

# The Life of The 'Boss of Cincinnati'

Edited by Louis Leonard Tucker

*I am the Boss of Cincinnati. I never dodged that statement in my life. I've got the best system of government in this country. If I didn't think my system was the best I would consider that I was a failure in life.*

*George B. Cox  
Cincinnati Post  
June 23, 1905*

*When the history of American politics in the quarter of a century between 1885 and 1910 is written, the name of George B. Cox will fill a considerable place.*

*Cincinnati Times-Star  
May 22, 1916*

George Barnsdale Cox (1853–1916) was the political superpower of Cincinnati, Ohio, for over a quarter of a century. From 1886 to 1916, he held the southwestern Ohio city in the palm of his beefy hand. He was the vortex of all political life, the “entire show in Cincinnati,” the “head and front” of her political machine, the man who made all vital decisions. According to Lincoln Steffens, the muckraker par excellence, Cox’s “machine and its methods . . . had been, it seemed to me, about the most perfect organization of the sort that I had seen or heard of.”<sup>1</sup> This was high praise indeed from one who had an intimate knowledge of the accomplishments of such prodigious political predators as Richard Croker and the “Honorable” William M. Tweed of New York City, “Senator” William Flinn and “Chris” Magee of Pittsburgh, “Colonel” Ed Butler of St. Louis, “Iz” Durham of Philadelphia and a host of others.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York, 1931), 487. Steffens believed, however, that the machine was in decline, that it was “neglecting the detailed work they used to do, did not keep up their voting lists and their blackmail data on citizens.”

<sup>2</sup>See Steffens’ classic *The Shame of the Cities* (New York, 1904). On bossism in America, see Lee S. Greene, ed., “City Bosses and Political Machines,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 353 (Philadelphia, 1964); Harold Zink, *City Bosses in the United States, A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham, N.C., 1930).



Society Collection

For twenty-five years Cox maintained an office above the Mecca Saloon on Walnut Street, next door to the Gibson House.

In his heyday, Cox was an awesome personality in Cincinnati. His name was a household word, known to adults and children alike.<sup>3</sup> Because he was a principal kingmaker for the state Republican Party, his reputation extended to all corners of Ohio. His political pronouncements and doings were frequently reported on the front pages of Ohio's leading newspapers. On the national level, his reputation was restricted to professional politicians and to those with a specialized interest in political affairs (newspapermen, political scientists, and the like).

In 1964, I began research on a history of The Cincinnati Association of Cincinnati, Ohio.<sup>4</sup> This civic organization had played a key role in destroying the Cox-Hynicka machine in the 1920's. Since my outline called for an opening chapter on the Cox-Hynicka era, I consulted the comprehensive card catalogue of The Cincinnati Historical Society, checking entries on Cox.<sup>5</sup> To my surprise, I found only a handful. I was particularly astonished by the dearth of recent secondary studies. One of the preeminent political giants of Cincinnati history, Cox has failed to attract his Boswell. A half century has passed since his death and yet no one has attempted an in-depth study of him. Only one secondary article exists and it hardly can be described as definitive.<sup>6</sup> Authors of recent general histories of Cincinnati discuss Cox, but they too present a sketchy, unsatisfying exposition.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>And feared by adults, as well. When Steffens sought to solicit information on Cox and his machine from Cincinnatians, he found that his interviewees would speak only behind closed doors — and then, only in a whisper; and they insisted that Steffens not refer to them by name in his publications. Their fears were justified since detectives employed by Cox maintained a close surveillance of Steffens. See Steffens, *Autobiography*, 484.

<sup>4</sup>*Cincinnati's Citizen Crusaders: A History of the Cincinnati Association* (Cincinnati, 1967).

<sup>5</sup>The catalogues encompass secondary works, manuscripts, pamphlets, newspapers and even photographs.

<sup>6</sup>Arlene Dingilian, "The Political Education of a Saloonkeeper," *The Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin*, XXIV, No. 4 (Oct., 1966), 313-320; based on a limited amount of primary evidence and hews closely to interpretation set forth by secondary commentators.

<sup>7</sup>Alvin Harlow's popular history, *The Serene Cincinnatians* (Cincinnati, 1950), makes passing reference to Cox, and its interpretation suffers from a lack of critical inquiry. The most recent general account, Dick Perry's *Vas You Ever in Zinzinnati?* (Garden City, New York, 1966), devotes five pages to the Cox era and elsewhere makes a few glancing references to him. Like Harlow's work, it is journalistic in style, based exclusively on secondary sources and disappointingly superficial in analysis.

