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“EVERYBODY VOTES FOR GILCHRIST”:
THE FLORIDA GUBERNATORIAL
CAMPAIGN OF 1908

by RIC A. KABAT

THE sun was breaking through in Tallahassee on January 5, 1909, as groups of people filled the streets excitedly awaiting the inauguration of Florida's new governor. The capitol was adorned with red, white, and blue bunting, and crowds had gathered on the grounds to watch the ceremonial festivities. At 12:00 P.M., Albert W. Gilchrist recited the oath officially accepting the office that he had sought so long and hard.¹ Stepping to the podium, he could see hundreds of people waiting to hear his inaugural address. Many wondered: will Gilchrist be progressive? Will he pursue liberal policies or will his administration be a throw back to the reactionary nineteenth-century Bourbon days?

Progressive reform was a catch phrase for southern social, economic, and political development at the turn of the century. Unlike the reforms (attempted and sometimes accomplished) of the Reconstruction or Populist years, reform in the early twentieth-century South came largely from the native white middle class.² The southern progressives formulated a reform philosophy, tempered by Protestantism and a rural heritage. Put broadly, it was a humanitarian rationalization of the industrialism embodied in the New South creed.³ Religious and secular organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Young Men's Christian Association, Southern Sociological Congress, and Southern Commercial Congress gave voice to the movement.

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1. Daisy Parker, "The Inauguration of Albert Waller Gilchrist, Nineteenth Governor of the State of Florida," *Apalachee* 6 (1963-1967), 28-29. See also Mary Evangelista Staid, "Albert Waller Gilchrist, Florida's Middle of the Road Governor" (master's thesis, University of Florida, 1950), 48-50.
2. Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville, 1983), 114.
3. For a discussion of the New South creed see Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970).



Governor Gilchrist, 1910. Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

The progressive spirit transformed southern politics. All the southern states initiated primary election laws taking nominating power from the political bosses and giving it to the people. Disfranchisement of blacks was initiated and completed, drastically shrinking the electorate. The argument was that ignorant black voters would no longer be used and manipulated by whites for political gain and that whites themselves could concentrate on needed legislation. As a result, the Democratic party represented white supremacy and reigned supreme throughout the region.⁴

Most southern states elected reform governors during this era. In Mississippi and South Carolina James K. "the White Chief" Vardaman and Benjamin "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman led reform administrations based on populist principles and demagogic tactics. Other reform governors in the South—Hoke Smith in Georgia, Braxton B. Comer in Alabama, and Charles B. Aycock in North Carolina—had middle class and urban backgrounds and were correspondingly influenced by progressive rather than populist reform theories.⁵

Reform swept through Florida, as it did throughout the South. Gilchrist's predecessor, Governor Napoleon B. Broward (1905-1909), was commonly identified with reform. Although considered by most writers and historians as a progressive, Broward had a philosophy based more on populism. He led a faction of the state Democratic party in Jacksonville known as the "straightouts" who were influenced by the Populist party's Ocala Demands of 1890. The "straightouts" were anti-corporation and anti-railroad but did not bolt the party. In essence, they were less conservative than archetypical Bourbon Democrats but less radical and more "respectable" than the agrarians. Broward consistently criticized out-of-state-owned business and industry and referred to himself as a "man of the people." In the gubernatorial election of 1904 he garnered most of his support from north and west Florida farmers. In fact, in

4. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 114.

5. *Ibid.*, 50-51, 76. See also William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge, 1970); Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge, 1944); Dewey W. Grantham, *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1958); Oliver H. Orr, Jr., *Charles Brantley Aycock* (Chapel Hill, 1961).

the statewide primaries he participated in Broward never carried his home county, Duval, Florida's largest and most urban county. While governor he unified and streamlined higher education, initiated the drainage of the Everglades, regulated child labor, and instituted other reforms.⁶ It was Broward's legacy that Gilchrist inherited.

When Gilchrist became governor, he was one of the most successful businessmen in the state. As a wealthy landowner from Punta Gorda and a leading member of the community, he found the anti-business rhetoric of Broward alien. Opposed to preserving an all encompassing agricultural society and an intrastate-owned business community, Gilchrist praised industrial development and welcomed northern investment. Yet, he favored regulation. In a campaign pamphlet of 1908, Gilchrist discussed "the natural man and the artificial man, which [was] a corporation," Each, he noted, had "certain rights, each should be restricted, each should be kept in due bounds, neither should be imposed upon."⁷ Gilchrist was a member of what historian Dewey W. Grantham has described as the "rapidly expanding middle class in the [South]" whose reforms, according to C. Vann Woodward, were "essentially urban and middle class in nature, . . . the typical leader . . . a city professional or businessman, rather than a farmer."⁸ According to still another southern historian, Sheldon Hackney, the southern progressives stressed "order, equity, development, [and] humanitarianism" which were "interrelated facets of a single economically self-interested, ethnically shaped, middle class attitude toward life."⁹ As a spokesman for economic development through positive governmental reform, Gilchrist voiced the social goals of Florida's progressives.

