

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Ryan Stephans for the Master of Arts

in History presented on March 16, 2011

Title: Greenbackers & Populists: The Failures and Successes of Agrarian Reform

Movements in Douglas County, Kansas, 1874-1904

Abstract Approved: _____

The historiography of third party movements in the United States has taken various forms. Some have viewed the movements in isolation, focusing primarily on the factors that made them either successful or unsuccessful. Others have undertaken to view the movements in the context of the two major political parties of the period. Those of the former often seek to explain why the movements failed to emerge as a viable option to the major parties, or why their period of success came to an end. Those of the latter more often examine how the major parties curtailed the success of the upstart movement, or describe the factors that made such a third party movement unsustainable. Rarely are these movements compared to each other, and when they are, the movements under examination are often far removed from each other in terms of the time periods in which they operated.

The following thesis seeks to address these problems by providing an analysis of the successes and failures of both the Greenback Party and the Populist Party by focusing on the election returns from Douglas County, Kansas. In this examination, the traditional interpretations of economic factors are analyzed, as well as the impact of environmental factors such as drought and grasshopper infestations on the support, or lack thereof, for these two political parties. In addition, the political platforms and election results for both are evaluated, demonstrating that they utilized similar rhetoric and desired similar ends from their campaigns. The purpose is to determine why two parties that used similar rhetoric, and faced similar economic and environmental conditions received different results. One can conclude that when third party ideas are significant to the populace, it is the contexts in which those ideas emerge that ultimately determine success or failure.

GREENBACKERS & POPULISTS:
THE FAILURES AND SUCCESSES OF AGRARIAN REFORM MOVEMENTS IN
DOUGLAS COUNTY, KANSAS, 1874-1904

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Social Sciences

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Ryan Andrew Stephans

May 2011

Approved by the Department Chair

Approved by the Dean of The Graduate School

Acknowledgments

My sincerest gratitude and thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Gregory Schneider and committee members Dr. Deborah Gerish and Dr. Christopher Lovett. Their advice and expertise has been invaluable to my research and work and this product would not have been possible without their assistance. I would also like to thank my parents Bill and Micki, and my brother, Sean, for their support and advice these past two years. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Katie for her love and support during the research and writing process.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
<u>Chapter</u>	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II GREENBACKISM & DOUGLAS COUNTY.....	14
III ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS.....	33
IV POPULISM & DOUGLAS COUNTY.....	52
V. CONCLUSION: FAILURE OR SUCCESS?.....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	73

Chapter I

Introduction

The politics of various developed nations in Western Europe, Asia, and the Middle East invariably possess systems that contain many parties. The United States, contrarily, presents a wholly different political arrangement, namely the prevalence of two major parties and the absence of competitive third parties that could challenge for the highest offices in the land. The primary reason for this is the “winner take all” method of elections in the United States. This system ensures that only the winners of a majority vote will win representation, as opposed to many parliamentary systems which employ a proportional representation system. That method guarantees representation to any party that received votes, creating numerous parties, and forcing coalition governments into existence.

The absence of competitive third parties in the United States has been discussed by countless scholars, political scientists, and historians, all seeking to explain why third parties have failed to garner support nationwide and have routinely disappeared after achieving moderate success.¹ Only on rare occasions have these third parties made successful advances in specific states and produced significant electoral success. This has led scholars such as Steven Rosenstone to question why these parties could not

¹ For a detailed analysis of the struggles and successes of third parties in different party systems see the following works: Lisa Klobuchar, *Third Parties: Influential Political Alternatives* (Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2008); J. David Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); Howard Pervear Nash, *Third Parties in American Politics* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959); William Nesbit Chambers, Walter Dean Burnham, and Joseph Sorauf, *The American Party Systems: Stages of Development* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975); Elmer Eric Schnattschneider, *Party Government: American Government in Action* (1942; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004); Marjorie Randon Hershey, “Citizens’ Groups and Political Parties in the United States,” in “Citizens, Protest, and Democracy,” special issue, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July 1993): 142-156; Nancy L. Rosenblum, “Political Parties as Membership Groups,” in “Symposium: Law and Political Parties,” special issue, *Columbia Law Review* 100, no. 3 (April 2000): 813-844; and John F. Bibby and Louis Sandy Maisel, *Two Parties or More? The American Party System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

sustain those advances and expand them to the rest of the country.² According to political scientist Rosenstone, third parties tend to emerge for three reasons. First, splits and disintegration of the major parties bring new political organizations to the forefront. Second, third parties that present viable candidates to the electorate (i.e. William Jennings Bryan, James Baird Weaver, H. Ross Perot, etc.) will inevitably attract voters who would have otherwise had to choose between two undesirable candidates. Finally, Rosenstone argues that third parties also attract voters who have loose ties to the major parties, often referred to as “independent voters” today.³ Rosenstone’s work chronicles third parties in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but his work does not explain the discrepancies between the relative successes or failures of these third parties. The investigation of this phenomenon in reference to the Greenback Party and the People’s Party in Kansas is the subject of this thesis.

The party that best exemplified third party success was the People’s (Populist) Party, which sought to increase government control of currency supply, as well as transportation and communication networks. This party managed to capture the support of the Democratic Party leadership and nearly broke the Republican Party’s stranglehold on the Great Plains. Historians Richard Hofstadter and Lawrence Goodwyn have chronicled the growth of this party and how it gave rise to further reform movements like the Progressives, though both saw the Populists and Progressives as separate reform movements, despite some of their similarities. Morton Keller has contended that the Populists were simply yet another third party co-opted by one of the two major parties

² Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

³ Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, ix.

and therefore, could not sustain itself independently.⁴ Finally, there is the school of thought, represented by Gretchen Ritter, John D. Hicks, and Fred E. Haynes, that addresses the influence of economic issues on the rise of both the Populist Party and its predecessor, the Greenback Party, which also wanted government control over the supply of currency & railroads. Ritter contends that these groups rose up to attack large corporations that they felt controlled government action.⁵ Hicks, also argues that economics was the primary motivation for farmers becoming Populist, in regard to low prices for crops and high freight rates by railroads. In his analysis, any farmer could be seen as a potential Populist.⁶ Finally, Haynes argues that the alliance of Greenbackers and Labor fell apart because the economic factors that encouraged the reform movements were gone, either through the course of the normal economic cycle, or by national legislation concerning monetary or economic issues.⁷

In his seminal work *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter contended that the Populist movement gave birth to the Progressives and later the New Deal. Hofstadter analyzed the rise of the Populists coming in the form of the agrarian protests of the 1870s, best exemplified in the National Grange and the Greenback Party. He described the widely held belief among Populists that “the contraction of currency was a deliberate squeeze, the result of a long-range plot of the ‘Anglo-American Gold Trust.’”⁸ Hofstadter’s work focused mainly on how the Populists were the first major reform

⁴ Morton Keller, *America’s Three Regimes: A New Political History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵ Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmer’s Alliance and the People’s Party* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1931).

⁷ Fred E. Haynes, “The Collapse of the Farmer-Labor Bloc,” *Social Forces* 4, No. 1 (September 1925): 148-156.

⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 75.

movement to achieve national success, and how that success would inspire the Progressives and New Dealers. Hofstadter made a connection between the Populists and Greenbackers, but he did so strictly on the basis of the currency debates, not the connections to the labor movement that both parties possessed.⁹ That connection with labor was chronicled by Chester McArthur Destler, who argued that Populists sought an alliance with labor precisely because the successful farmers, especially in the Old Northwest were increasing crop yields and acreage, forcing many small-scale farmers into tenancy. This made their plight the same as the urban factory workers in the eyes of the Populist Party.¹⁰

Historian Lawrence Goodwyn chronicled the origins of the Populist movement and its connection to the Greenback Party of the 1870s. However, Goodwyn does not conclusively explain why the Populists were more successful than the Greenbackers. His primary conclusion regarding the failure of the Greenback Party is that they lacked organization and tried to explain the complicated matter of greenback currency via “stump speeches.”¹¹ Neither Hofstadter nor Goodwyn connect the two parties to their fights with corporations during hard economic times (though Hofstadter did note the conspiratorial beliefs of the Populists), and do not deal with the problem of droughts and grasshoppers as reasons for success or failure of the parties.¹² Hofstadter and Goodwyn tend to focus on the differences in the platforms of the two parties as the main reasons for discrepancies in the election returns for each party, but this approach ignores the fact that

⁹ Hofstadter, 74-75.

¹⁰ Chester McA. Destler, “Consummation of a Labor-Populist Alliance in Illinois, 1894,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 4 (March 1941): 589-602.

¹¹ Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978), 19.

¹² Hofstadter, 75.

the Populist monetary policy, albeit based on “free silver” rather than greenbacks, began as a foundational plank in the Greenback Party platform. This school of thought paints the Populists as a liberal reform movement. David Lake agreed, showing that as a means of relieving the declining crop prices, Populists supported government construction of transportation networks and port facilities to enable the growing crop surplus to be exported and thereby increase prices, solving much of the monetary problem farmers faced.¹³ Lake’s view of the Populists became the dominant interpretation until the late twentieth century.

By the 1960s, historians began to reconsider Hofstadter’s argument that while differences existed between the Populists and Progressives, they were both radical reform movements. One of the most outspoken writers during this time was Karel D. Bicha, who wrote that Populists did not believe the government had any responsibility to maintain the welfare of the people or provide for any unemployment monies. Instead, they wanted to return the country to its perceived agrarian roots, making them more conservative than liberal.¹⁴ Writing twenty years after Bicha, James L. Hunt further examined this idea by comparing the Omaha Platform of 1892, with the decisions reached in the Kansas Supreme Court. He concluded that Populist judges in Kansas were more moderate, not embracing any radical agenda that would undermine a capitalist society.¹⁵ This interpretation of the Populists continued with William F. Holmes’ contention that the Populists were not radicals seeking to undermine the entire economic

¹³ David A. Lake, “Export, Die, or Subsidize: The International Political Economy of American Agriculture, 1875-1940,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (January 1989): 81-105.

¹⁴ K.D. Bicha, “The Conservative Populists: A Hypothesis,” *Agricultural History* 47, no. 1 (January 1973): 9-24.

¹⁵ James L. Hunt, “Populism, Law, and the Corporation: The 1897 Kansas Supreme Court,” *Agricultural History* 66, no. 4 (Autumn, 1992): 28-54.

system of the US, but instead wanted to uphold the Jacksonian values of small proprietary capitalism as a bulwark against what they saw as runaway corporatism.¹⁶ Interestingly, Holmes' methodology of examining the writings of Populists in the context of the late nineteenth century social structure, a structure that was radically changing, while farmers held strong to what they saw as traditional values, (i.e. religion, family, and hard work) actually confirmed Hofstadter's picture of discrepancies between the Populists and Progressives. Thus, an interpretation of the Populists as conservatives (meaning seeking limited change or reform) has emerged to counter the traditional view of a radical reform movement.

In the 1980s, Peter H. Argersinger conducted some of the most extensive research on the Populist Party. Unlike Bicha or Hunt, he contended that the Populists were not socially conservative reformers, but were highly liberal in their goals of women's suffrage, government railroad regulation and operation, and pushing for relief funds for the destitute on the Kansas prairies.¹⁷ In further publications, Argersinger went beyond simply analyzing the political leanings of the Populists to examine why they failed to take hold as permanent party. He argued that anti-fusion laws — allowing a candidate to be listed only once on the ballot — helped to split the Populist Party, as many voters would not vote for anyone listed as a “Democrat,” and so either did not vote, or in the case of those who leaned more to the Republican side, voted for the GOP.¹⁸ These laws, along

¹⁶ William F. Holmes, “Populism: in Search of Context,” *Agricultural History* 64, no. 4 (Autumn, 1990), 26-58.

By corporatism, I mean the organization of society into various industrial and professional corporations, which serve as the means of political representation, exercising political control over the people within their respective jurisdictions.

¹⁷ Peter H. Argersinger, “Ideology and Behavior: Legislative Politics and Western Populism,” *Agricultural History* 58, no. 1 (January 1984): 43-58.

¹⁸ Peter H. Argersinger, ““A Place on the Ballot”: Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws,” *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (April 1980): 287-306.

with shifting their focus to winning elections, rather than pressing for the reforms on which they campaigned, contributed to the Populist Party's decline in the late 1890s and lessened its impact.¹⁹ Argersinger also noted that Greenbackers, as well as Populists, faced a problem even when they succeeded in winning elections, as committee assignments were determined by the major parties in both the Senate and the House. The independent third party was not recognized as such, and therefore its members were often assigned to less important committees. When it came to debate, they were often not granted time to address their fellow Congressmen by the Speaker or Senate President, and so rarely had the opportunity to make their policy statements publicly on the floor of Congress.²⁰ Argersinger's work pointed to numerous factors behind the Populists' inability to sustain themselves as an independent political party.

While Argersinger extensively chronicled the unique struggles of the Populists to achieve their goals, Morton Keller argued that the Populists were not unlike other third parties in American history. In his book, *America's Three Regimes*, Keller explained how third parties are often co-opted by the major parties and lose their ability to garner national support. He briefly examined the Greenback Party, but spent extensive time discussing the Populists. His contention is that both parties were absorbed by the Democrats who were pushing harder for reform in an effort to break the Republican grip on the nation. This approach certainly provides an answer as to why these third parties could not sustain the minimal success they had, but does not answer the question as to why one was more successful than another. Keller's approach is novel because he does

¹⁹ Peter H. Argersinger, "Populists in Power: Public Policy and Legislative Behavior," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 1 (Summer 1987): 81-105.

²⁰ Peter H. Argersinger, "No Rights on this Floor: Third Parties and the Institutionalization of Congress," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 655-690.

not examine the American political system in terms of eras (i.e. Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, or Progressive), but in terms of regimes, focusing on subtle transitions rather than clearly defined breaks between eras or ages.

Unlike Keller, Argersinger, and Hofstadter, Jeffrey Ostler attempted to answer the question of why one party was more successful than the other by examining the reform movements in Kansas and Nebraska as compared to the minimal impact the Populists had in Iowa.²¹ His argument is that the differences between the state party systems can explain the success of the Populists in Kansas and Nebraska. Michael Pierce reached the same conclusion about Ohio, going so far as to dismiss economic prosperity in Ohio as a reason for the lack of Populist movement in that state.²² While this methodology helps to explain the failure of the Populists to become a national movement, neither Pierce nor Ostler analyzed the Greenback Party, making their works useful for a study of Populist failure, but not a comparison between that party and the Greenbackers.

Ostler also contended that the Populists subscribed to a belief in a British-based conspiracy to control the money markets in an effort to produce what they termed “wage-slavery”.²³ Ostler argued for an economic interpretation of the rise and fall of the People’s Party. This view was challenged by Robert Klepper who contended that economic conditions were terrible during both the 1870s and 1890s, but this does not adequately explain the rise and fall of agrarian reform movements.²⁴ While no one can

²¹ Jeffrey Ostler, “Why the Populist Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (November 1992): 451-474.

²² Michael Pierce, “Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio, 1890-1891,” *Agricultural History* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 58-85.

²³ Jeffrey Ostler, “The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism,” *Agricultural History* 69, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 1-27.

²⁴ Robert Klepper, “The Economic Bases for Agrarian Protest Movements in the United States, 1870-1900,” in “The Tasks of Economic History,” special issue, *The Journal of Economic History* 34, no. 1 (March 1974): 283-285.

argue against the terrible economic conditions of the 1870s and 1890s, Ostler's approach simply establishes the fact that the poor economy and the lack of government response led many to seek their political fortunes with upstart third parties. If we accept this premise that poor economic conditions led to political unrest and the rise of third parties, then surely when the worst economic crisis occurs, we should see the greatest rise in third party voting. However, that was not the case with the Greenback Party, which rose to prominence during the Long Depression of the 1870s, arguably the worst economic crisis the country would see until the Great Depression of the 1930s. Instead, this agrarian reform movement did not garner as many votes as the Populist Party, which emerged during a perceived less-disastrous economic downturn. This leaves us with Klepper's argument, which means that other factors must be considered in explaining the rise and fall of third parties.