Why the lack of biographical attention? Perhaps the principal reason is the almost total absence of source materials — another of my findings. Fundamental to the writing of biography is the personal correspondence of your subject, but Cox letters are as elusive as the Abominable Snowman. Suffice it to say that there is no known collection of Cox Papers and the likelihood exists that such a collection was never compiled. Like all political bosses, the “Old Boy” had an aversion to committing his thoughts to paper. He much preferred the spoken to the written word, for the latter might some day be directed against him in a court room. During an interview with Cox, Steffens once asked: “Of course, you have a mayor, and a council and judges?” Cox responded: “I have, but I have a telephone, too.”<sup>8</sup> The indication is that he used that telephone often. Again, he knew that telephones could never testify against him. Steffens also called attention to Cox’s “mean little front hall room” which served as his office. There was no secretary and, assuredly, no file cabinets.

What primary sources, then, are available for the researcher intent on reconstructing the life and career of the “Easy Boss”? The pickings are lamentably lean. Among printed works, there are a few essays and one book, which were written by contemporary muckrakers and ardent reformers.<sup>9</sup> Although these materials have a modicum of value, they must be used with caution. Cox’s critics were inclined to take straws of rumor and construct a monumental edifice of political transgressions. Their analysis was something less than objective. The published reports of two General Assembly investigating committees (1906 and 1908) are excellent sources for gaining an insight into the peculations and operating tactics of Cox’s gang, but they reveal little about Cox himself.<sup>10</sup> Cox’s death produced a spate

<sup>8</sup>Steffens, *Autobiography*, 483–484.

<sup>9</sup>Aside from the Steffens’ work, there are: Frank P. Stockbridge, “The Biggest Boss of Them All,” *Hampton’s Magazine*, XXVI (1911), 616–629; George K. Turner, “The Thing Above the Law — The Rise and Rule of George B. Cox . . .” *McClure’s Magazine*, XXXVII (1911–12), 575–591; Will Irwin, “Cox — The Last of the Bosses,” *Colliers* (Jan. 6, 1912), 11–12, 29, and continued in *ibid.* (Jan. 13, 1912), 12–13, 25–27; Henry C. Wright, *Bossism in Cincinnati* (Cincinnati, 1905), passim. Two magazines produced by contemporary Cincinnati reform groups (*Side Lights* and *The Citizens’ Bulletin*) are studied with anti-Cox diatribes.

<sup>10</sup>[State of Ohio], *Investigation of Cincinnati and Hamilton County* (Columbus, 1908); Arthur Espy, *The Legislative Investigations of Cincinnati in the Years 1906 and 1908* (Cincinnati, 1910).

of newspaper articles on his life and career, and these sources are helpful to the researcher.<sup>11</sup> But again, they are not as rich in detail as one would wish for, and some bear the taint of apocrypha.



*Society Collection*

**The election of Henry Hunt as mayor of Cincinnati in 1911 marked the beginning of Cox's downfall.**

Among primary sources, one item does stand out in solitary splendor. It is an autobiographical account which appeared in the

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<sup>11</sup>See the Cincinnati newspapers for the week of May 20, 1916. See also, the *New York Times*, May 16, 1921 and Nov. 29, 1921.

New York *World* on May 14, 1911; on the following day, it was reprinted in the Cincinnati *Enquirer*.<sup>12</sup> In it Cox related the story of his rise to power and laid forth the reasons for his success as a political leader.

What motivated Cox to prepare and release such a personal document? In a word, it was fear. In February, 1911, he was indicted for perjury as a result of the assiduous research efforts of Henry Hunt, the Hamilton County Prosecuting Attorney. A zealous reformer, Hunt had but one aim as a public official, and that was to destroy Cox and his machine and bring about the political redemption of the city and county.<sup>13</sup> He combed the transcripts of the legislative inquiries of 1906 and 1908 and detected inconsistency in Cox's testimony that he had not received part of the money ("gratuities") paid by certain Cincinnati banks to the county treasurer as interest on the deposit of public funds. The indictment for perjury followed. The incorruptible Judge Frank Gorman, who held the singular distinction of being free of machine influence, selected a special grand jury to try the case.<sup>14</sup>

Cox was petrified by the sudden turn of events. His initial reaction to the indictment was predictable. He charged that he was the victim of a political frame-up. When he came to realize that he had no control over the presiding judge and jury, he fell into a state of panic. He tried desperately to quash the indictment but without success. When he entered the courtroom he wore his customary air of bravado, but the facade soon disappeared. A spectator recorded the scene in these words:

He moved into the courtroom like a king — a massive somewhat puffy man, twin-brother in make-up to John L. Sullivan. While the clerk read the charge, he sat with his hands on his outspread knees and glared defiance from that dull but powerful eye of his.

