

Klyne Esopus MUSEUM



Mission:

**TO PRESERVE, INTERPRET, AND DISSEMINATE
THE HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF ESOPUS**

For directions, hours, or other information
845-338-8109

June 1-4pm, Friday-Sunday
July-November 1-4pm, Wednesday-Sunday
or leave a message anytime.

Contact us by email at
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The Klyne Esopus Museum
PRESENTS
THE 2004 SPECIAL EXHIBIT

Alton B. Parker

Esopus Resident

Jurist

1904 Presidential
Candidate

Peace Advocate



This year marks the one hundredth year anniversary of the 1904 Presidential Election in the United States. In that election Alton B. Parker, a resident of the Town of Esopus, ran against Theodore Roosevelt. Prior to 1904, Parker served many years as a New York State Justice and after his defeat in the election Parker remained politically active, especially as an advocate for peace.

Alton B. Parker was a hard-working man of character.

His life story as well as the 1904 campaign and election are filled with many interesting facts and events. In particular, it is striking how the campaign issues of today, one hundred years later, are similar to the issues debated in 1904.

As a resident of the Town of Esopus, Alton B. Parker's life plays an important part in our local history.

Alton B. Parker Timeline

A 'Great Ruddy Engine of Vitality'

Born: May 14, 1852 in Cortland, NY

Died: May 10, 1926 in NYC. Buried: Wiltwyck Rural Cemetery, Kingston, NY

Lived in Town of Esopus at Rosemont on the shore of the Hudson River.

1873 – Graduated Albany Law School, entered practice in Kingston.

1877-1885 – Surrogate of Ulster County; Chairman of State Democratic Committee in 1885

1885-1889 – Justice State Supreme Court

1889-1892 – Member Court of Appeals/Second Div.

1893-1896 – Member of the General Term

1896-1897 – Member of the Appellate Division

1897 – Elected Chief Justice Court of Appeals and resigned in 1904

1904 – Nominated for President of the United States, running against Theodore Roosevelt. Upon Parker's defeat, he opened a law practice in NYC where he continued to practice until his death.

This information in this booklet is the work of

Klyne Esopus Museum Board of Directors

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Jack St. John.

The five leading causes of death in the U.S. were:

1. Pneumonia & influenza
2. Tuberculosis
3. Diarrhea
4. Heat stroke
5. Stroke

The American flag had 45 stars. Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Alaska hadn't been admitted to the Union yet.

The population of Las Vegas, Nevada was 30.

Crossword puzzles, canned beer, and iced tea hadn't been invented.

There was no Mother's Day or Father's Day.

One in ten U.S. adults couldn't read or write.

Only 6% of all Americans had graduated from high school.

Coca Cola contained cocaine.

Marijuana, heroin, and morphine were all available over the counter at corner drugstores. According to one pharmacist, "Heroin clears the complexion, gives buoyancy to the mind, regulates the stomach and the bowels, and is, in fact, a perfect guardian of health."

18% of households in the U.S. had at least one full-time servant or domestic.

There were only about 230 reported murders in the entire U.S.

(Original source unknown, information from internet)

Growing up, Alton B. Parker was the only redhead in the county near Cortland. In fact, he waged many a fist fight in order to persuade the other boys to stop calling him "Red Top."

As a man, Parker stood six feet tall and was athletic and handsome. He had brown eyes which have been described as both kindly and lion-like. His brow was symmetrical, and his firm jaw and formidable chin gave a sense of strength to his face. He wore a generous-sized tawny mustache.

Parker has been described as a man with a look of determination and honesty on his face at all times. It was the type of look that immediately conveyed confidence to those who knew him, and the first impression he gave among strangers was that he was strong and dependable.

Parker's entire stature gave the impression of strength. He was tall, muscular, and athletic. He thrived on work and physical activity. Parker weighed about 200 pounds, and his health and energy were unflagging.

Parker's appearance made it evident that he enjoyed physical activity and outdoor life. Journalists of the day called Alton B. Parker a 'great ruddy engine of vitality'.

Early Life And Becoming a Lawyer

Alton B. Parker's grandfather moved from Massachusetts to Cortland, New York in 1803. It was on this farm that Alton Parker was born on May 14, 1852. Alton was a sturdy, even-tempered boy who helped with chores on the farm as soon as he was old enough.