What is most surprising about the Populists is that they achieved monumental success for an upstart party while utilizing a platform that had been tried just twenty years earlier in the form of the Greenback (later Greenback-Labor) Party.²⁵ Certainly, the Populists had other ideas and were supported by the Democrats, but the core of their beliefs (i.e. inflated currency, government control of railroads, etc.) was first espoused by the Greenbackers. Yet, when one examines the election results for the Greenback Party, one finds virtually no support for their ideas among the same people who supported the Populists just two decades later. While the scholars examined above have proposed varying answers as to why these parties were unable to sustain themselves, none have

²⁵ *The Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Republican State Convention of Kansas*, quoted in O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 60-61. Harold G. Moulton, *Principles of Money and Banking: A Series of Selected Materials, with Explanatory Introductions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), 197.

considered environmental factors along with economic issues. Only John D. Barnhart used the environmental conditions to explain the growth of the Populists, stating that the lack of rainfall in the early 1890s contributed to the growth of the Populists in Nebraska, and he did not examine economic factors in his analysis.²⁶

What was so different about the problems Great Plains farmers faced in the 1890s as opposed to the 1870s? At first, I suspected that the primary motivation might be economic, given that both the 1870s and 1890s were periods of extreme volatility and downturns in the American economy. By nearly all general measures, the 65-month economic contraction during the 1870s, known today as the Long Depression, was the worst economic downturn the country had seen, or would see, until the 1930s. If this were the case, then surely the Greenback Party, formed in 1874, would garner widespread support among those who would be hurt by a deflated currency (i.e. those with debts, not unlike many farmers). Yet farmers on the Plains did not vote for the Greenback Party in numbers similar to the votes the Populists would receive just twenty years later.²⁷ I then suspected that perhaps environmental factors might be responsible, and again I found that the grasshopper invasions and droughts of the 1870s were far worse than those experienced in the 1890s. Finally, I presumed a political problem; the platforms of the two parties must have differed on just enough issues to swing votes toward the Populists who would have gone for Republicans. Yet their platforms were not dissimilar, with both parties attacking the money interests in favor of the working class and farmers.²⁸

²⁶ John D. Barnhart, "Rainfall and the Populist Party in Nebraska," *The American Political Science Review* 19, no. 3 (August 1925): 527-540.

²⁷ Charles J. Hein and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1958), 10-38.

June G. Cabe and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections, 1859-1956* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1957), 102-147.

²⁸ Moulton, 197.

If all of the various factors favored the Greenback Party in the 1870s, why would this party fail to gain support from farmers on the Great Plains? To answer this question I sought to examine three factors (economic, environmental, and political) more closely and determine what the real effects the farmers on the Great Plains felt during the 1870s and 1890s. To do this, I determined that because Kansas was the center of Populist support, I needed to focus on one county in particular in this state. That county needed to have a substantial cross-section of the population in 1870 in which the percentage of native-born and foreign born were similar to the state as a whole. The objective was to find a county that would serve as a microcosm of the state. That county was Douglas County, which, at the 1870 Census, possessed one major city (Lawrence), and a population that was approximately 13.63% foreign born, which is the closest of any county to the state-wide number of 13.28%. In addition, the foreign born population of Douglas County in 1870 contained representatives from every nation of origin listed on the census forms.²⁹ With a total population of 20,592 people, the county possessed a large enough sample size from which to draw conclusions.³⁰

Chapter One of this thesis describes the philosophy of “greenbackism” and how that belief culminated in the launch of a national political party. The chapter then details the electoral results from Douglas County concerning the elections in which the Greenback Party ran candidates. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the decline of the party. Source material for this chapter came from speeches and campaign

Clanton, 60-61.

²⁹ Countries of origin listed on the 1870 census forms: British America, England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Great Britain (not stated), Germany, France, Sweden and Norway, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, and Holland.

³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. “Census of Population and Housing: 1870 Census.” U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1870.htm>. (accessed April 6, 2010).

platforms, electoral data for the state of Kansas, as well as secondary sources chronicling the decline of the Greenback Party.

Chapter Two examines the environmental and economic factors present during the 1870s and 1890s, focusing primarily on the presence or absence of grasshoppers and drought as factors in the development of agrarian reform movements, and the associated problems of economic decline during the 1870s and 1890s. The purpose of this chapter is to show that many farmers in the 1870s perceived that some of their problems stemmed from causes outside of government control, though they did not discount the actions of banks and railroads as contributing factors. The research for this chapter comes from anecdotal evidence contained in diaries and newspaper accounts detailing reports from Douglas County regarding the droughts and grasshoppers, as well as the general measures of economic health, presented alongside agricultural economic data.

Finally, Chapter Three details the rise and fall of the Populists in Kansas. This chapter follows a similar course as Chapter One, detailing the general causes of the formation of the Populist Party and their launching of national campaigns. Election returns from Douglas County, Kansas, are also presented, demonstrating that the Populists achieved greater electoral results using a similar platform as the Greenback Party. Data for this chapter was obtained from secondary sources, as well as campaign material and speeches of candidates. The chapter concludes with an examination of the fall of the party from prominence.

It is my argument that in the 1870s the Greenback Party faced economic conditions that were not bad enough for farmers to embrace radical reform ideas. They also could not be expected to provide a governmental solution to the environmental

problems, which were far worse for Great Plains farmers. However, twenty years later, the situation was reversed. While the economy had improved in general, farm prices had continued to decline, leading to a greater feeling of despair among farmers. In addition, the environmental problems had abated, leaving most feeling that their greatest problem was one that could be solved by government. It is because of these two primary factors that the Populist Party was able to use much of the Greenback Party platform to achieve a greater degree of success in Kansas just two decades later. For third parties in the nineteenth century, as well as parties currently operating, attractive rhetoric is critical, but it is the context in which those ideas emerge that will ultimately decide the success or failure of that party.

Chapter II

Greenbackism & Douglas County

As the United States entered the decade of the 1870s, the country seemed to be headed into a veritable “Golden Age.” The postwar recession had ended, and a new transcontinental railroad had finally connected the major cities and manufacturing centers of the East to the emerging states and territories in the West. In the South, “Radical Reconstruction” was in full effect, as the Republicans sought to weaken the Democratic Party’s hold on the South and protect the rights of the newly freed slaves. On the Great Plains, the United States Cavalry had begun a pacification campaign against the Native Americans in order to protect railroad builders and newly arrived settlers, who were fueled with hopes of a successful farm from cheap land acquired via the 1862 Homestead Act. President Lincoln and other Republicans hoped that these farmers would transform what Stephen Long had termed nearly a half-century earlier, “The Great American Desert,” into a fertile region which would feed the growing population of the Union. Perhaps no state better exemplified the hopes of the Republican Party, and indeed much of the nation, than Kansas. Over the previous fifteen years, the state had served as the first battleground of the Civil War, and emerged as a free state on the hinterlands of the conflict. Now it was supposed to become a massive field of small family farms.¹

¹ The following works provide a detailed analysis of the growth of the United States and the issues it faced following the Civil War: Fred A. Shannon, “The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus,” *The American Historical Review* 41, no. 4 (July 1936): 637-651; David Howard Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999); Stephen Ambrose, *Nothing Like it in the World: The Men who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Dee Brown, *The American West* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1994); Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government’s Dealings with some of the Indian Tribes* (1882; repr., Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1970); Thomas Crump, *Abraham Lincoln’s World: How Railroads, Riverboats, and Republicans Transformed America* (London: Continuum, 2009); and Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1921, repr. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

At the start of the decade, the United States Census reported that Kansas had a population of 364,399, ranking 29 out of 36 states.² Of that population, approximately 13% were born outside of the United States, the majority coming from Northern and Western Europe.³ Among the 72 counties of the state, one county stands out as best exemplifying the general population and character of the remainder of the state: Douglas County. This county was first opened to white settlement in 1854 and quickly became an important location to the state, as the California Trail crossed through it, and the county possessed an important trading post on the Kansas River at Uniontown (now located in Shawnee County).⁴ Squatter settlements emerged as pro-slavery groups from Missouri and free-staters from as far away as New England rushed to the state to help determine whether it would be a free or slave state.⁵ Being in such close proximity to a crucial waterway and a much traveled trail to the West made Douglas County an attractive place for settlement and by virtue of these features, people from a myriad of locations crossed through and settled here. Only Leavenworth County possessed similar features along with an important military installation at Fort Leavenworth.⁶

In addition, Douglas County was at the center of the antebellum conflict known as “Bleeding Kansas,” having witnessed border ruffians from Missouri attack the anti-slavery town of Lawrence. During the Civil War, William Quantrill also led a raid into

² U.S. Census Bureau. “Census of Population and Housing: 1870 Census.” U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1870.htm>. (accessed April 6, 2010).

³ US Census, 1870.

⁴ Barbara Rentenbach and Rosana J. Whitenight, “William G. Cutler’s *History of the State of Kansas: Douglas County*,” http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/douglas/douglas-co-p1.html#EARLY_SETTLERS (accessed July 27, 2010).

⁵ Barbara Rentenbach and Rosana J. Whitenight, “William G. Cutler’s *History of the State of Kansas: Douglas County*,” http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/douglas/douglas-co-p1.html#EARLY_SETTLERS (accessed July 27, 2010).

⁶ Judy Arnold, Bonnie Bruce, John Matthews, Bob Mills, Dick Taylor, Rosana Whitenight, and Shirley Renicker, “William G. Cutler’s *History of the State of Kansas: Leavenworth County*,” http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/leavenworth/leavenworth-co-p2.html#FORT_LEAVEWORTH (accessed July 27, 2010).

Douglas County, resulting in the town being nearly burned to the ground.⁷ In 1870, Douglas County had a population of 20,592, of which 13.63% were foreign born; only Leavenworth County had a larger population.⁸ The two European nations contributing the largest numbers to Douglas County's foreign-born population were Germany and Ireland, though the county also had representatives from every nationality listed in the 1870 Census records.⁹

While information relating to each class of occupation is not available at the county level, we can safely presume that the 28.38% of the state's population engaged in agriculture could be applied to Douglas County as well.¹⁰ While the census data demonstrates that Douglas County was representative of the state as a whole, one could argue that one county is not a large enough sample size, but consider that Douglas County's population in 1870 represented approximately 5.7% of the entire population of Kansas.¹¹ If one removes the only county larger than Douglas that percentage jumps to 6.2%.¹² Based on this information, it would be appropriate to use Douglas County as a basis for analyzing the discrepancies between voting totals for the Greenback Party and, twenty years later, the Populist Party.

Under most circumstances, analyzing the failure of one third party and the success of another is an exhausting endeavor, as they often possess disparate platforms and the circumstances of their rise to national attention are so varied that it virtually defies comparison. Historian Morton Keller concluded that the failure of third parties to

⁷ Duane Schultz, *Quantrill's War: The Life and Times of William Clarke Quantrill, 1837-1865* (New York: Macmillan, 1996).

⁸ US Census, 1870.

⁹ US Census, 1870.

¹⁰ US Census, 1870.

¹¹ US Census, 1870.

¹² US Census, 1870.

achieve success resulted mainly from their primary planks being co-opted by the major parties.¹³ Keller's argument fails to address the key issue of why certain parties experienced greater success than others, when each was fighting against the two major parties. As noted, most third parties emerged and disappeared, having little connection to each other; however, the Greenback Party and the Populist Party stand out from the others. Despite emerging nearly twenty years apart, the two parties showed striking similarities in their platforms and speeches, and yet their voting totals were as different as night and day. What follows is an examination of the platforms of the Greenback Party, their election returns in Douglas County, and ultimate demise of it as a viable political organization.

In the late nineteenth century it was not uncommon for even national third-parties to fail to appear on the ballot in some states, which could account for a party's failure even when certain conditions may have favored their platform. In Douglas County, Kansas, the Greenback Party first appeared as the Independent-Reform Party in 1874. The party remained active as the Greenback (later Greenback-Labor) Party, running candidates in every state election until 1884.¹⁴ While they remained active as a viable party, no Greenback candidate was able to win an election for an office in the state executive branch.¹⁵ Specifically in Douglas County, voting totals in gubernatorial elections reveal how little inroad the Greenback Party made in a state where more than 28% of the population was engaged in agricultural pursuits. Before focusing on Kansas, let us examine the rise of the Greenback Party nationally.

¹³ Morton Keller, *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Margaret Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908* (Emporia, KS: Emporia State University School of Library Science Monograph Series #5, 1981), 16-29.

¹⁵ Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*.

Following the Civil War, the United States was facing a problem of currency. To help finance the war effort, the Union had issued a new legal-tender paper currency, which came to be known as the “greenback dollar.” This paper currency was supported not by gold or any other standard measure of value, but by the credit of the United States government.¹⁶ This had the effect of inflating the money of the nation, which tended to favor those who were in debt. With the close of the war, the question was whether to continue the issuance of these legal-tender notes, or to curtail them in the hopes of stabilizing the economy following the war. The decision was made to retire the legal-tender notes in favor of a return to bimetallism (producing gold and silver coins in differing amounts), but with the onset of falling prices, Congress ceased retirement in 1868, and a policy of expansion was embarked upon as a response to the Panic of 1873.¹⁷

Congress could not simply print these notes and distribute them to the people. A solution was found in what became known as the “Ohio Idea.” This idea suggested that as a means of expanding the currency supply, government bonds would be redeemable in greenbacks as well as gold.¹⁸ Thus, those who had purchased government bonds during the Civil War could redeem them for greenbacks, but by 1874, President Grant had committed the Republican Party to “hard money,” by passing the Specie Payment Resumption Act the following January.¹⁹ When this law went into effect in 1879, “holders of the once greatly depreciated greenbacks could exchange their currency at

¹⁶ Jason Goodwin, *Greenback: The Almighty Dollar and the Invention of America* (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 220.

¹⁷ Richard H. Timberlake, *Monetary Policy in the United States: An Intellectual and Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 134.

¹⁸ Frederick Emory Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War, with a Special Reference to Iowa: A Study in Social Politics* (Iowa City, IA: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1916), 105.

¹⁹ Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, 105.

parity — 1 gold coin dollar for 1 green paper dollar.”²⁰ The paper currency steadily increased in value throughout the 1870s, but among the farmers this was seen as a devastating blow to their efforts to keep an inflated currency to enable them to pay debts with less-valuable paper dollars. Thus was born the philosophy of “greenbackism,” which stated that the federal government should increase the currency supply in accordance with the demands of the economy.²¹

Greenbackers wanted a currency that could always be in circulation in an amount that would ensure access to money for every citizen. Initially the Greenbackers sought redress from the Democratic Party, which, it was hoped, would support a “soft currency” in exchange for the votes of labor and farmers. Unfortunately, the Democratic Party in Ohio, and nationally, was split between those who supported “hard money” and those who supported the greenback cause. The party avoided addressing the issue in their platforms, angering Ohio farmers and laborers as well as those in other states. The Republican Party in Ohio and across the country was committed to a “hard money” policy, thus eliminating both major parties as an option for those who had come to love the greenbacks.²² With no major party supporting their ideals, Greenbackers were forced to create their own political party based on the “soft money” philosophy of “greenbackism.”

Certainly, creating a third political party was a radical idea, but organizing farmers was not. In 1867, the secret organization known as the National Grange of the

²⁰ Robert D. Hormats, *The Price of Liberty: Paying for America's Wars from the Revolution to the War on Terror* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2007), 90.

²¹ Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 64.

²² R.C. McGrane, “Ohio and the Greenback Movement,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (March 1925): 526-542.

Order of Patrons of Husbandry “was founded for the purpose of educating the farmers in the method of their work.”²³ The intent was simply to provide members with information regarding new techniques and ways to achieve better crop yields. There was no political arm of this group at its outset, which is not surprising, given that by its founding the post-war recession had ended and prices were on the rise. Farmers were experiencing wonderful growth and loans were extended with relative ease. As historian Robert C. McMath notes, “Like most voluntary associations, the Grange tried to hold itself above partisan politics.”²⁴ For the remainder of the 1860s and the first two years of the 1870s, the Grange maintained as its primary purpose the education of its members in the profession of farmer. As the United States entered the 1870s, its membership began to grow and as such its purposes expanded. As the Grange was a fraternal organization based upon a Masonic tradition, determining membership is rather difficult. Historian Morton Rothstein places the number of Granger families at 141,000 in 1874.²⁵ However, these would have to be families of more than 10 persons to match the membership number of 1.5 million put forth by Larry Schweikart.²⁶ Regardless of which number is chosen, Rothstein’s data shows a dramatic rise in membership: beginning with “a mere handful of local lodges in 1870, the number of Grangers increased to...almost 452,000 [families] in 1875.”²⁷ With this rise in membership and the increasing problems of the Long Depression, the Grange had to change its purpose if the farmers it served were to survive.