<sup>12</sup>It was also reprinted in the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*. I have not checked other leading newspapers, but it would come as no surprise to learn that they also contained this copyrighted article.

<sup>13</sup>See Hoyt Landon Warner, "Henry Hunt and Civic Reform in Cincinnati, 1903-1913," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, LXII (1953), 146-161; Hoyt Landon Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio, 1898-1917* (Columbus, 1964), 302-304. Also see, Henry Hunt, *An Account of My Stewardship* (Cincinnati, 1911).

<sup>14</sup>For details of the case, see the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, April 1-5, 1911. The March 18, 1911 issue (and subsequent issues) of *The Citizens' Bulletin* contained extracts of newspaper accounts from across the nation which made comment on Cox's indictment.

But as the long arguments went on, his face and manner changed. He began to swallow often, to moist his lips now and then, and presently I noticed his complexion, which seemed so florid when he entered the room, had gone pasty and sallow.<sup>15</sup>

It was at this point that Cox took the critical and uncharacteristic step of composing an autobiographical article and releasing it to the press. A measure of last resort, it was designed to win over public opinion and, hopefully, to influence the Grand Jury. In the context of Cox's career, it is a highly significant document.

Its defensive tone is understandable. One is amused, but hardly surprised, by Cox's righteous protestations of innocence; by his charge that he was being unjustly maligned; by his claim that he "never made a dollar out of politics," that he achieved his wealth through diligent application to business affairs; by his affirmation that Cincinnati was the "best governed city in the United States" and that he personally had prevented graft; by his assertion that he had removed the schools and the Police and Fire Departments from politics; by his fatherly advice to young men: stay out of politics because it offered no financial rewards, only abuse. Contemporary reformers anticipated this type of pap and the modern researcher also would expect it.

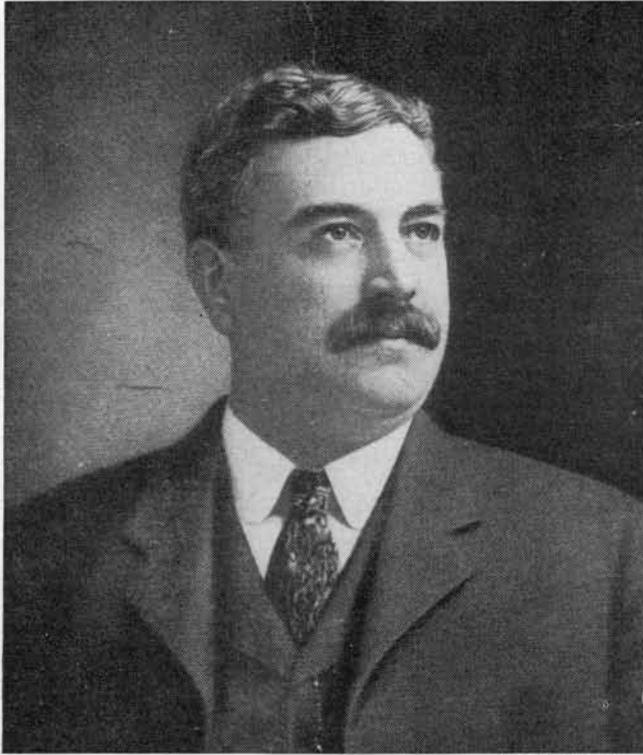
What will intrigue the researcher about Cox's defensive pose is the intellectual framework in which it is set. Cox's document reveals a pronounced Darwinian "angle of vision." Like many bosses and "captains of industry" of the post-Civil War era, Cox was a social Darwinist to the core.<sup>16</sup> His intellectual orientation was based on prevailing Darwinian social doctrine. Cox was not an intellectual and he probably was unable to articulate his social theories. But it was as natural for him to lapse into the Darwinian idiom as it was for Thomas Jefferson to speak the libertarian language of John Locke when he conceived the Declaration of Independence. These were the common thoughts of the day. Thus, in setting forth the reasons

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<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Herbert F. Koch, "An Ohio Warwick: Something of the Life and Times of George Barnsdale Cox," typed manuscript in The Cincinnati Historical Society; this account was written by a keen student of, and sometime participant in, the recent political history of Cincinnati.

