



West Virginia Historical Society

Volume XXI, No. 2, April, 2007
Volume XVIV, No. 2, April, 2005

Visit us on the web at www.wvculture.org/history/wvhssoc

CARL G. BACHMANN
West Virginia Congressional Leader
By: Michael K. Wilson

(Michael Wilson is a Clay County native who has resided in Charleston for the past several years. He earned his B.A. from Glenville State College, M.A. from Marshall University Graduate College, and did additional study at West Virginia University. He is currently the Senior Historian/Historical Services Unit Leader for the West Virginia Department of Transportation.)

West Virginians are aware of Senator Robert Byrd's leadership positions in the United States Senate. By 1977 he had risen to the position of Majority Leader. Twice Byrd has been named Senate Pro Tempore, in the line of presidential succession after only the Vice President and the Speaker of the House. In the House various West Virginia Congressman have held important committee chairmanships. None, however, have held any of the major leadership posts of Speaker, Floor Leader, or party whip except Carl Bachmann of Wheeling. From 1931 to 1933, Bachmann was the

Republican Minority Whip. No other West Virginia representative, Democrat or Republican, had held such a high position before Bachmann and none have accomplished it since.

Carl George Bachmann was born in



Carl G. Bachman (Photo Courtesy of WV Department of Transportation)

Wheeling on May, 14, 1890, the son of Charles F. and Sophia Neuhard Bachmann. As a youngster, Bachmann attended public schools in Wheeling and the Linsly Institute, graduating in 1908(1). As a schoolboy, Carl earned a reputation as an outstanding athlete. He continued his athletic career at Washington and Jefferson College in Washington, Pennsylvania for two years, lettering in football and basketball as well as setting the Pennsylvania college indoor high jump record. Carl left W&J for West Virginia University where he was a fullback and punter on the Mountaineer football team and lettered in basketball(2). He earned his undergraduate degree in 1913, followed by a law degree from WVU in 1915(3).

Following law school, Carl settled into the routine of a practicing attorney in Wheeling. He had married Susan Smith of St. Mary's in 1914, prior to his graduation from WVU. The Bachmanns would have three children: Charles F. II, who would later serve two terms in the West Virginia Legislature, Gilbert, and Susan Jane. Carl was active in the Presbyterian church, Masons, Shriners, and other fraternal organizations (4).

Bachmann had practiced law in Wheeling for two years when he was appointed Assistant Prosecuting Attorney of Ohio County. He held this position until 1920 when he was elected Prosecuting Attorney (5). Not much is known of the 1917-1924 period in the Prosecutor's office; however it certainly set the stage for higher office.

In 1924, West Virginia's first congressional district was made up of the four northern panhandle counties of Marshall, Ohio, Brooke, and Hancock plus Wetzel, Marion, and Taylor. The counties of the district were united by the common themes of industry and labor. Steel, of course, was the leading industry in the

northern counties of the panhandle and coal in the district's southern counties of Marion and Taylor. Organized labor was only beginning to become a political force and remained non-partisan. In fact, organized labor would not empower the Democratic Party, as it would for several years, for nearly another decade. In the 1924 Republican primary, Bachmann defeated Charles B. Mitchell, 15,532 to 15,008. In the general election he defeated Ohio County legislator George W. Oldham by a wider margin of 47,318 to 38,417(6).

1924 was a Republican year. Not only had Calvin Coolidge defeated West Virginian John Davis to win the White House in his own right, but the Republicans also increased their majority in the House to 247 seats compared to 183 for the Democrats and elevated Nicholas Longworth of Ohio to the Speaker's chair. Besides being Theodore Roosevelt's son-in-law, Longworth's contribution to the House would have the further reaching effect of helping to shape the modern position of Speaker. From 1925-1931, Longworth was a strong party leader and changed several rules that freed legislation that formerly could be tied up in committee (7). He also made an effort to be considerate of younger members like Carl G. Bachmann, who was sworn in as a member of the United States House of Representatives on March 4, 1925. As a House freshman, Bachmann began his career with assignment to the committees on Civil Service, Elections, Enrolled Bills, and Revision of the Laws (8). One must remember that from the early twentieth century until 1962, West Virginia was made up of six congressional districts. During the 69th Congress, 1925 to 1927, Republicans held five of the six seats. The remainder of the West Virginia delegation included Frank Bowman, a Republican from Morgantown, John Wolverton, a Republican from Richwood, Roane County Republican and long-time congressman Harry Woodyard,

Republican J.F. Strother from McDowell County, and the lone Democrat, J. Alfred Taylor from Fayetteville. The Senators from West Virginia were Democrat Matthew M. Neely of Fairmont, a West Virginia political legend for several decades, and Republican Guy D. Goff from the famous West Virginia political family of Clarksburg(9).