Although they were modest farmers, Alton's parents valued books and learning. Alton first attended the local district school, often barefooted. At age 12 he went to the Cortland Academy. After graduating, Alton attended the State Normal School in Cortland where he received training to be a teacher.

Parker decided at age 13 that he wanted to become a lawyer after one day his father, serving as a juror, took Alton with him to a local court. At age 16, Parker began teaching school at Virgil (in his native county) to earn money for law school. After Virgil, he taught in Binghamton and then went to Rochester, Ulster County, as a public school principal until he earned enough money to enter Albany Law School.

Alton B. Parker graduated from Albany Law School in 1873, and then began to work in the law office of Schoonmaker & Hardenberg, in Kingston as a clerk. He was soon admitted to the bar and practiced law until his election as a Surrogate Court Judge in Ulster County in 1878.

Judicial Career

Alton B. Parker practiced law until his election as a Surrogate Court Judge in Ulster County at age 25. He was the youngest Surrogate Ulster County ever had up to this time.

Alton Parker's popularity served him well and, after six years in the as Surrogate he was re-elected by a margin of 1,400 votes. His competitor had previously carried the party twice.

In 1885, the death of a Supreme Court Justice necessitated a replacement and Parker's loyalty to the party and popularity did not go unnoticed. At the close of that same year, at age 33, he received the unanimous nomination of the Democratic Party for Supreme Court Justice in New York State. The Republicans decided not to run a candidate against him.

In 1889 the Second division of the Court of Appeals was created and Parker was appointed to it. He was the youngest man who ever sat in the New York Court of Appeals.

Late in 1897 Justice Parker was designated by the Governor to take the place of an ill justice temporarily in the Appellate Division in New York City. In the fall of 1897, Parker was elected Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, the highest judicial position in the state. He served from January 1898 to August 1904 when he resigned to accept the Democratic nomination for President of the United States.

Service As Justice

Parker firmly believed that government was sometimes needed but was ultimately responsible to the people. He felt great satisfaction when serving as a Justice.

In 1886 the Kingston Freeman said that Parker's success socially, and as a lawyer and judge, had been phenomenal, and that the secret of it was not luck, but brains, hard work and tact. His approach to his judicial work was always methodical and thorough.

According to the public record, Alton B. Parker's judicial decisions reflected progressive and humanitarian values. Opponents frequently tried their best to unearth decisions, but to no avail. He usually sided with unions and defended the Constitution without fail.

At his death, the New York Court of Appeals sent a memorial to Alton B. Parker's family signed by Chief Judge Frank H. Hiscock, which said in part:

Life in 1904...

The average life expectancy in the U.S. was 47.

Only 14% of the homes in the U.S. had a bathtub.

Only 8% of the homes had a telephone.

A three-minute call from Denver to New York City cost \$11.

There were only 8,000 cars in the U.S. and only 144 miles of paved roads.

The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10mph.

Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa, and Tennessee were each more heavily populated than California. With a mere 1.4 million residents, California was only the 21st most populous state in the Union.

The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.

The average wage in the U.S. was \$0.22/hour.

The average U.S. worker made between \$200-\$400/year.

A competent accountant could expect to earn \$2,000/year, a dentist \$2,500/year, a veterinarian between \$1,500-\$4,000/year, and a mechanical engineer about \$5,000/year.

More than 95% of all births in the U.S. took place at home.

90% of all U.S. physicians had NO COLLEGE education. Instead, they attended medical schools, many of which were condemned in the press and by the government as "substandard".

Sugar cost \$0.04/pound. Eggs were \$0.14/dozen. Coffee cost \$0.15/pound.

Most women washed their hair once a month and used borax or egg yolks for shampoo.

Canada passed a law prohibiting poor people from entering the country for any reason.

Parker proved instrumental in the formation of the New York State Bar Association and the American Bar Association. He served as President of the American Bar Association from 1906-1907, President of the New York Co. Lawyers' Association from 1909-1911, and President of the New York State Bar Association from 1913-1914.

Alton B. Parker died in New York City while preparing to return home to Esopus in 1926 at the age of 74.

Peace Advocate

Alton B. Parker continued to be politically active in the years following 1904 Presidential campaign. He was in demand as a speaker, especially at colleges and universities from which he received many Honorary Degrees.

Parker was active as a peace advocate. For example, he served as Vice President of the National Arbitration and Peace Conference on April 14-17, 1907.