<sup>16</sup>The standard secondary source for this subject of social Darwinism is Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Philadelphia, 1944).

for his success, he affirmed that bosses are “evolved,” not self-made, and “the men best fitted for leadership become the leaders.” In his case, he had a “peculiar fitness” for political activity. Cox’s thought process was remarkably akin to that of William Graham Sumner, Yale’s high priest of social Darwinism.



*Society Collection*

**George Barnsdale Cox**

Perhaps the greatest value of the document lies in the biographical data it contains. Cox provided information on his birth, his parents, his early employment record, his entry into politics, his rise to political prominence, his business affairs and even his daily living regimen. Here is the stuff of biography, the essential raw materials for reconstructing Cox’s life. Here is information that is trustworthy. Here are facts that can be found nowhere else. On this basis alone, the document deserves to be rescued from its present position of relative

obscurity and highlighted in a respected historical journal, where it will come to the attention of the growing number of researchers interested in the political affairs of post-Civil War Cincinnati.

COX

IN WORDS OF HIS OWN

WRITES THE LIFE OF THE "BOSS OF CINCINNATI."<sup>17</sup>  
STORY OF HIS EARLY CAREER AND EVOLUTION AND  
THE SOURCE FROM WHICH CAME ALL HIS MILLIONS.  
BUSINESS ALWAYS IN MIND, EVER THE ENEMY OF  
GRAFT AND HAS NO THOUGHT OF RETIRING.

New York, May 14.—The *World* this morning, in a copyrighted dispatch from Cincinnati, gives what purports to be a statement written by George B. Cox himself on the subject: "What is a boss?" It is as follows:

by George B. Cox, Boss of Cincinnati.

(Copyright by New York *World*.)

This is the age of the boss. And it is not surprising when one understands what a boss really is.

A boss, in the accepted usage of the word, is the dictator of a political party. As a matter of fact, a boss is more often simply the leader of a political party. The term is partly relative. And nine times out of ten it is applied by those who wish to vilify a successful political leader. This is true in my case. I have been so uniformly successful since I rose to the leadership of the Republican Party in Cincinnati and Hamilton County in 1884 that my enemies and vilifiers for 27 years have been calling me a boss. They are at perfect liberty to do so. However, I maintain that I am nothing more or less than the leader of the Republican Party in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. But since the public seems to prefer the incorrect term of boss to the correct term of political leader, I will use that term throughout this article.

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<sup>17</sup>I have used the account from the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, May 15, 1911.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT. HON. GEO. B. COX. ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

**OUR PEERLESS LEADERS.**

VOTE THE TICKET STRAIGHT.

REMEMBER OUR CAMPAIGN BUTTON!

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R L

*Society Collection*

A campaign poster for the "Easy Boss"

### SAYS A BOSS IS EVOLVED

In the first place, I want to say that a boss is evolved—not self-made. He is a product of evolution—a natural product of American political life. Every community has developed bosses. The successful ones, naturally, have obtained more or less fame or notoriety. There have always been political leaders from the earliest days of civilization. The men best fitted for leadership became the leaders. In the old days strength and physical prowess were the chief attributes of the successful leader or boss; to-day the ability to control men is the most essential quality.

I had no ambition to become a boss—I am using the incorrect term instead of the correct term, political leader—when I entered politics as a young man. But because of my peculiar fitness I evolved into a boss.

Right here I want to say that the success I have met with I owe to the loyalty of my friends. I have never made a dollar out of politics. For 27 years my enemies have been investigating me, but even the bitterest of men will have to admit that they have never been able to prove the slightest dishonesty.

