

## **“I Make Politics My Recreation”: Vice President Garret A. Hobart and Nineteenth-Century Republican Business Politics**

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### **Abstract**

Until recent decades, American vice presidents were relatively obscure, little-known men who had minimal impact upon the politics and policies of the administrations they served. On this ignominious list remains Garret A. Hobart (1844-1899) of Paterson, New Jersey, vice president under President William McKinley, a businessman-turned-politician who died before his term expired. A closer look, however, reveals a man dubbed “assistant President” by contemporary journalists, an influential policymaker who had the president’s confidence, and a lawyer-entrepreneur who shrewdly maneuvered the shadowy line between business and politics. At times, his pursuit of personal fortune in the railroad and water supply businesses veered into suspicions of graft and illegality. Far from being a nineteenth-century nonentity, Hobart was a central voice for the Republican Party during the 1890s, and one of the more influential and controversial vice presidents in American history.

When Garret A. Hobart was nominated for vice-president on the 1896 Republican ticket with William McKinley of Ohio, many voters wondered “Who is Hobart?” Outside New Jersey and New York City, he was an unknown political commodity. But the unassuming businessman from northern New Jersey did not remain a mystery. When questioned about the issues of the campaign, he forthrightly proclaimed, “The silver heresy is the only issue upon which we have a chance of winning. We can stir the country with the menace of a change in the money standard that will reduce the purchasing power of the dollar to half a dollar and I intend to go at once to Canton and talk Major McKinley out of his high tariff campaign predilections.” McKinley, wary of the money issue (which the Democratic nominee William Jennings Bryan used to great effect) considered emphasizing a higher protective tariff to appeal to Eastern industrialists after four years of economic depression under Democratic President Grover Cleveland. Hobart would have none of it, and when pressed by Mark Hanna, McKinley’s wealthy campaign manager, asserted, “I think I know the sentiment of Eastern men better than you.” McKinley and Hanna backed down, and Hobart – who supervised the 1896 Republican Eastern campaign – successfully shifted Republican campaign rhetoric to money. “The transformation in the party’s outlook was instantaneous,” remembered one journalist, and “Hobart’s ‘money scare’” became the successful Republican message that fall.<sup>2</sup>

His contemporaries agreed: Hobart was a jovial and likeable (Figure 1). Republican Senator Joseph Foraker recalled his former Senate chief as “a good parliamentarian, prompt, and just in his rulings, and a genial, good-hearted, loyal and faithful man who justly enjoyed the friendship . . . of the entire membership without regard to party.” Journalist Arthur Wallace Dunn recalled

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<sup>2</sup> William Edgar Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton* (J.L. Murphy, Printer, 1914), 53-54; David Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart: Twenty-fourth Vice-President of the United States* (G. P. Putnam’s sons, 1910), 104; Irving G. Williams, *The American Vice Presidency: New Look* (New York: Doubleday, 1954) 69-70; *New York Times*, July 30, 1896, June 7, 1903.

him as “a genial man, a business politician, with a knowledge of the conditions which then governed the relations between business and politics and was very helpful in making adjustments.” Such testimonials dominate the historical record, but they also obscure a more complex and powerful figure – an individual with a myriad of business connections that made him very wealthy, of political interests that made him extremely influential among Republicans, and of investments and lobbying efforts that called into question his integrity as Vice President. He and President McKinley became so close that Hobart gained the newspaper moniker “Assistant President,” a title bestowed on few vice presidents in American history. Historians traditionally look to Mark Hanna for a portrait of American industrial wealth mixing too easily with Republican electoral politics. Vice President Hobart, the quintessential Gilded Age Republican business-politician, serves that purpose equally well if not better.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1. Garrett A. Hobart, Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-125819, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Garret Augustus Hobart came from an old American family, reaching back to seventeenth century New England and New York. His father’s ancestors arrived in Massachusetts in the 1630s, where several Hobarts served as Puritan ministers. Garret Hobart was a distant cousin of both John Henry Hobart (founder of Hobart College, later Hobart and William Smith Colleges in upstate New York) and Federalist U.S. Senator John S. Hobart. Abel Hobart, his great-grandfather, moved to the northern New Hampshire frontier in 1786 and raised a large family. One of Abel’s grandsons, Addison Hobart, was Garret Hobart’s father and a schoolteacher, moving to Marlboro, New Jersey around 1840. On his mother’s side were early New Amsterdam Dutch settlers, and his Presbyterian minister grandfather helped found Queens College, later Rutgers. His mother Sarah Vanderveer was born near the Monmouth Court House Revolutionary War battlefield, married Addison Hobart in 1841, and settled down in Long Branch, New Jersey.

On June 4, 1844, Garret A. Hobart was born, the middle child of three boys.<sup>4</sup> According to his only biographer, “Gus” Hobart was an extremely bright child, and was doted on by his mother. He briefly attended boarding school in Matawan, New Jersey, entered Rutgers College, and graduated near the top of his 1863 class. Hobart never

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Benson Foraker, *Notes of a Busy Life* (Stewart & Kidd Company, 1916); Arthur Wallace Dunn, *From Harrison to Harding: A Personal Narrative, Covering a Third of a Century* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1922), 224; Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (Harper, 1959), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 3-10; *New York Times*, July 12, 1896.

served in the Federal Army during the Civil War, even though he was easily old enough and did not suffer from major sickness until later in life. Instead, upon graduation, he devoted himself to legal studies.<sup>5</sup>

After a short stint as schoolteacher to help pay off school debt, Hobart studied law with the prominent Paterson attorney Socrates Tuttle, a friend of his father's. Tuttle's tutelage was important for several reasons. The Hobarts had always been Democrats but Tuttle was a prominent Passaic County Republican. Friends warned Hobart's father that his son would be converted to another political faith at Paterson, and indeed Hobart became a staunch Republican by the mid-1860s. In addition, Hobart soon fell in love with his teacher's daughter, Jennie Tuttle, whom he married in July 1869. The pair had two children who survived past infancy: Fannie Beckwith, born November 1871, and Garret Augustus Junior (called "Junior" in the family), born August 1884.

Tuttle was a rising Paterson politician, and Hobart wisely followed his mentor and benefited greatly from Tuttle's beneficence. Garret Hobart was licensed to practice law in 1866 and served as grand jury clerk for Passaic County. "The first job there was any money in for me was copying a pile of papers," he remembered. "[W]hen I learned that my compensation would be ten cents a foolscap page I thought I was on the high road to wealth." When Tuttle became Paterson mayor in 1871, he appointed his son-in-law city counsel. A year later, he was elevated to county counsel. Hobart was a sharp lawyer, but he also enjoyed the bounty of family connections.<sup>6</sup>

Hobart always denied he was a politician. "I make politics my recreation," he once said, claiming he was primarily a businessman and attorney. This attitude was either extreme humility or vast understatement, however, since he was involved in New Jersey politics almost constantly between the early 1870s and the 1896 election. After only a few months as Passaic County counsel in 1872, he ran successfully for the New Jersey Assembly and, in 1874, while still only 30 years old, he was unanimously chosen Assembly Speaker. By 1876, he was a state senator and acted as senate president for the 1881-1882 sessions, making Hobart the first New Jersey politician to serve as presiding officer in both legislative branches, all before the age of 40. He attended every Republican National Convention after 1876, was chosen a New Jersey Republican State Committee member in 1880, and in 1884 joined the Republican National Committee as a New Jersey representative. He eventually left the state committee in 1891, as one writer put it, "resigning only in order to indulge in the larger sport" of national politics. He was now widely reported as the Republican leader of northern New Jersey, and was nearly chosen US Senator in 1883. He declined running for governor several times, and was Vice Chairman of the Republican National Committee by 1896. Despite his curious denials, Hobart was no peripheral

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<sup>5</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 14-18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-26, 28-29, 42; Charles Anthony Shriner and Paterson (N.J.). Board of Trade, *Paterson, New Jersey: Its Advantages for Manufacturing and Residence: Its Industries, Prominent Men, Banks, Schools, Churches, etc.* (The Press printing and Publishing Company, 1890), 319-320; *New York Times*, February 13, 1885, July 12, 1896; Jennie Tuttle Hobart, *Memories* ([Paterson, N.J.]: Hobart, 1930), 4; William Nelson and Charles Anthony Shriner, *History of Paterson and Its Environs (the Silk City)* Vol. II (Lewis Historical Pub. Co, 1920), 425-426.