The following excerpt from a speech Alton B. Parker gave in 1904 illustrates his beliefs:

The display of great military armaments may please the eye, and, for the moment, excite the pride of the citizen, but it cannot bring to the country the brains, brawn and muscle of a single immigrant, not induce the investment here of a dollar of capital. Of course such armament as may be necessary for the security of the country and the protection of the rights of its citizens, at home or abroad, must be maintained. I protest, however, against the feeling that, by reason of the commanding position we have assumed in the world, we must take part in the disputes and broils of foreign countries; and that because we have grown great we should intervene in every important question that arises in other parts of the world.

This quote from 1904 summarizes Parker's viewpoint as well:

The most efficient work we can do in uplifting the people of other countries is by the presentation of a happy, prosperous, self-governing nation as an ideal to be emulated, a model to be followed.

In a life so varied in its interests and so rich in its achievements, there is matter for many pages. Those who carry on his work today as members of this court must dwell with special emphasis upon his service as Judge. They remember the clarity and poise and even balance of his judgements...

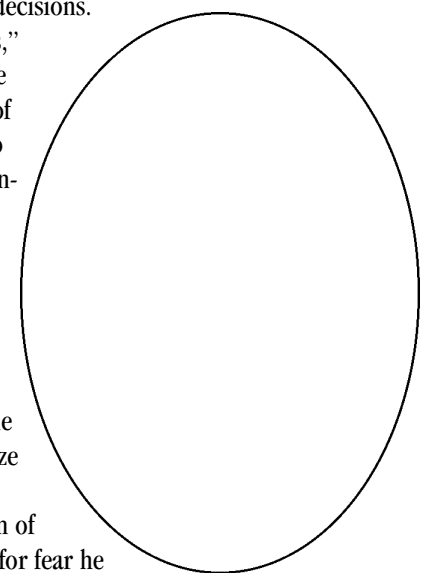
Stand on the Presidential Nomination

Alton B. Parker felt strongly that a judge should not publicly express his own personal political views. He took a firm stand on this matter, and the only opinions he expressed were contained in his legal decisions.

"I am a judge of the Court of Appeals," Parker said. "I shall neither embarrass the court by my opinions nor use the dignity of the court to give weight to them. I shall do nothing and say nothing to advance my candidacy. If I should receive the nomination, I shall then resign from the Bench and state my views as a private citizen."

Even Parker's most loyal supporters did not sympathize with his stand. They told him it was his obligation, if he were going to permit himself to be drafted as the Democratic presidential candidate, to utilize the opportunity to discuss issues and earn nationwide recognition. Many accused him of being a coward, afraid to express himself for fear he would lose the nomination, a weakling, and utterly without opinion.

Finally, the press appealed to Parker and on June 17, 1904, he wrote to the New York World to state his position that his first duty was to the court and that he felt the nomination for such an office should not be sought. That was his last word on the subject, clearly showing his integrity in this matter.



Winning the 1904 Democratic Presidential Nomination

The struggle within the Democratic Party over the nomination was an exciting time. Although popular, Alton B. Parker had been out of politics for over twenty years.

The moderate wing of the party waged a bitter battle against Parker in the months before the election. William Jennings Bryan, a formidable force within the party, wanted a weak man nominated who could not take control away from him. Bryan saw Parker as a tool of Wall Street and as a threat.

It was Parker's strongest opponent, William Randolph Hearst, who proved to be the greatest threat both to Parker and to many devoted Democrats. Hearst's perceived liberalism, however, invigorated the party and a renewed vigor for Parker's nomination emerged.

The Democratic convention in St. Louis on July 8, 1904, is viewed by many as one of the most exciting and sensational in the history of the party. Parker took the nomination after receiving 658 votes on the first roll call - just nine shy of the two-thirds required. Nearly two dozen more delegates changed their vote to Parker before the result was announced and the Democratic nomination for President of the United States was his.

The 1904 United States Presidential Campaign

Judge Alton B. Parker opened his campaign for President by giving an acceptance speech from his home at Esopus. People gathered to hear his speech, many arriving by boat at the landing dock on his Rosemont estate.

In the days before radio, many candidates traveled the country to give speeches. Parker, however, decided to conduct his campaign from his home at Esopus. He felt that his position as a judge would make it undignified for him to travel about the country and join in the muck-raking of the period. His speeches were free from personalities and innuendoes.