### HOW HE MADE HIS MILLIONS

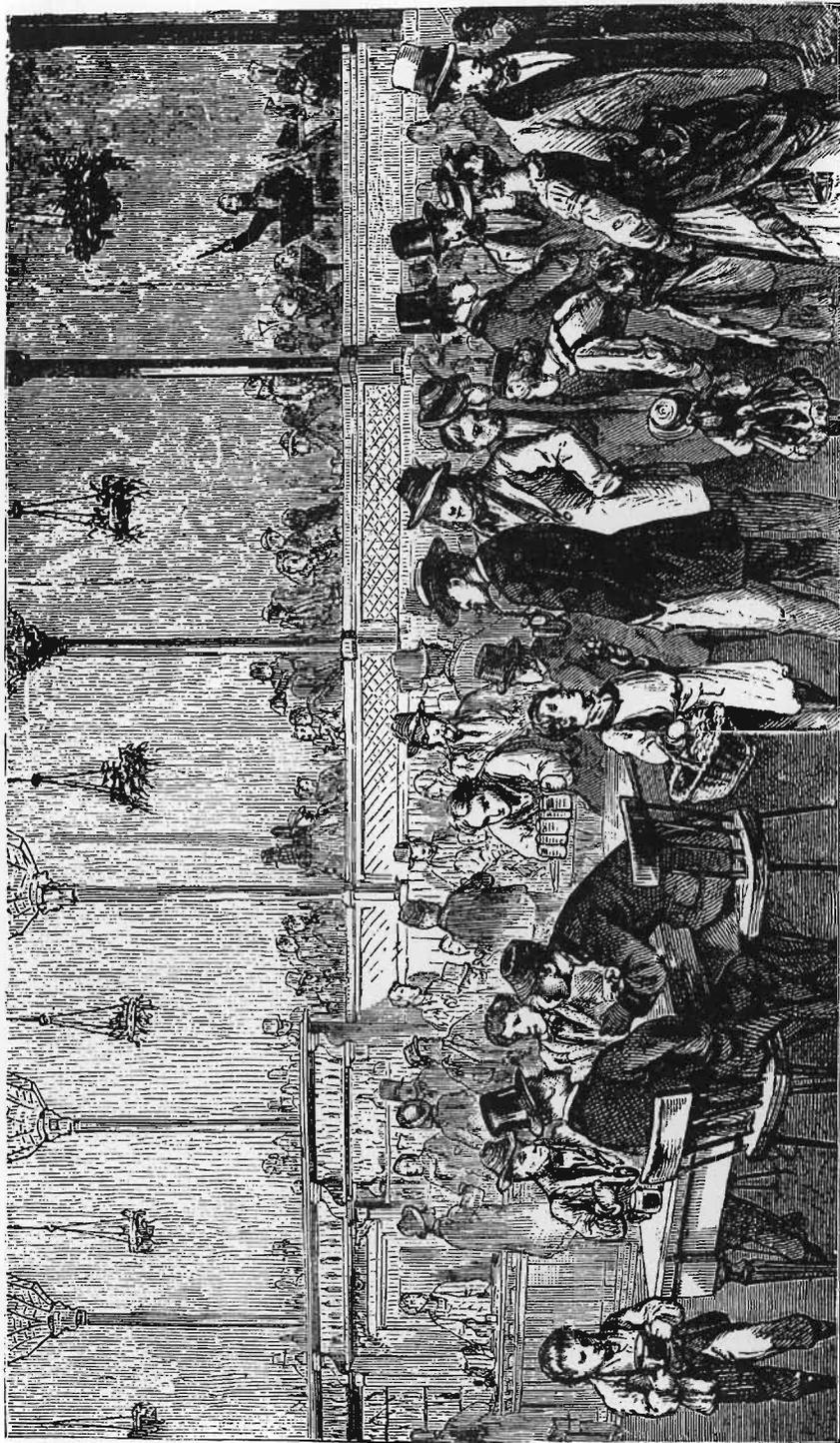
How did I make my millions? Principally in real estate and investments. I am interested in 31 different business enterprises, representing almost as many different kinds of business. For instance, I own half the Shubert Theatrical Company. Business with me comes first. But I have no personal or private interests when it comes to a question of doing that which is to be for the benefit of the party.

While I have taken an active interest in politics since I was 18 years of age, I have never neglected my business. I have always had my business on my mind. That is one of the reasons why I have been successful. In political matters I have never allowed personal feelings to sway me. I use my own judgment as to the class of candidates most acceptable to the people. Whenever I have defaulted in that I have been unsuccessful. Naturally I have met with some reverses, but since 1884, when I became leader of the Republican Party, Cincinnati has had only two Democratic Mayors. Their administrations were so unsatisfactory that the Republicans were returned at the next elections by large majorities.

### PAYS TRIBUTE TO CINCINNATI

Cincinnati is the best governed city in the United States. There is less graft, less dishonesty among its office-holders than in any of the larger cities in the country. Why? Because I have prevented graft. Because I have seen to it that the city had the right kind of men to serve it. Back in the early eighties I brought about honest elections, and since that time I have seen to it that the city officials gave honest administrations.

The fact that all the investigations by self-styled reformers for the past 27 years have not even resulted in the finding of seven illegal votes out of a total population of 400,000 is pretty good proof of my statements. It is in this very work of seeing that the city has honest and efficient servants, and that there is not the slightest graft, that a boss is most successful. The people do the



From D. J. Kenny, *Illustrated Cincinnati* . . . (1876)

Cox's "after-hours office" was at Wielert's Saloon on Vine Street in the Over-the-Rhine district.

voting. I simply see that the right candidates are selected.<sup>18</sup> The fact that they are elected settles all argument on that score. Furthermore, it costs a candidate nothing to run and be elected. I have eliminated the use of big sums for election purposes.