As the “Roaring Twenties” moved on, Bachmann settled into his role of congressman. Among his colleagues in the House who would later move to high profile positions in government were Alben Barkley and Fred Vinson from Kentucky. Barkley would move on to be the Majority Leader in the Senate and Vice President under Harry Truman while Vinson would serve in the Franklin Roosevelt Administration, as Secretary of the Treasury under Truman, and be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1946 until his death in 1953. Additionally, there were other colleagues who would leave the House for future prominence. New Yorker Fiorello LaGuardia would go on to be the famous mayor of New York City. Cordell Hull, from Tennessee, would move to the Senate, become Roosevelt’s Secretary of State, and win the Nobel Peace Prize after helping form the United Nations. Two future Speakers, John Nance Garner and Sam Rayburn, were members of the Texas delegation (10).

The *Congressional Record* shows little participation by Bachmann during floor debates, evidence that he mainly concerned himself with constituent services. The constituents must have been satisfied. In the 1926 primary, Bachmann easily overwhelmed Wheeling attorney and former state senator B.L. Rosenbloom, then defeated his 1924 opponent George Oldham by 2,722 votes in the general to win re-election(11). Republicans in the House lost nine seats but retained a 238-194 majority (12).

When the 70th Congress convened in 1927, some of the faces of the West Virginia House delegation had changed, but the majority had not. Besides Bachmann, Bowman and Strother returned but Wolverton had lost to William S. O’Brien, a Democrat from Upshur County, James Hughes, a Cabell County Republican had replaced Woodyard, and Kanawha County Republican E.T. England narrowly defeated Taylor by 217 votes (13). Along with changes in the delegation, Bachmann’s committee assignments changed as well. He remained on the Civil Service and Elections committees, but Enrolled Bills and Revisions of the Laws were replaced by the Accounts and Immigration and Naturalization committees(14). Bachmann was also named to the Fish Committee chaired by Hamilton Fish of New York. The committee was the first appointed by Congress to investigate communist activities in the United States. The committee held hearings and issued a final report but never introduced any bills (15).

Throughout Bachmann’s career he did not propose many bills. Most of the bills he proposed were called “private bills”, as opposed to “public bills.” Public bills are what most Americans are familiar with today. In short, a member of Congress proposes a bill which moves through committee, followed by a vote from the whole body. Upon passage it goes to the other house of Congress and if approved is subject to the President’s veto or signature into law. Private bills were brought forward by a member on behalf of an individual constituent or a group to perhaps extend benefits under the World War Veteran’s Act or to grant some other type of relief to an invalid person. These bills were referred to the appropriate committee for consideration such as Military Affairs or the Committee on Invalid Pensions (16). The number of private bills decreased after Congress

established agencies in the executive branch to handle the claims.

Bachmann had no primary election opposition in 1928, 1930, or 1932. He defeated Democrat Paul Wellman in the 1928 general election by nearly 12,000 votes and Brooke County lawyer Robert Ramsay in 1930 by more than 9,000(17).

The Republicans did not do as well as Bachmann in 1930. Following the stock market crash many businesses failed and unemployment sky-rocketed. Americans began to lose faith in the GOP. As such, the Democrats took control of the House with a 220-214 majority. Leadership changed with Longworth out as Speaker and Democratic leader John Nance “Cactus Jack” Garner was in. More changes were in store for House Republicans in the 72nd Congress when Longworth died of pneumonia in April 1931 and Republican Majority Leader John Q. Tilson of Connecticut was replaced by former Rules Committee chairman Bertrand Snell of New York who became the Minority Leader. The Republican whip from 1923-1931 was Albert Vestal of Indiana. Vestal, however was a sick man and would die in April 1932. A replacement was needed.

The term whip comes from the English phrase “whipper-in” or the person who kept the dogs with the rest of the pack during fox hunts. In Congress, the whip keeps track of the votes on legislation and ensures that members vote according to leadership wishes. The first whip was Republican James Tawney of Minnesota who was chosen by Speaker Thomas B. Reed in 1897. In the years to come the floor leader chose the whip, as in the case of Bachmann. Today the whip is chosen by the Democratic House Caucus and the Republican House Conference.

In a modern day Congress it is difficult to comprehend how Carl

Bachmann, a seemingly quiet, forth term congressman, was chosen as his party’s second ranking member of the House of Representatives. Undoubtedly, death, illness, and the shake-up in the Republican leadership played a role. Perhaps Bachmann had developed camaraderie with the new Minority Leader. Regardless, Carl Bachmann of West Virginia was the Minority Whip.

The main focus of the 72nd Congress was to do something about the Great Depression. In January 1932, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was created to establish a lending agency to extent credit to banks, railroads, and large corporations and to issue tax-exempt bonds. In February, Congress also gave authorization to Federal Reserve Banks to sell \$750 million in gold from the nation’s gold reserves to counter foreign withdrawals. These actions did little and the economy continued to tumble. During the same session, Congress passed legislation for a public works program and a hydroelectric facility on the Tennessee River. These were virtually the same programs that would be successful during Roosevelt’s New Deal; however, President Hoover vetoed them (18).

