

1884

On July 22, 1881 the second U.S. President to be assassinated was shot in the back at a Washington train station. President Garfield died almost two months later raising Chester A. Arthur to the Presidency. Arthur proved to be an able administrator and his term is best known for enactment of Civil Service reform. However, Arthur's style was markedly different from his predecessors and he was not a favorite of Republican party leaders.²⁶ Therefore, the nomination was considered open.

The Republicans again held their convention first, a practice unusual for an incumbent party. With general agreement on issues and platform the convention controversy lay simply in the decision whether to unseat an incumbent President. Secretary of State James G. Blaine was one of those who had stepped aside for Garfield in 1880 and he had the support of many party stalwarts who had supported him previously and were his former Senate colleagues. The President, recognizing his internal party weaknesses, did not strongly contest the takeover and Blaine captured the nomination on the fourth ballot.

The Democrats were aware of the Republican strife and felt they could finally win the White House after close races in 1876 and 1880. The only problem was finding a suitable candidate. Rising to the occasion was New York Governor Grover Cleveland who had cultivated a reputation for efficiency and honesty in his public career beginning with an election as Erie County sheriff in 1870. The Cleveland candidacy had gathered momentum prior to the convention and he easily gained a second ballot nomination.

It was to be a Democratic year as the Republican ticket ran into a series of bad judgments and bad timing. Blaine was accused of a shady role in the sale of worthless stock and a subsequent cover-up. His comments on the growth of wealth under Republican rule were unexpectedly heard by a reporter at a private New York dinner and the growing Catholic vote was insulted by the comments of some of vocal supporters.²⁷ Although Cleveland was not immune from personal attack,²⁸ the election activity of the Mugwumps (citizen reformers and anti-Blaine Republicans) focused most of the energy and criticism on the Republican nominee.²⁹

Maryland was more prominent in this national election as its U.S. Senator, Arthur P. Gorman, played a major campaign role. Gorman's ability as a political insider was quickly noticed in Washington and he became Chairman of the Senate Democratic Conference (caucus). He was elected head of the Democratic National Executive Committee in the 1884 general election and worked hard with others to raise monies in the first successful Democratic fight for the Presidency since 1856. In the third consecutive close election the Democrats finally prevailed. Cleveland obtained a slight edge in total votes 4,874,621 to 4,848,936 and an electoral vote margin of 219 to 182.

Not surprisingly, Maryland supported Cleveland with the patterns of voting within the state very similar to 1880. Cleveland's 96,946 to 85,748 victory in the state was a little more evenly balanced as the Democratic margin in Baltimore City dipped to 6,784. A Prohibition ticket first appeared in a Maryland presidential election in 1884 with its vice presidential candidate, William Daniel, a native of Maryland.³⁰ The Prohibition electors received 2,802 votes with its proportionally strongest areas being in diverse parts of the