious account, J-329, to the *Journal-Post* and to the *Wichita Beacon* for Brinkley advertising that was designed “to destroy the confidence of the people in my administration.” More than $75,000 had been spent for such purposes. Woodring claimed to have the sworn testimony of eye witnesses and photostatic copies to back up every statement. He also threatened to turn the evidence over to the proper authorities for legal action—although he never did so.  

Both Brinkley and Doherty denied the specific charges but not the general allegations; moreover, they were unwilling to file libel suits against the Governor. Throughout the rest of the campaign, Brinkley attacked Woodring’s rate war on Doherty and defended the Cities Service Company. The revelation of the Brinkley-Doherty connection appears to have helped Woodring and hurt Brinkley, for after that time the Governor, who had been running well behind the other two candidates, gained ground while Brinkley slipped.  

Brinkley’s declining support in late October was also due to the activities of the Republicans, who had decided to concentrate on him until the last two weeks of the campaign and then turn on Woodring. To offset the effects of Brinkley’s newspaper, *Publicity*, the Republicans utilized one of their own, *The Pink Rag*. *The Rag*, a sort of political underground paper, was especially vicious in its attacks on Brinkley. Landon also lashed out at Brinkley, and as the campaign entered the home stretch, the effects of the Republican and Democratic barrages began to take their toll.

Until the last two weeks of the campaign, Landon generally avoided direct attacks on Woodring; instead he addressed himself to issues—pledging lower taxes and economy, criticizing Helvering’s operation of the Highway
Department, and questioning Woodring’s stand on prohibition.\textsuperscript{80} Since Woodring supported the first two matters, he only had to address himself to the latter two. He met the criticism of Helvering’s conduct with the fact that in the previous year Kansas had surfaced more roads than any other state and had still cut its operating cost by $250,000. Concerning Landon’s charges that Helvering had gathered party funds through 5 percent assessments on state employees, the Governor merely asked if Landon himself had not done the same thing when he was State Chairman.\textsuperscript{81} Landon did not reply. With reference to prohibition, Landon charged the Governor with being “wet in Albany and dry in Kansas,” but Woodring proclaimed his allegiance to the drys and denounced the national Democratic party’s stand on repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Although the wet-dry question arose several times, it did not become a real issue in the state election.\textsuperscript{82}

Not all of Woodring’s challenges came from the other candidates and their followers. One of his major problems came from Kansas public-school teachers. The trouble stemmed from the Governor’s support of the tax limitation amendment, which would have prevented the levying of a general property tax in excess of 2 percent of the assessed property valuation. School-teachers and school officials opposed this, because the levy of many school districts already exceeded that rate and therefore, if the limit were imposed, a major source of school revenue would be taken away.\textsuperscript{83} In early October, Frank L. Pinet, secretary of the Kansas State Teachers Association, writing in the organization’s magazine, \textit{The Kansas Teacher}, called for the defeat of the amendment and of Woodring himself, because the Governor had shown “no sympathy for the schools of Kansas.”\textsuperscript{84} Woodring criticized Pinet for involving the association in partisan politics, and he argued that while the schools might suffer initially, in the long run they would benefit from the new, sound tax policies. Kansas teachers were not impressed, and they continued to fight the proposal and its sponsor. On election eve, thousands of school children, following their teachers’ instructions, distributed doorknob pamphlets urging people not to support Woodring or the tax limitation amendment.\textsuperscript{85} Another source of difficulty came from a member of the Governor’s own party. The old troublemaker Jonathan Davis, his extended honeymoon over, turned on Woodring, joined the Brinkley forces, and urged other Democrats to do likewise. How many of the old guard he carried with him is unknown, but there is no question that his defection hurt Woodring to some extent.\textsuperscript{86}

The last two weeks of the campaign saw the Republicans launch a full-scale attack on the Governor.\textsuperscript{87} Jesse Greenleaf, Republican member of the P.S.C., claimed that Woodring’s attack on Doherty had actually prevented lower gas rates in Kansas, because the P.S.C. was about to negotiate reduc-
tions when the Governor intervened in the hope of furthering his own political career. Landon's campaign manager, Frank Carlson, again brought up the prohibition question by claiming that "Woodring wants to appear wet outside of Kansas and dry inside of this state." Landon, too, unloaded his guns on the Governor, questioning his claims about economy, reduction of taxes, and reduction of utility rates. According to Landon, Woodring was "the greatest little claimer Kansas has had in a long time." Woodring struck back by charging that the Republican candidate was using "half-truths and distortions." Their bitter exchanges in the last week of the contest were of a political nature and led to no personal antagonism between the two men. In closing his campaign at Leavenworth on 7 November, Woodring merely reiterated what he had done during the past two years and then asked the voters to choose between his accomplishments and the promises of his opponents. Having taken his fight to each of the state's 105 counties, a tired and non-too-confident Harry Woodring returned to Neodesha to await the election.

