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# Principle vs. Pragmatism: Henry Loucks and South Dakota Populism 1884-1890

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Principle vs. Pragmatism: Henry Loucks and South Dakota Populism 1884-1900

by

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## **Abstract**

The People's Party of the United States was the most successful third party in American history. The formation of that party was linked to that of local Farmers' Alliances in a number of states. One such organization, the South Dakota Farmers' Alliance, was founded and led by a Canadian immigrant named Henry Langford Loucks. Although historians have noted the influence of Americans like Henry Wise Wood on Canadian agrarian movements, few have considered Canadian influence south of the border.

This study uses Loucks' speeches and newspaper writings as well as secondary sources, to examine the politicization of Loucks and the Dakota Alliance. Dakota populists faced many of the same pitfalls and the same fate as the People's Party nationally, for many of the same reasons. Trapped between pragmatism and principles, the group split and was eventually coopted by another political party. Loucks, who chose principle over pragmatism, lost political power.

## **Acknowledgments**

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*For Endre and Peter Varsanyi, whose dinner-time political  
conversations made me the person I am today.*

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## **Chapter I: Interpretations of Populism**

The 1890s, in many ways, marked the beginning of modern American politics. In that decade, many of the lines in the battles that would characterize the on-going struggle over the role of government were drawn and would last until at least the 1960s. Debates over the role of government, the rights of labor, the financing of state institutions, the economic plight of farmers and what to do about their place in the new global economic reality they faced were held all over the United States in long and sometimes messy confrontations between “reformers” seeking to make the American system more equitable for all and “conservatives” who desired to perpetuate the status quo. One of the major players in this confrontation was the People’s Party of America with its broad populist message that was interpreted in many different ways (and through a variety of political movements) across the country. Beginning with the Grange and the Greenbackers after the Civil War, farmers began to advocate for changes to the political and economic rules that governed America. Uniting in the mid-to-late 1880s as a loose consortium of the Farmer’s Alliances, principally the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union (NFA&IU) that had been formed in the 1880s, they contested the national elections in 1892, 1896 and 1900 as the People’s Party. It was the most successful third party political movement in American history.

Yet, despite its broad message of “America for all Americans”, the 1892 Memphis Convention of the NFA&IU was chaired by an unhappy Canadian, Henry Langford Loucks. In the months after a devastating loss in the 1892 election, one that Loucks and others had believed would bring success, he did something no other Populist leader had done before. He instituted a “test of loyalty”, demanding an ideological rigidity new to the organization that shook the oft-



divided and sectionally-diverse audience<sup>1</sup>. Never before had the farmers of Texas, North Carolina, Colorado and Dakota all been required to swear allegiance to a single set of principles. Yet Henry Loucks demanded it, and his radicalism had a dramatic effect on the entire Populist movement and, in many ways, spelled the beginning of its end. To understand the significance of Loucks' place in American Populism it is necessary to place him in the history of a broad and diverse movement, and in the historiographic debates regarding its roots, methods, accomplishments, and significance.

In the grand scheme, Populism – at least in its partisan incarnation – represented a mere blip on the American political timeline. Rising from the economic turbulence of the 1870s and 80s, its existence as a national political movement was a brief one, experiencing great success and then, lasting barely fifteen years, ending in electoral failure. Much has been made, though, in historical debate, about its lasting impact, if any.

The Populist movement was, for the most part, initially made up of farmers unhappy with their economic situation in an increasingly corporate-dominated national economy. Yet the cause of Populism, championed in the form of the People's Party, drew both members and methods from previous movements. Experimenting with cooperative programs earlier in the 1870s and 80s, farmers formed the back bone of an earlier movement, the Patrons of Husbandry, also known as the Grange, which sought to bring groups of farmers together to purchase supplies and market their crops. It attempted to achieve state regulation of freight rates, to limit the cost of getting crops to market, but its success was limited because only Congress could regulate

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.), 136-137.

interstate commerce. Largely defunct by the mid-1880s, the Grangers brought many of its ideas to the People's Party.<sup>2</sup>