figure or dilettante in Gilded Age Republican politics; he was a central and very powerful one.<sup>7</sup>

As his political power grew, so did his wealth. At his death in 1899, Hobart was a multi-millionaire with investments in an array of industries and syndicates. Most of that wealth came from his law practice. Hobart was not a courtroom attorney; in fact, he had a terrible speaking voice. “[W]hile not lacking in self-confidence, he was singularly diffident in addressing an audience, or pleading a case in court,” his biographer recalled. He had “an aversion to practice in the criminal courts” and rarely showed up in a courtroom. The official 1896 McKinley-Hobart campaign biography admitted that “he has actually appeared in court a smaller number of times than, perhaps, any other lawyer in Passaic County.” Instead, he became a corporation advisor and backroom expert on law and finance – a legal wizard industrialists consulted for help negotiating among the imperatives of business, public authority, and law. By 1896, he was “the director of at least sixty different companies, and his memory is so retentive that he can remember the closest details of each ... Take some information to him, and he listens gladly, almost voraciously, but when you are through he will tell you still later developments. He knows the financial standing of every man or firm of prominence in the country. The standing of every corporation, railroad, or other enterprise he seems to know all about.” Those directorships and investments covered railroads, intercity trolleys, banks, water and electric companies, manufactories, and real estate promotions across New Jersey and New York City. Railroads and water companies captured his greatest attention and earned him a good deal of money.<sup>8</sup>

Hobart specialized in bankrupt railroads. He was appointed receiver for the Jersey Midland Railroad, the Montclair Railroad, and the Jersey City and Albany Railroad. He eventually helped establish the New York, Susquehanna, and Western Railroad, a major coal carrier between eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and New England. He invested heavily and served on various railroad boards, including those he helped reorganize and place on firmer financial footing. He served as president of the Lehigh and Hudson Railroad and as first president of the New York, Susquehanna, & Western for several months in 1880, before resigning to monitor other business interests. He was also Paterson Railway Company president, which operated electric trolleys in that city, and supervised its 1891 reorganization with “considerable capital from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh being infused into the company.” In 1895, one year before his election as US vice-president, Hobart’s legal counsel, successful reorganizations, and multiple railroad investments made him such a respected industry leader that he was appointed one of three permanent Joint Traffic Association arbiters. The Association was a pooling arrangement to coordinate the rates of thirty-two railroads running between New York and Chicago; if the lines’ rate decisions conflicted, the three-man arbitration board decided the case. In addition to Hobart, this board included Jacob Cox, a Civil War general, Grant administration cabinet member, and Ohio governor, and James F. Goddard, an official of the Atchison, Topeka, and

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<sup>7</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 29-30; Nelson and Shriner, *History of Paterson and Its Environs (the Silk City)*, 425-426; Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 35; *New York Times*, January 13, 1874; Louis C. Hatch, *A History of the Vice Presidency of the United States*, ed. by Earl L. Shoup (Greenwood Press, 1970), 332.

<sup>8</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 30-31; Murat Halstead and Chauncey Mitchell Depew, *Life and Distinguished Services of Hon. William McKinley and the Great Issues of 1896* (Edgewood Publishing Company, 1896), 455-456. As Louis C. Hatch put it, Hobart “became an office lawyer, an organizer and advisor to great corporations, whose shrewd counsel enabled big business to work its will yet keep within the letter of the statute.” Hatch, *A History*, 333. He was also on the Board of Directors of the Edison Electric Illuminating Company. See Nelson and Shriner, *History of Paterson and its Environs (The Silk City)*, 421-422.

Santa Fe Railroad. The appointment was a high honor, mentioned favorably in the 1896 campaign biography, and testimony to his industry standing.<sup>9</sup>

His other major legal clients were water companies. As large eastern cities like New York, Jersey City, and Newark grew rapidly after the Civil War, widespread concern over water shortages and adequate delivery systems dominated political discussion, and legislators and savvy businessmen wrestled over public versus private water supplies. Private water companies sprouted across northern New Jersey to purchase water rights, acquire watershed lands, and build dams, reservoirs, and aqueducts, especially along the Ramapo and Passaic Rivers. Hobart was an early participant and eager industry investor. “He rescued the Passaic Water Company from the financial difficulties that embarrassed it and in conjunction with it formed a syndicate of water companies which obtained control of the vast watershed of the Passaic Valley,” reported one local historian. This company eventually played a prominent role supplying Newark’s water. An 1890 book written to boost local investment revealed the water syndicate’s larger plan: “It is no less, so the statements are, than that through the various corporations which are more or less under their control, to supply not only the cities of Northern New Jersey, ‘but for furnishing New York City and Brooklyn, when their demands shall exceed the quantity obtainable from their present sources.’” He also served as director or counsel for the East Jersey Water Company, Acquackanonk Water Company, Long Branch Water Company, East Milford Water Company, Montclair Water Company, and Highland Water Company, all operating across northern New Jersey. The 1896 campaign biography proudly informed readers, “He is the President of the water company that supplies Paterson, and could, perhaps, enumerate the hydrants; and so it is with everything he is connected with, so minutely does his mind grasp everything.” As wealthy as these connections made Hobart, his leadership of these water companies and his minute grasp of their business brought accusations of corruptions when he became vice president.<sup>10</sup>

His political interests often served his business pursuits. In 1875, Assemblyman Hobart of Paterson, while still receiver for the New Jersey Midland Railroad, introduced a bill to exempt railroads under receivership from paying state taxes if their profits were below 7%; the bill failed. He became a vocal critic of the Pennsylvania Railroad’s political influence and was “in favor of free railroads, and in favor of the people as against any monopoly.” Hobart was mainly interested in chartering and reorganizing northern New Jersey lines free from Pennsylvania Railroad interference, as seen in his receiver work and investments. In the early 1880s, he attempted to push controversial water laws through the New Jersey Legislature. Journalist William E. Sackett recalled:

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<sup>9</sup> Halstead and Depew, *Life and Distinguished Services of Hon. William McKinley*, 447, 461; Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 33; Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 51; Nelson and Shrinier, *History of Paterson and Its Environs (the Silk City)*, 419; On Hobart’s connection with the New Jersey Midland Railroad, see *New York Times*, March 18, 1875, March 25, 1879, February 22, 1880, March 25, 1880, and July 10, 1880. On Hobart’s connection with the Montclair Railroad, see *New York Times*, September 23, 1877 and December 18, 1878. On Hobart’s connection with the New York, Susquehanna, & Western Railroad, see *New York Times* September 1, 1881, May 4, 1883, May 2, 1884, December 25, 1885, September 7, 1894, September 6, 1895, and September 4, 1896. Thomas C. Platt also served on the Board of Directors of the Lehigh and Hudson Railroad.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson and Shrinier, *History of Paterson and Its Environs (the Silk City)*, 425-426; Shrinier and Board of Trade, *Paterson, New Jersey*, 79-80; Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 34; Halstead and Depew, *Life and Distinguished Services of Hon. William McKinley*, 447, 452.

Those bills contemplated the storage of the cataract overflow at Little Falls [near Paterson] in quantities that only a great city like New York could consume, and in the later controversies over its diversion to places beyond the State line it was freely said that the supply of New York was the ultimate aim of the Hobart acts ... [W]hen they had all been assembled and correlated, it was seen that they granted water franchises of enormous value for someone to seize. When a few years afterwards the East Jersey Water Company came into being to exercise theirs, it was widely suspected that its expected ultimate source of profit was to be found in supplying New York City with a new – or an additional – water service. The suspicion led to so much unfavorable comment, however, that, if the company really contemplated so unpatriotic an undertaking, it did not deem it prudent to enter upon it openly.<sup>11</sup>

The full extent of Hobart's and the New Jersey water syndicate's goal was only realized later.