Napoleon Broward's administration was unusually active. He had championed many reforms, and most of his suggestions

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6. Samuel Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward: Florida's Fighting Democrat* (Gainesville, 1950), 192, 205, 281, 304.
 7. Albert W. Gilchrist, "Address by Albert W. Gilchrist of Punta Gorda, Candidate for Governor of Florida" [n.p.], 1908, 5, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville (hereinafter cited as "Gilchrist Address").
 8. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 8; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951), 371.
 9. Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, 1969), 138.

were enacted. Although the new legislation benefitted most Floridians, Broward's activism alienated voters who were used to a more leisurely paced executive branch. Moreover, Broward openly supported friends from the "straightout" faction for political offices, and many Floridians thought that he was building a political machine. Many Floridians believed in 1908 that a candidate in the forthcoming gubernatorial election who was not politically connected to Broward stood a good chance of winning. Gilchrist saw his opportunity and entered the contest.

Winning a Democratic primary in Florida, or anywhere in the South during the early twentieth century, was tantamount to winning the general election. The Republican party was tainted because of its association with Congressional Reconstruction and was split into lily white and black and tan factions. The lily whites pursued federal patronage while the black and tans progressively sank into political oblivion. The primary system was one method (constitutional disfranchisement was the other) employed by southern Democrats to reduce black suffrage.

Florida adopted the system in 1901 with its Primary Election Act.¹⁰ The law mandated primaries for all political parties in races for the governorship, cabinet posts, congressional offices, and local offices. If a candidate failed to receive a majority, a runoff election was held within four weeks. The Democratic primaries were restricted to whites. Furthermore, the poll tax requirement, added to the Florida Constitution in 1889, prevented many blacks from voting in the general election.¹¹ Florida politics, like southern politics, was a domain of white supremacy.

By 1908, the issue of black participation in politics was resolved. New issues, such as the prohibition question, commanded political attention. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League, church groups, and other organizations had powerful influence in the state. With the demise of Populist agitation and black political activity, prohibition became one of the dominant themes in Florida politics.

In 1908, Florida's Constitution permitted each county to decide its own fate concerning prohibition. Even so, zealous pro-

10. Florida Legislature, *Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida, 1901* (Tallahassee, 1901), 160 (hereinafter cited as *Acts and Resolutions*, with appropriate year).

11. V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949), 539.

hibitionists continually called for a statewide ban of intoxicants. The prohibition issue split the state into two sections: the rural areas favored statewide prohibition; the more ethnically diversified urban areas supported local option. In bitter county elections pitting drys against wets, the drys won. By 1908, thirty-five out of forty-six counties were dry. That year the Anti-Saloon League happily reported "only 330 saloons left in the entire state."¹² Counties continued to go dry, and in 1918 the legislature passed a statewide prohibition bill. The following year Florida became a dry state.¹³

Pockets of anti-prohibition sentiment thrived in Florida, particularly in Tampa and Jacksonville. Tampa's economy depended on its cigar industry and the labor supplied by the city's large Latin community. Because Catholic Latins used wine in their religious practices, Tampa newspapers defended local option. They saw no reason to alienate the Latins and damage the vital cigar industry. Jacksonville was the largest city in Florida, and, like Tampa, had a more diversified populace than the prodry rural communities. By 1908, the preservation of local option developed into one of the major issues of Florida's gubernatorial campaign.

Gilchrist, Jefferson B. Browne, and John N. C. Stockton were the three candidates in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Their geographical bases affected the election's outcome. Gilchrist lived in south Florida— in many ways a frontier region in 1908— and had strong support in that area. He was an early settler and developer around Punta Gorda and personified the rugged individualism of the south Florida pioneer. Browne was a prominent attorney in Key West and a former member of the state senate and the Florida Railroad Commission. Although he was active in state government, he had little exposure among the people of north and west Florida. Stockton was a businessman and politician from Jacksonville and a close political ally and friend of Governor Broward. Like Broward, he garnered most of his support from the farmers and residents of small towns in north Florida and in the panhandle part of the state.

12. Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 280, quoting Ernest H. Cherrington, ed., *The Anti-Saloon League Year Book, 1909* (Columbus, Ohio, 1909), 27.

13. *Acts and Resolutions, 1918*, 30-48.