Financial reform was another important tenet of the People's Party platform. Increasing the amount of available currency (and therefore deflating farmers' often vast mortgage debt) was sought by many in its rural base to be a cure for their often debt-laden finances. The Greenbackers, a political party active in the 1870s and 80s, also formed a part of what would become the People's Party. Believing that a currency based not on available gold and silver, but on the fiat-based "greenback" of the Civil War-era, would inflate the currency and allow for a freer and fairer marketplace, farmers and many other Americans flocked to its banner. Greenbackers were fearful of corporate interests and monopolistic businesses and believed that bullion-based currency concentrated power in the hand of monopolistic corporations. This desire for more popular control over the capitalist system was echoed in the People's Party which attracted many Greenback Party supporters to the Populist cause. Eventually though, as new western mines expanded the silver supply, advocates of the free coinage of silver came to dominate the Populist currency reform movement and contributed, finally, to the perceived need for a national party to advocate their goals.<sup>3</sup>

But uniting Greenbackers from the Midwest, Silverites from the Mountain West, and farmers' groups from the Midwest and South proved extremely difficult. As a national party, the Populists were simply unable to agree on basic principles and strategies. Questions of policy and, in particular, acrimony over whether or not to "fuse" strategically with one of the major parties in certain regions eventually tore the movement apart. That many state-level groups fused with

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Samuel Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 1961), 124.

<sup>3</sup> John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of The Farmers' Alliance and The People's Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1931), 313-316.

different parties based on the particular conditions in their local politics made matters still more difficult. More radical, indeed socialist, cooperative-focused farmers clashed with moderate forces who sought only to improve the existing capitalist system rather than alter its rules outright. Many others simply could not see past the existing two-party political system. These debates, and others, played out nationally in 1896 and 1900, but they also occurred at the state-level, with Henry Loucks in South Dakota in 1890.<sup>4</sup>

South Dakota represented a microcosm of the entire Populist<sup>5</sup> endeavor. Emerging from farmers' organizations of the early-to-mid 1880s and originally an interest group focused on pressuring politicians of the region to adhere to the demands of its farmer base, farmers' groups transformed into a more broadly focused political party when they (quite correctly) came to believe that political responsiveness to their economic demands was lacking. Representative, in many ways, of the fate of the larger national party as forces, both within and without, pressured it to either "fuse" with an existing political party and to moderate its policies or to become still more politically militant, the difficulties the Alliance of South Dakota faced look a great deal like those of the People's Party later.<sup>6</sup>

In many ways though, the initial successes of South Dakota Populists (and groups in other states) offered inspiration to unite nationally. Indeed, the national movement was, like so many national movements, largely an amalgamation of regional political forces. South Dakota was simply one of its earliest success stories and its leader, Henry Langford Loucks, a Canadian-born farmer, would become one of the most powerful members of the Populist movement

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<sup>4</sup> R Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 129-131; 147-153.

<sup>5</sup> For this study, the use of the capitalized *Populist* will be utilized when describing the political party of the 1892-1908 period rather than the non-capitalized term *populist* which will be utilized when describing a political attribute.

<sup>6</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 129-31.

nationally and in South Dakota. A newspaper editor, writer, and political agitator, Loucks was the Farmers' Alliance leader in South Dakota and eventually, the President of the National Farmer's Alliance – an organizational buttress to the People's Party.<sup>7</sup>

Henry Loucks moved to Dakota Territory in 1884, bringing with him Canadian political experience and business experience from several industries south of the border. Immediately upon arriving, he set out to change the system which, in his mind, was unfair to the farmer.

In 1892, Loucks became President of the National Farmer's Alliance and Industrial Union, the umbrella organization of most of the state-level Populist organizations.<sup>8</sup> The Independent Party formed in South Dakota in 1890 under Loucks' leadership was the first of many of the National Alliance's affiliates to become a third political party at the state level. Though its creation was somewhat contentious, like the National Alliance it came to the realization that the two dominant political parties were not going to take it seriously unless it advocated politically for its farm and labor membership. Both the Independent Party and the National Alliance experienced early successes, but were, for the most part, absorbed by the Democratic Party by 1900.<sup>9</sup>

Born in Canada, Loucks moved to the United States as an adult and helped found the South Dakota Farmer's Alliance in 1884. In his many roles as organizer, candidate, rhetorical firebrand, and newspaper editor, Loucks, perhaps more than anyone else, was a true believer in the farmers' desire for government ownership of infrastructure, the need for an inflationary monetary policy, and many of the other antecedent Grange-Greenback reforms which he

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<sup>7</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 144-147.