Even out of office, Hobart haunted state government as northern New Jersey's lead Republican and lobbyist. He played a central role directing his protégé John Griggs's gubernatorial campaign in 1895; Griggs also studied law under Socrates Tuttle and Hobart helped him acquire New Jersey Assembly and Senate seats. "The laborious part – the strife in conventions, the work at primaries and polls – he did not undertake. To plan a campaign, to set in operation political forces, to forestall opposition, to utilize ambitions and even prejudices was not to him labor, but enjoyment," wrote Hobart's biographer. When Griggs won and New Jersey went Republican, delighted Republicans serenaded Hobart at his Paterson home and his national party profile increased dramatically. In March 1896, four months before Hobart's nomination, the *New York Times* decried his lobbying activities: "The Legislature, instead of serving the people, served the corporations ... Railroad, trolley, and pipe line companies were master." Hobart intervened for the Erie Railroad to defeat a state-mandated Jersey City track elevation plan, and replaced a State Board of Health-controlled Water Commission bill with one controlled by his friend Governor Griggs. "It was developed that Garret A. Hobart wanted to have control of that commission. He is largely interested in the East Jersey Water Company, which sells water, and it is not to the interest of that company to have the muddy Passaic clarified. By placing the appointment in the hands of the Governor and keeping it out of the State Board of Health, Mr. Hobart can be consulted and a commission can be appointed that will be acceptable to Mr. Hobart." By some measures in 1896, Hobart stood as a New Jersey Republican boss.<sup>12</sup>

Talk of national office began in 1895, emanating from party leaders and apparently Hobart himself. Jennie Hobart remembered a spring 1895 lunch conversation between Garret Hobart and Mark Hanna about McKinley's presidential chances in New York City, and thought this signaled something larger for her husband. Herbert Croly, one of Hanna's earliest biographers, suggested Hobart was Hanna's vice presidential choice. Hobart's wealth helped, with many party operators hoping the Paterson millionaire spent considerable sums of his own fortune on the campaign. When John Griggs won the 1895 New Jersey governor's race, telegrams from around the country congratulated Hobart turning the state Republican and papers speculated he harbored vice-

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<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, March 18, 1875, November 8, 1878, March 7, 1881, March 22, 1881; Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 149, 233.

<sup>12</sup> Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 35; Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 41, 49; *New York Times*, September 20, 1895, November 7, 1895, March 2, 1896, March 29, 1896.

presidential and cabinet ambitions. One read: “Hail Gov. Griggs! and hurraah for McKinley and Hobart in 1896!” “He was associated with the corporation chiefs of the country in a railroad pool that dominated nearly all the transportation companies in the land,” explained the journalist Sackett. “He was one of the most popular and one of the most influential members of the Republican National Committee. His wresting of New Jersey from Democratic control in the Griggs campaign had made him the most conspicuous figure among Republicans of the East – and it was from the East that the running mate of the Western State candidate must be taken.” In April 1896, the New Jersey Republican Party endorsed him for vice-president, but Hobart kept quiet, demurring in the old-fashioned way that he was not seeking office but would accept if offered.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the accolades, his private attitude toward the nomination was mixed. Some of his hesitancy was personal. His daughter Fannie died while the family was traveling together through Italy in June 1895, but her body was only interred at Paterson in March 1896, and the Hobarts were devastated. He expressed real reluctance to leave behind his business interests and Paterson lifestyle for Washington, DC. William E. Sackett, who knew him well, recalled that in national politics Hobart was “distrustful of himself”:

He was a singularly modest man, and one of the plainest and least pretentious as well. He seemed never to know what power there was in him until a call to a new field of endeavor gave occasion for its exercise. His rise from station to station had come to him not at all as the result of his own intrusion, but wholly because those around him saw the worth there was in him ... It was all the unconscious tribute of his compeers to the latent power of the man. So in politics the forces around him pushed him to the front. He never helped – nor ever resisted – just went along with the tide, as it were, and found himself at the head of the swim and leading when he supposed he had only been keeping along with the current.

While attending the 1896 Republican Convention in St. Louis, with the press reporting his candidacy and squeezing him for information, Hobart confided to his wife, “I am heart-sick over my own prospects. It looks to me I will be nominated for Vice-President whether I want it or not, and as I get nearer to the point where I may, I am dismayed at the thought.” He sickened with worry: “when I realize all that it means in work, worry, and loss of home and bliss, I am overcome, so overcome I am simply miserable ... our life for four months will not be worth living.”<sup>14</sup> His public remarks did not reveal this anxiety, however. Instead, he showed political toughness. When Republican Pennsylvania boss Matthew Quay asked release from convention obligations to vote for Hobart, he flatly told the Senator he would win nomination without him. “Nobody else stood a chance, for the financial interests of New York were outspoken in their declaration of preference,” he later boasted.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hobart, *Memories*, 5; Herbert David Croly, *Marcus Alonzo Hanna: His Life and Work* (The Macmillan Company, 1912), 191-192; *New York Times*, November 7, 1895, November 11, 1895, April 17, 1896; Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 51. Just after his 1899 death, the *New York World* noted, “The size of the Hanna campaign fund proved that, from this point of view, the [Hobart] nomination was not a mistake.” *New York World*, November 24, 1899.

<sup>14</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 74-89, 189-196; Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 56-58.

<sup>15</sup> Nelson and Shriner, *History of Paterson and Its Environs (the Silk City)*, 426. Hobart was having dinner when notified of his first ballot vice presidential nomination. On the way home, he told a reporter, “It seems as though I never spent a week in my life in which I got less sleep.” Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 86.

A tremendous celebration organized at the Paterson armory welcomed Hobart home (the city ran out of fireworks and ordered more from New York City), and 15,000 people attended. Hobart sheepishly told onlookers he was “embarrassed” but honored by their tribute.<sup>16</sup> His embarrassment disappeared by early July as he strongly endorsed the gold standard and condemned the Bryanite silver movement in his notification address. “An honest dollar, worth 100 cents everywhere, cannot be coined out of 53 cents’ worth of silver plus a legislative fiat. Such a debasement of our currency would inevitably produce incalculable loss, appalling disaster, and National dishonor.”<sup>17</sup> Though a protectionist, Hobart believed the money issue, not tariffs, led to a November Republican victory, and, in denouncing silver, his rhetoric far outstripped William McKinley (Figure 2).

Hobart’s insistence made money the 1896 Republican issue. At one point he called any “Greenbacker or Populist” who denounced gold “a commercial idiot,” which delighted Eastern financiers.<sup>18</sup> After a July vacation in Plattsburg, New York (also a soon-to-be favorite spot of the McKinleys), Hobart plunged into the campaign with enthusiasm and grit. Hobart and Quay ran the East Coast McKinley campaign and spent the fall at the New York City campaign offices in strategy meetings, greeting delegations, and attending local rallies. He rarely left New York or Paterson, with infrequent visits to Ohio and New Jersey. In October, he reluctantly began a whirlwind New Jersey speaking tour to drum up Republican votes, visiting Camden, Jersey City, Long Branch, Newark, and Paterson. When finished, he remarked to his wife, “Thank Heaven that is all done with ... I did pretty well, after all, didn't I?”<sup>19</sup> That fall, the Bryan campaign accused the railroads of charging Democrat delegations higher passenger rates than Republicans, like those visiting McKinley in Canton, Ohio. The charge is intriguing, considering Hobart’s career as prominent railroad attorney, Joint Traffic Association rate arbiter, and confidante of railroad magnates, but like many accusations of campaign fraud, virtually impossible to prove. He worked at his office on Election Day to distract himself, but returned home that afternoon. Three telegraph wires attached to his Paterson home and at 8:30pm news came that McKinley won a tremendous victory over William Jennings Bryan. Days later, Mr. Garret A. Hobart, Class of 1863, visited Rutgers College as guest of honor at their 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Their most famous alum was now vice-president elect of the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Hobart spent the winter before the inauguration concluding business affairs, reading about the vice-presidency, and readying for the move south. He resigned from leadership in companies that might have federal government business, like vice-presidency of the East Jersey Water Company, but refused to step down from every corporate board or totally divest himself: “It would be highly ridiculous for me to resign from the different companies in which I am officer and a stockholder whose interests are not in the least affected, or likely to be, by my position as

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<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, June 23, 1896.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, July 8, 1896.

<sup>18</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 100.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 46; *New York Times*, October 2, 1896, October 11, 1896, October 14, 1896, October 25, 1896, October 27, 1896, October 29, 1896, October 30, 1896, and October 31, 1896.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) 78-79; Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 109; *New York Times*, November 11, 1896.