²³ Frank M. Drew, “The Present Farmer’s Movement,” *Political Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Jun. 1891): 282.

²⁴ McMath, 60.

²⁵ Morton Rothstein, “Farmer Movements and Organizations: Numbers, Gains, and Losses,” in “Quantitative Studies in Agrarian History,” *Agricultural History* 62, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 169.

²⁶ Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot’s History of the United States* (New York: Sentinel, 2007), 440.

²⁷ Rothstein, 169.

The Grange sought to address the problem of purchasing equipment and supplies from merchants. A single farmer had little hope of negotiating a favorable rate for his purchases, but bulk orders, even when placed with local mercantile stores, could achieve a lower purchase price for each farmer. This was the first attempt at relief in which the Grange engaged. “At first, local Granges simply concentrated the trade of their members with merchants who promised the best rates.”²⁸ While this system would serve the farmers well for a time, the local Granges could not hope to sustain it as the local merchants purchased the goods from wholesale suppliers who could increase prices, necessitating a constant revision of the Granger-merchant arrangement. Robert C. McMath noted, that “by 1873, Grangers in several states had created business agencies that filled Grange members’ orders with goods purchased directly from wholesale houses and manufacturers.”²⁹ This system bypassed the local merchants and enabled the bulk purchase prices to be obtained directly from manufacturers such as Montgomery Ward. This new system spurred a growth in membership for the next two years. In August 1873, one month prior to the onset of the panic, there were 694 local granges in Nebraska for every 100,000 people engaged in agriculture; in Kansas this number was 359. By January 1875, those numbers had grown to 1,042 and 952 respectively.³⁰ Perhaps more impressive was the growth in membership seen in Montana, Colorado and the Dakotas, which went from 130 (in Colorado and the Dakota Territory only) in 1873 to a total of 1,757 per 100,000 people engaged in agriculture in all three regions by 1875.³¹

²⁸ McMath, 59.

²⁹ McMath, 59.

³⁰ Solon Justus Buck, *The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic, and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1913), 60, 66.

³¹ Buck, 60, 66.

Unfortunately, this business agency system was still susceptible to the increasing prices of the manufacturers. Some local Granges attempted to manufacture their own equipment with minimal success and the Grange moved toward a system that was independent of the major merchants, wholesalers, and manufacturers.³² This led to the creation of cooperatives where farmers purchased goods from each other for cash. However, these failed because the vast majority of farmers lacked the ready cash to make such stores work. These non-partisan attempts to resolve the crisis had clearly met with limited success.

Following the Panic of 1873, many in the United States had blamed, and not without good reason, speculators and financiers in the East who had overleveraged themselves on railroad bonds and stocks, as well as the efforts of Jay Gould and Jim Fisk to corner the gold market in 1869.³³ However, the money interests of the East returned the favor. Gould “blamed the Jay Cooke-induced Panic of 1873 on the ‘Granger legislation of the Northwest.’”³⁴ These were the laws “that several states used to regulate railroads and warehouses within their borders.”³⁵ The intention of these laws was to prevent railroads and grain elevators from charging high prices to farmers for services the farmers deemed were in the public interest. Railroad companies were furious at these pieces of legislation. Their argument was that no government had the power to regulate a private company which engaged in private commerce with individuals. In *Munn v. Illinois* (1876), the Supreme Court ruled the “Granger Laws” regulating the maximum

³² McMath, 60.

³³ For a detailed history of this event see the following works: Henry Clews, *Fifty Years in Wall Street* (1908; repr., Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006); Kenneth D. Ackerman, *The Gold Ring: Jim Fisk, Jay Gould, and Black Friday, 1869* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1988).

³⁴ Jack Beatty, *Age of Betrayal: The Triumph of Money in America, 1865-1900* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 308.

³⁵ Rothstein, 168.

price for storage of grain as constitutional by stating, “when private property is devoted to a public use, it is subject to public regulation.”³⁶

The Grange had now shown that agricultural production was a public purpose, which meant (at least to them) that they were entitled to the legal protections afforded any other public entity. Unfortunately, the other political aims of the Grange did not pass Congress. The Grange was in favor of the abolition of national banks, the free coinage of silver, and an increase in the issuance of paper money to a level they deemed to be “sufficient” (meaning consistently expanding to meet the demands of the increasing population).³⁷ These demands would be appealing to anyone in favor of a more activist federal government, but few people of this persuasion existed outside of the Grange, and the Grange itself was hardly capable of managing elections on a national scale. While Grange leaders stood for elections at the local and state level, generating enough votes to win an election to Congress would be difficult given the lack of financial means of most Grange members. What was necessary was a political party that could generate votes and manage campaigns in order to achieve tangible results. Out of the more politically oriented elements of the National Grange emerged the first national-scale third party since the Constitutional Union Party of 1860. This party came to be known as the Greenback (later Greenback-Labor) Party.

In 1874, the Greenback Party was founded in Indianapolis as the Independent Party or the National Party. Initially, it was a reaction to the emerging financial crisis and the decision to curtail the money supply of the United States. At the party convention in Indianapolis, a platform was laid out consisting of four planks: “1.) Repeal of the act for

³⁶ *Munn v. State of Illinois*, 94 U.S. 113 (1876).

³⁷ Drew, 295.

the resumption of specie payments; 2.) Issue of legal-tender notes convertible into obligations bearing interest not exceeding one cent per day on each \$100; 3.) Suppression of bank-notes; [and] 4.) No gold bonds for sale in foreign markets.”³⁸ Clearly, the party’s plan centered on economic reform, making it a single-issue party at its founding, which would explain the fact that the party was unable to win a single election until the mid-term contests of 1878.

In 1874 in Kansas, the party was noted on ballots as the Independent-Reform Party and, although they ran candidates for every state executive office, they failed to win a single contest.³⁹ In Douglas County the party does not appear separately in the election returns as all third parties are simply listed as “other.”⁴⁰ However, in the gubernatorial returns for that year, third parties managed only 5.2% of the vote in Douglas County.⁴¹ The Congressional elections that year were a different story, as the “other” category received 50.8% in Douglas County, though it should be noted that the Democratic candidate (and election winner) John Goodin is included in this total.⁴²

The 1870s were certainly a time of great economic concern, beginning with the Panic of 1873, and an emerging party based on reforming that economic system should have had a greater appeal, especially in states where the farming population made up a significant percentage of the electorate. However, based on the limited returns of the 1874 mid-term elections, it was clear the party needed to make a change if it hoped to

³⁸ Davis Rich Dewey, Albert Bushnell Hart, Ed., *Financial History of the United States* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1922), 379.

³⁹ Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*.

⁴⁰ June G. Cabe and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections, 1859-1956* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1957), 102-147.

Charles J. Hein and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1958), 10-38.

⁴¹ Hein & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁴² Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

challenge the Republicans for the presidency in 1876. The change was not to be a modification of party ideals, but instead the selection of a well-known candidate to generate a greater base of grassroots support.

In 1876, the Greenback Party held its convention in Indianapolis, where they re-articulated their platform in the following manner: “the immediate and unconditional repeal of the Specie Payment Resumption Act, the withdrawal of the circulating notes of national and state banks, and the substitution of greenback currency.”⁴³ That currency was not solely for the purpose of paying private debts but also would be “issued directly by the Government, and convertible on demand into United States obligations,” referring to the fact that according to government currency policy, United States bonds could only be purchased in gold coin.⁴⁴ The goal was to allow the average citizen to purchase interest bearing bonds using money that was worth less than the principle value of the bonds they purchased. This platform was not at all different from that of 1874, but at that same convention the delegates chose to nominate renowned inventor Peter Cooper for President. He was best known for having built the first successful steam locomotive; as a man of business, he was well chosen.⁴⁵ The remainder of the year saw Cooper and his running mate Samuel Fenton Cary making speeches across the country trying to generate support for the new party.

At the Cooper Union in New York in August of 1876, the ticket was ratified, and both Cooper and Cary spoke to crowd of supporters. While Cooper made a mild speech, merely thanking the crowd for their support, Cary proceeded to outline the tenets of the

⁴³ “National Politics: The Greenback Convention,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1876.

⁴⁴ Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 65.

⁴⁵ Rossiter Worthington Raymond, *Peter Cooper* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1901).

party's platform and the reasons why a new economic policy was needed. Cary addressed the opposition's argument, namely that money was plentiful and that the farmers and workers simply needed to address their own issues rather than looking for inflated currency. He stated that money might be available, "but it was in stagnant pools, and might as well be in the Atlantic Ocean."⁴⁶ Those pools he referred to were the holders of gold in East Coast cities. He also attacked the Specie Payment Resumption Act, which he claimed "would make the rich richer and the poor poorer."⁴⁷ The argument was that this would reduce the circulating money supply, creating a deflated currency, and thereby increasing the burden on debtors. Greenbackism as a philosophy "embodied the idea that the federal government should, on a continuing basis, adjust the currency supply to meet the fluctuating but generally expanding demands of the country."⁴⁸ Cary explained this philosophy by examining the monetary supply following the Civil War, stating that "In 1865 we had \$58 per head of circulating medium for every man, woman, and child, in 1875 we had not quite \$15 per head."⁴⁹ In their minds, this was the fundamental problem with the government's policy of currency restriction; without increasing the money supply, businesses during the depression would be unable to pay wages, resulting in widespread unemployment and the average citizen unable to meet their obligations. If the government did not keep greenbacks in circulation, the only currency media would be gold or silver, with gold being primary. This would leave banks and gold houses in control of the nation's currency, keeping the money in the hands of the few, rather than the many. Cary finished his speech by declaring his ideal

⁴⁶ "Peter Cooper's Meeting," *New York Times*, August 31, 1876.

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, August 31, 1876.

⁴⁸ McMath, 64.

⁴⁹ "Peter Cooper's Meeting," *New York Times*, August 31, 1876.

situation to alleviate the crisis. The *New York Times* reported that “He would have labor so scarce that every farmer would want to hire men at good wages.”⁵⁰ Thus, the party focused on economic concerns with few other issues. About a month later, Cooper addressed the New York state convention in Albany, elaborating further on two key points of the party: “First, we must put this whole power of coining money, or issuing currency, as Thomas Jefferson says, ‘where, by the Constitution, it properly belongs’ — entirely into the hands of our Government.”⁵¹ Cooper again articulated the demand for a national currency that was used for all debts, public and private, and placed in the sole control of the United States government. Second, he reiterated the demand that currency must be convertible into government bonds at the discretion of the individual.⁵²

Despite the presence of a well-known candidate, the party failed to even finish second in that election year, polling less than 1% of the vote, though garnering 6.26% in Kansas.⁵³ In Douglas County, the total received by third parties was more than double, approximately 14% of the vote, though this includes votes from both the Prohibition Party and the Anti-Secret Society Party.⁵⁴ Those two parties combined managed only 133 votes in the entire state, compared to the 7,770 for the Greenback Party, making the Greenback platform significantly more popular statewide.⁵⁵ Congressional election returns in Douglas County again list only Republican totals and “other,” which received 41.5% of the vote.⁵⁶ It seems clear that the major parties were not addressing the

⁵⁰ *New York Times*, August 31, 1876.

⁵¹ Peter Cooper quoted in “The Greenback Convention,” *New York Times*, September 27, 1876.

⁵² *New York Times*, September 27, 1876.

⁵³ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed 3 April 2010).

⁵⁴ Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁵⁵ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed 3 April 2010).

⁵⁶ Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

concerns of some of the Kansas electorate, though no Greenback candidate won their contest for a state executive branch seat, and the third parties in the gubernatorial election garnered nearly 17%.⁵⁷

Two years later, the party had merged with the labor unions to form the Greenback-Labor Party, and its platform had noticeably broadened. While still fixated on the economic depression, which was nearing its conclusion, the party had ceased to demand exclusive issue of greenbacks, stating, “The circulating medium, whether of metal or paper, shall be issued by the government, and made a full legal tender for all debts, duties, and taxes in the United States at its stamped value.”⁵⁸ Going further, the party’s platform had embraced Western mining interests by advocating that “that the coinage of silver be placed on the same footing as that of gold.”⁵⁹ In addition:

Congress shall provide said money adequate to the full employment of labor, the equitable distribution of its products, and the requirement of businesses, fixing a minimum amount per capita of the population, and otherwise regulating its value by wise and equitable provisions of law, so that the rate of interest will secure to labor its just reward.⁶⁰

These policies merely expanded the economic platform presented during the two previous election cycles. The party now demanded that “official salaries, pensions, bonds, and all other debts and obligations, public and private, shall be discharged in the legal-tender money of the United States.”⁶¹ In addition, the labor movement’s ideas were

⁵⁷ Hein & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*.

Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*.

⁵⁸ Harold G. Moulton, *Principles of Money and Banking: A Series of Selected Materials, with Explanatory Introductions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), 197.

⁵⁹ Moulton, 197.

⁶⁰ Moulton, 197-198.

⁶¹ Moulton. 197.

added to the party with demands for “a shorter work week, government labor bureaus, and restrictions on contract prison labor and immigration.”⁶² The platform helped the party secure 14 seats in the United States House of Representatives, though as noted earlier, none came from Kansas.⁶³

In the state-level elections, the Greenback-Labor coalition won no executive branch offices.⁶⁴ For the first time in Douglas County, the totals for the Democratic Party in the Congressional elections were separated, and all third parties combined earned 15.1% of the vote.⁶⁵ The race for Kansas governor saw an increase in third party voting, as the total of all third parties was 21.3% in Douglas County.⁶⁶ These mid-term elections served as a new starting point for the party, which was now hoping to make a greater showing in the next presidential election.

By 1880, the party needed to find a candidate to match the Civil War veterans of both the Republicans and Democrats, who ran James Garfield and Winfield Scott Hancock, respectively. They chose fellow veteran James Baird Weaver of Iowa, who had enlisted as a private in the Union army. Weaver had been active in the Republican Party, but had left following the scandals of the Grant administration. By distancing himself from those scandals, Weaver became a viable candidate for the party, which had adopted the following platform at its national convention in Chicago:

All money to be issued and its volume controlled by the National Government, an eight hour workday, enforcement of a sanitary code in industrial establishments, curtailment of child labor, the

⁶² Rosenstone, 65.

⁶³ Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 52.

⁶⁴ Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*.

⁶⁵ Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁶⁶ Hein & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*.

establishment of a Bureau of Labor Statistics, the regulation of interstate commercial facilities by Congress or an agency of its designation, a graduated income tax, the ballot for women, and equal voting rights for Negroes.⁶⁷

This platform had reduced the prevalence of the economic issues, as the Panic of 1873 had concluded the previous year. Now the party stood for not only government control of U.S. currency, but also for labor issues, income taxes, and universal suffrage. The party had grown and expanded, with new focus on corporations directly, and Weaver made this point clear in a speech given in Boston in June of 1880:

the agents of commerce — money, transportation and the transmission of intelligence — necessary to the welfare and prosperity of the republic had been wrenched from the hands of the people and given into the hands of soulless corporations...the old parties did not dare to champion the cause of the people. Only a party organized for the specific purpose of controlling corporations could ever accomplish the task...Any party kept in power for twenty-five years will become corrupt. You might just as well keep a president in for twenty-five years as to keep a party in for that time. It is the same men that are controlling the party to-day that controlled it in 1860, the same old rings, and that is the tendency everywhere now.⁶⁸

Weaver's speech showed that the party was railing against corporate control and long-established parties. His presence and this new platform certainly broadened the party's appeal, as shown in the election returns from that year. Weaver polled 3.32% of the

⁶⁷ Rosenstone, 66.

⁶⁸ James B. Weaver, quoted in Fred Emory Haynes, *James Baird Weaver* (Iowa City, IA: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1919).

popular vote nationwide, and nearly 10% of the vote in Kansas, while the Prohibition Party and Anti-Secret Society Party polled a combined 35 votes.⁶⁹

However, the Greenback-Labor Party saw its representation in Congress shrink to ten seats, indicating that the party had peaked. Third party candidates and the Democratic candidate for Douglas County's Congressional representative earned 38% of the vote combined.⁷⁰ No Greenback-Labor Party candidate won a state office, and in Douglas County, third party candidates for governor polled a combined 4.1% of voters.⁷¹ It was clear that the party was on the decline, though they would continue to run candidates in the next two election cycles.