<sup>8</sup> There was another Northern National Alliance organization from which the South Dakota group seceded due to its more moderate leadership and less political stance. See Robert McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (New York: Norton, 1977), 87.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 105.

combined with his own religiously-infused temperance. He steadfastly refused to compromise on almost any of his core beliefs throughout his more than thirty years in politics. Originally gaining great influence in the state through his tenacity and organizational skill, he soon alienated many with his “all or nothing” attitude that made political cooperation difficult if not impossible once the Alliance moved openly into politics.<sup>10</sup>

Loucks embodied, for all intents and purposes, the fate of the farmers’ movement of South Dakota. Through writing, editing, and managing the movement’s newspaper, *The Dakota Ruralist*, Loucks consistently sought to increase the Alliance’s influence over the people. He travelled throughout the American Midwest in search of political allies and was heavily involved in cooperative financial enterprises built on Alliance principles. Loucks was at the very least the foremost agrarian agitator in South Dakota. His focus on fiscal and monetary issues, at first a great asset to him and the movement, eventually became an albatross, as his refusals to be pragmatic and to compromise on certain policy measures allowed the major political parties of the state to expropriate and moderate Populist ideas. As a result, his brightness and that of the Independent Party burned out and Loucks, defeated, returned to lecturing and sermonizing his fiscal prescriptions in front of smaller and smaller crowds. By the time American soldiers returned from war in 1918 some twenty years after his political heyday, he was near poverty and the movement he helped build had, for all intents and purposes, vanished. For the purposes of this study, Henry Loucks and the movement of South Dakota must first and foremost be placed in the context of the historical studies that have preceded this one.

Over the last eighty years there have been many attempts to categorize the geographically broad, disparate and sometimes contradictory Populists. At first focused largely on the

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<sup>10</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 87-100.

movement as a national political party and then honing in on state-level analyses, several important historiographic changes occurred over these eight decades. Beginning with John Hicks in 1931, placing the Populists accurately within the American political lexicon has proven difficult and, sometimes, contentious. Were Populists progressives or reactionaries? Were they reformers or did their calls for change mask an underlying nativist racism? These were just some of the questions for which historians have sought answers.

John Hicks' *The Populist Revolt* was the first attempt to contextualize the entire agrarian protest movement in the United States at a national level.<sup>11</sup> Tracing the complaints of the Populist movement to economic factors, Hicks placed Populism on a progressive timeline. He saw Populism as a bellwether of the political reforms that would come later in the progressive movement and the New Deal. Deeply connected to Frederick Jackson Turner's<sup>12</sup> view that the American democratic spirit can be explained by the frontier experience, he connected the agrarian radicals who pioneered Farmers' Alliances with the self-sufficient innovators of Turner's thesis and put them forth as early purveyors of the political reforms of his own era.

Hicks saw economics as the primary cause of the Populist revolt. Financial problems such as debt, tenant farming, and sharecropping prompted angry farmers to seek political change and, in Hicks' mind, recommended to them many potential solutions. The subtreasury plan, the idea that a series of mini-treasury houses could be placed throughout farming communities across the United States and enable farmers to more easily gain access to credit by putting their crops up as collateral was one of the primary means by which Hicks differentiated the Farmers'

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<sup>11</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History*, The Barnes & Noble Library of Essential Reading (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1893).

Alliances of the West (upon which he focused) and that of the South (which he largely dismissed.)<sup>13</sup>

In Hicks' view, the Populists existed in a binary world populated by either financially strapped farmers or wealthy corporations. With the two sides facing off in an epic battle, Hicks and other progressive historians viewed the arguments of the 1890s as between small town farmers and big business or between reform-minded moralists and the greed of entrenched privilege. For Hicks, economic factors largely explained the rise of the Populist movement.<sup>14</sup>

Hicks' explanation for some of the roots of the political groups emanating from the South and Ohio, New York and other states was grounded solidly in an economic analysis based on the geographic particularities of the two regions. Like his student, Theodore Saloutos<sup>15</sup>, Hicks built his analysis of Populism atop a basic acceptance of Turner's frontier thesis and Turner's belief in the political attitudes inherent to frontier life and the human requirements of a frequently more vulnerable environment. They both saw some degree of continuity between what the Populists sought to address and what future reformers in the early twentieth century wanted to change. There was a line, they suggested, between the democratic reforms of the Populists and the changes brought in the progressive movement.<sup>16</sup> Hicks's economics-based explanation represented the first of many studies of national agrarian political discontent and influenced all future discussions of Populism.

Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* marked the first important break from economic analysis that sought to place the agrarian political movements of

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<sup>13</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 196-200.

<sup>14</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 24-35.

