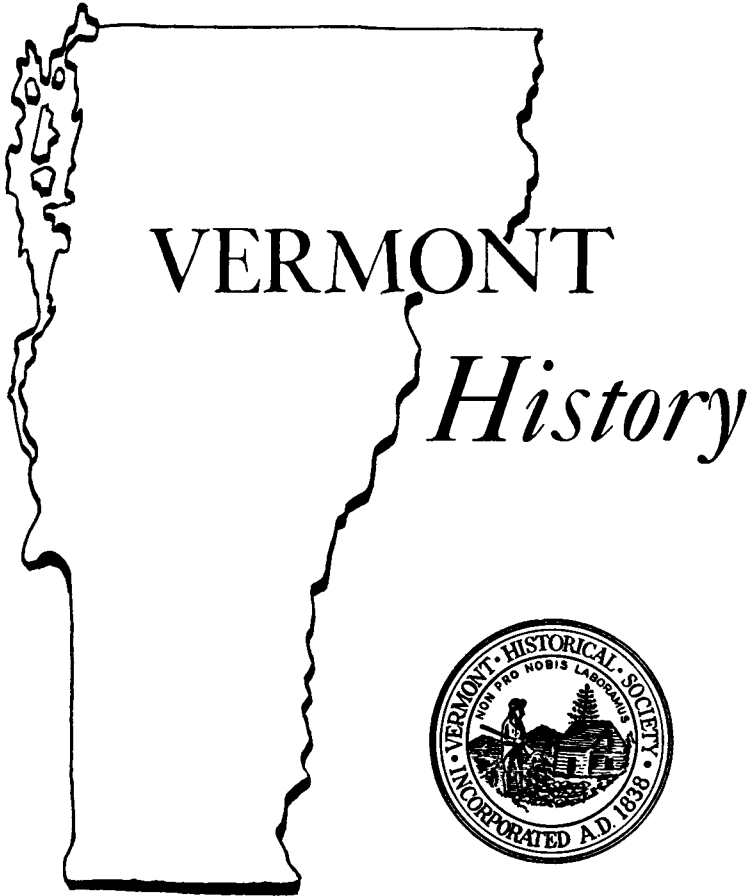


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Warren Austin retained his Senate seat by only 3514 votes in the 1934 election. The Democrats almost won enough support to overturn the Vermont custom of electing only Republicans to the Senate . . .

## Vermont's Traditional Republicanism Vs. the New Deal: Warren R. Austin and the Election of 1934

By GEORGE T. MAZUZAN

1934 was a political year with great significance in Vermont. Contrary to the tradition which generally dictated that excitement in most Vermont elections stemmed from Republican intraparty politics, the 1934 race for the Senate seat, held by Warren R. Austin, was substantially challenged by the Democrats. With Vermont and the nation steeped in the midst of economic depression, the minority party sensed victory through the appeal of the New Deal policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Indeed, across the nation in the 1934 elections the Democrats picked up ten Senate seats which were previously held by Republicans. Only by a successful appeal to Vermont tradition did Warren Austin retain the usual Republican plurality and continue a political career that resulted in 1946 in his appointment as the first United States Ambassador to the United Nations. To evaluate that 1934 election properly, consideration first should be given to Austin's entrance into national politics less than four years earlier.

### I.

The son of a lawyer, Austin was born in Highgate Center on No-

vember 12, 1877. After spending his early years in that village, he went to preparatory school at Brigham Academy in Bakersfield, Vermont, and from there to the University of Vermont, where he was graduated in 1899.

After his formal education, Austin read law in his father's office in St. Albans. He was admitted to the Vermont bar in 1902. For the next several years he practiced law in St. Albans and became involved in community affairs. He served in various political posts and ultimately was elected mayor of the city in 1909 for a one year term. With the exception of an eighteen-month stint in China in 1916-17, as a representative of the American International Corporation, Austin devoted most of his time between 1910 and 1930 to his successful law practice first in St. Albans and then, after returning from the Orient, in Burlington. He developed popularity as a public speaker and became well known throughout the state.

In December 1930, occurred the death of Vermont Senator Frank L. Greene of St. Albans. Under Vermont statutes, a special election was required to determine his successor because the vacancy occurred more than six months prior to the next general election. However, until the special election was called, the governor had power to appoint an interim Senator.