By 1880, the Panic of 1873 and the ensuing depression had run its course. According to the National Bureau for Economic Research, the contraction ended in March of 1879 and the next contraction cycle did not begin for another three years.⁷² By 1882, there were reports circulating that the Greenback-Labor Party was already dead.⁷³ However, the party still ran candidates for state and national offices, though they again failed to win any contests.⁷⁴ Totals from Douglas County reveal that all third party candidates for Congress captured only 6.1% of the vote, and fared only slightly better in the race for Kansas governor, earning almost 9%.⁷⁵ Across the country it seemed fewer and fewer voters were swayed by the party's appeal for "soft money." In states such as

⁶⁹ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed April 3, 2010).

⁷⁰ Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁷¹ Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*.

Hein & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁷² National Bureau of Economic Research, "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions," <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html> (accessed February 27, 2010)

⁷³ Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, 146.

⁷⁴ Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*.

⁷⁵ Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

Hein & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*.

Maine, the party began to split into two factions: those who wanted an alliance with a major party, and those who wished to remain independent.⁷⁶ Two years later, the party ran Massachusetts governor Benjamin Butler for president, but he polled only 1.33% of the popular vote, winning no states -- though he fared better in Kansas, winning 6.15% of voters.⁷⁷ Among Douglas County voters, third party candidates for President earned a combined popular vote of nearly 9%, but no totals are given for third party Congressional candidates.⁷⁸ In the gubernatorial elections that year, the third parties polled only 3.3% of the vote, a significant drop from the previous election cycle.⁷⁹ This would be the last time the Greenback-Labor Party would appear on the ballot for state or national offices. Gretchen Ritter noted that the party lacked the resources of the major parties to organize its campaigns and failed to provide a strategy for success at the national level.⁸⁰ Peter Argersinger argued that because the Congressional rules were made by the major parties, they were able to prevent the Greenbackers from even opening debate on their agenda.⁸¹ In the end, the party failed not only because of these factors, but because of environmental and economic conditions that did not support the growth of a radical reform movement. The discussion of those factors is the subject of the following chapter.

⁷⁶ “The Maine Democracy”, *New York Times*, June 28, 1882.

⁷⁷ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed April 3, 2010).

⁷⁸ Cabe & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁷⁹ Hein & Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*.

⁸⁰ Ritter, 151.

⁸¹ Peter H. Argersinger, “No Rights on this Floor: Third Parties and the Institutionalization of Congress,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 655-690.

Chapter III

Economic and Environmental Problems

Historians Gretchen Ritter and Peter Argersinger have argued that factionalism, a lack of both organization and strategy, and the difficulties involved in overcoming the committee rules established by the major parties, contributed to the demise of the Greenback Party.¹ However, issues such as drought, grasshoppers, and the economy can also serve to explain the lack of growth for the party in Kansas. Lauren Soth has noted that part of the reason the coalition of farmers and laborers fell apart was because the land-grant colleges were offering affordable learning in new technologies and techniques that would enable the growth of large-scale farming, negating the grassroots support for the third party.² Soth's analysis was based on research from the Old Northwest (Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana), and later research on Populism in Kansas in the 1890s. The large-scale farms Soth described were not yet present in Kansas in the 1870s, leaving the state with a collection of smaller family-based farms.

Using Soth's conclusions as a guide, we must invariably ask why the Greenback Party did not achieve greater results in Kansas if large-scale farming had not yet emerged in that state. To answer that question let us consider first the economic and environmental issues between 1874 and 1884 (the period during which the Greenback Party was active in Kansas, and then we will compare those conditions to the 1890s, when the Populists were much more successful.

¹ Peter H. Argersinger, "No Rights on this Floor: Third Parties and the Institutionalization of Congress," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 655-690; Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

² Lauren Soth, "The End of Agrarianism: Fission of the Political Economy of Agriculture," in "Proceedings Issue," special issue, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 52, no. 5 (December 1970): 663-667.

Numerous historians have chronicled the economic problems associated with the Panic of 1873, and many have connected those problems with the rise of agrarian protest movements.³ There is little disagreement that the 65-month economic contraction known today as the Long Depression⁴ contributed to the growth of an agrarian reform movement across the country, but to what extent? Robert Klepper has contended that economic downturns do not adequately explain the rise of agrarian reform movements.⁵ He proposed an approach that included both economic and political considerations, but he made no mention of other factors that explained the varying degree of support for agrarian reform movements in the United States. To be sure, economics played a key role in the formation of these movements, so let us briefly examine the precipitant cause of the Panic of 1873, the failure of the Philadelphia-based firm of Jay Cooke and Company.

Throughout the 1860s and into the early 1870s, the building of railroad had become a major industry in the United States, spurred by government land grants and subsidies. Between 1865 and 1872, more than 32,000 miles of railroad track were laid in

³ For a detailed investigation of the connection between the growth of agrarian reform movements and economic downturns, see the following works: Isaac Lippincott, *Economic Development of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1921); Edward Winslow Martin, *History of the Grange Movement, or The Farmer's War Against Monopolies* (Chicago: National Publishing Co., 1874); Solon Justus Buck, *The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic, and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1913); Robert Klepper, "The Economic Bases for Agrarian Protest Movements in the United States, 1870-1900," in "The Tasks of Economic History," special issue, *The Journal of Economic History* 34, no. 1 (March 1974): 283-285; and William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975).

⁴ National Bureau of Economic Research, "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions," <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html> (accessed February 27, 2010).

⁵ Robert Klepper, "The Economic Bases for Agrarian Protest Movements in the United States, 1870-1900," in "The Tasks of Economic History," special issue, *The Journal of Economic History* 34, no. 1, (March 1974): 283-285.

the United States, with total mileage growing each year until 1872.⁶ After October 1873, however, the United States entered into its longest continued economic contraction, following an economic panic in that same month.⁷ In a report to the United States National Monetary Commission in 1910, David Kinley noted that “the immediate cause of the crash was due to the fact that some of the largest of these enterprises [meaning railroads] did not realize profits quickly enough to pay the loans which had been advanced on them.”⁸

No greater example of this problem could be found than that of Jay Cooke and his Northern Pacific Railroad. As the man who had financed the Union’s war efforts, Jay Cooke was a well-known and well-respected businessman. His reputation had earned him the admiration of virtually every American, and many were willing to trust him when it came to sound investments.⁹ Following the linkage of the Union and Central Pacific Railroads at Promontory Point in 1869, Cooke had become the leading financier of the struggling railroad. His efforts generated momentum for the railroad and it seemed that nothing could stop him from completing the second transcontinental railroad in the United States. To finance the road, Cooke “would rely on land grants from the federal government, these would provide the collateral to support the \$100 million in construction bonds Cooke proposed to sell.”¹⁰ Here again, Cooke’s legacy of financing the Civil War served him well. As historian Steve Fraser noted, “All sorts of middling

⁶ Rendig Fels, “American Business Cycles, 1865-79,” *The American Economic Review* 41, no. 3 (June 1951): 326.

⁷ National Bureau of Economic Research, “US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions,” <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html> (accessed February 27, 2010).

⁸ David Kinley, United States National Monetary Commission, United States Congress Senate, *The Independent Treasury of the United States and its Relations to the Banks of the Country*, United States 61st Congress, 2nd Session, 1909-1910, Senate (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1910), 226.

⁹ Henrietta Melia Larson, *Jay Cooke: Private Banker* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

¹⁰ H.W. Brands, *The Money Men: Capitalism, Democracy, and the Hundred Years’ War over the American Dollar* (New York: Atlas Books, 2006), 161.

folks — widows and clerks and schoolteachers and ministers and small businessmen who normally maintained a skeptical attitude about Wall Street — had taken the plunge in Northern Pacific bonds, trusting in Cooke’s impeccable reputation.”¹¹ To further encourage investment, Cooke had advertised the great possibilities of the Northern Pacific, creating “fantastical brochures depicting Duluth as the Paris of the prairies.”¹²

Those advertisements further claimed that:

The Red River Valley of Dakota would grow the grain that would feed the world; the plains of Montana would supply the beef. The headwaters of the Yellowstone, with their geysers and hot springs, were a tourists’ wonderland. The Cascade Mountains of Washington held timber that would build houses for a nation of a hundred million. The sheltered harbor of Puget Sound made San Francisco seem a roadstead.¹³

It was simply too good to be true. With investments dwindling, Cooke was forced to find new ways to keep up the building on the Northern Pacific in the hopes that new investors could be located or the road could be completed and show a profit before he went bankrupt. He advanced “money obtained from depositors at short-term in expectation that an European market would develop.”¹⁴ That market never materialized. By then, European investors were holding back money, unsure whether American railroads were a sound commitment of their finances. With fewer and fewer investors, his own finances growing thin, and the scandals of *Crédit Mobilier* and the Erie Railroad, Cooke had no market for his Northern Pacific bonds and was suddenly bereft of liquid capital.¹⁵ In

¹¹ Steve Fraser, *Every Man a Speculator: A History of Wall Street in American Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 122.

¹² Fraser, 122.

¹³ Brands, 161.

¹⁴ Fels, 337.

¹⁵ Brands, 162.

September 1873, a report was published indicating that the creditworthiness of Jay Cooke & Company had essentially vanished, and the company could no longer market the bonds of the Northern Pacific. People who had invested in the banking house rushed to recover their assets. Cooke was forced to attach a note to the closed doors of his Philadelphia branch, stating, “Owing to unexpected demands on us, our firm has been obliged to suspend payment.”¹⁶ The panic was on.

Utilizing economic data to draw conclusions can sometimes be a difficult endeavor. Often pieces of data lead to differing conclusions, leaving the historian with disparate data points to correlate and compare. In addition, perceptions of economic distress can often be much worse than the actual economic data would appear, creating even further problems with analyses. However, let us consider the actual data to determine if the economic conditions following the Panic of 1873 were as disastrous as people such as Scott Reynolds Nelson claimed.¹⁷

As noted earlier, the National Bureau of Economic Research indicates that between October 1873 and March 1879 the United States was in an unbroken economic contraction, followed by three years of economic expansion, then another 38 months of contraction ending in 1885.¹⁸ If one only used this data point, it would be easy to conclude that the economic downturn was the primary cause for the rise of the greenback movement, but other pieces of data show that perhaps the downturn was not as terrible for farmers in Kansas.

¹⁶ Jay Cooke, quoted in Brands, 162.

¹⁷ Scott Reynolds Nelson, “The Real Great Depression,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 55, no. 8 (October 17, 2008): B9.

¹⁸ National Bureau of Economic Research, “US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions,” <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html> (accessed February 27, 2010).

Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson have done extensive research into economic data from the founding of the United States to the present day, and their research suggests that the recessions of the 1870s and early 1880s were not as terrible for those engaged in agriculture. First, Officer and Williamson charted the annualized growth rates of Real Gross Domestic Product in the United States economy. The annualized growth rate is the hypothetical growth rate necessary each year measured from the GDP on a starting date to reach the GDP on an ending date. Based on their data, the U.S. Real GDP needed to grow by 4.21% annually between 1873 and 1879 (the years of economic contraction initiated by the Panic of 1873).¹⁹ Also, between the end of the recession and 1885, that annualized growth rate needed to be 4.49%.²⁰ This data suggests that the economy was growing, not contracting. Using the Consumer Price Index, Officer and Williamson also demonstrated that \$1 in 1873 would be worth only \$0.83 by 1879, representing a decline of 17% in only six years. That same dollar would be worth \$0.80 in 1885.²¹ Purchasing power was therefore falling, but given the presence of paper currency on the market, however limited, one should expect a degree of inflation. The Specie Payment Resumption Act had pegged the currency to gold, and purchasing power declined less rapidly following resumption in 1879. In addition, the wages of farm laborers in 1879 had increased by 9% since the start of the Civil War, though this was a 27% decline since the start of the panic. Those wages would increase by 19% in the six

¹⁹ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Annualized Growth Rate and Graphs of Various Historical Economic Series," MeasuringWorth, 2009, <http://www.measuringworth.com/growth/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

²⁰ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Annualized Growth Rate and Graphs of Various Historical Economic Series," MeasuringWorth, 2009, <http://www.measuringworth.com/growth/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

²¹ Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2010. <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

years following the end of the recession.²² It should be noted that this data represents the earnings of those employed on farms as hired hands, not the actual owner of the farm, but given the coalition of farmers and laborers the Greenback Party sought to achieve, the effects of the panic on labor is also noteworthy.

Interest rates were also falling, with short-term rates dropping from 10.31% in 1873 to 5.06% in 1879, while long-term rates over that period fell from 5.55% to 4.22%.²³ After the panic, both short-term and long-term rates continued to fall, dropping to 4.06% and 3.53%, respectively.²⁴ A falling interest rate would tend to favor a farmer, as it would mean money would be easier to get from banks, which further indicates that perhaps the 1870s and early 1880s were not as hard on farmers as one might first suspect, given the continued economic recession noted by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Finally, Thorstein Veblen chronicled the changes in the price of wheat between 1867 and 1892. His data shows that between 1873 and 1879, the price of wheat in Chicago (the nearest board of trade in existence at the time to Kansas) averaged approximately \$1 per bushel, with a maximum price over that period of \$1.21 per bushel, and a minimum price of \$0.89.²⁵ Following the panic, the price of wheat increased greatly until 1882, when it began a rapid decline. Even with this decline, the price of wheat between 1879 and 1885 still averaged about \$1 per bushel with a maximum price

²² Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Annual Wages in the United States, 1774-2008," MeasuringWorth, 2009. <http://www.measuringworth.org/USwages/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

²³ Short-term interest rates represent interest on loans that mature in less than one year, whereas long-term rates would apply to mortgages, or the interest paid on government bonds.

²⁴ Lawrence H. Officer, "What Was the Interest Rate Then?" MeasuringWorth, 2008. <http://www.measuringworth.org/interestrates/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

²⁵ Thorstein Veblen, "The Price of Wheat Since 1867," *The Journal of Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (December 1892):72.

of \$1.16 and a minimum of \$0.84.²⁶ From this data, the price of wheat was relatively stable during this time, again suggesting that farmers in Kansas were not greatly affected by the panic. Veblen made a similar conclusion, noting that “the farming community of the wheat-growing country did not long feel the effects of the shock, and they never realized that 1873-78 was a season of hard times.”²⁷ Given this data, it seems that farmers in Kansas had little economic reason to embrace a radical reform movement like the Greenback Party.

However, of all possible events that could define the 1870s in Kansas and the Great Plains, none has been chronicled in as great detail as that of the grasshopper plagues.²⁸ While the presence of these insects was well known before the 1870s, this decade saw the greatest coverage of the effects of the pests in local and national newspapers. Beginning in 1874, reports are numerous as to the wide extent of grasshopper ravages, and since this year was the first year in which the Greenback Party emerged as a national party, it serves as an excellent beginning for a study of the impact of the grasshoppers on the state of Kansas.

In 1874, the Kansas State Board of Agriculture produced its annual report on the condition of crops and the various factors that influenced the harvest of that year. The portion of that report that referenced Douglas County stated the following:

²⁶ Veblen, 72.

²⁷ Veblen, 77.

²⁸ The following works detail the effects of the grasshopper plagues in various areas of the Great Plains: Harold E. Briggs, “Grasshopper Plagues and Early Dakota Agriculture, 1864-1876,” *Agricultural History* 8, no. 2 (April 1934): 51-63; John T. Schlebecker, “Grasshoppers in American Agricultural History,” *Agricultural History* 27, no. 3 (July 1953): 85-93; Annette Atkins, *Harvest of Grief: Grasshopper Plagues and Public Assistance in Minnesota, 1873-1878* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984); Kerri M. Skinner, “The Past, Present, and Future of Rangeland Grasshopper Management,” *Rangelands* 22, no. 2 (April 2000): 24-28; and George B. Hewitt and Jerome A. Onsager, “Grasshoppers: Yesterday, Today, and Forever,” *Rangelands* 4, no. 5 (October 1982): 207-209.

Grasshoppers. — Appeared about Aug. 12th. Corn, fruit and vegetables damaged; young trees injured. But few eggs deposited.

Chinch Bugs. — Spring wheat, oats, corn, fall wheat and tame grasses injured.