What do I consider my greatest achievement? I take great pride in my achievement of taking the schools, the Fire and Police Departments out of politics. This was my first work after I became boss of Cincinnati. Cincinnati was the first large city in America to take its schools, Police and Fire Departments out of politics. Since I brought it about, practically every city has tried to accomplish the same thing. Many have been successful, but it is still a deplorable fact that the Police Departments in many cities are dominated by politics.

It was through my efforts that Cincinnati obtained its water-works,<sup>19</sup> but my chief work as boss has been to preventing graft and seeing that the city has had the right men to serve it. A boss is not necessarily a public enemy.

At the present time I am striving to get the city home rule.<sup>20</sup> The question of home rule is the greatest problem before the cities of this country to-day. No further progress can be made in municipal affairs until the cities become free. I am striving to

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<sup>18</sup>At the Hamilton County Republican Convention of 1903, the chairman opened the proceedings with this blunt statement: "We are going to have a Republican State ticket, and we know pretty well who is going to be on it. But we are used to it and like it. It is a good thing to know what you are going to do, and if you do not know what you ought to do it is a good thing for someone to tell you." *Side Lights*, June 6, 1903. Cox controlled the conventions with an iron hand; the meetings rarely lasted an hour. All the candidates were handpicked by Cox. See also: *ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1903; and the celebrated "Akron speech" of William Howard Taft (Oct. 21, 1905) printed in *Ohio State Journal*, Oct. 22, 1905.

<sup>19</sup>This facility was a great asset to the city. Prior to its construction, Cincinnati experienced severe problems with the muddy, polluted waters of the Ohio River, often described as "a thousand miles of typhoid." The new water works brought clear drinking water and a reduction in deaths from typhoid.

<sup>20</sup>Cox wanted home rule, but home rule that would not jeopardize the control exercised by his machine. In 1902, reform Democrats in the Ohio General Assembly introduced a home rule bill. But because it contained provisions which threatened to terminate the power of his machine, Cox fought it with concentrated passion and eventually defeated it. The disappointed and angry Democrats rose en masse and sang this parody of the Doxology:

Praise Cox to whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, ye people of O-hi-o;  
Praise Hanna, Nash and all the host,  
But praise George B. Cox the most.

Originally printed in the *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*, Oct. 23, 1902, quoted in Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*, 114.

have Cincinnati make its own laws instead of being ruled by legislators from rural districts. The cities of this country should make their own laws and I believe the time is close at hand when they will do so.

### HIS START IN LIFE

I was born in Cincinnati on April 29, 1853, in a quarter that was peopled largely by the poor.<sup>21</sup> My father was an Englishman, who came to this country in 1847. He was a very pious man, but he died when I was only 8 years of age, without leaving a dollar. I had to leave school and help support my mother. The only work I was fitted for was selling newspapers, so I began at once to peddle them on the city's streets. I was successful from the start, and I was soon able to give my mother several dollars every week for our support. I suppose there was little difference between my early life and that of a newsboy in New York today. It was a hard battle, but I was a husky lad and I stood it well. I was as fond of a scrap as any one, and I dare say that I fought a good many times, and if my memory serves me right I was the victor on most occasions.

In addition to selling papers I blacked boots. I ran errands and made small sums by doing such odd jobs as a small boy has the opportunity to do. From the very first I knew what poverty meant, and for that very reason I began to save small amounts every week. The first \$1,000 I ever possessed I saved in small amounts. It took years to do it and it was the hardest money I ever earned, but it taught me the value of saving, for with it I got my start in life.

When I grew too big to sell papers I became a butcher's boy at the munificent salary of \$5 a week. To earn a larger salary I next became a wagon driver, and after I had saved a nest egg I became a tobacco salesman.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Cox was born at Sixth and Elm Streets, then a reeky tenement district.

<sup>22</sup>He also served as a cabin boy on a steamboat which traveled the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. See Frank Y. Grayson, *Thrills of the Historic Ohio River* (Cincinnati, 1929), 168.

### FIRST ENTRY INTO POLITICS

I was 18 years of age at that time and I made my first entry into politics. I allied myself with the Republican Party (for one reason because my father had been a Republican) and served as a challenger at the polls on election day. I was a big, husky young fellow and was especially useful when it became necessary to throw illegal voters out of line.