On December 23, 1930, retiring Governor John E. Weeks appointed to the post his friend of long standing, Frank C. Partridge of Proctor.<sup>1</sup> The appointee subsequently sought to keep his seat in the upcoming primary to be held on March 3, 1931. Prior to this appointment, Austin had been persuaded by some close Republican friends to place his own name in contention for the nomination.<sup>2</sup> There had been speculation to this effect in the press for several days and Austin formally announced his candidacy on December 22, 1930.<sup>3</sup>

A bitterly contested campaign ensued. It involved local issues and personalities. There was the matter of age — Austin was a youthful 53 compared to Partridge's 68. On prohibition, Austin took an ambiguous stand while Partridge campaigned as a "dry." Machine politics

1. "Hon. Frank C. Partridge," *The Vermonter*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 3.

2. Among the confidants who were instrumental in persuading Austin were Roy L. Patrick, president of Rock of Ages, Eugene Magnus of Eastern Magnesia Talc, Guy W. Bailey, president of the University of Vermont, Tom Gurney, prominent Republican and funeral director in Burlington and Roswell Austin of St. Albans, Warren's brother. The younger Austin had been in the Vermont legislature for a number of terms and had a good feel for the support Warren could expect to receive. Mrs. Frank B. Start, interview with author, Burlington, Vermont, July 23, 1970.

3. *Montpelier Evening Argus*, December 20, 1930; *Rutland Herald*, December 23, 1930.

also became a factor. Austin rallied support as the chosen representative of the “young guard,” and he denounced Partridge as a member of the Proctor political machine.<sup>4</sup>

Austin held a distinct advantage over his opponent because Partridge was kept in Washington by a continuing session of Congress. Nonetheless, the Partridge campaign outspent Austin by over six thousand dollars.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, Austin made over sixty speeches throughout the state.<sup>6</sup> The election was declared a toss-up on the eve of the primary, but the next day’s count found Austin the victor by over eight thousand votes out of the total of seventy-eight thousand.<sup>7</sup>

The special election, held on March 31, 1931, was typically anticlimactic as the Democratic candidate, Stephen M. Driscoll of St. Albans, waged only a token campaign against his Republican opponent. Privately, Austin showed disdain for the Democrat’s political power; he remarked to his mother several days before the election that he planned to go to Washington very soon afterwards.<sup>8</sup> The major concern of the Republican Party leaders was the voter turnout — not in the sense that they were worried Austin would lose but rather that the Republican plurality might not be all that they hoped.<sup>9</sup> Their fears proved well founded when a small vote carried Austin to victory by less than a two-to-one margin.<sup>10</sup>

Although a new session of Congress was not to begin until December, Austin established himself immediately in Washington. As a freshman Senator he worked with caution as he learned the intricacies of the position. Austin found the routine there entirely different from anything he had faced in the past.<sup>11</sup> After the first session of the Seventy-Second Congress had met for a month, Austin found himself critical

4. *Burlington Clipper*, January 15, 1931; *Newport Standard*, January 29, 1931; *Rutland Herald*, January 30, 1931; Austin press releases, February 5, 1931, February 9, 1931, Speech File, Austin Papers, Bailey Library, University of Vermont.

5. A total of \$49,382.26 was officially expended by both candidates in the primary campaign. *Statements of Expenditures of Candidates for Nomination for United States Senator*, Secretary of State, Montpelier, Vermont, March 11, 1931, March 13, 1931.

6. *Barre Daily Times*, March 2, 1931.

7. *Report of Canvassing Board*, March 10, 1931, Secretary of State, Montpelier, Vermont.

8. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, March 23, 1931 Correspondence File, Austin Papers. While in the Senate, Austin wrote faithfully to his mother on nearly a daily basis until her death at the age of 93 in 1941. Even with her advanced age, she was an avid reader of newspapers and the *Congressional Record*.

9. *Caledonian Record*, March 31, 1931; *Burlington Daily News*, March 31, 1931.

10. *Official Certificate of Election*, Secretary of State, Montpelier, Vermont, April 7, 1931.

11. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, December 12, 1931, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.

of procedures. He felt that too many political speeches were made. He believed that some reform was needed to confine loquacious Senators to the issues at hand.<sup>12</sup> Austin made his initial foray into the debates in late March when he addressed the Senate in opposition to a Democratic supported revision of the tariff.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to his mother he noted that the debate had made him groggy physically but that he was eventually stimulated and encouraged by the approbation of both his Democrat and Republican colleagues.<sup>14</sup> It appeared that he was pleased with his new Senate career.

## II.

While Austin was serving his freshman year in the Senate, the economy of the nation sank lower and lower. Nonetheless, Austin supported the policies of the Herbert Hoover administration because he feared federal encroachment on the power of the states or individuals. Even when on the short side of a vote in the Senate, he felt that he could accommodate principle to politics on any issue that bordered on abrogation of the Constitution.<sup>15</sup> But he did sense that leadership was lacking.

After the overwhelming defeat of Hoover, which Austin considered "a crushing blow to the country,"<sup>16</sup> the Vermont Senator continued to be perplexed by the arguments and the actions of the lame-duck Congress on questions of economy and relief. He sensed that a lack of leadership, coupled with the deteriorating economic conditions of the country, led the Congress into a position both destructive and contradictory unto itself. He noted that in attempting to effect economies while at the same time providing relief from unemployment Congress cut appropriations which, in turn, created unemployment. Then the legislature reversed itself by appropriating funds to create doles.<sup>17</sup> Regretfully, Austin conceded he could offer no solution to this problem.

The "hundred days" of the Franklin Roosevelt administration left Austin wary of the President's leadership. "I am very apprehensive of the arbitrary powers which are being placed in the hands of one man,"

12. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, January 11, 1932, *ibid.*

13. *Congressional Record*, 72nd Cong., 1st sess., March 29, 1932, 75, Part 6, 6990, 6992-99, 7001-7004.

14. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, March 30, 1932, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.

15. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, March 9, 1932, *ibid.*

16. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, November 10, 1932, *ibid.*

17. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, January 14, 1933, February 15, 1933, *ibid.*



he wrote to his mother.<sup>18</sup> Three weeks later he again criticized departure from "American liberty" by the Democratic leadership. He expressed fear that "we are headed for a dictatorship which will make Mussolini blush."<sup>19</sup> The majority of first New Deal draft bills sent to the special session of Congress by the President were opposed by Austin.<sup>20</sup>

The Warren R. Austin Papers, 1877-1962, were donated to the University of Vermont by Mrs. Warren Austin in 1963. The collection spans 81 linear feet and includes personal and political correspondence, speech files, desk calendars, clippings and printed material for the period 1914-1963. Warren Austin's senate and United Nations years are the most heavily documented groups in the collection. Processing is in progress, and there will be a complete inventory available soon. The papers are being preserved in the Special Collections area of the Guy W. Bailey Library.

After a trip to California in November 1933, as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee investigating the appointment of receivers in bankruptcy by federal judges, Austin felt he had sensed the pulse of the nation. He saw grassroots support for his proposition of a return to fundamental principles as stated in the Bill of Rights and a social system in which individual opportunity, encouragement and responsibility would survive. He recognized that in some sections of the country citizens considered only the temporary expediency of day-to-day operations. But he felt that this attitude was a front. In one of his best expressions of New Deal opposition, he tritely stated, "permanent liberty is more necessary than immediate prosperity." He maintained that it was generally believed that the New Deal would not function satisfactorily.<sup>21</sup>

Austin continued to oppose the leadership and policies of the Democrats in 1934.<sup>22</sup> His attitude toward what he considered the high-hand-

18. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, April 8, 1933, *ibid.*

19. Austin, letter to Herbert Hoover, Palo Alto, California, May 3, 1933, PPF, Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Library, West Branch, Iowa; Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, April 27, 1933, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.

20. *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., March 30, 1933, 77, Part 1, 1042; April 28, 1933, Part 3, 2562; May 3, 1933, Part 3, 2808-2809; June 9, 1933, Part 6, 5424-25; June 13, 1933, Part 6, 5861.