Vice President.” If that changed, more resignations would follow. But for now, “I have no intention of resigning all the offices that I hold.”<sup>21</sup>

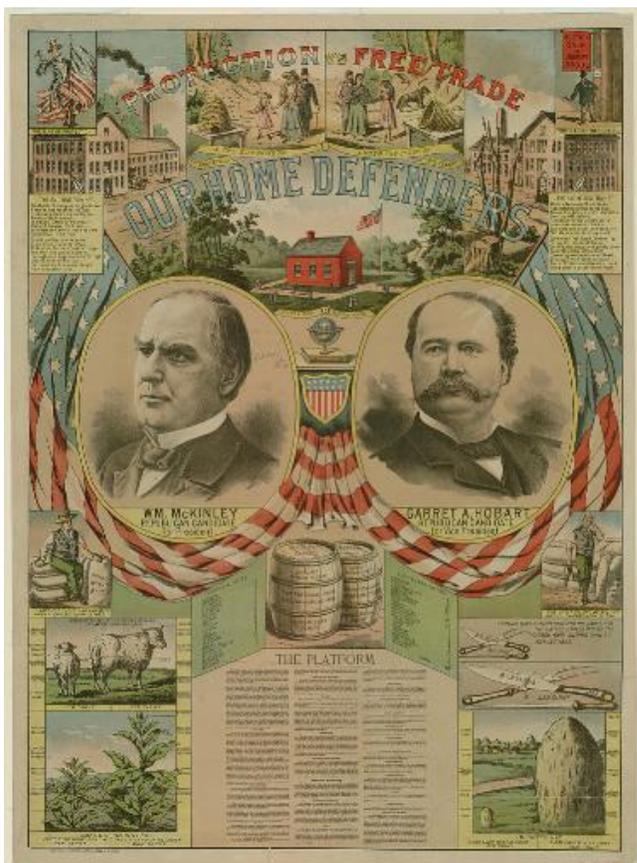


Figure 2. 1896 Campaign poster : “ Our Home Defenders.” Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-pga-03756, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

One office he refused to relinquish was Joint Traffic Association rate arbiter, a striking omission considering the Interstate Commerce Commission was only ten years old, the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was seven years old, and the Senate frequently debated railroad legislation. The Supreme Court was one month away from declaring the 1889 Trans-Missouri Freight Association, forerunner of the Joint Traffic Association, unconstitutional. None of this concerned Hobart and, in February 1897, he and the other arbiters heard an Erie Railroad appeal on faster New York-Chicago trains charging higher passenger rates (the arbiters also heard a September 1896 appeal while Hobart was a candidate and another in April 1897 when he was vice president). On March 2, 1897, the Hobarts departed Paterson amidst hometown cheers, and at Communipaw, New Jersey, they boarded a special four-car train for the Capitol. Honoring their business associate, three railroad presidents contributed their private cars for the Hobart family’s enjoyment: the “Atlas,

“Philadelphia,” and “Baltimore,” owned by the heads of the Central of New Jersey, Philadelphia and Reading, and Baltimore and Ohio Railroads respectively. The train arrived in Washington in four hours eight minutes, a new “record run” for that route.<sup>22</sup>

Looking “self-possessed and spruce,” Garret Augustus Hobart took the oath on March 4, 1897, becoming the United States’ twenty-fourth vice-president.<sup>23</sup> The Senate at that time faced public scorn for not passing needed legislation after the Panic of 1893. Hobart’s predecessor, Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, believed Senate protocol prevented interference with senators’ speeches or attempts to speed the agenda. Hobart’s addressed this problem in his inaugural, telling senators, dignitaries, and spectators, that Senate business had to change: “expedition is the hope of the country ... To obstruct the regular course of wise and prudent legislative action, after the fullest

<sup>21</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 109-112; *New York Times*, February 18, 1896.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, September 16, 1896, January 6, 1897, February 17, 1897, February 18, 1897, March 2, 1897, March 3, 1897, April 24, 1897.

<sup>23</sup> Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 117.

and freest discussion, is neither consistent with true Senatorial courtesy, conducive to the welfare of the people, nor in compliance with their just expectations.”<sup>24</sup> He would be a task-master rather than an umpire, a role many senators judged with suspicion. True to his background, his Senate gavel was crafted from an apple tree near his Long Branch birthplace and presented by two Paterson banks. He appointed as his secretary Frederick Evans Jr., a Welsh Baptist preacher’s son, Princeton graduate, and Republican journalist. Evans retained a high Capitol profile, became “a shining light in Washington society,” and was later connected with August Belmont’s efforts to build the New York subway.<sup>25</sup> While hungry Republican job-seekers swamped the Capitol, Hobart struggled to be recognized. Two weeks after taking office, he visited the Treasury Department to speak with Secretary Lyman Gage, but a department aide told Hobart that Gage was too busy. In good humor, the Vice President left his calling card – “Please give him by card when he is disengaged” – and the oblivious aide eventually apologized.<sup>26</sup>

The Hobarts led McKinley’s Capitol society. After briefly occupying the Arlington Hotel, they leased the Lafayette Square mansion of former Pennsylvania Senator James Cameron, once the Civil War headquarters of New Jersey native General George B. McClellan. Their elegant home, dubbed the “Cream White House,” hosted Senate dinners and parties for foreign dignitaries.<sup>27</sup> Belgium’s Prince Albert visited in March 1898, the Vice President played Washington tour guide for the royal visitor, and banqueted with the Prince at Hobart’s house. By 1898, the *New York Times* suggested that “Mr. Hobart is already a tower of strength to the Administration ... [the Hobarts] are themselves in great demand at all the most exclusive entertainments in Washington, and are quite unspoiled by the unusual attentions they are receiving.”<sup>28</sup> The Hobarts attended parties every night except Sundays, “a regular social schedule for at least a week in advance is always on the vice president’s desk,” and some speculated they spent “tens of thousands” of dollars in entertaining by 1899.<sup>29</sup>

Mark Hanna frequented the Hobart home, often enjoying breakfast with the Vice President – “then he would lie on the couch in Mr. Hobart’s study, discussing politics until it was time to go to the Senate,” Jennie Hobart remembered.<sup>30</sup> President McKinley visited regularly, since the White House was a quick walk, playing cards and “and [spending] long evenings, over boxes of fragrant perfectos, in consultation with the Vice-President on perplexing problems of state.” The men grew close and, testifying to Hobart’s business acumen (and McKinley’s lack thereof – he went bankrupt in 1894), McKinley presented his salary to the Vice President and Ohio Republican banker Myron Herrick for them to invest. A normal day for Hobart began with a 9

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<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, March 5, 1897, *New York World*, March 5, 1897.

<sup>25</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 135; *New York Times*, March 16, 1897, February 13, 1898, and February 21, 1900.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, March 18, 1897; Another Hobart secretary, J. Philip McHenry, met a grimmer fate – he committed suicide in Arizona in 1905 while in the employ of a gold mining company; see the *New York Times*, July 31, 1905. After the inauguration, Hobart’s son applied with McKinley to become a White House electrician, much to the President’s amusement. Apparently, he earned money in Paterson installing burglar alarms and doorbells; see the *Paterson Evening News*, March 9, 1897.

<sup>27</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 116-119.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, February 7, 1898 and March 13, 1898.

<sup>29</sup> *Washington Star* quoted in *Paterson Evening News*, May 13, 1899. “The social life of the ‘Cream White House’ thus became an important element in the political influence of the administration,” wrote Magie. Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Hobart, *Memories*, 24.

a.m. breakfast, followed by office work, where Secretary McHenry sifted through correspondence and made two piles on the Vice President's desk: personal letters and business affairs. "Mr. Hobart got out of most of his directories when made vice president, so as to be free to give virtually undivided attention to his official work, but there are still many matters upon which his business associates consult him by mail," the *Washington Star* reported. By 1130am, he was at the Capitol consulting with senators.<sup>31</sup>

Since First Lady Ida McKinley suffered from epileptic seizures and often avoided White House dinners, Jennie Hobart substituted. "Many a time he sent for me at the eleventh hour to come to some White House dinner," the Second Lady recalled. "My presence, [McKinley] said, gave him confidence. A request from the President is in reality a command. It meant I must cancel any previous engagement and come, however inconvenient."<sup>32</sup> Jennie and Ida remained friends and the Hobarts gave her a surprise birthday party in 1897. There was also a major Washington social dispute that first year. The British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Julian Pauncefote, insisted his office was socially superior to the Vice President and Hobart should visit his home first to pay respect. Cleveland's Vice President Adlai Stevenson acquiesced to this secondary status during his term. Hobart refused, however, and official Washington supported his decision. For months the dispute lingered, until finally the British Government forced Pauncefote to back down and pay a visit to the Vice President. Telegrams congratulated the Hobarts on their victory.<sup>33</sup>

The vice presidency, however, was not all social graces. Hobart's first year in office established him as a major congressional and Administration figure. He worked exceptionally hard at being an effective Senate president, studying Senate rules, expediting business, and rarely leaving his chair – one observer called him a "chronic audience."<sup>34</sup> His experience as New Jersey Assembly Speaker and Senate President prepared him for his parliamentary role. He made fast friends in both parties and senators genuinely admired him: "He meant to preside over the sessions of the Senate, take an interest in the discussions, and enter into personal relations with each Senator ... No member of the Senate was more faithful in attendance on its sessions, or in attention to the speeches made by the members than was the Vice-President ... while never acting as a partisan, he became a political factor."<sup>35</sup> One Senate spectator compared Hobart to John C. Calhoun in his grasp of Senate rules.<sup>36</sup> The *Washington Post* remarked, "the Senate has been more businesslike

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<sup>31</sup>Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 58; Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 132; *Washington Star* quoted in *Paterson Evening News*, May 13, 1899.