With the ongoing depression and high unemployment, 1932 was not going to be a Republican year. The “FDR landslide” of 1932 swept a 311-116 Democratic majority into the House of Representatives. When the 73rd Congress convened in 1933, there were so many Democrats that they required space on the Republican side of the aisle (19). In the 1932 general election, Bachmann faced his 1930 opponent Robert Ramsay. Ramsay was born in Durham, England on March 24, 1877. He immigrated to the United States and settled in Hancock County with his parents when he was four years old. Following graduation from WVU, Ramsay became a lawyer, the City Attorney of Follansbee, and eventually the Brooke

County Prosecuting Attorney. Ramsay won five of the seven counties in the district and was victorious over Bachmann by about 3,000 votes (20).

Though defeated, Bachmann did not give up politics. In 1934, he attempted to reclaim his seat against Ramsey but was unsuccessful. He served as the campaign manager for Senator William Borah of Idaho in a failed attempt for the Republican presidential nomination in 1936. From 1939 to 1941, he served on the Wheeling City Council and ran for a United States Senate seat in 1940, but lost in the Republican primary (21).

Bachmann's best public service for his state might have been undertaken during the 1940s. He was appointed to the West Virginia Liquor Control Commission in 1941 and served until 1944. In addition, from 1942 to 1944, in the heat of World War II, Bachmann served as the Executive Director of Civil Defense in West Virginia. Fittingly perhaps, Bachmann concluded his career in public service by being elected mayor of Wheeling and serving a single term from 1947 to 1951 (22).

Bachmann remained active with his law practice and banking interest and enjoyed a long and prosperous life. His wife, Susan, died in 1974, but Carl lived nearly long enough to see his ninetieth birthday. He died in Wheeling on the evening of January 22, 1980.

Only a footnote in the history of the House of Representatives, Bachmann will never be remembered as one of the great legislators of the republic. This is justifiable. His name is not attached to any law or great compromise that changed the course of American History. He should be remembered in West Virginia, however.

In our state we tend to idolize our own who were the first, the best, or the only one to accomplish some sort of feat. This is what Carl Bachmann did from 1931 to

1933.

Works Cited

1. "Bachmann, Carl George," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present. United States House of Representatives world wide website.
2. "Former Mayor Dies," The Intelligencer, Wheeling, WV, 24 January 1980, p.1.
3. Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, 1774-Present.
4. Fred B. Watkins, Editor. West Virginia Blue Book. Jarrett Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1943. p. 44.
5. Ibid.
6. John T. Harris, Editor. West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register. Tribune Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1925.
7. Robert V. Remini. The House: The History of the House of Representatives. Smithsonian Books in cooperation with HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2006. p. 301.
8. John T. Harris, Editor. West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register. Tribune Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1926. pp.100-01.
9. Charles Lively, Editor. West Virginia Blue Book. Jarrett Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1940. pp. 100-01.
10. Roster of 69th Congress. Unknown world wide website.
11. M.S. Hodges, Editor. West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register. Mathews Printing and Lithograph, Charleston, WV, 1930. p. 592.

12. "Congressional History" section, Office of the Clerk link, United States House of Representatives world wide website.
13. Hodges, 1930, p.593.
14. John T. Harris, Editor. West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register. Jarrett Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1928. pp.166-67.
15. Carl G. Bachmann Interview, Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory, 1968.
16. U.S. Congress. House 71st Cong., 1st sess., 1929. Congressional Record.
17. M.S. Hodges, Editor. West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register. Jarrett Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1931.
18. Remini, pp. 307-09.
19. Ibid, p. 311.
20. Charles Lively, Editor. West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register. Jarrett Printing Company, Charleston, WV, 1933. p.649.
21. "Bachmann, Carl George," The Political Graveyard world wide website.
22. Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present.

William D. Wintz Receives Honor From Putnam County Commission



William D. Wintz, former WVHS President and recipient of the Virgil A. Lewis Award, was honored by the Putnam County Commission on January 16, 2007. Wintz was recognized, by having a "Bill Wintz Day" (June 27, 2007, Bill's birthday) proclaimed for Putnam County, for his work in preserving the physical and written history of Putnam County and his many published works on West Virginia History. Bill has also recently published "All the Way from Omaha Beach to the Czech Republic," a memoir of his World War Two experience.

**EIGHTH HOOT OWL NIGHT
AT THE ARCHIVES FOR
GENEAOLOGY RESEARCH**

The West Virginia Department of Archives and History, in cooperation with the Mining Your History Foundation, will once again sponsor an all night genealogy research opportunity on March 30. The evening begins at 6:00 p.m. and ends the next day at 8: 00 a.m. For additional information and registration, call (304) 558-0230 or e-mail Fred Armstrong at farmstrong@wvculture.org or Wes Cochran at (304) 442-1774, wescochran@juno.com.