Kansas political forecasters were a little more bold in 1932 than they had been two years before. Nearly all of them picked Landon to win, but they were divided about fifty-fifty on whether Woodring or Brinkley would come in second. There was general agreement, however, that Woodring had been rapidly gaining support in the last two weeks of the contest. That final surge brought Woodring close to victory, but not close enough, for Landon took an early lead and never relinquished it. Final tabulations showed Landon gathering 278,581 votes to Woodring's 272,944 and Brinkley's 244,607. The Kansas precedent of never reelecting a Democratic Governor was still intact.

Why had Woodring failed? Why was it that in spite of a fine record, an effective state organization, and vigorous campaigning, he had not been reelected? Before answering these questions, it should be noted how extremely close the election was. In a contest that saw eight hundred thousand votes cast, less than six thousand separated the winner and the runner-up. Had less than one-half of one percent of those voting cast their ballot for Woodring instead of Landon or Brinkley, the victory would have gone the other way. What had kept the Governor from getting the small number of additional votes that could have changed the outcome? There were a number of crucial factors. First, and most important, was the fact that the Republicans were reunited. This was especially important, because Kansas was a Republican state. Second, Woodring had antagonized many members of his own party by his refusal to call a special session of the legislature, as Jonathan Davis had asked him to do, and by his actions at the 1932 state and national Democratic conventions. The defection of Davis and some of his
followers to Brinkley also hurt. Third, by tying himself firmly to the tax limitation amendment, which also went down to defeat, the Governor frightened and antagonized Kansas schoolteachers, who fought him vigorously. Fourth, the Brinkley vote, which took votes from both of the regular party candidates, appears to have hurt Woodring more than it hurt Landon. Finally, Woodring was unable to get the farm vote. While he sympathized with the plight of the farmers, he did not know what to do about it. Believing that agricultural relief should be a federal responsibility, he had done nothing; thus, he could not appeal to the rural voter. The relative importance of each of these factors in the outcome of the election is uncertain, but together they spelled defeat.

Although Woodring had been rebuffed on 8 November 1932, it had been a very good day for Democrats throughout the nation. In Kansas they had had one of their most successful election days ever, as they returned George McGill to the United States Senate, sent three men to Congress, and elected sixty representatives and seventeen senators to the state legislature. The big story of that day, however, and the one most pleasing to Woodring, was the presidential victory of his friend Franklin D. Roosevelt. Carrying forty-two states, including Kansas, Roosevelt rolled up an impressive 472-to-59 margin in the electoral college, thus becoming the thirty-second President of the United States.

While his defeat by Landon was disheartening, Woodring was less upset than one would have expected. With his friend FDR headed for the White House, Woodring knew he was in a good position to share some of the fruits of the presidential victory, and that is exactly what he expected to do. After all, he had been one of the “original” Roosevelt supporters, had channeled funds into the FDR coffers at several critical periods, and had worked hard at Chicago to help the New Yorker win the nomination. He was, therefore, confident that Roosevelt and Farley would reward him accordingly. A more retiring person would have sat back and waited to see what position would be offered, but not Woodring. He did not want just any job; he wanted to be Secretary of Agriculture, and he set out to obtain the position.

Whether Woodring really wanted the Agriculture post or whether he sought it because he felt it was the job that he was most likely to get is uncertain. His only real qualification for the position was the fact that he was Governor of one of the most important agricultural states. Except for lowering taxes, he had, as Governor, made no real effort to aid the farmer; moreover, he had made no specific proposals about how to cope with the problem of farm surpluses or the resulting low prices. Only after FDR’s nomination
did Woodring begin to think seriously about the farm problem. Perhaps it was Roosevelt's September 14 statement that Woodring understood the problem of agriculture as well as anyone else in the country that boosted the Kansan's ego and motivated him to seek the Agriculture post.

Less than two weeks after Woodring's defeat, his friends and supporters began to conduct a letter-writing campaign to solicit support from politicians, newspapermen, and agricultural organizations for having the Governor appointed as Secretary of Agriculture. On 5 December, Woodring and Helvering, who also expected to be duly rewarded for his support of FDR, traveled to Warm Springs, Georgia, to discuss the farm problem with the President-elect. Although Woodring publicly termed the conference "eminently satisfactory," he privately felt that he had not had adequate time to present his views. Therefore, on 27 December he wrote to Roosevelt, criticizing the various Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan proposals; presenting the barest outline of his relief program, which would make "the tariff effective on farm products"; and requesting "at least an entire evening's discussion" of his proposals. The requested meeting was set for 12 January 1933.

Before Woodring traveled to Hyde Park, he had to fulfill his final obligations to the state of Kansas by formally turning over the reins of government to his successor. That task was accomplished on Alf Landon's inauguration day, 9 January 1933. At the swearing-in ceremony, Woodring made his farewell address. After citing the achievements of the past two years and praising Landon, his "neighbor and friend for years," he closed by stating that he left the office "with the feeling that I have given my state the very best that was mine." While many Kansans were undoubtedly happy to see him go, a large number probably held views similar to those of the Topeka columnist Charles H. Sessions and the Emporia journalist William Allen White. Sessions wrote, "If it falls to the Democrats ever to elect another governor of Kansas we hope they will show the good sense to elect Harry Woodring." Although White had supported Landon in the election, he paid an editorial tribute to Woodring by sayings:

Governor Woodring should not be lost to public life in this state and in this country. He is a man of exceptional qualities of heart and mind. He is as honest as daylight. He is clear-visioned and courageous. The Democratic president looking over the West for a cabinet officer can find no man better fitted for the honor and for the hard work required of a cabinet-head than Governor Harry Woodring of Kansas. Kansas is as proud of Harry Woodring as though he had overcome the handicap of his Democracy in a Republican state.