<sup>15</sup> Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933*; Theodore Saloutos, *Populism: Reaction or Reform?* (Huntington, New York: R. E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 416-423.

the late-nineteenth century as the “frontier democracy” precursor of the New Deal of the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> Hofstadter argued, in many ways was the opposite of Hicks’s. Hofstadter did not see a straight line between the Populists and the Progressives in their political ideals, he saw a broken one where a few policy prescriptions passed from one to the other, but he saw none of the political and social openness in Populism that he did see in the progressive movement.<sup>18</sup>

Hofstadter’s analysis placed populism and the People’s Party in a whole new context. Arguing, as was popular in the post-war America of the 1950s, that America was based on a general consensus and was fundamentally moderate and not radical, Hofstadter set about to paint the Populists as anomalies. Linked to his study of the sometimes submerged “paranoid style” in American politics,<sup>19</sup> which he saw as the intermittent emergence of an anomalous radicalism in an otherwise tranquil American politics, he argued that populism was not the progressive movement that Hicks would have us believe. On the contrary, he argued, “in the books that have been written about the Populist movement, only passing mention has been made of its provincialism; little has been said of its relations with nativism and nationalism; nothing has been said of its tincture of anti-Semitism.”<sup>20</sup> Purveyors of the future these men were not, he argued. And the battle they waged was not one of radicalized workers and farmers against entrenched privilege; the Populists had fought against traditional American moderation.<sup>21</sup>

Hofstadter looked to right these perceived omissions in Populist historiography and to demonstrate that although the Populists did seek government intervention, their methods were crude and their ideals seldom pure. He suggested that their ideals were rooted in the myth of the

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<sup>17</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 420-423; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 3-9.

<sup>18</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 4-7; 132-33.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform : From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 61.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8. In these pages Hofstadter suggests that it was the more intractability of the Populists that made them regressive in character.



yeoman farmer and a strong (though sometimes subdued) nativism. Indeed, there was a sharp difference between the Populists and the New Dealers.<sup>22</sup> Sean Wilentz described Hofstadter's views in his foreword to *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*: "the Populists were gripped by rural mythology and provincial conspiracy mongering, whereas the New Dealers were consummate realists and experimenters who had adapted to the urban industrial age."<sup>23</sup>

This marked difference between Populists and later progressive reformers would impact many of the later histories of the Populist movement and offered a true challenge to the progressive model of interpretation that, led by Hicks and Saloutos, dominated the study of Populism from the 1930s-1950s. Although Hofstadter's suggestion prompted an academic firestorm and many of Hofstadter's suggestions, particularly those focusing on anti-Semitism and conspiracy mongering seem, in some cases, rather exaggerated, *The Age of Reform* altered the historiography of the subject dramatically.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, it was now possible to speak of Populism without automatically implying a connection to subsequent reform movements.

Robert H. Wiebe, the Northwestern University historian, saw the populists as united and as a new emerging group. Through a class-focused study of the era, Wiebe's *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* suggested that the Populists were just a political expression of an overall assertion of power by a new American middle class that grew into a sort of self-realization at the turn of the last century. For Wiebe, "the presumed passing of the frontier wove a thread of uneasiness"<sup>25</sup> into the lives of these new middle-class American farmers, businessmen and professionals. This uneasiness led to a communal sense of persecution by many, some of whom

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 4-6; 316-319.

<sup>23</sup> Sean Wilentz in Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, xv.

<sup>24</sup> Robert M. Collins., "The Originality Trap: Richard Hofstadter on Populism," *The Journal of American History* 76 (June 1989), 150-167.

<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 65.

united in attempts to rectify it. Occupying a more moderate position than Hofstadter, Wiebe did not see the Populists as paranoid, but saw them instead as driven apart by poor leadership and often contradictory goals.<sup>26</sup>

New Left historians like Lawrence Goodwyn and Robert C. McMath emerged in the 1970s as the evaluators of Populism and agrarian politics. With the political successes of the Civil Rights Movement in mind, they asked a very important question: what factors enable grassroots political action? At the time, historical study had not focused on explaining the growth of these groups. In Populism, they saw the opportunity for a fascinating case study.

Lawrence Goodwyn's take on the populist movement introduced a novel approach to the study. Despite also focussing on economics as the basis for the movement's discontent, Goodwyn portrayed economics not as the cause of the Populist political movement, but as a catalyst for a protest *culture*. "Insurgent movements are not born in 'hard times', but from insurgent culture"<sup>27</sup> he said. It was the construction of a cultural superstructure – a deep dissatisfaction with the status quo that cut across other pre-existing affiliations like vocation, religion, and sometimes even race that enabled a certain populist political unity. It was this protest culture that battled an inherently complacent majority, one that marked the largest divide between radicals and moderates in his study.<sup>28</sup>

The scaffolding for this culture of protest began, in Goodwyn's eyes, with the Farmers' Alliances. Like Robert McMath's study of the growth of Texas populism, *The Populist*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise : The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 62.