<sup>32</sup>Hobart, *Memories*, 31.

<sup>33</sup>*New York Times*, June 9, 1897; Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 183-188; Hatch, *A History*, 48-49; In the summer and fall of 1897, away from official Washington, they vacationed in Newport and with the McKinleys at Plattsburg, attended horse shows and auctions, gave War Secretary Russell Alger a Paterson gala, attended the opening of the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, and visited Mark Hanna in Cleveland; see *New York Times*, August 2, 1897, August 5, 1897, August 6, 1897, August 8, 1897, August 10, 1897, August 11, 1897, August 14, 1897, August 16, 1897, August 19, 1897, October 1, 1897, October 3, 1897, October 9, 1897, October 21, 1897, October 24, 1897, November 2, 1897, November 4, 1897, January 16, 1898. The Hobarts were very friendly with the Grant family and attended the dedication of the Grant Tomb in New York City in April, 1897 with President McKinley, as well as the Washington Monument in Philadelphia in May; see the *New York Times*, April 28, 1897, May 15, 1897, May 16, 1897.

<sup>34</sup>Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 150.

<sup>35</sup>Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 150.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.* 156.

than at any time during many years past.”<sup>37</sup> Hobart only used his tie-breaking vote once, in February 1899, voting against an anti-colonial amendment promising Filipino self-government at the earliest opportunity. He was uneasy among senators at first, again “distrustful of himself” with national leaders, but his reticence gave way to confidence. “I find that I am as good and as capable as any of them,” he declared with assurance. “If they know a whole lot of things I don’t know, I also know a whole lot of things they don’t know. And there is a common humanity running through them all that makes us all as one, after all.”<sup>38</sup> Confidence also came from McKinley’s growing trust in his Vice President’s good sense. “[T]he Major found himself depending very largely upon Mr. Hobart’s judgment, skill, and adroitness in dealing with men and problems of state,” relates Sackett.<sup>39</sup> A clear sign that Hobart influenced McKinley came in 1898, when the President selected John Griggs, Hobart’s New Jersey protégé, Attorney-General. The Vice President now had an ally in the Cabinet.<sup>40</sup>

Hobart also faced political challenges that first year. He predicted Congress would soon pass currency reform, but the Gold Standard Act would only be approved after Hobart died. An important task of the Vice President was confiding with New Jersey and New York City Republican leaders. He helped the New Jersey Republican Party construct constitutional amendments, including one cracking down on gambling. He lunched with New York bigwigs Senator Thomas C. Platt and Congressman Lemuel E. Quigg to strategize the 1897 New York City mayoral race and show administration support for the Republican machine, as opposed to the reform candidate Seth Low. On top of this, Hobart’s Joint Traffic Association position caused him embarrassment in June 1897, when newspapers accused him of violating Federal anti-trust laws as national arbiter. Doubly incriminating was that some violations came while he was Vice President. Interstate Commerce Commission Chairman William C. Morrison singled out the Vice President for blame: “Mr. Hobart must have known the way the pool would be viewed by the public, but he contented himself with taking the stand of Eastern capitalists that a pool is a legitimate railroad aid.”<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly, no historian has accused Hobart of conflict of interest or mentioned that railroads paid for his services while in office. The only commentator to mention his affiliation was the South Dakota populist Richard Pettigrew in his 1920 broadside, *Imperial Washington*:

When the Joint Traffic Association was organized in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Law, and suit was brought by the Government to dissolve it on that account, it was found that the Association was a combination of thirty-two of the leading roads in the United

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>38</sup> *New York Times*, February 15, 1899; Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 57-58.

<sup>39</sup> Sackett, *Modern Battles of Trenton*, 58.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, December 4, 1897; His hometown paper noted just after he took office: “Mr. Hobart is a singularly modest man, but there is no timidity in his modesty. He is a practiced presiding officer, too, having sat over Senate and House, and presided over a number of conventions, and he has long enjoyed reputation in New Jersey of being an extremely keen and an unusually well posted parliamentarian. He can give a good many of the Senators over whom he is to preside cards and spades in a parliamentary game, and still win against them. He’ll probably give them a taste of his quality before he steps down and out.”; see *Paterson Evening News*, March 8, 1897. One correspondent suggested that, at first, Hobart was bored being Senate President; see *New York Times*, April 6, 1897. He had hoped to speed up Senate business, but quickly realized that was impossible; see Hatch, *A History*, 81-82.

<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, June 10, 1897, June 12, 1897, September 20, 1897, September 22, 1897, and November 18, 1897

States to pool the business, agree upon the division of traffic, and have uniform rates, so far as the public was concerned; that Hobart, Vice-President of the United States, was one of the arbitrators and drew a salary as such arbitrator for this Joint Traffic Association, and when the suit was brought before the United States Court in New York, Judge Lacombe announced from the bench that he was disqualified from sitting on the case because he owned the stocks and bonds of the defendant railroads, and he said: 'I am of the opinion that there is no judge in this Circuit but that is suffering a like disqualification.'<sup>42</sup>

When the Supreme Court ruled against railroad pooling arrangements in the 1897 Trans-Missouri Case, a decision against the Joint Traffic Association was inevitable; it was declared unconstitutional in October 1898. The Court said that "contracts or combinations among railway companies to fix and maintain rates upon competitive traffic operated as a restraint of interstate commerce, because the natural and direct effect of such contracts and combinations was to maintain rates at a higher level than otherwise would prevail . . . their natural and direct effect was to increase tolls or charges payable by the public upon all interstate commerce over the railways." Both cases were the first application of the Sherman Act to railroads "and that its provisions made illegal an agreement among competing railroads to maintain rates."<sup>43</sup> The Supreme Court judged Vice President Hobart's proudest professional achievement and a signal of his industry standing to be unconstitutional. He submitted his resignation as arbiter in November 1897.<sup>44</sup>

Vice-President Hobart also played a role in the 1898 Spanish-American War. Jennie Hobart inadvertently invited a prominent anti-Spanish Cuban Junta sympathizer to the Prince Albert dinner, and he presented her a "small jeweled flag, the badge of Cuba's hoped for freedom, accompanied by a flowery letter" as a token.<sup>45</sup> When he found out, the Vice President quickly told the State Department of the error and returned the gift. McKinley had been resistant to a declaration of war for months, as pressure built in Congress to avenge Spain's Cuban atrocities and what many considered to be Spanish complicity in the February 1898 sinking of the *Maine*. With the Senate revolting against McKinley's reticence, Hobart took McKinley for a carriage ride and told him he could not control the upper house – if the White House did not support a war declaration, the Senate would pass one without him. In April 1898, President McKinley signed the Spanish war declaration using the Vice President's pen to sign "WILLIAM" on the document. New Jersey shore hoteliers, wrote Hobart, worried that the Spanish Navy might attack beach resorts. He dryly replied, "it seems to me that Spain would have more serious business to

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Franklin Pettigrew, *Imperial Washington* (C.H. Kerr & Company, 1922), 91-92.