21. Austin, letter to Herbert Hoover, Palo Alto, California, November 28, 1933; Hoover, letter to Austin, December 2, 1933, PPF, Hoover Papers; Austin, letter to Will Rogers, Beverly Hills, California, November 28, 1933; Austin, letter to Harry Chandler, Los Angeles, November 28, 1933, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.

22. *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 2nd sess., January 27, 1934, 78, Part 2, 1484;

edness of the New Deal leadership was supported by a revocation of air-mail contracts by Postmaster-General James A. Farley. This development made Austin a more solid antagonist of the administration. It also served to focus some of the national spotlight on him.

Austin called the air-mail issue another demonstration of government by force rather than government by law. Under the McNary-Waters Act of 1930, an air-mail system had been established to be supervised by the Postmaster-General.<sup>23</sup> It provided a so-called bidding system. This, in effect, limited bidders to those who had certain specified experience and who were found by the Postmaster-General to be "responsible bidders." As a result no collusion, agreement, or conspiracy among the bidders would be possible. In other words, the policy of the government sought to have these lines independent of each other and evenly competitive. Thus, it prevented bonafide bidders for one air-mail line from competing with bonafide bidders for another line. As a result each bidder was impelled to devote all his energy to obtaining the line he sought.

In 1932, a lobbying group was established by air companies without contracts to force an investigation of the system. A special Senate Investigating Committee was created and Austin was named a member.<sup>24</sup>

While hearings were held throughout January and February 1934, Postmaster-General Farley, with the concurrence of the President, cancelled all the current air-mail contracts effective February 19, 1934,<sup>25</sup> and charged that the operators were guilty of fraud, collusion, and conspiracy in negotiation of contracts. Austin was particularly irked because the cancellations were made before the work of the Special Investigating Committee was finished. He felt certain that the action was taken because the committee's investigation would not show fraud or collusion and would block any cancellation.<sup>26</sup> Austin was quick to charge publicly that Farley's action involved the Postmaster-General in politics of a sinister nature.<sup>27</sup>

Hearings of the Special Committee continued into May.<sup>28</sup> The sub-

May 12, 1934, Part 8, 8714; May 15, 1934, 8846; June 16, 1934, Part 11, 12013; June 18, 1934, 12381-82.

23. U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 46, 259.

24. Austin, Speech over NBC network, April 9, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

25. *New York Times*, February 10, 1934.

26. Austin, NBC speech April 9, 1934, Austin Papers.

27. Austin, Speech before the Organization of Republican Women, Philadelphia, April 16, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

28. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, May 11, 1934, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.

sequent catastrophe of using ill-trained Army pilots by the Post Office Department to fly the mail previously flown by the contractors and of a new bill presented to Congress which eliminated the former carriers from competing for contracts<sup>29</sup> exacerbated the hostility which had grown between Austin and the policies of the New Deal. The Senator felt it was merely another step toward tyranny:

However unfortunate may seem the material and intimate results of the cancellations of the air-mail contracts and the acts which have succeeded that, the poignancy of the event was the grave and serious doubt excited in the minds of men and women of the purpose of the "New Deal" which is neither Republican nor Democratic. Is it an emergency policy? Or is it a permanent departure from free institutions and a surreptitious establishment, without the knowledge or consent of the people of ideas of government which are in conflict with the breeding, the traditions, and the settled purpose of the American people?<sup>30</sup>

The staunch opposition of Austin to the manipulation of the New Deal set the stage for the 1934 elections in Vermont.

### III.

The early success of the Roosevelt program increased the desire of the Democrats to gain strength in the off-year elections at the expense of the anti-New Dealers. As early as January, Austin was aware that a stronger than usual Democratic effort would be directed against him and all Republicans because of New Deal opposition.<sup>31</sup> He keenly watched the results of a special election in that month which filled Vermont's other Senate seat and its lone seat in the House of Representatives following the death of Senator Porter Dale of Island Pond.<sup>32</sup> Austin confessed that the returns from Franklin, Chittenden and Rutland counties indicated that he must work vigorously to gain reelection in the fall.<sup>33</sup> In showing concern over the Democratic

29. *New York Times*, February 23, 24, March 1, 2, 1934; *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 2nd sess., March 14, 1934, 78, Part 4, 4506-4507; April 28, 1934, Part 7, 7628-29.