I drifted into the liquor business, becoming a bartender. I was at that trade for several years, eventually becoming proprietor of a saloon at Central Avenue and Longworth Street.<sup>23</sup> Of course, as soon as I was of age, I voted and I became active in ward politics. At 24 I was elected to the City Council. In those days the Democrats had everything their own way. We had no election laws to speak of, and citizens not only voted as many times as they wanted to, but the officials who counted the votes counted in or counted out the candidates, just as they pleased. I decided that if the Republicans were ever to have a fair deal in Cincinnati it would be necessary to pass strict election laws, and accordingly I set about to have such laws passed. It took many years, but eventually I was successful in having such laws passed by the Legislature, and I was equally successful in having them enforced.<sup>24</sup> Needless to say, conditions were greatly improved.

By living economically and saving my money I was able to sell my saloon in 1881 and devote my time to real estate and other business enterprises.

In the fall of 1884 I was elected Chairman of the Republican County Committee and conducted the campaign in the October elections, which resulted in the election of two Republican Congressional candidates. The national election was set for November of the same year and I was asked by a subcommittee of the National Republican Committee to manage Blaine's campaign<sup>25</sup> in

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<sup>23</sup>Popularly known as "Deadman's Corner" because of the numerous murders committed there; most remained unsolved.

<sup>24</sup>In this area, Cox really stretched truth to the breaking point. The Drake Committee report abounds with testimony of election irregularities committed by the Cox machine.

<sup>25</sup>The James G. Blaine-Grover Cleveland presidential campaign.

Hamilton County. Of course I accepted, and, although Blaine was defeated in the country, he carried Cincinnati and Hamilton County by a large majority. The victory gave me the leadership of the Republican Party in Hamilton County, and I have been able to keep that position ever since.

Of course, I have met with defeats. Twice I was defeated for the office of County Clerk.<sup>26</sup> I still believe I was counted out the first time, but the second time I was defeated beyond the question of a doubt. However, the Republican ticket was successful, so it was a personal, rather than a party defeat. Only twice have the Democrats succeeded in electing a Mayor. Fourteen years ago they elected Tafel and seven years ago they elected Dempsey.<sup>27</sup> Their administrations were so unsatisfactory that the Republicans won easily at the next elections.

As I said before, Cincinnati is the best governed city in the United States. It is not "wide open" in the popular usage of that term, but a liberal policy is observed. It is possible to get a drink on Sunday. More than one third of our population is composed of Germans, and they demand that privilege. The gambling houses were driven out many years ago,<sup>28</sup> and the social evil is regulated as far as it is possible to regulate it. Cincinnati has all the problems of the large cities of America, and, of course, there is a certain amount of vice and crime. But I do not hesitate to say that we have come nearer to solving these vexatious problems than has any other municipality of our size.

While I have always taken an interest in state politics I have never been very active in them.<sup>29</sup> I find it takes enough of my time to look after Hamilton County, and there are 87 other counties in Ohio. To be the boss of Cincinnati is a big enough

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<sup>26</sup>He was defeated in 1885 and 1889.

<sup>27</sup>Gustav Tafel and Edward J. Dempsey.

<sup>28</sup>The reformers repeatedly charged that Cox's group and the gambling element worked cheek by jowl; some affirmed that they were one and the same. Another common diatribe by the reformers was that Cox and his top lieutenants reaped large financial rewards from gambling.

<sup>29</sup>What little record that exists would tend to contradict this self-effacing statement. Cox was active in state political activities. This is an aspect of Cox's career that needs intensive study.



*Society Collection*

**Fourth Street, looking west from Walnut, about 1886. In the 1870's this area was nicknamed "Gambler's Row."**

job. I have had no ambition to extend my scope. The only other public office I ever held was that of State Oil Inspector, to which I was appointed by Governor Foraker in 1888.<sup>30</sup>

### BIG BUSINESS VENTURES

About eight years ago I entered the banking business, and since that time I have been President of the Cincinnati Trust Company, the second largest trust company in the city.<sup>31</sup> About the same time I became interested in the theatrical business. Anderson and Ziegler, Cincinnati theatrical managers, needed \$100,000 to move and improve one of their theaters. I let them have the money. I saw there was an opportunity to make money in the business and so I engaged in other theatrical enterprises.

I am interested with B. F. Keith in theaters in Cincinnati, Louisville and other cities, and I own half the Shubert Theatrical Company. I might add that there is no truth in the rumors of peace between the theatrical syndicate and the Shuberts. However, I hope that it can be brought about. There are far too many theaters in every city.