Conditions of crops, etc. — A heavy deficit in feed for hogs; large numbers being sold off. There is wheat enough, and but few will be unable to procure seed.

Destitution. — There will be numerous cases of individual hardship, but Douglas County is able to provide for them.²⁹

This represents the official statement of the state government as to the effects of drought, grasshoppers, and other pests on the agriculture of Douglas County. This report indicates that the county would be able to provide for any relief that may have been necessary, and it seems that the county fared decently during that harvest year. However, newspaper accounts detailing the statewide effects produce a different picture. The articles printed in the *New York Times*, which were taken from reports from local newspapers, suggest that the effects of the grasshoppers and drought were severely damaging to Kansas' hopes for a successful harvest. "The two months' drought in Kansas, which had served to dwarf the crops, and the ravages of chinch bugs, have for some time rendered harvest prospects anything but flattering."³⁰ The report also indicated that Governor Thomas Osborn visited the most affected communities and that a method of relief was in the works at the state level.³¹ Perhaps most importantly, the article related that the "wheat crop, which had already been harvested, was large enough to supply the State, so that bread will be plenty."³² Finally, the report noted that the temperature ranged from 103°

²⁹ Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society, *Third Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas* (Topeka: State of Kansas, 1874), 21-22.

³⁰ "The Locusts of the West," *New York Times*, August 17, 1874.

³¹ "The Locusts of the West," *New York Times*, August 17, 1874.

³² "The Locusts of the West," *New York Times*, August 17, 1874.

to 109° even in the shade.³³ It seems that while Kansas was certainly affected by drought and insects, the damage was not enough to warrant a massive shift in support away from the Republican Party.

While official reports and newspaper accounts detail the effects of the drought and insects, examining the diaries and letters of local residents can often produce a better image of how the effects of environmental factors were perceived. One such account is contained in the diary of Mrs. James C. Horton of Lawrence. Her husband was a well-known business man in the city and had served as a State Senator.³⁴ Mrs. Horton's diary not only contains extensive references to her husband's travels back and forth from Topeka to Lawrence, but also details her perceptions of the weather on most days. While she was not the wife of a farmer, her interpretations are noteworthy as they provide observations about the local weather in Douglas County. In her diary entries for 1874, Mrs. Horton recalls 53 days of warm or hot weather between April 1 and November 1, while only noting 30 days that she described in milder terms (i.e. beautiful, nice, fine, fair, etc.).³⁵ She rarely mentions the temperature, but did recall that the thermometer read 110° on August 5.³⁶ At one point, she remarked that "We had a prayer for rain at our church yesterday."³⁷ In her diary she noted only two days of rain between that comment and September 1. She also noted that, "Grasshoppers are eating everything the trees look as barren as mid winter and the grass is brown & crackles under your feet."³⁸ Based on

³³ "The Locusts of the West," *New York Times*, August 17, 1874.

³⁴ "J.C. Horton Dead," *Kansas City Journal*, June 4, 1909.

³⁵ Diary of Mrs. James C. Horton, 1874, Kansas State Historical Society, H.L. Moore Collection.

³⁶ Diary of Mrs. James C. Horton, 1874, Kansas State Historical Society, H.L. Moore Collection, pg. 32, Wed, Aug. 5, 1874.

³⁷ Diary of Mrs. James C. Horton, 1874, Kansas State Historical Society, H.L. Moore Collection, pg. 28, Mon, Jul 6, 1874.

³⁸ Diary of Mrs. James C. Horton, 1874, Kansas State Historical Society, H.L. Moore Collection, pg. 34, Tues, Aug 18, 1874.

this account, the report from the State Board of Agriculture, and the newspaper article from *The New York Times*, we can conclude that 1874 was a year of drought and pests, but given that few perceived a need for federal relief, it is clear that this was not a year in which Kansas farmers felt a need to embrace a radical reform movement such as the Greenback Party, at least not in 1874, as evidenced by the voting totals in that year.

The remainder of the 1870s saw occasional flare-ups of droughts and grasshopper invasions, but none approached the level of 1874. In 1875, reports indicated that “Kansas and Nebraska, where apprehension was felt in the earlier part of the season, will not only find themselves amply provided for by a bountiful harvest within their own borders, but will have millions of bushels of wheat for export to Europe.”³⁹ The *New York Times* also reported that both spring and winter wheat prospects in Kansas for 1875 were only 3% below average.⁴⁰ By all accounts, 1875 was a successful harvest year for the state, and the damage done by drought and insects in the previous year was barely visible.

Reports from 1876 are varied. The *New York Times* reported that “The farmers of Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, and adjoining territories, have had a hard struggle of it during the past three years owing to the ravages of the locusts. Those who had accumulated money from former years of prosperity have seen it all swept away, and there are very few of the farmers, gardeners, and ranchmen who are not in debt.”⁴¹ Despite this report, the Kansas State Board of Agriculture stated that in Douglas County, the grasshoppers appeared in limited numbers and left significant numbers of eggs.⁴² That same report indicated that between April 1 and November 1, every month with the

³⁹ “The American Harvest,” *Sydney (Australia) Morning Herald*, October 2, 1875.

⁴⁰ “The Crops,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1875.

⁴¹ “Grasshopper Ravages,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1876.

⁴² Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society *Fifth Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas* (Topeka: State of Kansas, 1876), 269.

exception of October saw at least 3 inches of rain in Lawrence, Kansas, and that during June, July, and August, the lowest total rainfall for a month was 3.51 inches.⁴³ It seems that while many were injured by the effects of drought and locusts in previous years, 1876 was not a year of difficulty in terms of environmental factors. The same can be said of 1877 and 1878. Few reports of grasshoppers or drought are found in newspapers for these years, and *The New York Times* reported in 1878 that Kansas “will sow 386,023 more acres than last year and expects a crop of 20,000,000 bushels for export.”⁴⁴ If a poor economy was not enough of a factor for Kansas farmers to embrace the Greenback Party, then certainly the environmental conditions were not adequate either. 1874 was a year of hard times, but even in that year, no reports are found where farmers were mobilizing for a radical reform movement or demanding federal intervention and relief. We must therefore concede that perceptions of the economic and environmental conditions of the 1870s were not sufficient for a radical third party to take hold in Kansas.

The 1890s were a different story. While there was not a decade-long recession, there were several smaller contractions separated by brief periods of economic expansion. The National Bureau of Economic Research noted four distinct periods of contraction during the decade: July 1890 - May 1891; January 1893 - June 1894; December 1895 - June 1897; and June 1899 - December 1900.⁴⁵ The majority of historians have focused on the second of these recessions, which is often referred to as the Panic of 1893.⁴⁶ Since

⁴³ Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society *Fifth Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas* (Topeka: State of Kansas, 1876), 269.

⁴⁴ “The Crops of the Country,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1878.

⁴⁵ National Bureau of Economic Research, “US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions,” <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html> (accessed July 8, 2010).

⁴⁶ The following works examine the causes and effects of the Panic of 1893: Elmus Wicker, *Banking Panics of the Gilded Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); W. Jett Lauck, *The Causes*

the purpose of examining the economic conditions of this decade is to establish how they contributed to the relative success of the Populist Party, I will be using economic data reflective of the decade as a whole, rather than examining each recession as a stand-alone event, as the end of each recession did not result in the demise of the Populist Party.

Just as in 1873, the recessions of the 1890s were primarily the result of railroad overbuilding and speculation. Despite the clear problems speculation and overbuilding had caused in 1873, investors became willing to gamble on the future success of railroads owing to bumper crops in the West, combined with increased foreign demand and a general improvement of business activity in 1885 and 1886.⁴⁷ In addition, the rate wars between many of the railroad companies had subsided, due mainly to the absorption of smaller companies by larger ones and the creation of pools (agreements to fix shipping rates and to not infringe on each corporation's business region) in order to guarantee stable profits.⁴⁸ According to William Lauck, railroads began to eye the Southwest, South, and Northwest as possible areas for profit, and between 1886 and 1890, railroad companies built more than 39,000 miles of track, approximately a 30% increase in total mileage, with 19,044 miles being built in the Northwest and Southwest.⁴⁹ This particular fact differentiates the recessions of the 1890s from that of the 1870s. In 1873, the panic was centered in New York and Eastern markets, whereas the panics of the 1890s were focused in the Western states and territories.⁵⁰ The federal government followed up this construction by offering land at affordable prices to settlers in these regions, and the land

of the Panic of 1893 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907); Robert Sobel, *Panic on Wall Street: A History of America's Financial Disasters* (1968; repr., Washington D.C.: Beard Books, 1999); and Alexander D. Noyes, "The Banks and the Panic of 1893," *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (March 1894): 12-30.

⁴⁷ William Jett Lauck, *The Causes of the Panic of 1893* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1907), 3.

⁴⁸ Lauck, 3.

⁴⁹ Lauck, 3.

⁵⁰ Elmus Wicker, *Banking Panics of the Gilded Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 52.

that was sowed with crops delivered them in abundance during the latter half of the 1880s.⁵¹ It was clear that the railroad companies had once again provided the nation with opportunities for economic expansion.

All of this came at a cost. According to Lauck, those companies that had embarked upon this latest period of expansion did so on the strength of loans, just as their predecessors had in the 1860s and 1870s, with the total indebtedness of those companies increasing by 2.5 billion dollars.⁵² Much of this investment was coming from overseas. American companies were purchasing goods from abroad and because they were not able to immediately pay for them, they offered stocks and bonds as payment, which companies in Great Britain especially wholeheartedly accepted.⁵³ Thus, on both sides of the Atlantic, companies were staking their fortunes on the success of railroads in the United States; railroad companies were steadily increasing their indebtedness in order to expand into areas of limited population and potential for growth.

Following this period of boom times in building and expansion, the country stumbled into its first period of contraction, though we may view the entire decade as a period of contraction with brief periods of incomplete recovery.⁵⁴ The causes of this downturn are numerous and there seem to be little consensus as to what precipitated the depression. A.D. Noyes laid the blame at the feet of banks and their failure to perform due diligence before issuing loans.⁵⁵ As noted earlier, William Lauck contended that extension of credit to railroads for building into sparsely populated areas was a major

⁵¹ Lauck, 5-6.

⁵² Lauck, 10.

⁵³ Lauck, 11.

⁵⁴ For a detailed look at this methodology, see Charles Hoffman, "The Depression of the Nineties," *The Journal of Economic History* 16, no. 2 (June 1956): 137-164.

⁵⁵ Alexander D. Noyes, "The Banks and the Panic of 1893," *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (March 1894): 12-30.

factor. Regardless of which interpretation one chooses, it is clear that railroads were at the heart of the panic, just as in 1873. The effects of entering into another decade of economic depression would prove disastrous for the farmers of the Great Plains and Kansas specifically. Using the same data points to analyze this depression, we can see how the 1890s were much worse on farmers than the 1870s.

Officer's and Williamson's research concluded that for real GDP to reach the level of 1897, it needed to grow by 1.25% each year, compared with 4.21% for the 1870s.⁵⁶ Thus, the economy was expanding much slower in the 1890s as opposed to the 1870s. In addition, purchasing power was also falling. By 1890, an 1873 dollar would be worth only 76 cents, and that same dollar would only purchase 69 cents worth of goods by 1897.⁵⁷ Interest rates for short-term loans fell by more than 2% during the decade and long-term rates had dropped to 3.39% by 1897.⁵⁸ Normally, an inflated currency and low interest rates would be cause for excitement among indebted farmers, but those occurrences are meaningless when one cannot receive a high enough price for their crop to alleviate the inflated currency. Between 1890 and 1897, only one year saw the price of wheat rise above 89 cents per bushel (the lowest price of the 1870s), while the average price during that period was 74 cents, compared with the nearly one dollar average for the 1870s.⁵⁹ In 1894, that price fell to its lowest total of the decade at 57 cents per bushel, which "was a price at which the farmer claimed, undoubtedly with truth,

⁵⁶ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Annualized Growth Rate and Graphs of Various Historical Economic Series," MeasuringWorth, 2009, <http://www.measuringworth.com/growth/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

⁵⁷ Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2010, <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

⁵⁸ Lawrence H. Officer, "What Was the Interest Rate Then?" MeasuringWorth, 2008, <http://www.measuringworth.org/interestrates/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

⁵⁹ Katherine Bemet Davis, "Tables Relating to the Price of Wheat and Other Farm Products Since 1890," *The Journal of Political Economy* 6, no. 3 (June 1898): 403-410.

that he could not afford to produce.”⁶⁰ Thus farmers were receiving less for their crops and the dollars they were paid with were purchasing less, leaving them in an ever-increasing state of dependence on loans. Also, those who labored on the farms saw their wages drop by 5% during the 1890s, though they suffered considerably less than the actual landowners.⁶¹

Economic problems during the 1890s were certainly worse for farmers than twenty years earlier, but environmental factors seemed to have improved. John D. Barnhart is one of the few historians to have examined how environmental factors affect politics. He concluded that the lack of rainfall in the early 1890s contributed to the growth of the Populist Party in Nebraska.⁶² However, a lack of rainfall was not only a problem in Nebraska; it also seemed to be true of Douglas County, Kansas as well. In her diary, Mrs. Sweet of Baldwin made multiple notes of the weather during 1890 and 1891. Between April 1 and November 1, 1890, she mentioned only 14 days of rain, while noting 34 days where the weather was either “fine,” “nice,” “beautiful,” “fair” or some other dry adjective.⁶³ The next year saw 21 days of rain noted and only 11 days in which a dry word could be attributed to the weather.⁶⁴ While this indicates that there was not a drought present as there was in the middle part of the 1870s, there was certainly not consistent rainfall. Barnhart notes that another period of little rainfall occurred in 1894,

⁶⁰ Davis, 407.

⁶¹ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Annual Wages in the United States, 1774-2008," MeasuringWorth, 2009, <http://www.measuringworth.org/USwages/> (accessed July 8, 2010).

⁶² John D. Barnhart, "Rainfall and the Populist Party in Nebraska," *The American Political Science Review* 19, no. 3 (August 1925): 527-540.

⁶³ Diary of Mrs. Sweet of Baldwin, KS, Jan 1, 1890 — Nov. 26 1891, Kansas State Historical Society, Misc. Sweet Collection.

⁶⁴ Diary of Mrs. Sweet of Baldwin, KS, Jan 1, 1890 — Nov. 26 1891, Kansas State Historical Society, Misc. Sweet Collection.

leading to yet another series of gains for the Populists.⁶⁵ Other than these two isolated periods, there is little evidence of drought throughout the decade. According to data from the National Climactic Data Center, the average monthly rainfall between June and August for Kansas Climate Region 3 (the region which includes Douglas County and most of northeastern Kansas) was 6.43 inches in 1895, 5.33 inches in 1896, and 4.24 inches in 1897.⁶⁶ These are typically the driest months in Kansas, yet the rainfall totals show significant, albeit annually declining, precipitation.

Rainfall was not the only concern of farmers. During the 1870s, swarms of grasshoppers swept down on the Kansas farmland and laid waste to vast areas of the state. The 1890s, however, seem to show little evidence of a similar occurrence. According to a July 11, 1891 article in the *New York Times*, there was concern that the grasshoppers hatched in Colorado would lay eggs in Kansas and decimate crops the following year.⁶⁷ However, the crop report for 1892 showed that the wheat “quality is excellent in Kansas, and the quantity exceeds expectations,” but corn was 30% below average.⁶⁸ No reports of problems with crops for 1893 can be located, but concern soon arose in 1894 after a report surfaced that “some of the best corn sections along the Kaw River will not have half a crop.”⁶⁹ However, by September of that year, the *New York Times* reported that “rains have greatly improved pastures, gardens, meadows, and orchards; plowing for a large acreage of wheat; seeding begun.”⁷⁰ Thus, it seems that

⁶⁵ Barnhart, 536.

⁶⁶ Jesse Enloe, "Kansas Climate Division 3 Precipitation June-August 1895-2010," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Climactic Data Center, 2011. <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/temp-and-precip/time-series/index.php?parameter=pcp&month=8&year=1895&filter=3&state=14&div=3> (accessed March 18, 2011).

⁶⁷ “Editorial Article 7,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1891.

⁶⁸ “Reports of the Crops,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1892.

⁶⁹ “Kansas Crops are Ruined,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1894.