30. Austin, Speech before the Union League Club of New York City, June 14, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

31. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, January 19, 1934, Correspondence File, Austin Papers; Austin, letter to Herbert Hoover, Palo Alto, California, January 2, 1934, PPF, Hoover Papers.

32. Vermont's representative in the House, Ernest W. Gibson of Brattleboro, resigned his seat in the lower body to run for the Senate against the Democratic candidate, Harry W. Witters, in the January 16 special election. The resultant vacancy in the House of Representatives caused Charles E. Plumley to run on the Republican ticket against Democrat Robert W. Ready of St. Albans in the same election. The results showed a surprising strength by the Democrats. Both Gibson and Plumley won by 8,000 votes out of a total of 48,000 cast. *Burlington Free Press*, January 17, 1934.

33. Austin, letter to Mrs. Chauncey G. Austin, January 19, 1934, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.



strength, Austin was conceding that the campaign would be an aberration because victory in the Republic primary would not necessarily guarantee the same result in the general election. It was evident that the Democrats would put on one of their stronger contemporary campaign efforts in attempting to unseat Austin.

The primary did not worry Austin despite early rumors that he might face stiff opposition in the September 11 Republican election.<sup>34</sup> A candidate did emerge in the person of vitriolic Harry Amey of Island Pond, whose chances against Austin were rated low. Austin conducted an advertising and letter-writing campaign and did not bother to speak directly against his opponent.<sup>35</sup> The final vote in the primary proved Austin to be correct in his assumption that Amey would not be a threat to his renomination. Austin won easily, 44,507 to 14,731.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless Austin had reason to be increasingly concerned about his Democratic opposition. Democratic strength in Vermont could best be concentrated on Austin. While other statewide offices were to be filled in the November election, the issues at the state level would not be subject to attack as was Austin's consistent anti-New Deal position.<sup>37</sup> Nationally, the Democrats looked forward to a big year and if it seemed likely that Vermont would ever repudiate its traditional allegiance to the Republican Party, this was the time.

As early as June, newspaper writers were predicting that the Vermont Democrats, spurred by Washington pressure, would place their strongest man against Austin.<sup>38</sup> That person would be Frederick C. Martin (1882-1945), a native of Bennington who had been appointed by President Roosevelt in 1933 as Collector of Internal Revenue for Vermont. Formerly President of the County National Bank in Bennington, Martin had maintained a long and active career in Democratic Party politics. He had been the Democratic candidate for Governor of Vermont in 1920 and 1924, and for United States Senator in 1928 and 1932. In the 1932 Senatorial campaign, running against the Republican incumbent, Porter Dale, he polled one of the largest votes ever given a Democrat in Vermont. He had been a delegate to Democratic National Conventions in 1912, 1920, 1924, and 1928, and in

34. As early as April, Austin received word that the present governor, Stanley C. Wilson of Chelsea, might campaign for the Senate nomination. However, nothing came of it. John E. Weeks, Middlebury, Vermont, letter to Austin, April 23, 1934; Austin, letter to Weeks, April 26, 1934, Correspondence File, Austin Papers.

35. *Statement of Expenses of Warren R. Austin, Candidate for the Office of United States Senator, Secretary of State, Montpelier, Vermont, September 18, 1934.*

36. *Canvass of Votes for United States Senator, September Primary 1934, Republican Party, Secretary of State, Montpelier, Vermont.*

37. *St. Albans Messenger*, September 20, 1934.

38. *Middlebury Register*, cited in the *Rutland Herald*, June 5, 1934.

1932 he was chairman of the Vermont delegation. Unlike Austin, Martin was not known for his oratorical ability, but he was known as a successful businessman with a winning personality.<sup>39</sup>

The question of how greatly the Democrats could make inroads into Republican ranks was constantly under study. One newspaper indicated early that, if Vermont intended to show resentment against Austin for his criticism of the New Deal, such sentiment would have been reflected in the primary. This paper felt the overwhelming victory by Austin was a barometer of Republican strength.<sup>40</sup> But generally it was thought that Austin would face a stern test in November.<sup>41</sup> In a national survey, Turner Catledge of *The New York Times*, conceded that the popularity of FDR would be a rallying point for most Democrats but that this would not suffice to stop Austin in Vermont.<sup>42</sup>