The rumor that I am about to move to New York is equally untrue. I was born and raised in Cincinnati, and I have no intention of leaving it. I spend about four weeks out of every year in New York, and I get enough of it to last me for the other forty-eight. I don't like the life there — the late hours and the terrible expense. In New York I am never able to get to bed before 1 or

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<sup>30</sup>The link between Cox and Governor "Fire Alarm Joe" Foraker, also a Cincinnati, is another facet of Cox's career that requires further illumination. Available evidence suggests a close working relationship but additional proof is needed before a conclusive judgment can be made. It is known, for example, that Foraker was responsible for having the Ohio Legislature pass a "ripper" bill in 1886 whereby the Cincinnati Board of Public Works, an elective body, was abolished and replaced by a Board of Public Affairs to be appointed by the Governor. By law, the new agency became the dispenser of 1,200 to 2,000 jobs in the city. The real dispenser of the spoils, however, became Cox. For this favor, Cox threw his support to Foraker in future elections. Cox's appointment as State Oil Inspector was definitely a form of political payoff. See Wright, *Bossism in Cincinnati*, 30-31, 34.

<sup>31</sup>Cox encountered difficulties as a banker. State bank examiners detected irregularities in the records and Cox was forced to divest himself of his interest in the bank. The Cincinnati *Enquirer* (May 21, 1916) asserted that Cox's failure in the banking business was the main cause for his decline in power in the last five years of his life. The election of Henry Hunt as mayor in 1911 marked the beginning of Cox's decline.

2 o'clock in the morning. Here in Cincinnati I am in bed every night by 9:30.



*From The Cincinnati Southern Railway*

**The residence of George Cox is still standing in Clifton at the corner of Jefferson and Brookline Avenues.**

### HIS DAILY LIFE

I arise every morning at 6:30 and am through breakfast by 7:30. I take a 25 or 30 mile ride in my automobile before going to my office at the Cincinnati Trust Company. I always arrive there at 9 o'clock and, except for an hour or so at noontime, I am there until 5 o'clock in the afternoon. I am accessible to every one except bores and pests. I take dinner at one of the hotels or clubs with my business or political associates and arrive home about 8 o'clock in the evening. I get my pleasure in my home life, for, while I have no children, I have a loving and devoted wife. Although I have large theatrical interests I rarely go to the theater. When I do go I attend matinees so as not to waste an evening.

Next to my home life I get the greatest pleasure out of politics. After all, politics is a game. I like it because I am successful. One usually likes to play the game in which one is successful. It's human nature.

Naturally, my success as a boss has brought all manner of attacks upon me. I have been assailed from every quarter, and on every pretext. I am attacked for two reasons: First, because most people suppose a boss is dishonest; and, secondly, because I've been so successful. Success is one thing disappointed office-seekers can never forgive in a boss. I believe the bitterest attacks that have been made on me have emanated from the disappointed officeseekers — men within the ranks of the Republican party who have been turned down by me because of their unfitness.

If people wish to believe every political boss dishonest that is their privilege. I challenge anyone to prove that I have been dishonest or that I have ever made a dollar out of politics. My indictment at the present time is simply a political move on the part of my enemies. I will clear myself of the charge at the proper time. I am hardened to attacks by the press. I am living my life as I believe I should live it. My enemies cannot affect me.

#### ADVICE TO YOUNG MEN

I would strenuously advise young men not to enter politics. If I had a son I would forcibly prevent him from taking any kind of an active part in it. In the first place there is no money in it for the honest man, and in the second place there is only abuse, whether you are successful or unsuccessful. In fact, the more successful you are the more abuse will be heaped on you. Politics as a profession doesn't pay.

As I said before, this boss-ship was not of my seeking. It was the result of a natural evolution of things. However, it has become such a part of my life, I have grown into it to such an extent that I cannot voluntarily give it up. I am only 58 years of age — far too young to retire. In fact, the question of retiring

has never entered my mind. I am going to continue as the leader of the Republican Party in Cincinnati as long as the Republican Party wants me.

What would happen if I should resign or die? Of course I don't know. I am not gifted with second-sight. But I am inclined to believe that another leader would soon develop to take my place. And I venture to predict that if he met with success for any length of time he would be called the new boss of Cincinnati.

This is the age of the boss. No one must lose sight of this fact for a second.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>What was the outcome of the indictment? Within three months, Cox was able to quash the case. As the Cincinnati *Enquirer* (Nov. 5, 1911) reported, Cox's judges first ousted Judge Gorman and then discharged the "Old Boy" without a trial on a "frivolous technicality making the administration of justice in this county a hissing and a reproach."