After Landon's inauguration, Woodring and Helvering headed for New York, where they spent the entire afternoon of 12 January discussing the farm problem with Roosevelt. At that meeting, as he had done at Warm
Springs and in his letter, Woodring voiced violent opposition to the Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan, emphasizing that he was opposed to restricting production as long as people at home and abroad were going hungry. His solution was to “return to America her foreign [agricultural] markets” by establishing “a program of debenture credit on foreign sales and to exchange agricultural products with foreign nations.” Roosevelt listened with interest to these ideas, but he was not yet ready to commit himself to a farm program or to a man to head it. What promises, if any, were made concerning a job in the new administration are unknown, but that Woodring was confident of receiving a good position seems evident from the fact that a week later he completed arrangements to lease a large apartment at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington.

In late January, Woodring returned to Kansas and continued a personal letter-writing campaign to people close to Roosevelt, asking that they urge appointment of him as Secretary of Agriculture. In a letter to Louis Howe, one of FDR’s oldest and closest advisers, Woodring boldly proclaimed:

I want to be Secretary of Agriculture. . . . As to future political aspect and success—we must depend on our real friends. One cannot be elected President without first being nominated. One cannot be nominated only by work of loyal friends. Gov. R. was not nominated by the Wallaces, Peakes [sic], Murphys, Ed. O’Neals, Tabors and such bandwagon Roosevelt Republicans. But by Woodrings, Helverings, Farleys and Howes.

The point was clear—he had done something for Roosevelt; now the favor should be returned.

Towards the end of January, reports began to circulate in Washington that Henry A. Wallace of Iowa, an advocate of the Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan, might be named as the new Secretary of Agriculture. These reports were unsettling to Woodring, but when Roosevelt wrote on 1 February and assured him that no decision would be made on the appointment until just prior to the inauguration, the Kansan’s hopes received a boost. Both Howe and Farley were Woodring supporters; but this meant little, for when it came to making cabinet selections, Roosevelt had a mind of his own. As he remarked to the press and to his close advisers, “I regard the cabinet as peculiarly my own official family to be named only by me.”

During the second week of February the President-elect decided to offer the Agriculture post to Wallace. After some hesitation the Iowan accepted, and on 22 February the formal announcement was made. The decision to give the position to Wallace rather than to Woodring was a reflection of Roosevelt’s policy views rather than a personal matter. He had come to the conclusion that Voluntary Domestic Allotment rather than restoration of
world markets offered the best hope for the American agricultural dilemma; thus, he chose Wallace. Although Woodring was not aware of it, he had been given serious consideration for the post of Secretary of War, but in the end Roosevelt decided to appoint former Utah Governor George H. Dern to that position.\(^\text{110}\)

Woodring was quite upset when he did not get the cabinet position that he had hoped for, but Farley reminded him that many fine positions were still to be filled and assured him that he would not be forgotten. However, when Inauguration Day arrived, Woodring's future was still undecided. A few days later he was tentatively offered the position of Treasurer of the United States, which would have meant that his signature would have appeared on every piece of United States paper money; but Woodring rejected this idea, because he did not desire what was primarily a clerical job. In the days that followed, there was considerable speculation that he would be named either Governor-General of the Philippines or Comptroller of Currency, but no such offers were forthcoming.\(^\text{111}\)

Finally, in late March, Farley approached Woodring about an appointment as Assistant Secretary of War. Woodring's first reaction was one of disappointment; with the domestic and world situation being what it was at that time, the War Department did not sound like a very exciting place to be.\(^\text{112}\) There were, however, some factors that made the job appealing to Woodring: his military service had been a very pleasant experience, and he had been quite impressed by the caliber of leaders that he had come into contact with; there would also be considerable opportunity for travel.\(^\text{113}\) Furthermore, he had taken an active role in the affairs of the National Guard and of the American Legion—organizations that were vitally concerned with national defense. The new position would give him the opportunity to do something concrete to provide for that defense. He also realized that if he turned this job down, he had no way of knowing what the next offer might be. The position would at least put him in the “Little Cabinet,” and it would give him an opportunity to be in a policy-making position. When Woodring hesitated, Farley suggested that he go and talk the matter over with Secretary of War Dern before making his decision. After discussing the nature of his duties with the affable Dern, Woodring decided to take the post.\(^\text{114}\) On 30 March he informed the President of his acceptance, and on the following day his name was submitted to the Senate for confirmation. Since there was no opposition, the appointment was quickly approved, and on 6 April 1933, with Secretary Dern and the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, at his side, Harry H. Woodring took the oath that made him the Assistant Secretary of War.\(^\text{115}\) A new and controversial career was about to begin.