The Vermont Democrats opened their campaign headquarters in Rutland, and they held an unusually loud convention in Montpelier on September 25. The major plank in their platform was an unqualified endorsement of the New Deal program, and there was a strong indication that their campaign would not suffer from a lack of funds.<sup>43</sup> Money from the national Democratic war chest allowed the Vermont party to utilize such techniques as publication of an eight-page newsheet, *The Vermont Democrat*, and to bring in help from outside the state to assist their campaign. Unaided by advertising, the newsheet was sent primarily to the rural districts. Its main slogan read: "Back Roosevelt — Help Vermont." It pointed out the areas in which Vermont had received money from the federal government through New Deal programs such as flood control and the AAA.<sup>44</sup>

In bringing Alben Barkley of Kentucky into Vermont to support their candidates, the Democrats attempted a major thrust at Austin by charging that his stands against New Deal legislation were retrogressive. Barkley was part of a "shock troop" barn-storming plan which concentrated on Vermont, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Missouri.<sup>45</sup>

The major Democratic workers and candidates for other Democratic offices also leveled attacks at Austin. Harry W. Witters of St.

39. *Brandon Union*, September 14, 1934; *St. Albans Messenger*, September 20, 1934.

40. *St. Albans Messenger*, September 18, 1934.

41. *Vergennes Enterprise*, September 14, 1934; *Enosburg Standard*, September 14, 1934.

42. *New York Times*, September 21, 1934.

43. *Rutland Herald*, September 21, 1934; *Burlington Free Press*, September 26, 1934.

44. *The Vermont Democrat*, Box: unarranged, Austin Papers.

45. *Burlington Free Press*, October 23, October 25, 1934.

Johnsbury, the overall Democratic campaign manager, claimed that Austin was fearful he would be the first Vermont Republican candidate for the Senate to go down to defeat since the Civil War. He said Austin realized that his assaults on the President and the New Deal had turned the voters of Vermont against him.<sup>46</sup>

The publicity manager for the Democrats, Allan Markley of Middlebury, labeled Austin a mere politician, a far cry from a statesman. He said the Senator voted against New Deal bills simply because they were Democratic measures. Austin's stand, said Markley, contradicted previous positions he had taken on similar measures under the Hoover administration.<sup>47</sup>

James P. Leamy of Rutland, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, lashed out at Austin's stand on the constitutionality of New Deal bills. Leamy asked in a speech at Hartford why Austin should question this aspect when the Supreme Court of the United States had endorsed most of the measures.<sup>48</sup>

But Fred Martin carried the brunt of the attack. He continuously brought out Austin's anti-New Deal stands. At one point in the campaign, Martin charged that Austin voted for only one New Deal measure — the National Economy Act — and that vote was favorable only because the Vermont state legislature passed a resolution asking each member of its Congressional legislation to vote for it.<sup>49</sup> This type of hard-hitting attack was intensified as the campaign continued. While newspaper opinion was divided regarding reasons the Democrats coveted Austin's seat, it was generally believed that a Democratic victory in rock-ribbed Republican Vermont would have a tremendous psychological effect upon the entire nation.<sup>50</sup>

Austin's own campaign did not shy from the issue. The state Republican organization knew that the Democratic emphasis would be directed against Austin, and Republican leaders prepared for the challenge by an all-out organizational attempt.<sup>51</sup>

By the middle of October, the Republican headquarters announced it had organized practically every town in Vermont. It particularly stressed that new town committees were much larger than before. In former campaigns, three or four members constituted an active town

46. *Ibid.*, October 19, 1934.

47. *Rutland Herald*, October 19, 1934.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Newport Express*, October 19, 1934.

50. *Vergennes Enterprise and Union*, October 5, 1934; *Boston Advertiser*, October 21, 1934.

51. *Burlington Free Press*, October 2, 1934.



committee, whereas in 1934 the average size was between twenty and thirty-five.<sup>52</sup> There was fear that voter apathy might prove detrimental to the Senator's reelection.<sup>53</sup> Intense Republican activity indicated the apprehension the GOP had over the possibility of defeat.