<sup>43</sup> Victor Morawetz, "The Sherman Anti-Trust Act." *American Economic Association Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 11, No. 1, Papers and Discussions of the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting: Being the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the Association. New York City, December 27-31, 1909 (April 1910), pp. 322-323; Eliot Jones, *Principles Of Railway Transportation* (MacMillan Company, 1924), 96-97, 101-102, 345. Also see Sumner H. Slichter, "The Legality of the Combination of Competitors under the Sherman Act," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 25, No. 8 (October 1917), pp. 761-804, and Albro Martin, "The Troubled Subject of Railroad Regulation in the Gilded Age – A Reappraisal," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (September 1974), pp. 339-371.

<sup>44</sup> *New York Times*, November 18, 1897.

<sup>45</sup> Hobart, *Memories*, 56-64.

attend to than seeking the destruction of Summer resorts along our coast.”<sup>46</sup> But police guarded Hobart’s Paterson home in case of trouble, and he accompanied the President reviewing troops at Falls Church, Virginia that May.<sup>47</sup>

By mid-autumn of 1898, Garret Hobart’s health had deteriorated. Doctors diagnosed a serious heart ailment exacerbated by his heavy Senate schedule, busy Washington social calendar, and a bad case of the flu. He experienced weakness, breathing difficulties, and periodic fainting spells, but his health problems were kept secret, even from his family. He continued Senate duty but, after delivering the session’s closing address, he was so ill he nearly collapsed. He regained enough strength to accompany McKinley on a March visit to Mark Hanna’s Thomasville, Georgia home, but contracted the flu again, tired quickly, and returned to Washington for two months of bed rest. In April 1899, newspapers gossiped about his condition, as doctors constantly attended him, friends blamed the humid Capitol climate, and politicians wondered if he could stand a rigorous 1900 re-election campaign. Hobart denied any election decisions had been made and President McKinley, himself unwell, made sure to visit his ailing “Assistant President.”<sup>48</sup> Marcus Hanna reassured the press, “nothing but death or an earthquake can stop the re-nomination of Vice President Hobart.”<sup>49</sup> No doubt irritating his heart condition was news in May that brother-in-law Hobart A. Tuttle, New Jersey Governor Foster M. Voorhees’ private secretary, was implicated in a scheme to defraud a Maine railroad car company. A New Jersey circuit court decided against Tuttle in early August. Hobart finally left Washington in early June to convalesce at Normanhurst, a Long Branch summer cottage leased from the widow of millionaire publisher Norman Munro, a short distance from his birthplace.<sup>50</sup>

Long Branch, where Hobart spent much of life, was a desirable resort in the late nineteenth century, populated by the wealthiest and most prominent Americans – “a lovely seaside village of small houses – true cottages – with wonderful filigreed porches from which one could look out from high bluffs over the Atlantic,” described President Grant’s biographer William McFeely.<sup>51</sup> Grant relaxed at Long Branch the last two decades of his life and President Garfield died there in 1881. Hobart rested on doctor’s orders, keeping activity to a minimum. He attended

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<sup>46</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 173-174; Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 193; *New York Times*, April 16, 1898.

<sup>47</sup> Hobart, *Memories*, 56-64; *New York Times*, May 29, 1898; Escaping the 1898 Washington summer, the Hobarts vacationed with millionaire New York hotelier George Boldt at Thousand Islands and at Plattsburg, visiting their usual Lake Champlain haunts. In September, they entertained the McKinleys at their Paterson home, including a tour of the country club and city water works. Thanksgiving 1898 was a private McKinley-Hobart White House affair. See *New York Times*, July 15, 1898, July 22, 1898, July 23, 1898, July 28, 1898, August 1, 1898, September 2, 1898, September 3, 1898, September 4, 1898, September 5, 1898, September 6, 1898.

<sup>48</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 202-204; For newspaper bulletins of Hobart’s chronic illness, see *New York Times*, January 7, 1899, March 11, 1899, March 13, 1899, March 14, 1899, March 19, 1899, March 20, 1899, March 21, 1899, March 23, 1899, March 24, 1899, March 25, 1899, March 28, 1899, April 7, 1899, April 10, 1899, April 15, 1899, April 21, 1899, April 23, 1899, April 27, 1899, May 3, 1899, May 5, 1899, May 6, 1899, May 13, 1899, June 3, 1899, June 4, 1899, June 11, 1899; *Paterson Evening News*, April 8, 1899, April 10, 1899, April 12, 1899, April 22, 1899, May 8, 1899. Despite his poor health, he continued business pursuits in the spring and summer of 1899, joining syndicates of investors who consolidated trolley lines and gas-electric companies in New Jersey. See *New York Times*, April 2, 1899, June 17, 1899, and *Paterson Evening News*, July 28, 1899. The Normanhurst rental cost Hobart \$4000, over \$98,000 in 2007 dollars.

<sup>49</sup> *Paterson Evening News*, April 26, 1898.

<sup>50</sup> *New York Times*, May 25, 1899, May 28, 1899, and August 2, 1899.

<sup>51</sup> William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981) 261.

a New York dinner for the Prussian Insurance Commission, helped organize a country club and a “Vice President’s Cup” golf tournament, as well as a horse show, and entertained friends like Mark Hanna, but most often kept still. “All work was forbidden, and for the first time since he assumed the responsibilities of life he was truly idle. Hours and days were spent on the piazzas, and under the trees, in absolute rest,” feeding his fish (a gold one named McKinley and a silver one named Bryan) and taking carriage rides.<sup>52</sup> Often lacking strength, he was pushed around in a wheelchair, and sightseers peeked into the grounds to glimpse the resident celebrity. By early July, he rallied and took carriage rides around town with his wife and spoke with old friends.<sup>53</sup>

Administration troubles dragged Hobart back into the limelight in July 1899, when President McKinley asked him to request War Secretary Russell Alger’s resignation. Alger came under withering criticism for his apparent mismanagement of the War Department and lack of preparedness in the war with Spain. By 1899, many called for his resignation but few were willing to do it, including McKinley and Secretary of State John Hay. Knowing Alger and Hobart were close friends, McKinley sent Attorney-General Griggs requesting Hobart “wield the axe.”<sup>54</sup> “The President did not show his usual hypersensitive regard for other people’s feelings in handing over to a sick man a disagreeable task which it was his own duty to perform,” castigates McKinley biographer Margaret Leech.<sup>55</sup> When Alger visited his ailing friend at Normanhurst, Hobart told the Secretary that McKinley wanted him out. Alger was shocked, but the next day forgave the Vice President for his unwilling role, “ran and threw his arms around [Hobart] and kissed him.”<sup>56</sup> Hobart’s hometown *Paterson Evening News* doubted Alger’s obliviousness to his firing (“a cock-and-bull story,” the paper editorialized) and suggested that in exchange for his resignation, the Vice President offered some kind of financial “consideration” or buyout. “That this consideration was the cause of the withdrawal, no one doubts. The only question that survives the bargain is the terms – they will no doubt be disclosed as events progress.”<sup>57</sup> Hobart was confined to bed just days after the Alger controversy. Attending a horse show in late July, he looked weak and left after only a few hours. When President McKinley departed for his annual Plattsburg vacation, the Hobarts joined them. Exhausted by the hoopla, his fainting spells returned and he was bed-ridden for days. Finally, on August 25<sup>th</sup>, the presidential party returned to Long Branch, where Hobart resumed his recuperation, and onlookers noted his pale complexion and “febleness” when they arrived.<sup>58</sup> McKinley and Hobart received a rousing welcome, and it nearly wore out the Vice President. He returned to Paterson for good in September.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *New York Times*, June 13, 1899, June 25, 1899, July 7, 1899, July 16, 1899, July 28, 1899. Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 206-208.

<sup>53</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 206-208; *New York Times*, June 18, 1899 and July 9, 1899.

<sup>54</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 208-211; Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 376.

<sup>55</sup> Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 376.

<sup>56</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 211; *New York World*, July 21, 1899.

<sup>57</sup> *Paterson Evening News*, July 21, 1899; The *News* declared that McKinley gave Hobart the Alger job “through the cowardice of the presidential coterie” and blamed the affair for worsening the Vice President’s health. See *Paterson Evening News*, July 22, 1899.

<sup>58</sup> *New York Times*, July 21, 1899, July 29, 1899, August 5, 1899, August 7, 1899, August 8, 1899, August 10, 1899, August 12, 1899, August 15, 1899, August 19, 1899, August 21, 1899, August 24, 1899, August 25, 1899, August 26, 1899.

<sup>59</sup> *New York Times*, September 17, 1899 and September 20, 1899.