Gilchrist was born on January 15, 1858, in Greenwood, South Carolina. His father, William E. Kilcrease, owned a large plantation in Gadsden County, Florida, and was one of the state's wealthiest planters.¹⁴ Following his father's death from pneumonia in 1860, and the economic dislocations of the Civil War, the family plantation was mismanaged and ruined. Gilchrist and his mother, Rhoda E. Kilcrease, were left destitute. In 1870 Rhoda married Dr. J. G. Gibbs of Columbia, South Carolina, and her new affluence made it possible for Gilchrist to attend Carolina Military Institute, in Charlotte, North Carolina. He graduated from the Institute in 1878, and in the same year passed the exam for admission to West Point. In 1881 he failed a philosophy examination and resigned from the Academy, although the military training proved to be valuable later. From 1887 to 1904, Gilchrist served as colonel and brigadier general in the Florida State Militia. During the Spanish-American War, Gilchrist was a major in the Third United States Volunteer Infantry stationed in Cuba. Proclaiming that "I killed no one and no one killed me," he returned to civilian life in 1899.¹⁵

Before the war, Gilchrist had served in the Florida House of Representatives from DeSoto County in 1893 and 1895; he was reelected in 1902 and 1904. In 1896 he had refused to endorse the minting of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one, and lost support from the dominant silver faction of the state Democratic party. As a result, Gilchrist was defeated for reelection by the independent free silver candidate, O. T. Stanford. By 1903, he had recouped his political losses, and in 1905 was elected as speaker of the house.¹⁶ Although he was neither personally nor politi-

14. Florida Historical Society, *Makers of America*, 4 vols. (Atlanta, 1909-1911), III, 56. Rhoda E. Gibbs, Gilchrist's mother, filed an affidavit in 1905 explaining Gilchrist's change of surname from Kilcrease to Gilchrist. She claimed "that before his death . . . William E. Kilcrease requested his wife . . . to have his son Albert Waller to use the original name Gilchrist, and in obedience to this request his son Albert Waller did take and use the name Gilchrist when a boy." Affidavit of Mrs. Rhoda E. Gibbs, Deed Book S, Gadsden County Courthouse, Quincy, Florida, 433.

15. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 17, 1916.

16. Political campaign advertisement, July 26, 1915, Albert W. Gilchrist papers, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

tally connected with Broward and the "straightouts," Gilchrist supported most of the governor's reforms. Being speaker increased his statewide exposure, and he used it as a stepping stone to the governorship. A Jacksonville paper declared: "he wanted to catch every wind that might blow him into the governor's chair, for he believed that might prove a very pleasant place to rest."¹⁷

From 1880 to 1886, Jefferson Browne was the attorney for Key West and Monroe County. When Grover Cleveland was elected president in 1884, Browne received a federal patronage position as postmaster of Key West. In 1890, Browne successfully ran for the state senate and was elected president of that body. In 1892 he attempted to gain the Democratic nomination for governor but failed. He was collector of customs for Key West in 1893, and from 1904 to 1907, served as chairman of the Florida Railroad Commission.¹⁸

Starting his career as a bank clerk, Stockton quickly worked his way up in the lucrative field of banking. He helped to establish the National Bank of Florida in Jacksonville and eventually became its vice president.¹⁹ In 1890 he entered the phosphate mining industry with Broward. The two maintained a friendship and political alliance that lasted until Broward's death in 1910. Stockton and Broward were the principal members of the "straightout" faction of the Democratic party in Duval County.

Stockton achieved prominence in Duval County politics through his membership on the Jacksonville Board of Public Works. In 1896 he was elected to the Florida House of Representatives where he attracted statewide recognition as a "straightout" leader. He ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination to the United States Senate in 1904.²⁰

17. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 15, 1907.

18. Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and The New* (St. Augustine, 1912; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1973), xiii-xiv. Information taken from E. Ashby Hammond's Introduction. Browne later became chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court (1916-1923) and retired from public life in 1925.

19. Harry G. Cutler, ed., *History of Florida, Past and Present, Historical and Bibliographical*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1923), I, 117.

20. *Ibid.*, 118. Stockton ran for the United States Senate again in 1910 and 1914, but after failing three times, he retired from public life.

On November 14, 1907, the Democratic party of Florida held a "coming out" convention in Ocala.²¹ At that time, Democratic politicians announced for various offices. The Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union* reported that "no such convention was ever before held in the state" and that "it is at once unique."²² The sessions took place under huge circus tents, and the Ocala band furnished a festive atmosphere. An estimated 2,000 people came to hear the candidates express their views and state their platforms.