⁷⁰ “Government Crop Report,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1894.

despite the presence of grasshoppers along the Kaw River, wheat production remained solid. The federal crop report for 1895 in Kansas also showed reason for hope, as it stated, “Corn brought rapidly forward; gardens fine; stock, water, and fruits abundant.”⁷¹ No mention of grasshopper invasions can be found during the latter half of the decade, and all reports indicate that harvests were expected to be substantial. By the end of the decade, methods were devised in Kansas to trap grasshoppers by causing them to fly up into machines and then fall into pans coated with oil.⁷² It seemed that the problem of grasshoppers was addressed, and they would no longer be a scourge upon the land.

Clearly the 1890s were a wholly different decade for Kansas farmers than the 1870s, both economically and environmentally. The 1870s were a period in which farmers faced few economic problems. Wheat prices remained high, and farmers could expect to receive decent interest rates for loans, although their purchasing power declined by 17%. By contrast, they faced environmental factors that would help to decimate many acres of farmland. Grasshoppers and droughts were responsible for more problems than the economic downturn, but this was not a situation the government could be expected to alleviate. The government could not make it rain, nor could they sweep away the grasshoppers through legislation. Put simply, the solutions to the problems farmers faced in the 1870s were not in the hands of their elected representatives, which may partially explain why they did not embrace a radical reform movement such as the Greenback Party.

However, by the 1890s, the situation was seemingly reversed. Farmers now saw the average price of wheat fall by 26% for the decade as compared with the 1870s, while

⁷¹ “Government Crop Report,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1895.

⁷² “Big Trap for Grasshoppers,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1899.

their purchasing power had declined to only 69% of its value in 1873. They could now buy less with the smaller profit they made for their crops. In addition, the environmental problems had seemingly vanished. While there were periods of limited rainfall during the 1890s, most of the decade saw generally positive environmental conditions and the grasshoppers were being dealt with through innovation. It should be noted that the main benefit of positive environmental conditions would be increased numbers of crops, which would necessarily reduce the price in accordance with basic supply and demand principles, so we cannot discount the fact that farmers in some ways suffered from their own success. Regardless, farmers saw themselves as victims of big business and they subscribed to a belief in a British-based conspiracy to control the money markets in an effort to produce what they termed “wage-slavery.”⁷³ In short, they now saw their problems as ones that could be resolved by government involvement in the economy and the nationalization of major industries that they believed served a public purpose. The following chapter examines the rise of the Populist Party during the late 1880s and 1890s, partially as a result of these economic conditions.

⁷³ Jeffrey Ostler, “The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism,” *Agricultural History* 69, no. 1 (Winter 1995), 1-27.

Chapter IV

Populism & Douglas County

Alongside economic and environmental differences between the 1870s and 1890s, the political situation had also changed. The country had emerged from Reconstruction, and seemed to be expanding at a breakneck pace. In the South, the Democratic Party returned from the darkness of Reconstruction to “redeem” the region from the horrors of carpetbaggers, and Republican politics. In the West, the great pacification of the Native American tribes had virtually ended with the massacre at Wounded Knee. A new social elite had emerged, made wealthy by their investments in the industrial capacity of the nation. This group was headlined by famous families such as the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers. Nationally, the country had endured its second presidential assassination (James Garfield), and among those who had not benefitted from the so-called Gilded Age, reform was the word of the day.

Just as in the 1870s, Kansas was at the center of the growing discord. The state was now the massive field of small family farms the Republicans had wanted. It had been crisscrossed by numerous railroads, and in the eyes of much of the nation, the issues that had caused so much unrest and economic collapse were behind them. However, the stagnant economy had been revived in the same way the post-Civil War recession had ended, through speculative investments in railroads. Just as in the 1870s, the farmers sought redress for high railroad rates, low crop prices, and high debts through a reform movement, which would ally itself with the labor unions, in the hopes of curtailing the

power brokers who had made their millions, as the farmers saw it, through corruption and greed.¹

At the opening of the 1890s, the United States Census reported that Kansas had a population of 1,427,096, ranking 19 out of 48 states and territories including the District of Columbia.² That number represents a more than 300% increase in population since 1870. Of that population, approximately 10% were born outside of the United States, a decline of 3% among this subgroup since 1870.³ In this same census, Douglas County had a population of 23,961, accounting for 1.7% of the state's total population and ranking 15th out of 107 counties.⁴ Douglas County's total population had changed very little, increasing by little more than 3,000 in twenty years, but this consistency can make the analysis of the discrepancies in the success of political parties easier, as there are fewer variables which may cloud any examination of the data.⁵

The rise of the Populist Party nationally followed a similar path as the Greenback Party in the 1870s. In 1876 the Greenback Party had reached the peak of its (limited)

¹ The following works provide a detailed examination of the economic issues of the United States during the period following the Panic of 1873 and the Long Depression: Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Herbert Hovenkamp, "Regulatory Conflict in the Gilded Age: Federalism and the Railroad Problem," *The Yale Law Journal* 97, no. 6 (May 1988): 1017-1072; Paul A. Shackel, and Matthew M. Palus, "The Gilded Age and Working-Class Industrial Communities," *American Anthropologist*, New Series 108, no. 4 (December 2006): 828-841; Vincent de Santis, "American Politics in the Gilded Age," in "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Issue," *The Review of Politics* 25, no.4 (October 1963): 551-561; Richard White, "Information, Markets, and Corruption: Transcontinental Railroads in the Gilded Age," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 2003): 19-43; Gerald Prescott, "Wisconsin Farm Leaders in the Gilded Age," *Agricultural History* 44, no. 2 (April 1970): 183-199; and Peter H. Argersinger, "New Perspectives on Election Fraud in the Gilded Age," *Political Science Quarterly* 100, no. 4, (Winter 1985-1986): 669-687.

² U.S. Census Bureau. "Census of Population and Housing: 1890 Census." U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1890.htm>. (accessed October 10, 2010).

³ U.S. Census, 1890.

⁴ U.S. Census, 1890.

⁵ It should be noted that the extensive data available for the 1870 Census is not present for the 1890 Census due to a fire in 1921 in the basement of the Commerce Building in Washington D.C., where the records were kept.

success, and farmers began to seek new avenues for their relief.⁶ This was especially true in the South, where the institution of slavery had been replaced by sharecropping and the crop-lien system. That system was the primary motivating factor for farmers in the South to organize themselves, as it forced them to constantly mortgage the following year's crop, often at interest rates that exceeded 100% annually, in order to obtain the supplies necessary to harvest it.⁷ Just as they had before, farmers initially sought relief on their own, organizing into what became known as the Farmers' Alliance.

The first such alliance was founded in 1876 in Lampasas, Texas. It was known as the "Grand State Farmers Alliance" in 1878, but was broken up by the fact that so many members wanted to join forces with the Greenback Party, while others remained loyal to the Democrats, the "party of the fathers."⁸ Lawrence Goodwyn notes that between 1880 and 1882, "120 alliances came into being."⁹ However, it was difficult for the rural poor, who the "Grand State Farmers Alliance sought to unite, to give up their memories so easily and abandon their long-established political ideals for the hopes of reform from political outsiders.¹⁰ By 1883, only 30 alliances sent delegates to the Texas state meeting.¹¹ It was clear that the Alliance would have to break or expose the stranglehold held by the current mode of politics and economy.

⁶ Excellent histories of the rise of the Farmers' Alliances and the Populist Party can be found in: Lawrence Goodwyn's *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978); Frank M. Drew, "The Present Farmers' Movement," *Political Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1891): 282-310; William F. Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel," *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 1 (February 1994): 59-80; and Herman Clarence Nixon, "The Cleavage Within the Farmers' Alliance Movement," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 15, no. 1 (June 1928), 22-33.

⁷ Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978), 21.

⁸ Goodwyn, 26.

⁹ Goodwyn, 26.

¹⁰ Goodwyn, 26.

¹¹ Goodwyn, 26.

Just as the “Grand State Farmers Alliance” was at its height, in Cook County, Illinois another Farmers Alliance was forming. This was known as the National Farmers’ Alliance. Unlike the National Grange, this was not a secret society, but instead fought against what Frank Drew called “class legislation.”¹² Rather than being a national body, this Alliance (often called the “Northern Alliance”) allowed each state to determine how best to protect its members, leaving “scanty material upon which to build a national body.”¹³ Drew notes that by 1891, there was little membership outside of Minnesota and Nebraska.¹⁴

In the South, multiple organizations joined together into the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union, though it was most often called the “Southern Alliance.” Drew chronicled its fusion with the Louisiana Farmers’ Union and the Agricultural Wheel, remarking that most members resented the term “Southern Alliance,” as the organization had chapters in many Northern states and tying the movement to the sectionalism of the antebellum period was decidedly unpopular.¹⁵ Regardless, attempts at union with the Northern Alliance were made, but according to Drew, the Southern Alliance refused to allow each state to decide if the Alliance’s activities would remain secret within their borders, and it was the appeal of secrecy, brought about by the National Grange, of which many farmers were members, that caused those in Kansas to abandon the Northern Alliance in favor of the Southern.¹⁶ There were also attempts to join forces with the Knights of Labor, but because of the efforts of the Knights to impose

¹² Frank M. Drew, “The Present Farmers’ Movement,” *Political Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1891): 282-283.

¹³ Drew, 283.

¹⁴ Drew, 283.

¹⁵ Drew, 283-285.

¹⁶ Drew, 284-285.

the “single-tax,” (an idea proposed by Henry George, which would place a tax on land values regardless of the improvements made upon the land) there was little desire to unite with them beyond presenting their platform together to Congress.¹⁷

The purposes of the Southern Alliance were similar to that of the National Grange. Drew presents those purposes as the following:

1. To labor for the education of the agricultural classes in the science of economical government, in a strictly non-partisan way, and to bring about a more perfect union of said classes.
2. To demand equal rights to all and special favors to none.
3. To indorse the motto: “In things essential, unity; in all things, charity.”
4. To develop a better state, mentally, morally, socially and financially.
5. To constantly strive to secure entire harmony and good will among all mankind and brotherly love among ourselves.
6. To suppress personal, local, sectional and national prejudices; all unhealthy rivalry and all selfish ambition.
7. The brightest jewels which it garners are the tears of widows and orphans, and its imperative commands are to visit the homes where lacerated hearts are bleeding; to assuage the sufferings of a brother or a sister; bury the dead; care for the widows and educate the orphans; to exercise charity towards offenders; to construe words and deeds in their most favorable light, granting honesty of purpose and good intentions to others; and to protect the principles of the Alliance unto death. Its laws are reason and equity, its cardinal doctrines inspire purity of thought and life; its intentions are "peace on earth, good will towards men."¹⁸

Ironically, the goal of suppressing sectional rivalry was exactly the problem. Each alliance viewed itself as speaking for all farmers and as a result, neither could claim to be the sole voice of agrarian unrest. To be sure, there were similarities in their goals. Both demanded an income tax, though the Northern Alliance specifically stated that it be

¹⁷ For a full examination of this idea see Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of the Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth, The Remedy* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, & Company, 1882).

¹⁸ Drew, 286.

graduated.¹⁹ They both also argued for the end of national banks and deficit spending in government, as well as the direct election of Senators.²⁰ Both also made demands for government ownership and operation of railroads, though the Southern Alliance was willing to accept government regulation if it would remove the perceived abuses against the farmers.²¹

Despite their agreement on specific issues, there were still many disagreements. The Southern Alliance accepted government regulation of interstate transportation, but said very little with regard to government ownership, except in the case of the Pacific railroads.²² Southerners were more concerned about the cost of bagging their cotton, rather than the cost of shipping it, and so they generally railed against the so-called “Jute Trust,” jute being the fiber used to make the bags for transporting cotton.²³ In addition, the Northern Alliance demanded the restriction of liquor trafficking, but only the Indiana, California, and North Dakota chapters of the Southern Alliance spoke at all about liquor, and they demanded total prohibition.²⁴ Finally, the demands of labor unions were evident in a few state alliances, but were not present in the national platforms, as only Michigan and Nebraska demanded an eight-hour workday in “factories, mines and shops.”²⁵ Drew also chronicles other issues specific to each state which differentiated the various alliances from each other. It is clear that while there may have been a national consensus on basic issues, each state had demands of their own, creating fracture within the movement. As Herman Clarence Nixon observed, each alliance group had specific so-

¹⁹ Drew, 291-293.

²⁰ Drew, 291-293.

²¹ Drew, 291-293.

²² Drew, 299.

²³ Herman Clarence Nixon, “The Cleavage Within the Farmers’ Alliance Movement,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 15, no. 1 (June 1928), 24.

²⁴ Drew, 298.

²⁵ Drew, 301.

called “trusts” to fight against, making it difficult for them to unite in one common cause.²⁶

Each of the various state alliances competed to achieve the best possible result for their own membership. That factionalism was exactly what the Southern Alliance had originally sought to avoid. Nixon points out that the Southern Alliance fought for more innovation and synthetic food processing in order to procure cheaper prices on necessary products. The Northern Alliance objected that this would bring ruin to many lard producers, while simultaneously increasing the market for cottonseed oil.²⁷ As Fred Shannon observed, the alliances might be better served by uniting on the few problems they shared, rather than fighting every battle in every region.²⁸ While these were the specific issues on which the two Alliances differed, they also were of completely opposite minds when it came to the discussion of forming a political party to speak for their interests. The Southern Alliance was the more radical, willing to embrace political revolution in order to achieve its reforms, while the Northern Alliance favored working through the current parties to change the perceived unfairness of the system.²⁹ The farmers of the Old Northwest were becoming growing producers by expanding into large-scale farming and were now of interest to the policymakers in Washington. Jeffrey Ostler also noted that the Northern Alliance remained nonpartisan because the competitive nature of politics in those states created an atmosphere where reform could

²⁶ Nixon, 24.

²⁷ Nixon, 22, 26-27.

²⁸ Fred Albert Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), 317.

²⁹ Nixon, 32.

come from established parties.³⁰ The farmers of the Old Northwest now saw the farmers of the South and West as the agitators for reform, just as they had been two decades earlier.³¹ Farmers in Kansas were not about to go quietly. Instead, they began to throw their support behind an upstart third party, just as their Ohio brethren had done in the 1870s.

Six years after the Greenback Party ceased to exist, a new agrarian-based reform party emerged, centered in Kansas and Nebraska. That party was the People's Party, its members often referred to as Populists. For the twelve years between 1890 and 1902, the Populists were an extremely successful third party, scoring major victories in both 1892 and 1896. The highest vote total received by a Populist gubernatorial candidate in Douglas County during those years occurred in 1898, where the Populists claimed 42.7% of the vote in Douglas County in a losing effort to Governor William E. Stanley.³² For other state offices, the Populists were successful in capturing the state's entire executive branch in 1892 and 1896, the same years the party won the state's electoral votes in the presidential election.³³ Finally, in contests for the US House of Representatives, the Populists twice, (1892 and 1896,) won the seat from the 2nd Congressional District, in which Douglas County resides, as well as capturing the state's at-large seat in 1896.³⁴ While in Douglas County the Populists never captured a majority of the votes, their totals were significantly higher than that of the Greenbackers. Between 1890 and 1902, the

³⁰ Jeffrey Ostler, "Why the Populist Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (November 1992): 451-474.

³¹ Nixon, 33.

³² Charles J. Hein and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1958), 10-38.

³³ Margaret Briggs, *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908* (Emporia, KS: Emporia State University School of Library Science Monograph Series #5, 1981), 16-29.

³⁴ June G. Cabe and Charles A. Sullivant, *Kansas Votes, National Elections, 1859-1956* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1957), 102-147.

lowest totals the Populists received were in those bookend years, where they received 2.3% and .2%, respectively. Also in the contest for the at-large seat in 1902, the Populists secured 3% of the vote in Douglas County.³⁵ In all other elections over those twelve years, the lowest total received by a Populist candidate was 21.2% in 1890 and on two occasions, both in 1894, the third party total was higher than that received for the Democratic candidate.³⁶ It is clear from this data that the Populists were much more successful than the Greenbackers, which is not a fact in dispute. The real question is why were they so much more successful?