One issue that Parker addressed during the campaign was that of campaign gifts from huge corporations. Parker made a vigorous speech in which he attacked the corruption in politics that occurs through the acceptance of such campaign gifts. Roosevelt finally responded four days before the election, claiming this to be a falsehood. Even after the election, however, Alton B. Parker pursued the matter which led to an investigation of campaign funds by Congress.

Daily Life at Rosemont

When serving as Justice and later when he returned to his law practice, Alton B. Parker spent as much time as possible at his Rosemont estate. He was known to follow a daily routine.

At Rosemont, Parker always rose early, usually at 6:30 a.m., and walked down to the Hudson River to start his day by taking a short swim. After returning to the house to shave, dress, and have a cup of coffee he went for a one hour horse ride, regardless of the weather or the season. He then returned home, dressed for business, and had a hearty breakfast.

After breakfast at Rosemont, Parker often worked on his writings. Sometimes he would first work with his hired man taking in the hay or feeding the livestock before retiring to his library to work. After lunch, he divided his time between his livestock, crops, and judicial or legal work. Parker always put on his evening dress for dinner.

On Sunday mornings, he and Mrs. Parker took their little boat to Kingston and worshiped at the Episcopal Church where their son-in-law was the rector. On Sunday afternoons, Parker enjoyed playing with his grandchildren and showing visitors around before Sunday dinner.

Despite rising early each day, Alton B. Parker did not go to bed until almost midnight each night. He was a sound sleeper who averaged less than seven hours a night in bed.

After the Presidential Election

Parker seemed to take his 1904 defeat for President of the United States in stride. The next morning as he was dressing he announced, "Now I am going to New York to make some money" - and he did just that.

Alton Parker resumed his law practice in New York City and headed a law firm there from 1904 until 1926. Although he maintained an apartment in NYC, Parker spent a great deal of time at Rosemont where he enjoyed looking after his estate.

Alton B. Parker was a first-rate lawyer. He served as prosecution counsel in New York Gov. William Sulzer's impeachment trial, he represented Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor in contentious proceedings before the U.S. House of Representatives, and was involved in complex contempt cases in the federal courts.

withdrawals. A frantic crowd stormed the bank, which meant the bank's ruin. Alton Parker jumped up on a counter and addressed the crowd. He was able to assure the depositors that their money was safe and pledged his word that they would get their money. The run was averted.

Parker later accepted a position as president of the bank on the condition that he was not paid. He served as the bank's president until institution was back on its feet.



Parker's Rosemont Estate

In 1898, Alton B. Parker established his home on a 140 acre estate known as Rosemont. This estate is located on the banks of the Hudson River in Esopus, New York. He lived there for 28 years until his death in 1926.

The house at Rosemont was built on the stone foundation of a Dutch house of colonial times. It was set on a hillside, facing the Hudson River. It was a house typical of an American gentleman, yet it was modest and comfortable. The books and pictures, glowing fireplace, large dining room, and sunny library were fine examples of simplicity and refinement.

Visitors to Rosemont were well-received and Parker loved to show people around his estate. The Rosemont estate was mostly self-sufficient, and Parker enjoyed the simple life and beauty there. He was a strong man who would often help with the work and loved animals. Inside the house, Parker would sit at the head of a large mahogany dining room table surrounded by his family and guests.

Visitors arriving at Rosemont often found Parker on his porch, and they were immediately greeted with a hardy handshake and welcome. It is from his porch at Rosemont that Alton B. Parker delivered his acceptance speech after becoming the Democratic candidate for President in 1904.

The 1904 United States Presidential Election

In retrospect it may seem that Alton B. Parker never had a chance to win the Presidential election, but in 1904 it did not appear to be that evident. Between internal quarrels in the Republican party, sweeping reactions in trade, and resentment of 'big business' over Roosevelt policies, the chances for election seemed fairly balanced.

The results of the Presidential election, however, were strongly in Theodore Roosevelt's favor. Roosevelt won 56% of the popular vote compared to 38% won by Parker. Of the total 476 electoral votes, Teddy Roosevelt won 336 (71%) and Alton Parker won 140 electoral votes (29%). Theodore Roosevelt strongly carried the Northern states, while Parker's victories were in the South.

The popularity of incumbent Theodore Roosevelt and division within the Democratic Party over currency issues were the two greatest factors that led to Parker's defeat. In reality, Teddy Roosevelt's popularity at the time would have made it difficult for any Democratic candidate to defeat him.

