

Ohio  
Wesleyan  
University

**MOCK PRESIDENTIAL  
NOMINATING CONVENTIONS  
AT OHIO WESLEYAN**

**1884-2008**

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Beginning in 1884, students at Ohio Wesleyan have held a total of twenty-five mock nominating conventions. The ones held in 1884, 1888 and 1892 appear to have been quite successful but were not continued until after the establishment of the Department of Political Science in 1917. Beginning in 1920, mock conventions have been held in succeeding presidential election years with the exception of 1960 and 1968.

In nine of the mock conventions the nominee for president became the choice of the national convention, but there was much less agreement on the vice-presidential nominees. The three on which there was vice-presidential agreement were John N. Garner, Earl Warren, and Geraldine Ferraro. The 1984 mock convention is the only one in which there was complete agreement with the national convention.

All but one (1932) of the mock conventions held before 1972 were Republican conventions. The mock conventions held in 1972, 1976, 1984, 1988, 1992, 2004 and 2008 were Democratic, reflecting the consistent policy since 1972 in having the party out of the White House holding the mock convention.

There have been a number of curious events associated with Ohio Wesleyan's mock conventions. The first convention, held in 1884, ended by sending a telegram to candidate James G. Blaine informing him of his selection at Ohio Wesleyan. This precedent was repeated in 1920 when Herbert Hoover was likewise notified.

A most unusual event occurred in 1924 when the mock convention failed to nominate a Republican candidate. This convention was carefully planned under the auspices of the Republican, Social Science, and Liberal clubs. On May 16<sup>th</sup>, the *Transcript* reported "Republicans Make No Selection in Mock Convention." The withdrawal from the convention by 60 delegates favoring Robert M. LaFollette made it apparent that no candidate could win enough votes to be nominated. The LaFollette supporters reassembled in the Chapel Annex and nominated LaFollette as the candidate of the "Liberal Party of America."

The *Transcript* for May 23, 1924 reported that a mock convention at Ohio State had nominated Al Smith for president and Robert M. LaFollette for vice-president. That convention adopted a platform plank urging the repeal of the "pernicious" Volstead Act.

The real Republican National Convention of 1924 experienced a problem similar to the OWU mock convention. Supporters of Robert M. LaFollette "bolted" the convention and formed the LaFollette (or Wisconsin) Progressive Party, with LaFollette as its candidate. This action, however, did not prevent the Republicans, "the party of prosperity," from nominating and electing Calvin Coolidge president for the term 1925-1929.

The 1928 mock convention was faced with choosing among 12 Republican candidates. They chose Charles Evans Hughes over Herbert Hoover. In the 1932 Democratic mock convention Newton D. Baker won over Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had led on the first ballot.

Holding a mock convention under war-time conditions in 1944 presented unusual problems. Professor Arneson's large class on European Governments provided the solution. The convention, held in the Chapel Annex, was composed of two class sessions, on June 2 and June 5. Eight states were represented, with instructed delegations on the first ballot. Senator Bricker of Ohio was nominated on the sixth ballot and Earl Warren was chosen for vice-president on the first ballot. In the 1944 Republican National Convention, Senator Bricker was nominated for vice-president as running mate to Thomas E. Dewey for president.

The 1948 mock convention illustrates two possible objectives of such exercises. If the objectives were always to anticipate the decisions of the National Convention the nominees of the mock conventions might have matched more nearly the actual nominees. Thomas E. Dewey had won the Republican nomination in 1944 and there was a strong possibility that he would be chosen again. Instead, the mock convention nominated Harold E. Stassen on the third ballot, with Dewey receiving only five votes. There was strong anti-Dewey feeling, which perhaps anticipated his defeat in the November election. The students nominated Warren for vice-president and so did the National Convention.

Again, in 1964, the mock convention nominated Henry Cabot Lodge by a "landslide" on the second ballot, with Barry Goldwater as his running mate. Goldwater became the presidential nominee of the National Convention. In the mock convention, Goldwater had won the presidential nomination on the instructed first ballot which was intended to show how delegates would vote in the National Convention in San Francisco. The student preference for Lodge was clearly demonstrated.

In the 1976 Democratic mock convention, Hubert Humphrey was nominated on the third ballot. Here, also, the first ballot, designed to show how the students thought the real National Convention would act, was cast for Jimmy Carter. This shows a definite political skill in sensing who would win the national nomination, but also the student preference for someone else. This time the preference was for an enormously popular candidate, but one who would not survive the next four years. Hubert Humphrey died of cancer January 13, 1978.

The mock Republican convention in 1980 showed a preference for George Bush over Ronald Reagan. The student choice was Bush for president and Howard Baker for vice-president. The May, 1980, *Transcript* published several detailed articles about the leading candidates. One article compared and contrasted Bush with Reagan. President Reagan did not draw strong support from OWU students. Their criticisms had to do with age, conservatism, and errors and exaggerations in his speeches. They seem to have been impressed by Bush's experience as FBI Director. Also, his campaign on campus was well organized. On the other hand, there is

evidence of some strangely mixed motivations. The chairperson of the Indiana delegation stated that her vote for Bush was more against Reagan than a vote for Bush. In 1984, Gary Hart led on the instructed first ballot, but was then defeated by Walter Mondale, who was nominated by the Democratic National Convention.