Gilchrist, Browne, and Stockton officially announced for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. R. Hudson Burr of Tallahassee, chairman of the Florida Railroad Commission, also entered the contest only to drop out soon after the convention. Gilchrist and Browne read their allotted twenty minute speeches, but Stockton could not attend the convention, and George Matthews of Marion County spoke for him. According to a contemporary source, Matthews, "in a flight of eloquence," described Stockton "as the ideal man for the highest office [and] was applauded to the echo."²³

When Gilchrist spoke, he "captured the crowd with his quaint wit and apt applications." The reporter who described the speech noted that Gilchrist explained his views on various topics: prohibition, limited black suffrage, drainage of the Everglades, the state press, and the relationship between industry and labor unions.²⁴ The speech was important because it defined Gilchrist's campaign platform.

Concerning prohibition, Gilchrist favored local option. He explained that "state prohibition . . . requires an amendment to the constitution, the approval or rejection of which is left to the people." Hoping to attract the rural vote, Gilchrist suggested that local option paralleled the ideas of initiative and referendum advocated by the Populist party. Admitting that he drank "probably a dozen drinks a year, spiritous, vinous, or malt," Gilchrist believed in temperance and had voted for prohibition

21. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 15, 1907.

22. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 15, 1907.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.* Later in the campaign, Gilchrist issued a platform outlining his views on the issues. See "Gilchrist Address."

in DeSoto County. Considering Gilchrist's Tampa-based support, his position on prohibition was logical.²⁵

Gilchrist then compared the position of Florida's blacks to the ethnic problems of Japanese and whites in California. Since Californians had a race problem of their own, he theorized that "they would surely join the southland in an alliance on the race question." Gilchrist supported the white primary in Florida because it reduced "the balance of power of the Negro vote." By "preventing division in the white vote of the state," the candidate explained, the primaries eliminated blacks from the political scene and strengthened white rule.²⁶

Drainage of swamplands, particularly the Everglades, was an important topic in 1908. During Broward's administration, a drainage commission had been established. The commission—staffed by the governor, attorney general, secretary of agriculture, and the state treasurer—studied drainage projects and collected a five cent per acre tax on privately owned swampland. The funds were earmarked for building a drainage infrastructure." Gilchrist supported the commission's efforts to reclaim land in south Florida.²⁸

Gilchrist also praised newspapers by saying that "the press does more for the development of the state than all other agencies combined." He proclaimed that the press "does much for the election of the successful candidates," presumably referring to himself. He then thanked several state journals for "the favorable consideration" of his candidacy.²⁹ The state's major newspapers—the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, *Tampa Morning Tribune*, *Ocala Banner*, *Miami News-Record*, and the *Gainesville Daily Sun*—supported Gilchrist. Perhaps the persuasive campaigner hoped to sway the cynical news media with flattery; it is certain that his remarks were not intended to alienate the fourth estate.

Finally, Gilchrist discussed the relationship between industry and labor unions. The "organization of capital is necessary to

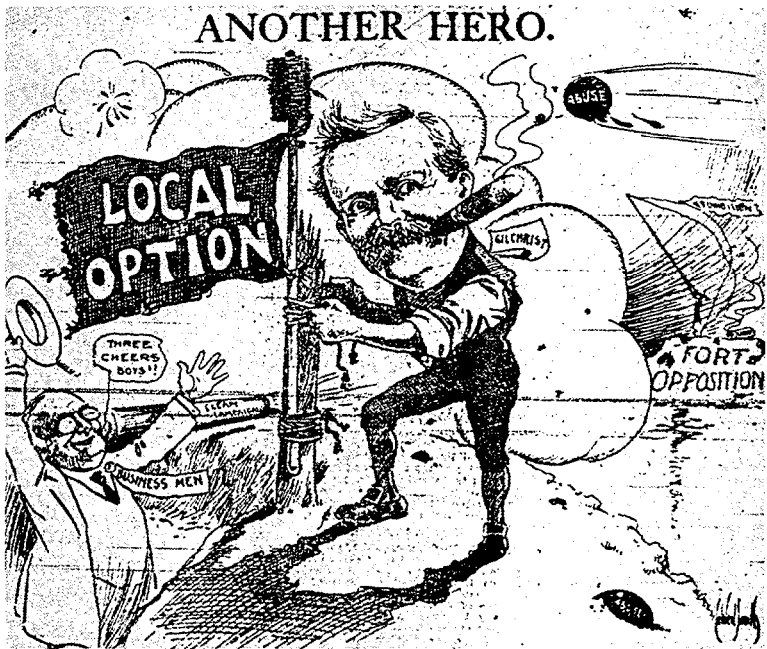
25. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 15, 1907.

26. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 15, 1907.

27. Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 223. See also Nelson Manfred Blake, *Land into Water—Water into Land: A History of Water Management in Florida* (Tallahassee, 1980), 97.

28. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 15, 1907.

29. *Ibid.*



Political cartoon from the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 15, 1908.

produce great results," he said, but "labor should also organize to secure its just rewards." When differences arose, they should be "settled by arbitration."³⁰ Gilchrist's rational and progressive stand came from his knowledge of Tampa's cigar-makers unions and mutual aid societies. The unions secured relatively high wages for their members, and the mutual aid societies developed a unique low interest home loan program.³¹ Gilchrist was popular in Tampa and was dependent on the cigar-makers' vote. Furthermore, labor unions (particularly the street car organiza-

30. Ibid.

31. José Revero Muñiz, *The Ybor City Story, 1885-1954*, trans. Eustasio Fernandez and Henry Beltran (Tampa, 1976), 27. See also Gary A. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Chicago, 1987), 111-28, 175-205. In 1908, both the Cigar Makers International Union, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and the Industrial Workers of the World were active in Tampa.

tions) were also powerful in Jacksonville and Pensacola in 1908. In fact, the unions in Pensacola had entered the local political scene. Evidently, Gilchrist's pro-union comments did not offend Florida industrialists as the state's conservative journals continued to support him.³²

Following Gilchrist's speech, Browne took the stage and, reciting "facts and quotations in a statesmanlike way," delivered his opening campaign speech. He supported statewide prohibition as "the best economy for municipalities."³³ Prohibitionists such as Browne assumed that money previously spent on alcohol would flow into the local economy and fund such socially constructive enterprises as schools, commerce and industry.³⁴ Browne added "that his entire record . . . had [always] been in favor of the people." He concluded by noting his experience as postmaster of Key West and his membership on the Florida Railroad Commission.³⁵

In the months following the Ocala convention the candidates were relatively quiet. The state Democratic committee met in February, and set the date of the primary election for May 19, 1908.³⁶ In April and May the campaign gathered momentum as the three candidates criss-crossed the state making speeches. During the first few weeks the contenders limited themselves to reciting their platform proposals, but as the election grew near the campaign turned bitter.

Gilchrist's main headquarters were in the Doty Building in Jacksonville; he also set up offices in Punta Gorda. According to a newspaper, Gilchrist's belief that he could "personally look after all matters pertaining to [his] candidacy" changed as the campaign progressed. Traveling extensively throughout the state, Gilchrist hired a campaign manager and a small staff to help coordinate the contest.³⁷

32. For a discussion of the status of labor unions in Florida, particularly in Pensacola, in 1908 see Wayne Flynt, "Pensacola Labor Problems and Political Radicalism, 1908," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 43 (April 1965), 315-32. Nine labor candidates were elected to the Escambia County executive committee, and five union candidates won in five of Pensacola's eleven city precincts.

33. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 15, 1907.

34. Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 280.

35. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, November 15, 1907.

36. *Ibid.*, February 11, 1908.

37. *Ibid.*, March 5, 1908.

Gilchrist's platform was published daily as a political advertisement in the major newspapers. As the *Pensacola Journal* stated, "the General's smiling visage greets you, accompanied by a statement of the interesting fact that he is a candidate for governor, with a sub-statement of views on certain leading issues."³⁸ "No faction, machine, or ring brought him out. He came out as a candidate alone and single handed. He will be glad to receive the support of the corporations, of the anti-corporations, the prohibitionists and the anti-prohibitionists, of the local optionists, the Christians, the Jews and of the Gentiles, the Publicans and Sinners. He would even accept support from the Pharisees."³⁹ Such campaign tactics did not amuse Gilchrist's opponents, who accused him of fence-sitting. Although vague on certain issues, Gilchrist confronted the central issue of prohibition and never backed down from his support of local option. Throughout the campaign he was continually accused by Browne and Stockton of being a puppet of the "whiskey interests" and corporations. To his credit, Gilchrist never retaliated against his opponents with comparable defamations, and their claims were not substantiated. Since prohibition was a major issue on which the election hinged, Gilchrist's support of local option was a courageous stand.

Gilchrist introduced an interesting and amusing gimmick to the campaign. He distributed postcards with a drawing of three monkeys. One monkey was covering its eyes, the second its ears, and the third its mouth. Gilchrist explained that the monkeys represented his philosophy of life in that, "they had wisdom enough to shut their eyes, their mouths, and their ears as to other people's business and mind their own." He was disappointed because "some people in criticizing the inscription on the postcards . . . see only the monkeys without seeing the lesson taught." To further promote his candidacy, he bought sets of monkeys made of porcelain and planned to send one to every voter in Florida. The statues had to be imported from Japan, and he obtained only 800. Nevertheless, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that the sets were "highly appreciated by those who have been fortunate enough to receive them."⁴⁰

38. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, April 26, 1908, quoting *Pensacola Journal*.

39. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 15, 1908.

40. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1908.

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Browne and Stockton also established campaign offices in Jacksonville. Browne campaigned in north and west Florida attempting to gain recognition in these areas. In a speech delivered in Tallahassee, he delineated his platform proposals of statewide prohibition, a strong railroad commission, state regulation of primaries, and requiring all railroads to have "an accredited representative" live in the state. Denying the reputation of "corporation man," Browne declared himself a state righter, one who did not "gain inspiration" from the national Republican administration.⁴¹ Like Browne, Stockton enunciated his platform by placing a running advertisement in major newspapers. It called for a "franchise tax on railroads, state prohibition, extension of [the] school system, saving the public land, regulating railroad rates, and the reduction of primary expenses." Stockton was against "franchise abuses, lobbying, overcapitalization of railroads, [ballot corruption], and gambling."⁴²

Stockton quickly stumbled into two problems. The first concerned his proposals to establish a civic league in every Florida community. The leagues were to act as "town meeting" organizations where local Democrats could get together and discuss political issues. He also wanted the leagues to be part of the Democratic party's machinery and give him advice. Gilchrist and Browne quickly condemned the leagues as obvious tools intended to bolster Stockton's political standing. The anti-Stockton press, from every region of the state, provided intense condemnation. An editorial in the *Tampa Morning Tribune* declared: "What Stockton fictitiously calls civic leagues . . . would be used as various wheels, cogs, springs, and alarm bells in a gigantic political machine."⁴³ The analysis was probably correct. With Stockton facing a difficult campaign, and his political ally Broward experiencing problems in the Democratic senatorial primary campaign against Duncan U. Fletcher, William B. Lamar, and John S. Beard, Stockton hoped the leagues would further his own political fortunes.

Stockton's second problem emerged in mid-April 1908. It concerned his business dealings with Gus Morton, a former business partner in the phosphate industry. Morton publicly ac-

41. Tallahassee *Weekly True Democrat*, November 22, 1907.

42. *Jasper News*, May 1, 1908.

43. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 16, 1908.

cused Stockton of owing him money and of acting irresponsibly. Morton announced his switch of support from Stockton to Gilchrist. He then challenged Stockton to a debate over the latter's qualifications for the governorship. The debate took place at the Alachua County Courthouse in Gainesville on April 18, and generated statewide media attention.⁴⁴ Stockton defended himself by showing that for reasons unknown Morton had exaggerated a private disagreement. In a letter published in the *Gainesville Daily Sun*, Stockton wrote, "what has induced Gus Morton after all these years to suddenly turn against me . . . just before the primary election can be guessed by others as easily as by myself."⁴⁵ Stockton skillfully defended himself, but the incident's negative publicity damaged his standing among the voters. No explanation for Morton's actions was ever made.

While Stockton floundered in the civic league and Gus Morton fiascoes, Gilchrist consolidated support. The *Deland Record* called him "the idol of all South Florida."⁴⁶ In Eustis Lake he "was full of dry jokes and saw every voter on the street."⁴⁷ The *Fort Pierce News* reported that Gilchrist was "a man of the people, and from the people."⁴⁸ The editor of the *Lake Butler Star* believed Gilchrist "would make Florida an ideal governor."⁴⁹ Gilchrist's vigorous campaigning increased his statewide recognition and support.

On April 11, Gilchrist visited Tampa and spoke at the opening of the Gilchrist Institute, a private high school, for which he had donated the land and contributed \$1,000 toward construction costs. A reporter was on hand and wrote that the students arrived "in electric cars, decorated with huge banners extending their entire length, bearing the words Gilchrist Institute." A crowd of more than 200 people waved "miniature flags, and at the head was a graceful young lady pupil most appropriately costumed as the Goddess of Liberty." Gilchrist's speech "was interrupted frequently by applause and the rendering of the Gilchrist Institute yell . . .

44. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, April 19, 1908.

45. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1908.

46. *Tallahassee Weekly True Democrat*, April 3, 1908, quoting *Deland Record*.

47. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 31, 1908, quoting *Eustis Lake Region*.

48. *Tallahassee Weekly True Democrat*, April 3, 1908, quoting *Fort Pierce News*.

49. *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, March 3, 1908, quoting *Lake Butler Star*.