Most of the Republicans who spoke in support of Austin stressed the experience he had gained in the Senate.<sup>54</sup> One editorial supported Austin because the writer saw, in the context of the national elections, that Austin would be in line for a prominent position in the Senate in view of expected defeats of many old-time Republicans.<sup>55</sup>

Between the primary and the general election, Austin, in person or on the radio, made a total of thirty-three speeches throughout the state.<sup>56</sup> Even before the primary, he had spoken against the New Deal and suggested a return to the development of individual opportunity and incentive. He chided the Democrats for their experimentation program on the ground that it lacked stability.<sup>57</sup> This was a part of the overall Austin campaign theme. Austin stood on his record. It particularly stressed recovery through normal business practices and fundamental economic laws rather than experimentation, a return to constitutionalism and an appeal for rugged individualism and the independence of Vermont.

Austin aimed his whole campaign at the traditional Vermont citizen. By stressing individualism and the independence of Vermont, he felt he could appeal to this group. He claimed that the Democrats totally ignored the outlook of Vermonters. They shocked the Vermonter's cautious character by trying to sell the New Deal, an experiment of unknown quality.<sup>58</sup> He constantly criticized the program for brushing aside the sovereignty and independence of the state.<sup>59</sup>

Austin maintained that if Martin were elected, Vermont would surrender one of its Senators to the White House and only one Senator

52. *Montpelier Evening Argus*, October 18, 1934; *Burlington Free Press*, October 18, 1934; *Newport Express*, October 19, 1934.

53. *Waterbury Record*, October 8, 1934; *Bennington Banner*, October 10, 1934.

54. This was the same argument the Partridge supporters used against Austin in the 1931 primary. *Rutland Herald*, October 20, 24, 1934; *Bennington Banner*, October 23, 1934; *Burlington Free Press*, October 25, 1934.

55. *Brattleboro Reformer*, October 8, 1934.

56. Entries for September 12 - November 5, 1934, *Calendar Book*, 1934, Austin Papers.

57. Austin speech at Old Home Day, Sandgate, Vermont, September 1, 1934; Speech at the Parker Hill Service of the Universalist Church, Springfield, Vermont, September 9, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

58. Austin, Speech at Republican State Convention, October 2, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

59. Austin, Speech at St. Albans, Vermont, October 23, 1934; Speech over WDEV, Waterbury, Vermont, November 5, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.



would be left to represent the people of Vermont.<sup>60</sup> He decried the rubber-stamp attitude of Martin. Austin pointed out again and again that outside political interests were active in Vermont. The reasons were clear enough to Austin: the national Democrats could not tolerate exposition of their measures. And Austin claimed that the attempts by the administration to inject "foreign doctrines and socialistic ideas" were resented by all Vermonters.<sup>61</sup>

While Austin lashed out at the New Deal and its political ramifications in Vermont, he unconsciously called attention to the lack of a GOP program to offer as a substitute for the New Deal. Actually, what the Republican offered was negative, based largely on a return to policies of pre-depression days:

There will be no further manipulation of the value of the currency; that there will be no further devaluation of gold; that there will be an effort to balance the budget; that profits will not be confiscated but will be more equitably divided; that government will stop its socialistic trend; . . . that experiment without regard for experience will be discontinued and theorists will be supplanted by men of experience.<sup>62</sup>

Austin appeared as a traditionalist in an age that was eager for change. In the face of a vast expansion of federal powers, Austin urged Vermont and all the states to reassert their regulatory authority in social legislation. He stressed the older, cherished ways at a time when many Vermonters were contrary-minded and were willing to accept the New Deal.

The Senator ended his campaign in a whirlwind manner. In a literal eleventh-hour appeal for votes, he broadcast over the radio on the day before the election. It was a repetition of a tactic he had utilized in the 1931 primary. The day began with an 8:45 A.M. address over WDEV in Waterbury, followed by a noon-hour appearance on the steps of the Pavilion Hotel in Montpelier, and it closed with a trip to Montreal where he delivered a final half-hour speech at 10:30 P.M. over a radio station in that city.<sup>63</sup>

On November 6, Vermonters trudged to the polls to demonstrate that Austin's fear of defeat had been well founded. By only a slim 3514 vote margin was he able to defeat Martin, 67,146 to 63,632. Austin lost six counties to his opponent, and five of them, Bennington, Chittenden, Franklin, Rutland and Washington, accounted for over half