The last six mock conventions, beginning with 1988, have reflected the impact of the recent historical movements to advance the roles of women and African-Americans in U. S. society. Three African-Americans, Jesse Jackson in 1988, Colin Powell in 1996 and Barack Obama in 2008, were nominated for president. Also, three women, Diane Feinstein in 1992, Nancy Kassebaum in 1996 and Elizabeth Dole in 2000, have followed in the footsteps of Geraldine Ferraro in being nominated for vice-president. Another female candidate, Governor Ann Richards of Texas, was actually the first choice of the 1992 mock convention for vice-president, but was withdrawn when the unconstitutionality of a president and vice-president from the same state was noted.

As so often is true of our political discussions, attention in this brief review has been focused on the political personalities. Throughout the history of our mock conventions, however, much was also said about the policies. Frequently, the report of the committee on resolutions was accompanied by a minority report, and it was not unusual for the minority report to be adopted, after being debated. In the early days, Chinese Exclusion and Prohibition were debated. In the 1920's, armed intervention in Mexico was proposed and defeated and a plank supporting compulsory military training was adopted. Support for a "close association of nations" came from the new "Liberty Party of America" under LaFollette's leadership.

LaFollette supporters also walked out of the Republican mock convention in 1936 and adopted a platform to limit the powers of the Supreme Court, and to make amending the Constitution easier, also for the U.S. to support the World Court, and for tariffs to be lowered. In 1940, a popular referendum on an offensive war was debated and rejected. In 1952, a proposal to replace the U.N. with a union of non-Communist states was voted down. The 1976 mock convention devoted seven hours to debate on platform issues. Topics included legalizing marijuana, and prostitution, the death penalty, abortion, busing, and public ownership of natural resources. Since 1988 many serious issues such as the lowering of the drinking age, increasing federal AIDS research funding and establishment of a Palestinian homeland alongside Israel, have been included in the party platforms.

Mock conventions generally have been judged to be educational and entertaining. The 19<sup>th</sup> century conventions collected admission charges and devoted the proceeds to support the YMCA and the construction of a gymnasium. Recent mock conventions have included a vote cast by a life-sized cardboard cutout figure of John Wayne, a platform plank to move the nation's capital from Washington, D.C. to Tillamook, Oregon, and including talk show host Oprah Winfrey and actor Harrison Ford in the balloting for vice-president.

Given the recent trend toward “front-loading” the state presidential primaries earlier in the year, the mock conventions have recently been held much earlier than the dates in May and June that were common as late as 1984. The last four mock conventions have been held in February, with the 2008 mock convention the earliest ever on February 1 and 2. This trend is an effort to have the mock convention held before the actual nominee is clear very early in the year.

## Nominees for President and Vice President

	<u>Year</u>	<u>Mock Conventions</u> <b>President</b> <b>Vice President</b>	<u>National Conventions</u> <b>President</b> <b>Vice President</b>
x	1884	James G. Blaine R _____ Lincoln R	James G. Blaine R
x	1888	Benjamin Harrison R	Benjamin Harrison R Levi P. Morton R
	1892	Benjamin Harrison R William McKinley R	Benjamin Harrison R
	1920	Herbert Hoover R Warren G. Harding R	Warren G. Harding R Calvin Coolidge R
	1924	(Failed to nominate) Robert M. LaFollette nominated by 60 delegates in "Liberal Party of America"	Calvin Coolidge R Charles G. Dawes R Robert M. LaFollette, nominated by Progressive Party
	1928	Charles E. Hughes R Nicholas Longworth R	Herbert Hoover R Charles Curtis R
o	1932	Newton D. Baker D John N. Garver D	Franklin D. Roosevelt D John N. Garver D
x	1936	Alfred M. Landon R Robert A. Taft R	Alfred M. Landon R Frank Knox R
	1940	Thomas E. Dewey R Robert A. Taft R	Wendell Willkie R Charles McNary R
	1944	John W. Bricker R Earl Warren R	Thomas E. Dewey R John W. Bricker R
o	1948	Harold Stassen R Earl Warren R	Thomas E. Dewey R Earl Warren R
x	1952	Dwight D. Eisenhower R Arthur S. Flemming R	Dwight D. Eisenhower R Richard M. Nixon R
x	1956	Dwight D. Eisenhower R Arthur S. Flemming R	Dwight D. Eisenhower R Richard M. Nixon R
	1964	Henry C. Lodge R Barry M. Goldwater R	Barry M. Goldwater R William E. Miller R
x	1972	George McGovern D Reuben Askew D	George McGovern D Sargent Shriver D

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mock Conventions</u> <b>President</b> <b>Vice President</b>	<u>National Conventions</u> <b>President</b> <b>Vice President</b>
	1976 Hubert Humphrey D Jimmy Carter D	Jimmy Carter D Walter Mondale D
	1980 George Bush R Howard Baker R	Ronald Reagan R George Bush R
x o	1984 Walter Mondale D Geraldine Ferraro D	Walter Mondale D Geraldine Ferraro D
	1988 Jesse Jackson D Paul Simon D	Michael Dukakis D Lloyd Bentsen D
	1992 Lloyd Bentsen D Diane Feinstein D	Bill Clinton D Albert Gore D
	1996 Colin Powell R Nancy Kassebaum R	Robert Dole R Jack Kemp R
	2000 John McCain R Elizabeth Dole R	George W. Bush R Dick Cheney R
	2004 John Edwards D Howard Dean D	John Kerry D John Edwards D
x	2008 Barack Obama D John Edwards D	Barack Obama D Joe Biden D

x = Mock convention presidential nominee same as in actual convention that year.

o = Mock convention vice-presidential nominee same as in actual convention that year.

EEW/lme (original text)

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