Gilchrist! Gilchrist!
 Rah! Rah! Rah!
 Vote for him for governor!⁵⁰

If the yell was unimaginative, its sentiments were clear, and the speech was one in a series delivered at political rallies in Tampa. State newspapers printed accounts of the meetings, helping to spread Gilchrist's name and message to the voters.

Gilchrist won the primary election by over 3,000 votes, but he did not obtain a majority. He received 23,248 votes to Stockton's 20,068, while Browne trailed with 8,986. Gilchrist captured twenty-four counties— Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, DeSoto, Duval, Franklin, Gadsden, Hillsborough, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lake, Leon, Levy, Madison, Manatee, Nassau, Orange, Osceola, Putnam, St. Johns, Suwannee, and Volusia. Stockton lost his own county, Duval, but carried twenty others— Brevard, Calhoun, Citrus, Dade, Escambia, Hamilton, Hernando, Holmes, Lee, Liberty, Marion, Pasco, Polk, St. Lucie, Santa Rosa, Sumter, Taylor, Wakulla, Walton, and Washington. Browne only received two— Jackson and Monroe. Gilchrist ran well in the cities, winning Jacksonville, Tallahassee, and Tampa, while Stockton only carried Pensacola. Gilchrist and Stockton now prepared to face each other in the runoff election scheduled for June 16.⁵¹

The runoff campaign between Gilchrist and Stockton was vicious and bitter. Stockton accused Gilchrist of being a frontman for the "whiskey interests" and of accepting up to \$360,000 from out-of-state breweries and distilleries to fund his campaign. A group of Protestant ministers in Jacksonville, calling themselves the Ministerial Alliance, joined Stockton in denouncing Gilchrist. Stockton made his allegations in a speech delivered in Tampa on June 6. As the local newspaper put it, he "declared the recent primary was carried for General Gilchrist by corporate influence and whiskey soaked corruption." Waving a piece of paper over his head, Stockton proclaimed: "I have here a letter written on stationery of the Chattanooga Brewing Co., which is addressed to D. L. Thrift, at Maclenny, Fla.

50. Tallahassee *Weekly True Democrat*, April 17, 1908, quoting *Tampa Times*.

51. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 30, 1908.

It is from D. Muller & Co., liquor dealers of Jacksonville, and states that a gallon of whiskey is being sent by express, which please use to the best advantage in the interest of General Gilchrist's candidacy for governor."⁵²

The letter that Stockton read for the Tampa audience was printed on June 5, in the *Jasper News* under the title of "This Tells The Tale." The letter was actually an advertisement of the Chattanooga Brewing Company that included a typed written message addressed to D. L. Thrift, a candidate for sheriff in Baker County.⁵³ There was no letterhead, and it was obvious the letter could have been typed by anybody. It was difficult to escape the conclusion that Stockton's supporters were guilty of dirty politics. There was more to come.

William E. Boggs, pastor of Jacksonville's First Presbyterian Church and a member of the Ministerial Alliance, started the rumor that Gilchrist had accepted \$360,000 from out-of-state brewers and distillers. Stockton agreed with the allegation and called for the Alliance's support. In a series of letters exchanged between J. O. Lafontisee, Gilchrist's campaign manager, and Boggs, the true nature of the accusation was revealed.

Lafontisee, responding to a speech made by an Alliance member in Ocala citing Boggs as the source of the rumor, wrote asking for an explanation. The Reverend Boggs answered in a long, rambling, and, in places, incoherent letter. Accusing Lafontisee of being young and disrespectful and referring to him as "boy" (Lafontisee was thirty-seven years old), Boggs wrote: "I was in the office of my friend, Mr. A. H. King, on the afternoon of Friday, May 22, 1908, with . . . Mr. Stevens, president of the Anti-Saloon League of Florida . . . Mr. _____ entered the room, and after some conversation he asked, 'Have you gentlemen learned the amount sent into Florida by the distillers and brewers of the United States to influence the pending election?' We answered in the negative. . . . And so our friend, after first telling us how we had obtained this information (the matter was entirely honorable, and the information was very definite and reliable, as it seemed to us), said the aggregate was \$360,000 or about that." Boggs admitted that his friend had

52. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 7, 1908.

53. *Jasper News*, June 5, 1908.

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failed to link Gilchrist with the money, "but anybody with half an eye could see how this bribery fund was related to him."⁵⁴

Lafontisee's response to Boggs's letter denied Gilchrist's involvement in the scandal and ridiculed the charge. Pointing out that "you have nothing more to base it on than the hearsay statement of Mr. _____," Lafontisee further stated, "I neglected to learn that either age or a ministerial cloak gave license to slander, as to blacken the character of the humblest citizen." The campaign manager concluded, "I am satisfied, sir, that had you investigated a little there would have been no need for this correspondence."⁵⁵

Gilchrist offered \$1,000 to anyone who could prove that he accepted \$360,000. No one collected the offer, and no evidence ever surfaced connecting Gilchrist with any dealings with brewers and distillers. Boggs's accusation was an obvious attempt by a Stockton supporter to curb Gilchrist's rising popularity.