But ominous events occurred in August and September 1899, particularly for a weak-hearted convalescent like Hobart. At Plattsburg, word arrived that his only surviving brother C. T. Hobart, Chief Engineer on the Columbus, Lima, and Milwaukee Railroad, had been hit and severely injured by a train. He eventually recovered. Then, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, came the sensational revelation Hobart was connected with a plot to capture New York City's water franchise. Possibly illegal, definitely surreptitious and unethical, the "Ramapo Scheme" dominated New York news for months and impacted state and city politics for years. It may also have affected Hobart's health; three days after the allegations, the *New York Times* reported that Hobart was ill in bed. Margaret Leech reported he was "exhausted by the excitement," but he was likely worried by links to a brewing scandal.<sup>60</sup> In mid-August 1899, the New York City Board of Improvements debated a \$200 million dollar water contract with the Ramapo Water Company of New Jersey and New York. "[P]repared in secret," the contract was foisted on the Board at the last minute, and stipulated the company deliver 200 million gallons of water a day, at \$70 per million gallons, for 40 years – meaning the city would be obligated to pay \$5 million a year to a private water concern into the 1940s.<sup>61</sup> \$70 per million gallons was vastly inflated, nearly double the rate currently paid by the City. Newark and New Jersey City paid \$32 and \$36 respectively for their water in 1899. Democratic City Comptroller Bird S. Coler and other Board members recognized the scheme, raised objections, and blocked passage. Investigations over the next several weeks by the Mazet Committee, the *New York Times*, and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* uncovered intrigues among leaders in both political parties, chief among them Vice President Garret A. Hobart.<sup>62</sup>

The Ramapo Scheme – "a Steffansesque collaboration between business and political machine," one historian described it – dated from the 1880s when New Jersey State Senator Hobart attempted to pass bills allowing water franchises enormous power to acquire watersheds, a move rumored to facilitate a water supply for a rapidly growing New York City.<sup>63</sup> The Ramapo Company was chartered around the same time, with investors like ex-President Ulysses S. Grant and Frederick Conkling (brother of New York Senator Roscoe Conkling), to supply Ramapo River water in New Jersey for New York City's fire protection. The Company failed twice, once in acquiring the fire contract and a second time because of the 1893 Panic, but recovered in 1895 when former Navy Secretary and New York Republican leader General Benjamin F. Tracy became company president. With the encouragement of Tracy, Senator Thomas Platt, Brooklyn political boss Silas B. Dutcher (who became Ramapo president in 1897), and New York State Assembly Speaker S. Fred Nixon, a bill was rushed through the New York Legislature that gave the Ramapo Water Company power to acquire watersheds similar to a railroad with eminent domain. The bill also empowered the company to build reservoirs, water works, and aqueducts,

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<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, August 12, 1899, August 13, 1899, August 18, 1899, and August 21, 1899; Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 461.

<sup>61</sup> Lazarus White, *The Catskill Water Supply of New York City: History, Location, Sub-surface Investigations and Construction* (New York: Wiley, 1913), 16; *New York Times*, August 17, 1899.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Grondahl, *I Rose Like a Rocket: The Political Education of Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004) 348-349; John Langdon Heaton, *The Story of a Page: Thirty Years of Public Service and Public Discussion in the Editorial Columns of the New York World*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1913) 167-168; *New York Times*, August 20, 1899. Bird Coler campaigned against the "Ramapo Scheme" in his 1900 run for New York governor.

<sup>63</sup> Keith D. Revell, *Building Gotham: Civic Culture and Public Policy in New York City, 1898-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 118

and to lay pipelines under New York State's rivers and streams. The empowering bill – “secured through the influence of the Republican machine” – attracted little attention because the Company's object was unseen, but that changed in August 1899, when plans became alarmingly apparent.<sup>64</sup>

Even with ridiculously high water prices, perhaps the Ramapo Water Company's proposed contract with the City could have been defended if the company swiftly supplied an expanding metropolis fearful of water shortages – the city's boroughs consolidated into one municipal government with 3.25 million people in 1898. But that too came under intense scrutiny, as it was revealed the company fronted for the East Jersey Water Company. Henry L. Butler, Paterson native, former New Jersey Water Commission member, and father of future Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler, informed the press of pipeline and reservoir construction just above Paterson to store 300 million gallons of water, “an amount far above the needs of the county which the company now supplies.”<sup>65</sup> Ramapo was a dummy company, he said, without resources or water to complete the contract – it needed a backer. He explained indecorously: “it is a fake concern without money and without the ability to carry out such a contract as it seeks to make. Clearly, then, there must be something else behind the whole scheme, and it is my opinion that the East Jersey Company is the nigger in the woodpile.”<sup>66</sup> The New Jersey Water Commission mapped the Ramapo River as a potential public water supply in the 1880s with Commission employees posing as railroad workers, presumably cloaking their work from nosy private water companies, but they had mysteriously disappeared. Until the Ramapo Company acted on its New York City contract, the East Jersey Water Company obliged – it was the “solution to the mystery.”<sup>67</sup>

But the Ramapo Company's inability to fulfill its contract would not last. Pending New York City's approval of the contract, the Ramapo Company quietly purchased nearly 200,000 acres of Catskills land and watersheds and, as incentive to residents and businesses, promised to transform their region into a tourist-friendly “second Switzerland.”<sup>68</sup> Not only would Catskills' water supply the City, it would create electricity for trains, homes, and hotels, controlled by a Ramapo-owned electric company. In addition, the *Times* reported a Platt ally purchased the defunct Delaware and Hudson Canal to help the Ramapo Water Company direct water supplies to New York. Ramapo would not remain a dummy long.<sup>69</sup>

Once contract details were publicized, attention turned toward the politics behind Ramapo and its 1895 empowering bill. Vice President Hobart was prominently implicated. For two decades, he encouraged corporations to capture the New York City water market. He invested widely in New Jersey water companies and sat on their Board of Directors. Throughout the 1890s, Republicans bragged of his uniquely detailed knowledge of water company policies and finances. The Ramapo Water Company was a “ramification” of the East Jersey Water Company, on whose

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<sup>64</sup> Revell, *Building Gotham*, 118; Edward Hagaman Hall et al., *The Catskill Aqueduct and Earlier Water Supplies of the City of New York* (The Mayor's Catskill Aqueduct Celebration Committee, 1917), 79; *New York Times*, August 18, 1899, August 19, 1899, August 23, 1899.

<sup>65</sup> *New York Times*, August 22, 1899.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *New York Times*, August 24, 1899, August 26, 1899, August 27, 1899.

behalf Hobart invested, directed, counseled, and lobbied for years. Henry L. Butler drew the connection immediately, that Hobart's involvement with both "might in some manner explain the alleged understanding between the two companies."<sup>70</sup>

Coler charged that Republican leaders like Hobart, Platt, Dutcher, and Tracy connived with Tammany Hall machine leader Richard Crocker to restrain the Republican-backed Mazet Committee's anti-corruption investigations if the Ramapo contract passed. The Mazet Committee, a state legislative investigating body, hounded Crocker and his cronies over New York City's corrupt public services, and held high-profile hearings on prostitution and a reputed New York City ice monopoly. "This body's prestige suffered from the charge that its investigation was unduly partisan," wrote one Tammany observer. "Moreover, it was generally felt by the public that its work was inefficiently carried on. Nevertheless, it produced a considerable array of facts showing the existence of gross maladministration."<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the *quid pro quo* dated to the 1897 mayoral race, one newspaper correspondent suggested, when Hobart confided with Platt and Quigg and the Republican field divided between the reformer Seth Low and the "Straight Republican" candidate (and recent Ramapo president) Benjamin F. Tracy. Divided Republicans ensured the election of Richard Crocker's candidate, the Tammany Democrat Robert A. Van Wyck, as consolidated New York's first mayor. "It is a fact that Vice President Hobart has been an important factor in the [Ramapo] concern ever since it was organized, twelve years ago, while the fact that Silas B. Dutcher, another prominent Republican, is the President of the company is corroboration of the charge that politicians of the Republican Party are connected with it," the *Times* reported.<sup>72</sup> Rumors circulated of legislative bribes, well-placed gifts of water company stock, and "ententes" between Republican and Democratic New York machines. The *Times* blasted Hobart, claiming the scandal led "to the political threshold of the [McKinley] Administration itself . . . Every rascal in the job, be he near the President, be he in the Senate Chamber, or be he a third-rate Tammany hack, must have his Constitutional chance to show the he is not guilty."<sup>73</sup>

Bird Coler compared the Ramapo Scheme to the infamous 1870s Tweed Ring, a legendary swindling organization encased in New York City government. "Some eminent Republicans got up the Ramapo job, and they are now in the background, hoping that the Democrats will be sent to jail," Croler regaled Democratic supporters. "I have been unable to discover the name of a single stockholder in the concern beyond its officers, who for some reason, certainly not for a good and honorable one, persist in keeping their aiders and abettors in the background." Ramapo's secret investors had to be exposed, and eventually the Mazet Committee, facing public pressure, investigated the Ramapo contract with Controller Coler's assistance. But few prominent subpoenas were issued: Dutcher, Crocker, Van Wyck, Frank Platt (Senator Platt's son), and General Tracy – not Senator Platt or Hobart. The highest ranking implicated Republicans stayed home and the investigation fizzled.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *New York Times*, August 22, 1899.