It should be noted that the traditional interpretation of the success of the Populists stems from their union with the Democratic Party. If one only examines the elections in which the Populists won, it would be easy to draw that conclusion. However, when we take a closer look at all of the election data, we see something interesting regarding this claim. First, one should not dismiss the fact that Democratic Party was helpful in getting the Populists a greater degree of support, but as noted earlier, the Populists were capable of capturing more votes than the Democrats on two occasions in 1894. Second, while the victories in 1892 and 1896 were made possible by the union of the two parties, in 1890, the Populists won the election for Kansas Attorney General without the help of the Democrats.³⁷ Also, in 1892, the Populists won the election for State Treasurer without the major party's backing. While this alone shows the ability of the Populists to achieve victories without the Democrats, when one examines similar information regarding the

³⁵ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

³⁶ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

Third party totals are combined from all third party candidates as noted earlier.

³⁷ Briggs, 16-29.

In Kansas, the Populists fused with the Democrats in 1892, though a national fusion would not occur until 1896.

Greenback Party, one can see that there were other factors at play than simply major party support. In two separate elections, one for State Treasurer and one for Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Greenback candidate joined with Democratic Party and was still unable to secure victory.³⁸ In addition, one candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction joined forces with the Prohibition Party candidate and failed to win, indicating that third party, or even major party support was not necessarily a guarantee to victory. It is clear that the absence or presence of unity with a major party is not a *determining* factor, though one cannot discount the benefit it gave Populist candidates.

In the 1890s, elements of the populace opposed the “sound money” policy of the Republicans. The Populists seized upon these elements and launched their political party in 1890 in Omaha, Nebraska. Their platform bore a striking resemblance to that of the Greenback-Labor Party of the late 1870s and early 1880s, espousing eight planks:

(1) free coinage of silver, (2) abolition of national banks and sub-treasury instead, (3) income tax, (4) paper money, (5) government control of railroads, (6) non ownership of land by foreigners and limiting state and national revenues to expenditures, (7) eight hour day for labor, (8) universal suffrage and popular election of senators, president, and vice-president.³⁹

In addition to denying foreigners land, they also demanded the government “reclaim land then ‘held by railroads and other corporations, in excess of such as are actually used and needed by them,’ to be ‘held for actual settlers’; and government ownership of ‘the

³⁸ Briggs, 16-29.

³⁹ Nancy Albaugh Leatherwood, “Populist Legislation in Kansas” (bachelor’s thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1901), 17.

means of communication.”⁴⁰ Beyond the fundamental changes to the electoral procedures, the Populists were essentially advocating the entire platform of the Greenbacks from 1880, with the additions of “free silver” and restrictions on land ownership.

In 1880 the Greenbackers were on the way out, with only 10 seats in Congress. The Populists, meanwhile, had captured nine seats in Congress by that time including five from Kansas by 1890. In Kansas, the Populists failed to win the gubernatorial election, but 16.1% of the voters in Douglas County voted for a third party candidate, compared with only 5.2% in the first year the Greenback Party ran candidates.⁴¹ In addition, third party candidates for the House of Representatives managed to win 21.2% of the vote.⁴² These successes would set the stage for a Populist run for the White House two years later.

The Populists enjoyed great success in 1892. Not only had they created a groundswell of momentum from 1890, but they nominated a presidential candidate as well as gubernatorial and congressional candidates. That year their platform “added a graduated income tax, and changed from the control to ownership of railroads. Postal banks were added and pensions favored, and prohibition of immigration under contract demanded.”⁴³ Regulation seemed less on their minds than total government control of industries. In addition to their platform, the Populists took another page out of the Greenback playbook in nominating the most successful presidential candidate from that

⁴⁰ *The Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Republican State Convention of Kansas*, quoted in O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 60-61.

⁴¹ Hein and Sullivant, 10-38.

⁴² Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

Comparisons of totals for Greenback candidates in 1874 are difficult as third party and Democratic candidates are listed in the election returns in a combined category of “other.” Democratic candidates would not be separated until 1878.

⁴³ Leatherwood, 17-18.

party in James B. Weaver. While Weaver's speech at the nominating convention in Omaha did not evoke the demands of 1880, he did articulate the fundamental belief of the Populists in stating, "it is the great duty to-day devolving upon the party which you represent to rescue the Government from the grasp of Federal monopolies and restore it to the great common people to whom it belongs."⁴⁴ In one sentence, Weaver declared that the primary enemy of the people was a government controlled by monopolistic corporations, not unlike the declarations of the Greenbackers in 1880.

That year was also remarkable in the election returns. The Populists captured the governorships of both Colorado and Kansas, the latter state a Republican stronghold. In Douglas County, the fusion of Populists and Democrats garnered nearly 40% of the vote in the gubernatorial election, and 40.6% of the vote for the Congressional at-large seat to the U.S. House of Representatives.⁴⁵ In the election for the Second Congressional District, third party candidates only received 2.3% of the vote as the Democratic candidate, Horace Ladd Moore, did not unite with the Populists.⁴⁶ In addition, the party held eleven seats in the House of Representatives, including five again from Kansas. In terms of the presidential campaign, the Populists achieved a historic feat, becoming the first third party to capture at least three states (the Populists actually won five states in 1892) since John Bell's Constitutional Union Party in 1860.⁴⁷ Specifically in Kansas, Weaver was nominated by both the Populists and the Democrats, as the long-time

⁴⁴ James B. Weaver, quoted in Fred Emory Haynes, *James Baird Weaver* (Iowa City, IA: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1919), 315.

⁴⁵ Hein and Sullivant, 10-38.

⁴⁶ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁴⁷ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed April 3, 2010).

Republican state fell to another party for the first time, with Weaver capturing 40% of the vote in Douglas County.⁴⁸

It did not last. In the 1894 election, the Populists were on a downswing, losing three seats in Congress, but Kansas Representative Jerry Simpson saw signs of hope, stating, “The Populist Party will live so long as there are popular grievances to remedy; so long as times are hard and men are out of employment, and so long as capital continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few people.”⁴⁹ To some, the fusion with Democrats was already hurting the party, as prominent members such as Benjamin H. Clover, a Congressman elected in 1890 by the Populists, were leaving the party because of its fusion with the Democrats.⁵⁰ In 1894, the Populist-Democratic ticket won only 31.3% of the vote in Douglas County in the gubernatorial election, as the Republicans regained control of the state’s executive branch.⁵¹ That year the at-large seat to the US House of Representatives went to the Republicans, as did the Second Congressional District, with the Populists gaining only 34.3% and 29.1% of the vote, respectively, though both totals were higher than those received by the Democratic candidates.⁵²

Apparently there was still a section of the population who felt their concerns were not being addressed. That same year, a young, vibrant Democrat from Nebraska named William Jennings Bryan was leading a coalition of “Silver Democrats” in joining ranks with the Populists. It was clear that when the Northern Alliance refused a third party and joined ranks with the Republicans, or remained nonpartisan, that the Southern Alliance

⁴⁸ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed April 3, 2010).

Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁴⁹ Jerry Simpson, quoted in “Jerry Simpson Sees Visions,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1894.

⁵⁰ B.H. Clover, “Clover’s Letter,” *The Emporia (Kansas) Gazette*, August 16, 1894

⁵¹ Hein and Sullivant, 10-38.

⁵² Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

would need to find support from the Democrats, “the party of the fathers” as the Southerners called them.⁵³ In a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives, Bryan clearly stated his firm belief in the common people, declaring that “Free government cannot long survive when the thousands enjoy the wealth of the country and the millions share its poverty in common.”⁵⁴ It seemed the Populists had found their hope for the future and it was in a Democrat.

Two years after that speech, Bryan was again at the forefront of the news as he stepped to the podium in Chicago, Illinois, to deliver a speech to the Democratic Party prior to his nomination for President. His speech was both rousing and Populist in its mantra, as he invoked the long-standing cause of the Greenbacks, first stated by Peter Cooper in 1876: “We say in our platform that we believe that the right to coin money and issue money is a function of government. We believe it. We believe it is a part of sovereignty and can no more with safety be delegated to private individuals than can the power to make penal statutes or levy laws for taxation.”⁵⁵ In addition, Bryan made it clear that the money issues of the day were just as paramount to the Populist-Democratic ticket as it was to the Greenbackers, stating that “when we have restored the money of the Constitution, all other necessary reforms will be possible, and that until that is done there is no reform that can be accomplished.”⁵⁶ Bryan was just the candidate the Populists needed. He was youthful and energetic, with a magnetism which captivated the masses. Populists hoped he would sweep their new platform into existence by carrying the banner

⁵³Nixon, 33.

Ostler, “Why the Populist Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska, but Weak in Iowa,” 474.

⁵⁴ William Jennings Bryan, *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan, Volume I* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1911), 90-91.

⁵⁵ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896* (Logansport, Indiana, 1896), 226—234.

⁵⁶ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896* (Logansport, Indiana, 1896), 226—234.

for the party, helping those other Populists to win their elections. The new Populist agenda was extensive, declaring that:

(1) They invite the union of all reformers, oppose the gold standard and European level of prices. (2) They favor the strictest economy in the administration of government. (3) They favor ‘the overthrow and destruction of all monopolies and combines organized for the plunder and oppression of the people.’ (4) They demand ‘strict and effective control over all persons and corporations performing public or quasi-public functions and if necessary to protect the interests of the public ownership by the government of public utilities.’ (5) They demand ‘that the President and Secretary of the Treasury be prohibited from the issue or selling of bonds without the authority of Congress being first given to each separate issue.’ (6) They demand the free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the ratio of sixteen to one, independent of other nations for they believe that the United States is capable of maintaining such a system. (7) They demand that the constitutional trial by jury be extended to every form of action, whether civil or criminal and they denounce trial of citizens by contempt proceedings without the right of trial by jury.⁵⁷

This was the Greenback-Labor platform reborn. The visions of unlimited paper currency had been replaced with “free silver,” and the labor demands were removed, as the eight-hour work day was growing in acceptance with management (though not regulated by law until 1938), and the other labor demands were soon to be realized. It seemed the movement had come full circle, growing out of a monetary-based, single-issue party to a large-scale national movement with mass appeal, to a return to issues of money supply.

The election returns showed the mass appeal of the platform. The Populists were back in the governor’s mansion in Topeka with John W. Leedy. Leedy may have lost Douglas County, but he still managed 40.3% of the vote.⁵⁸ In the House of Representatives, Orrin L. Miller, a Republican, won the Second Congressional District,

⁵⁷ Leatherwood, 18-19.

⁵⁸ Hein and Sullivant, 10-38.

though the fusion of Populists and Democrats captured 41.7% of the vote in Douglas County, and the Populists won the at-large seat, with 41.4% of Douglas County voting for the fusion candidate.⁵⁹ As for Bryan, he won Kansas with 51.32% of the popular vote statewide,⁶⁰ and 41% of the vote in Douglas County.⁶¹ The fusion with the Democrats proved successful nationally as well, with 21 Populists being elected to the US House of Representatives, and though Bryan failed to win the White House, it was a clear message that unless Populist demands were met, the Republicans were likely to lose in future elections.

Despite the success of the fusion campaign, the hard-line (or as John D. Hicks described them, “mid-road”) Populists were angry.⁶² Many felt they had sacrificed everything except “free silver” to secure fusion with the Democrats, and the Congressional victories were little consolation with a Republican in the White House again.⁶³ As Hicks noted, “They blamed Bryan and the Democrats for their heartless disregard of [former Georgia Representative Tom] Watson.⁶⁴ They blamed themselves for ever consenting to an unholy alliance with the enemy. And they conceded freely that the Populist party as a great and independent organization was a thing of the past.”⁶⁵ Hicks also observed that, “In national affairs, the Democrats were generally advertised, during and after the campaign of 1896, as having gone squarely over to Populist principles, and many Populists, assuming that this was the case, stood ready to forget the

⁵⁹ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁶⁰ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed April 3, 2010).

⁶¹ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁶² John Donald Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1931).

⁶³ Hicks, 378.

⁶⁴ Tom Watson was the Populist choice for Bryan's running mate in 1896, but lost out to Democrat Arthur Sewall.

⁶⁵ Hicks, 379.

fiction of a separate party of their own.”⁶⁶ The party was split, and in 1900, the mid-road Populists nominated Wharton Barker, while the fusionists reluctantly continued to support an all-Democratic ticket of Bryan and Adlai E. Stevenson, grandfather of 1952 and 1956 Democratic Presidential nominee Adlai E. Stevenson II.⁶⁷

Unfortunately, the one thing Populists could not predict was a recovery of the economy. By June of 1897, the latest recession of the 1890s had passed, and prospects did not look good for any candidate running on economic reform.⁶⁸ In addition, the very foundation of Bryan’s campaign, “free silver,” was becoming less convincing, because, as John Donald Hicks observed, “gold was becoming more plentiful.”⁶⁹ This showed in the 1898 elections, when Republican Justin D. Bowersock won the Second Congressional District with nearly 60% of the vote, as did the Republican candidate for the state’s at-large seat in the House of Representatives.⁷⁰ In fact, only one Populist was returned to office, Edwin Reed Ridgely from the Third Congressional District. That year’s gubernatorial election also went to the Republicans in the person of William E. Stanley, with the Populist-Democratic candidate garnering only 42.7% of the vote in Douglas County.⁷¹ The party had peaked, and with the gold strikes in Alaska and the Yukon Territory, combined with a more widespread discontent with the “Robber Barons” of the

⁶⁶ Hicks, 390.

⁶⁷ Hicks, 400.

⁶⁸ National Bureau of Economic Research, “US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions,” <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html> (accessed February 27, 2010).

⁶⁹ John Donald Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the Populist Party* (St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 388.

⁷⁰ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁷¹ Hein and Sullivant, 10-38.

Gilded Age, reform was now at the center of American politics, thereby eliminating the need for a third party.⁷²

In 1900, the Populists continued to run a fusion campaign in Kansas with the Democrats, but were just as unsuccessful as they were two years earlier. Republican William E. Stanley retained the office of governor, with the Populist-Democratic candidate garnering only 41.5% of the vote in Douglas County, a full 1% less than the previous election.⁷³ Republican Justin D. Bowersock won his reelection campaign for the Second Congressional District, with 59% of the vote, as did the Republicans in the at-large campaign.⁷⁴ Bryan failed to win the state this time, not even managing 40% of the vote in Douglas County,⁷⁵ and less than 46% of the vote statewide.⁷⁶ This was the last time Populist candidates would challenge the Republicans in the state. By 1902, the party was out of Congress and the period of agrarian unrest was at an end. Nevertheless, the Populists had brought to light a myriad of issues that demanded attention, and their fusion with the Democrats had certainly demonstrated that farmers and laborers could prove valuable constituencies in the future to either party.

⁷² Morton Rothstein, "Farm Movements and Organizations: Numbers, Gains, and Losses," in "Quantitative Studies in Agrarian History," special issue, *Agricultural History* 62, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 161-181.

⁷³ Hein and Sullivant, 10-38.

⁷⁴ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁷⁵ Cabe and Sullivant, 102-147.

⁷⁶ David Leip, *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (accessed April 3, 2010).

Chapter V

Conclusion: Failure or Success?

The Greenback Party and the Populist Party provide historians with striking examples of grassroots reform efforts, which failed to achieve their desired goals. Both parties managed to run well-known candidates for president in the persons of Peter Cooper for the Greenbackers, James B. Weaver for both parties, and William Jennings Bryan for the Populists. Both parties emerged from smaller agrarian-based reform movements, namely the National Grange and the Farmers' Alliances, and both parties sought to develop a farm-labor coalition to battle the Republican hold on the money interests. Even the political platforms of both parties were strikingly similar, with the Greenbackers demanding unlimited paper currency, and the Populists championing the unlimited coinage of silver, both "soft money" ideas. They both pushed hard for nationalization of the transportation and communication industries. Yet despite their similarities, the results each party achieved in Kansas were virtual opposites.

Even the circumstances surrounding their emergence as political forces were similar. The Greenback Party emerged following the great calamity of the Civil War, the assassination of President Lincoln, and an economic crisis, namely the Panic of 1873. The Populist Party rose to prominence in 1890, ten years after the assassination of President Garfield, but only one year removed from the tragedy at Wounded Knee, effectively the end of the Indian Wars, and following another economic panic in 1890. While the economic crises of the 1890s were much harsher on farmers than the Panic of 1873, the environmental factors (i.e. drought, grasshopper invasions) were much worse in

the 1870s than the 1890s. Farmers were more inclined to seek relief locally when problems were not perceived to be created by government or big business.