Gilchrist gained strength despite attempts by Stockton and the Ministerial Alliance to discredit him. The *Leesburg Commercial* advised its readers that Stockton's accusations were "for political effect only."⁵⁶ The *Ocala Banner* illustrated the ridiculousness of Stockton's claims: "Sending a jug of liquor into said [dry] counties with the compliments of Albert Gilchrist would be like a red flag flaunted in the eyes of an infuriated bull."⁵⁷ In the last days of the campaign Chandra W. McMullen of Tampa wrote a campaign song for Gilchrist. Set to the tune of "Everybody Works but Father," Gilchrist and the crowds at his campaign stops joined together in singing:

Everybody votes for Gilchrist
For he's a great, good man
We're certainly going to elect him
If we possibly can
Stockton better take in washing

54. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, June 12, 1908. W. A. Lambert of Ocala was the president of Florida's Anti-Saloon League in 1908. The "Mr. Stevens" Boggs referred to was probably an official in the local organization. See Ernest Hurst Cherrington, ed., *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem*, 6 vols. (Westerville, OH, 1926), III, 1,004.

55. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, June 12, 1908.

56. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 6, 1908, quoting *Leesburg Commercial*.

57. *Ibid.*, June 11, 1908, quoting *Ocala Banner*.

Broward also ran
Everybody votes for Gilchrist
For he's the man.⁵⁸

Gilchrist won the election by over 9,000 votes. He collected 32,465 votes and carried thirty-two counties—Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Calhoun, Clay, Columbia, DeSoto, Duval, Escambia, Franklin, Gadsden, Hamilton, Hillsborough, Jackson, Jefferson, Lake, Leon, Levy, Madison, Manatee, Marion, Monroe, Nassau, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Putnam, St. Johns, Suwannee, Volusia, Wakulla, and Walton. Stockton polled 23,391 votes and captured fourteen counties—Brevard, Citrus, Dade, Hernando, Holmes, Lafayette, Lee, Liberty, Pasco, St. Lucie, Santa Rosa, Sumter, Taylor, and Washington. In the four-week interval between the elections, Gilchrist had acquired much of Stockton's former support in the northern and western rural counties, and he also carried Pensacola.⁵⁹ He won a smashing victory, and, with the state's newspapers referring to him as governor-elect, prepared for the anti-climatic general election scheduled for November 3.

To break the monotony, journalists, with tongue in cheek, proposed a bridal primary to elect a wife for Gilchrist, a lifelong bachelor. The proposal was bandied about by the newspapers and provided a humorous diversion during the long, hot summer months.⁶⁰ John M. Cheney of Orlando was nominated for governor by the Republican party, and A. J. Pettigrew of Tampa was the Socialist nominee. Gilchrist won the election by a landslide, receiving 33,036 votes. Cheney gathered 6,453 votes, and Pettigrew managed to poll 2,427.⁶¹ The long campaign was over, and Gilchrist was on the threshold of a new and entirely different challenge.

The Florida gubernatorial election of 1908 was in some ways a watershed event. The Populist based reform zeal of the Broward years gave way to the business oriented progressivism of Gilchrist. Although continuing such Broward policies as drainage, Gilchrist did not agitate the rural "crackers" with talk of statewide prohibition and anti-corporation schemes. Many lib-

58. Ibid., June 14, 1908.

59. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, June 27, 1908.

60. Tallahassee *Weekly True Democrat*, July 10, 1908.

61. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, December 7, 1908.

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eral state representatives and senators were elected who responded to the new governor's reform proposals.

During Gilchrist's administration a juvenile court system was established, a prison farm was purchased, election laws were reformed, the pension system was revised, a crippled childrens hospital was created, a trust regulation law was enacted, and other reforms were put into the statute books.⁶² Gilchrist's reform policies were continued and expanded during the administrations of Park Trammell (1913-1917) and Sydney J. Catts (1917-1921).⁶³ Those Floridians who were worried on that bright inaugural day in the winter of 1909 had no need for concern. The state was in good hands.

62. *Acts and Resolutions, 1909, 27, 71, 129-32; Acts and Resolutions, 1911, 41, 70-83, 181-88.*

63. See Stephen Kerber, "Park Trammell of Florida: A Political Biography" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1979); and Wayne Flynt, *Cracker Messiah: Governor Sydney J. Catts of Florida* (Baton Rouge, 1977).