After his defeat, Parker returned to his law practice.

Major Campaign Issues

TARIFF

Alton B. Parker's views on the tariff were not radical, nor were they protectionist. He recognized that there were industries in the United States whose growth was stimulated by the tariff.

That being said, he believed that the tariff should be the subject of nonpartisan investigation, and that the legislation should follow the findings of a competent body. He also believed that the tariff law should neither provide excessive benefit, nor should it injure American manufacturing interests.

TRUSTS

Parker felt that there should be no unreasonable restraints on trade and no unfair monopolies in patents, trademarks, or in the possession of great capital or exclusive ability to carry on certain business.

The Inter-State Commerce Law and other Federal statutes, in his opinion, should be interpreted in judicial proceedings to declare illegal all inter-state commerce operated through a system that creates unreasonable, unfair restraint of trade.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Alton B. Parker believed that obtaining authority over foreign lands, namely Panama and the Philippines, were closed incidents due to the acceptance of them by the people. He believed that they were not proper subjects for active political discussion.

CURRENCY

Parker was convinced that the American people determined gold to be the single metallic basis of the currency system and that all issues of currency should be maintained on par with gold.

LABOR

Parker recognized the right of labor to organize, but was also impressed with the advantages that came to labor by way of organizing into unions. He was convinced that capital or employers whose right to organize was never disputed must recognize both the moral as well as the legal and economic value to labor through effective organizing.

Parker was firm that employers and employees, capital and labor must recognize and respect the fundamental principle of the American government that is the right of individual choice, liberty of action within the law and limitations that the law placed upon all aggressions of any kind of organization, either that of capital or that of labor.

Family

Alton B. Parker was the son of John Brooks Parker and Harriet F. Stratton. Parker's mother was a devout and intelligent woman. His father was a lover of books and knowledge, and was not particularly successful as a farmer. Alton had one brother, Fred H. Parker.

On October 16, 1872, Parker married Mary L. Schoonmaker whom he had met while teaching at Rochester, near Kingston. Parker's first employment after graduating from Albany Law School was at his father-in-law's law firm, Schoonmaker & Hardenberg, which brought Parker to settle in Ulster County.

Parker had a son, John Parker, who died tragically of tetanus at a young age. His only daughter was Bertha Parker, who married Charles Mercer Hall and had two children, Mary and Alton Parker Hall. Alton B. Parker often enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren while living in Esopus.

Parker's first wife, Mary Schoonmaker, died in 1917. Years later in 1923, he married Amelia D. Campbell who later died in the 1950's.

Parker's great-grandchildren include Alton Parker Hall, Jr., Mary Hall, and Ted, Mary Louise, and Nancy Oxholm.

Personal Characteristics

Alton B. Parker was born poor but built up a small fortune that amply provided for his needs. Saving and good judgement brought him what he had, and his success in life came largely from his own effort. Wealth, however, seemed to be far from his mind and he was content to have his needs met simply. Parker preferred a simple, uncomplicated lifestyle.

Alton Parker was a hard-working man. He enjoyed the rigors of both physical and mental activity. For example, he did not hesitate to roll up his sleeves and help out with physical labor at his Rosemont estate. He equally enjoyed reading books or working tirelessly to solve a difficult legal problem.

Parker loved his home and family. He would often take his young grandson with him for an early morning swim in the Hudson River at Rosemont. He was known to take his granddaughter, Mary, in his arms and dance up and down the wide hall of the Rosemont house, whistling all the while.

Parker was generous to others with his wealth and his time. He donated to charities such as the local orphan asylum. He was one of the managers of the Kingston City Hospital, and was even the freight agent of a steamboat company so that the little private dock on his farm could be used for the convenience of the neighborhood.

Local Involvement

Alton B. Parker was a generous man who was active in his local community. This community involvement is exemplified in the story of Parker's role in saving the Ulster County Bank.

In 1981, the Ulster County Savings Institution was forced to close its doors as a result of embezzlements by its Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. Alton Parker was on his farm when he learned of the difficulty and immediately went to the bank.

Parker took a leadership role to help save the depositors from loss. He pledged to stay with it until the bank was saved. He secured twenty-five trustees and worked tirelessly until the General Term of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals both sustained Parker's plan for the bank as sound in law.

A local newspaper, however, alarmed depositors and advised them to make