<sup>71</sup> *New York Times*, August 24, 1899; Gustavus Myers, *The History of Tammany Hall* (Gustavus Myers, 1901), 285-286.

<sup>72</sup> *New York Times*, August 19, 1899 and August 22, 1899

<sup>73</sup> *New York Times*, August 21, 1899, August 24, 1899.

<sup>74</sup> *New York Times*, August 22, 1899, August 23, 1899, August 31, 1899, September 7, 1899.

Frank Platt denied that he or his father had received stock bribes or was complicit in the Ramapo Scheme. Dutcher refused to release Company stockholders' names, but would let the Committee see them if they promised secrecy. When asked who had the list, Dutcher answered vaguely that the Company Secretary possessed it and was vacationing "somewhere in Jersey," a coy answer possibly referring to Hobart at Long Branch.<sup>75</sup> Stonewalled by the Company and unable to gain investors' names, Mazet abruptly dropped the Ramapo investigation and the Committee itself disbanded in December. The *Times* offered other explanations on the Mazet Committee's Ramapo failure: "When the Ramapo job was taken up, which all familiar with its history knew was of Republican origin, there was some hope that the searchlight of official investigation was to be turned on full, no matter what or whom its rays might disclose. The hope was quickly dispelled. So soon as it became clear that the inquiry must lead straight to the Republican organization, it was first restricted and then diverted and finally stopped."<sup>76</sup> A Republican committee refused to uncover Republican crimes.

The Mazet Committee concluded the Ramapo investigation on September 21, 1899. Hobart, his heart condition worsening, left Long Branch for Paterson the day before. It had been a stressful year for the Vice President, beginning with the Joint Traffic Association decision in the fall of 1898, when his illness began. This had been followed by the serious springtime attack, his brother-in-law's indiscretions, the Alger resignation, his brother's railroad accident, and the Ramapo accusations. All took their toll. He could no longer lie down and slept in a chair. Rumors of declining health filtered into newspapers as did speculation on his Republican successor if Hobart did not run. Reporters congregated outside his Paterson home, as they had at Grant's Mount McGregor cottage in 1885, looking for signs of alarm and tracking visitors to decipher the Vice President's condition. On November 1, Hobart's retirement from public business was announced; he would never return to Washington. Hobart's heart problems rapidly worsened and he died the morning of November 21, 1899, the fourth vice president to die in office. McKinley, the Cabinet, senators, and congressmen attended the immense Paterson funeral rites. Vice President Hobart left an estate worth over \$2.6 million dollars, nearly \$50 million in 2007 dollars. In 1903 a Hobart statue designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens student Philip Martiny, showing him as vice president holding the Senate gavel, was dedicated outside Paterson City Hall memorializing one of their most celebrated citizens (after Alexander Hamilton).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *New York Times*, September 14, 1899.

<sup>76</sup> *New York Times*, December 9, 1899; *New York World*, The *New York World* editorialized, "The sources of the Ramapo water supply are more difficult to locate than the sources of the Nile ... The secret dossier of the Ramapo Rascals must contain some might interesting names from the way in which it is guarded." See *New York World*, September 22, 1899, September 25, 1899, and November 1, 1899.

<sup>77</sup> Magie, *Life of Garret Augustus Hobart*, 212-217; Hobart, *Memories*, 78; For coverage of Hobart's declining health, death, funeral, and statue dedication, see *New York Times*, September 24, 1899, September 26, 1899, October 31, 1899, November 1, 1899, November 2, 1899, November 3, 1899, November 4, 1899, November 5, 1899, November 6, 1899, November 7, 1899, November 8, 1899, November 9, 1899, November 10, 1899, November 11, 1899, November 12, 1899, November 14, 1899, November 15, 1899, November 17, 1899, November 18, 1899, November 19, 1899, November 20, 1899, November 22, 1899, November 25, 1899, November 26, 1899, December 2, 1899, June 10, 1900, July 10, 1900, December 1, 1900, December 30, 1900, May 25, 1902, June 2, 1903, June 4, 1903; *New York World*, November 22, 1899; *Paterson Evening News*, September 8, 1899, September 20, 1899, September 27, 1899, October 30, 1899, October 31, 1899, November 1, 1899, November 2, 1899, November 21, 1899.

Historians have not studied Hobart closely, due primarily to the relative obscurity of the vice presidency. Hobart's Presbyterian pastor Dr. David Magie wrote his only biography in 1910 and Jennie Hobart completed a short remembrance of her husband's Capitol days in 1930. Vice presidential historian Louis C. Hatch complimented Hobart on his central role in the McKinley Administration, while Irving G. Williams sank the New Jersey politician into postbellum vice presidential oblivion: "largely and justly forgotten ... inferior men in an age that offered a plenitude of inferior men in high positions."<sup>78</sup> In 2007, one left-wing Polish magazine resurrected Hobart's name and connected him with Vice President Dick Cheney, drawing close parallels between the two "Assistant Presidents."<sup>79</sup>

Vice President Hobart lends himself well to counterfactual history – what would have happened had Hobart succeeded to the presidency after McKinley's 1901 assassination? A Hobart Administration would have tightly allied with Old Guard Republicanism – Senate lions like Mark Hanna, Nelson Aldrich, William Frye, and Eugene Hale were familiar and friendly – as opposed to Theodore Roosevelt's hyper-active progressivism. High tariffs would protect U.S. factories and the gold standard defended from populist upstarts like Bryan. He would have been the railroad industry's advocate, opposing any further regulation (like the 1906 Hepburn Act), and resisted anti-trust attacks. He would have weakened the I.C.C. and appointed Supreme Court justices who would have backed the Joint Traffic Association. While he loyally supported 1890s American colonial expansion, Hobart lacked McKinley's messianic, Christianizing, "civilizing" impulse and would have steered a frugal, insular, restrained foreign policy. President Hobart would not have intervened in the Russo-Japanese War, sent the Great White Fleet around the world, or grabbed land for the Panama Canal. Hobart was no sable-rattler in search of "splendid little wars." Governing like another Chester Arthur or Benjamin Harrison, the pro-business Hobart would have infuriated early twentieth century insurgents like Robert LaFollette, Progressivism would have been temporarily derailed, and Paterson would boast a presidential library celebrating "Gus" Hobart's achievements.<sup>80</sup>

As industry massed and railroads spread across Gilded Age America, politics increasingly intertwined with business. Each had what the other wanted; business desired permission and largesse to expand into larger conglomerates, politicians lusted after money to finance elections and bankroll entrenched power. Neither party was immune, but the public increasingly identified Republicans with the union of big business, big money, and big government, a union that ignited a Progressive reaction after 1900. Vice President Garret A. Hobart directed that union as lawyer, business receiver and director, and New Jersey Republican. He represented everything Progressives hated: a railroad advocate when railroads became America's most mistrusted industry, a corporate attorney who facilitated the agglomeration of capital when the public revolted against monopolies and trusts, a financial operator who used his political insight to capture lucrative business opportunities, and a national leader who moved easily between the worlds of political pull and economic power. As much as Hanna or any Gilded Age business-politician, Hobart symbolized the era.

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<sup>78</sup> Williams, *The American Vice-Presidency*, 62;

<sup>79</sup> Lewica.pl. Found at: <http://lewica.pl/?id=15208>.

<sup>80</sup> For a counterfactual take on Hobart, see the article "President Hobart? It Might Have Been," *New York Times*, July 10, 1988.