60. Austin, Speech over WDEV, Speech File, Austin Papers.

61. Austin, Radio Speech from Montreal, November 5, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

62. Austin, Speech at Morrisville, Vermont, October 24, 1934, Speech File, Austin Papers.

63. Entry for November 5, 1934, Calendar Book, 1934.

the votes cast.<sup>64</sup> In comparison, the two other Republican candidates running for major office won by the usual large Republican plurality. Charles Plumley of Northfield handily defeated Carroll E. Jenkins of Orleans in a race for the seat in the House of Representatives, 73,500 to 55,005. In the gubernatorial race, Charles M. Smith of Rutland, the former Lieutenant Governor, likewise easily won over the Democrat's James Leamy, 73,521 to 54,083.<sup>65</sup>

#### IV.

Any assessment of the campaign must account for the emphasis placed on Austin's Senate seat compared to the other posts up for election. Surely Austin had been one of the critics of the New Deal. Nationally, the Democrats felt that 1934 was their year. Even in Vermont they believed they had a chance through an appeal for endorsement of the New Deal. Bolstered by a popular votegetter such as Frederick Martin, they became convinced it was worth the effort to try to turn the trick.

The platforms of the two candidates must also be taken into account. The issues were national in scope, and there could not have been a more clear-cut choice for the voter. Martin's campaign solidly endorsed the New Deal while Austin opposed it in all its aspects.

Psychologically, Austin had an advantage. He stood on his record that always had favored rugged individualism, frugality and the independence of the Green Mountain State. He emphasized these points at every opportunity. Austin proclaimed himself to be his own man, representing his own state against practically the rest of the nation. His campaign was based on a strong appeal to a Vermont tradition of conservatism not to be denied. At a time when change was taking place rapidly, Austin remained within the mold of the conservative Vermont political tradition.

In the face of all this, Austin's near defeat demonstrated the impact the New Deal had on the voters of Vermont. Nearly half of those who voted were willing to abandon old ideas of frugality, independence and rugged individualism in favor of the experimentation offered by the New Deal.

Austin continued as a political conservative in his opposition to the New Deal throughout the remainder of the thirties. His stands on domestic issues later were eclipsed by his internationalist leadership in

64. *Canvass of Votes for United States Senator, November 1934, State of Vermont, Public Records Division, Montpelier.*

65. *Burlington Free Press, November 7, 1934.*

the field of foreign affairs, and ultimately by his appointment to the United Nations. But in the face of the Democratic attempt to deprive Austin of his Senate seat in 1934, he gained his political tenure. Never again would he be concerned about reelection.

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### *A Different View of Montpelier:*

“This village is a clean, pleasant place, very much in the center of the state. It lies in a deep narrow valley, along the banks of Onion River, of the size of Otter Creek. The hills rise somewhat abruptly and many of them rather barren. The place is unhealthy to most strangers. Scarcely a man who has been here a week, but has a cold, arising from the dense, cold damp air and fogs, which rest in the valley.”

— Samuel S. Conant to his wife, Eliza, Oct. 18, 1822.

Samuel S. Conant was born in Ashburnham, Mass., in 1797, but moved almost immediately with his parents to Brandon, Vermont, where his father, John Conant, built a sawmill, later a blast furnace, and then the first stove manufactory in Vermont (which produced the famous Conant stoves). He was among Brandon's early leaders, and Conant Park was named for him.

Two of John's several sons joined him in business, and Thomas Jefferson Conant became a prominent Hebrew scholar, but Samuel S. (the second child) wandered from home. He married Elizabeth Trumbull Mills of West Hartford, Connecticut, moved to New York City, and was variously a merchant and an editor. When he wrote the letter here describing Montpelier he apparently was employed by the Vermont Legislature as an engrossing clerk. Elsewhere in the letter he writes that the job is worth about \$200, and that the legislative session will last four or five weeks. His wife was in Brandon, awaiting the birth of their third child.

Samuel Conant suffered from poor health. Letters to his wife were frequently written from well-known watering places, and he often complained of his ailments. He died in Brandon at the age of 33.

The letter quoted here, and others written by Samuel Conant, are in the Library of the Vermont Historical Society.