While both parties saw their dreams of an independent third party vanish in a decade, the legacy of agrarian reform movements lies in the changes brought about by their activities. Within twenty years of the last Populist-Democratic fusion campaign, the 16th and 17th Amendments had been passed, creating the graduated income tax and the direct election of senators, respectively. Labor reforms such as the eight-hour workday were in place for most Americans by the New Deal. While Richard Hofstadter has argued that the Populists were merely idealists, yearning for the yeoman farmer of the past, it is hard to ignore the fact that the Progressives certainly implemented many Populist goals.¹

The conclusion we can reach from examining these two reform movements in Douglas County is an incomplete one. While we can identify the critical factors in the rise and ultimate fall of these movements, and compare and contrast their efforts, in the end neither was truly successful. Neither party managed to create enough of a following to sustain themselves beyond the immediacy of the crises from which they sprung. Both parties saw their ideas taken up by another group of reformers, who in turn advanced their cause further, but not so far as to create a sustainable reform party.

The question I posed at the beginning of this thesis was: Why did the Populist Party achieve greater results in Douglas County, Kansas than the Greenback Party given nearly identical political platforms? The answer is threefold. First, the Greenback Party emerged at a time when environmental factors (i.e. drought and grasshopper plagues) were at their worst for Kansas farmers, but this was not a problem for which government

¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

had a solution. Second, the economic conditions in the 1870s were not nearly as devastating as those of the 1890s for Kansas farmers. Third, the Populists were a better organized party and their fusion with the Democratic Party, and its strength in the labor unions, helped them achieve a wider political base than the Greenbackers could have hoped to achieve. The Populists were never able to win Douglas County, but given that they were able to consistently outperform the Greenback Party we can sufficiently say that they did achieve greater results, however limited they may have been.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- “The American Harvest.” *Sydney (Australia) Morning Herald*. October 2, 1875.
- “Big Trap for Grasshoppers.” *New York Times*. August 20, 1899.
- Bryan, William Jennings. *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan, Volume 1*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1911.
- Clover, B.H. “Clover’s Letter.” *The Emporia (Kansas) Gazette*. August 16, 1894.
- “The Crops.” *New York Times*. June 23, 1875.
- “The Crops of the Country.” *New York Times*. May 3, 1878.
- Davis, Katherine Bemet. “Tables Relating to the Price of Wheat and Other Farm Products Since 1890.” *The Journal of Political Economy* 6, no. 3 (June 1898): 403-410.
- Diary of Mrs. James C. Horton. 1874. Kansas State Historical Society. H.L. Moore Collection.
- Diary of Mrs. Sweet of Baldwin, KS, Jan. 1, 1890-Nov. 26, 1891. Kansas State Historical Society, Misc. Sweet Collection.
- Drew, Frank M. “The Present Farmer’s Movement.” *Political Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1891): 282-310.
- “Editorial Article 7.” *New York Times*. July 11, 1891.
- George, Henry. *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and the Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth, The Remedy*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, & Company, 1882.
- “Government Crop Report.” *New York Times*. July 24, 1895.
- “Grasshopper Ravages.” *New York Times*. November 27, 1876.
- “The Greenback Convention.” *New York Times*. September 27, 1876.
- “J.C. Horton Dead.” *Kansas City Journal*. June 4, 1909.
- “Jerry Simpson Sees Visions.” *New York Times*. December 9, 1894.

- “Kansas Crops are Ruined.” *New York Times*. August 4, 1894.
- Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society. *Third Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas*. Topeka, KS: State of Kansas, 1874.
- Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society. *Fifth Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas*. Topeka, KS: State of Kansas, 1876.
- Lauck, William Jett. *The Causes of the Panic of 1893*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907.
- “The Locusts of the West.” *New York Times*. August 17, 1874.
- “The Maine Democracy.” *New York Times*. June 28, 1882.
- Martin, Edward Winslow. *History of the Grange Movement, or the Farmer’s War Against Monopolies*. Chicago: National Publishing Company, 1874.
- Munn v. State of Illinois*, 94 U.S. 113 (1876).
- “National Politics: The Greenback Convention.” *New York Times*. February 17, 1876.
- Noyes, Alexander D. “The Banks and the Panic of 1893.” *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (March, 1894): 12-30.
- Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896*. Logansport, IN, 1896.
- “Peter Cooper’s Meeting.” *New York Times*. August 31, 1876.
- “Reports of the Crops.” *New York Times*. September 11, 1892.
- U.S. Census Bureau. “Census of Population and Housing: 1870 Census.” U.S. Census Bureau. (Accessed April 6, 2010).
<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1870.htm>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. “Census of Population and Housing: 1890 Census.” U.S. Census Bureau. (Accessed April 6, 2010).
<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1890.htm>.
- Veblen, Thorstein. “The Price of Wheat Since 1867.” *The Journal of Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (December 1892): 68-103.

Secondary Sources

- Ackerman, Kenneth D. *The Gold Ring: Jim Fisk, Jay Gould, and Black Friday, 1869*. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1988.
- Ambrose, Stephen. *Nothing Like it in the World: The Men who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- Argersinger, Peter H. "“A Place on the Ballot”: Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws.” *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (April 1980): 287-306.
- . “Ideology and Behavior: Legislative Politics and Western Populism.” *Agricultural History* 58, no. 1 (January 1984): 43-58.
- . “New Perspectives on Election Fraud in the Gilded Age.” *Political Science Quarterly* 100, no. 4 (Winter 1985-1986): 669-687.
- . “No Rights on this Floor: Third Parties and the Institutionalization of Congress.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 655-690.
- . “Populists in Power: Public Policy and Legislative Behavior.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 1 (Summer 1987): 81-105.
- Arnold, Judy, Bonnie Bruce, John Matthews, Bob Mills, Dick Taylor, Rosana Whitenight, and Shirley Renicker. “William G. Cutler’s *History of the State Of Kansas: Leavenworth County*.” (Accessed July 27, 2010).
http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/leavenworth/leavenworth-co-p2.html#FORT_LEAVENWORTH.
- Atkins, Annette. *Harvest of Grief: Grasshopper Plagues and Public Assistance in Minnesota, 1873-1878*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984.
- Bain, David Howard. *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1999.
- Barnhart, John D. “Rainfall and the Populist Party in Nebraska.” *The American Political Science Review* 19, no. 3 (August 1925): 527-540.
- Beatty, Jack. *Age of Betrayal: The Triumph of Money in America, 1865-1900*. New York: Vintage Books, 2007.
- Bibby, John F., and Louis Sandy Maisel. *Two Parties or More?: The American Party System*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

- Bicha, K.D. "The Conservative Populists: A Hypothesis." *Agricultural History* 47, no. 1 (January, 1973): 9-24.
- Brands, H.W. *The Money Men: Capitalism, Democracy, and the Hundred Years' War over the American Dollar*. New York: Atlas Books, 2006.
- Briggs, Harold E. "Grasshopper Plagues and Early Dakota Agriculture, 1864-1876." *Agricultural History* 8, no. 2 (April 1934): 51-63.
- Briggs, Margaret. *Candidates for State Office: 1859-1908*. Emporia, KS: Emporia State University School of Library Science Monograph Series #5, 1981.
- Brown, Dee. *The American West*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1994.
- . *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1970.
- Buck, Solon Justus. *The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and its Political, Economic, and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1913.
- Cabe, June G., and Charles A. Sullivant. *Kansas Votes, National Elections, 1859-1956*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1957.
- Cashman, Sean Dennis. *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.
- Chambers, William Nesbit, Walter Dean Burnham, and Joseph Sorauf. *The American Party Systems: Stages of Development*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Clanton, O. Gene. *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1969.
- Clews, Henry. *Fifty Years in Wall Street*. 1908. Reprint, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006.
- Crump, Thomas. *Abraham Lincoln's World: How Railroads, Riverboats, and Republicans Transformed America*. London: Continuum, 2009.
- de Santis, Vincent. "American Politics in the Gilded Age." In "Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Issue." Special Issue, *The Review of Politics* 25, no. 4, (October 1963): 551-561.
- Destler, Chester McA. "Consummation of a Labor-Populist Alliance in Illinois, 1894." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 4 (March 1941): 589-602.

- Dewey, Davis Rich. *Financial History of the United States*. Edited by Albert Bushnell Hart. New York: Longmans, Green, & Company, 1922.
- Enloe, Jesse. "Kansas Climate Division 3 Precipitation June-August 1895-2010," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Climactic Data Center, 2011." (Accessed March 18, 2011). <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/temp-and-precip/time-series/index.php?parameter=pcp&month=8&year=1895&filter=3&state=14&div=3>.
- Fels, Rendig. "American Business Cycles, 1865-1879." *The American Economic Review* 41, no. 3 (June 1951): 325-349.
- Fraser, Steve. *Every Man a Speculator: A History of Wall Street in American Life*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Gillespie, J. David. *Politics at the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.
- Goodwin, Jason. *Greenback: The Almighty Dollar and the Invention of America*. New York: Macmillan, 2003.
- Goodwyn, Lawrence. *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Hair, William Ivy. *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975.
- Haynes, Fred E. "The Collapse of the Farmer-Labor Bloc." *Social Forces* 4, no. 1 (September, 1925): 148-156.
- . *James Baird Weaver*. Iowa City, IA: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1919.
- . *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War, with a Special Reference to Iowa: A Study in Social Politics*. Iowa City, IA: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1916.
- Hein, Charles J., and Charles A. Sullivant. *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections: 1859-1956*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Government Research Center, 1958.
- Hershey, Marjorie Randon. "Citizens' Groups and Political Parties in the United States." In "Citizens, Protests, and Democracy." Special Issue, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July 1993): 142-156.
- Hewitt, George B., and Jerome A. Onsager. "Grasshoppers: Yesterday, Today, and Forever." *Rangelands* 4, no. 5 (October 1982): 207-209.

- Hicks, John D. *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1931.
- Hoffman, Charles. "The Depression of the Nineties." *The Journal of Economic History* 16, no. 2 (June 1956): 137-164.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*. New York: Vintage Books, 1955.
- Holmes, William F. "Populism: In Search of Context." *Agricultural History*, 64, no. 4 (Autumn, 1990): 26-58.
- . "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel." *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 1 (February, 1994): 59-80.
- Hormats, Robert D. *The Price of Liberty: Paying for America's Wars from the Revolution to the War on Terror*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2007.
- Hovenkamp, Herbert. "Regulatory Conflict in the Gilded Age: Federalism and the Railroad Problem." *The Yale Law Journal* 97, no. 6 (May 1988): 1017-1072.
- Hunt, James L. "Populism, Law, and the Corporation: The 1897 Kansas Supreme Court." *Agricultural History* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 28-54.
- Jackson, Helen Hunt. *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with some of the Indian Tribes*. 1882. Reprint, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995.
- Keller, Morton. *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Kinley, David. United States National Monetary Commission, United States Congress Senate. *The Independent Treasury of the United States and its Relations to the Banks of the Country*. United States 61st Congress, 2nd Session, 1909-1910, Senate. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910.
- Klepper, Robert. "The Economic Bases for Agrarian Protest Movements in the United States, 1870-1900." In "The Tasks of Economic History." Special Issue, *The Journal of Economic History* 34, no. 1, (March 1974): 283-285.
- Klobuchar, Lisa. *Third Parties: Influential Political Alternatives*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2008.
- Lake, David A. "Export, Die, or Subsidize: The International Political Economy of American Agriculture, 1875-1940." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (January 1989): 81-105.

- Larson, Henrietta Melia. *Jay Cooke: Private Banker*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936.
- Leatherwood, Nancy Albaugh. "Populist Legislation in Kansas." Bachelor's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1901.
- Leip, David. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. (Accessed April 3, 2010). <http://www.uselectionatlas.org>.
- Lippincott, Isaac. *Economic Development of the United States*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1921.
- McGrane, R.C. "Ohio and the Greenback Movement." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (March 1925): 526-542.
- McMath, Robert C. *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.
- Moulton, Harold G. *Principles of Money and Banking: A Series of Selected Materials, with Explanatory Introductions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916.
- Nash, Howard Pervear. *Third Parties in American Politics*. Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959.
- National Bureau of Economic Research. "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions." (Accessed February 27, 2010). <http://www.nber.org/cycles/cyclesmain.html>.
- Nelson, Scott Reynolds. "The Real Great Depression." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 55, no. 8 (October 17, 2008): B9.
- Nixon, Herman Clarence. "The Cleavage Within the Farmers' Alliance Movement." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 15, no. 1 (June 1928): 22-33.
- Officer, Lawrence H. "What Was the Interest Rate Then?" *MeasuringWorth*. 2008. (Accessed July 8, 2010). <http://www.measuringworth.org/interestrates/>.
- Officer, Lawrence H., and Samuel H. Williamson. "Annual Wages in the United States, 1774-2008." *MeasuringWorth*. 2009. (Accessed July 8, 2010). <http://www.measuringworth.com/USwages/>.
- . "Annualized Growth Rate and Graphs of Various Historical Economic Series." *MeasuringWorth*. 2009. (Accessed July 8, 2010). <http://www.measuringworth.com/growth/>.

- Ostler, Jeffrey. "The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism." *Agricultural History* 69, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 1-27.
- . "Why the Populist Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (November 1992): 451-474.
- Pierce, Michael. "Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio, 1890-1891." *Agricultural History* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 58-85.
- Prescott, Gerald. "Wisconsin Farm Leaders in the Gilded Age." *Agricultural History* 44, no. 2 (April 1970): 183-199.
- Raymond, Rossiter Worthington. *Peter Cooper*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1901.
- Rentenbach, Barbara and Rosana J. Whitenight. "William G. Cutler's *History of the State Of Kansas: Douglas County*." (Accessed July 27, 2010). http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/douglas/douglas-cop1.html#EARLY_SETTLERS.
- Ritter, Gretchen. *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865-1896*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Rosenblum, Nancy L. "Political Parties as Membership Groups." In "Symposium: Law and Political Parties." Special Issue, *Columbia Law Review* 100, no. 3 (April 2000): 813-844.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus. *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Rothstein, Morton. "Farmer Movements and Organizations: Numbers, Gains, and Losses." In "Quantitative Studies in Agrarian History." Special Issue, *Agricultural History* 62, no. 3 (Summer, 1988): 161-181.
- Schlebecker, John T. "Grasshoppers in American Agricultural History." *Agricultural History* 27, no. 3 (July 1953): 85-93.
- Schnattsschneider, Elmer Eric. *Party Government: American Government in Action*. 1942. Reprint, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004.
- Schultz, Duane. *Quantrill's War: The Life and Times of William Clarke Quantrill, 1837-1865*. New York: Macmillan, 1996.
- Schweikart, Larry and Michael Allen. *A Patriot's History of the United States*. New York: Sentinel, 2007.

- Shackel, Paul A., and Matthew M. Palus. "The Gilded Age and Working-Class Industrial Communities." *American Anthropologist*, New Series 108, no. 4 (December 2006): 828-841.
- Shannon, Fred A. "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus." *The American Historical Review* 41, no. 4 (July 1936): 637-651.
- . *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945.
- Skinner, Kerri M. "The Past, Present, and Future of Rangeland Grasshopper Management." *Rangelands* 22, no. 2 (April 2000): 24-28.
- Sobel, Robert. *Panic on Wall Street: A History of America's Financial Disasters*. 1968. Reprint, Washington D.C.: Beard Books, 1999.
- Soth, Lauren. "The End of Agrarianism: Fission of the Political Economy of Agriculture." In "Proceedings Issue." Special Issue, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 52, no. 5 (December, 1970): 663-667.
- Timberlake, Richard H. *Monetary Policy in the United States: An Intellectual and Institutional History*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. 1921. Reprint, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997.
- White, Richard. "Information, Markets, and Corruption: Transcontinental Railroads in the Gilded Age." *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 2003): 19-43.
- Wicker, Elmus. *Banking Panics of the Gilded Age*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Williamson, Samuel H. "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present." *MeasuringWorth*. 2010. (Accessed July 8, 2010). <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>.

I, Ryan Stephans, hereby submit this thesis/report to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available to use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, digitizing or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

Signature of Author

Date

Greenbackers and Populists: The Failures and
Successes of Agrarian Reform Movements in
Douglas County, Kansas, 1874-1904

Signature of Graduate Office Staff

Date