<sup>28</sup> Goodwyn suggested in the conclusion to the abridged version of *The Democratic Promise* that the radicals pushed as hard and as far as they could before a "loss of nerve" occurred during which Americans again were overtaken by complacency. Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment : A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 265.

*Vanguard*,<sup>29</sup> for Goodwyn the Alliance of Texas offered a unique opportunity to study the growth of this culture. It was there, in Alliance halls, they both argued, that farmers acquired the language and organizational methods required to seek reforms – both positive as Hicks had suggested and negative as Hofstadter had.<sup>30</sup> McMath and Goodwyn certainly differed in how they discussed the collapse of Populism. Goodwyn viewed it as having been largely co-opted by opportunistic politicians who bet that American complacency would trump reform mindedness.<sup>31</sup> McMath, for his part, saw fewer cultural reasons for the movement’s decline and saw politics and internal arguments over the “fusion” question as the primary explanation for its demise.<sup>32</sup> Despite these differences, Goodwyn and McMath shared a perspective on the origins of populism and its importance in the preparation for political action.

In particular, Goodwyn’s approach was important, as it enabled a way of seeing all populists and their supporters as a democratic grassroots movement with many common beliefs and cultural traditions rather than purely as a geographically or vocationally-driven interest. He discussed “one movement” rather than disparate “movements” that battled a naturally complacent element in American culture.

Goodwyn’s inclusion of a greater number of social and cultural considerations impacted virtually all future studies of American populism. He contended that the Farmers’ Alliances acted as grassroots rhetorical and theoretical laboratories for a new political culture at a local level before their national political expression in the People’s Party of America.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Robert McMath, *Populist Vanguard : A History of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance* (New York: Norton, 1977).

<sup>30</sup> Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise : The Populist Moment in America*; Robert McMath, *American Populism : A Social History, 1877-1898*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 208-211; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 153-157.

<sup>31</sup> Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, 265.

<sup>32</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 186-99.

<sup>33</sup> Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, 308-311.

Michael Kazin's *The Populist Persuasion* was, in many ways, a continuation of Goodwyn's cultural focus. Kazin suggested that the Populists were actually not so unique in the American experience as commonly believed.<sup>34</sup> In fact, they were both the inheritors and forbearers of a common populist, mass-mobilizing zeal that permeates American political culture.

For Kazin, it was "inherited streams of grassroots rhetoric"<sup>35</sup> that tied the farmers, women, and workers of the People's Party to the constant American push for reform. For Kazin, the Populists were just one eruption of many of the popular pushes for reform and reclamation present in American history. From the eighteenth century onward, a subculture of producers – farmers and wage-laborers – reached political consciousness whenever their lifestyles were most threatened. It was then that they acted.<sup>36</sup>

The Populists of Henry Loucks's day were the producers for whom, regardless of their class label, economic life had gradually become untenable. They then "reached out to other reformers of their time: the W.C.T.U., the Prohibition Party, Knights of Labour, and many more".<sup>37</sup> Much like Goodwyn, it was for Kazin a common realization that focussed on "expand[ing] the power of the state only in order to restore the glories of an earlier day"<sup>38</sup> (when producers were more respected) that united so many seemingly disparate groups.

Kazin united the Hicks and Goodwyn perspectives on Populism. Culture to him was very important; a common rhetoric created the opportunity for the American producing culture to assert itself when its numbers were adequate and interests sufficiently threatened. For Goodwyn,

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3-7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4; 43-44.

<sup>37</sup> Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

this culture became enflamed only when economic plight met with adequate rhetorical preparedness. Unlike Goodwyn though, Kazin viewed it as a constant background rather than as a simultaneous condition for, and expression of, political change.

Charles Postel's *The Populist Vision* was published in 2007.<sup>39</sup> Seeking to consolidate the progressive and consensus narratives that emanated from the 1930s through the 1960s, Postel painted a picture of the Populists as “progressive” in that they sought reforms that they themselves defined as leading to a more prosperous and inclusive future. He attempted to deconstruct the narrative, dominant since Hofstadter, which suggested that the Populists had sought to return America to an imaginary yeoman-farmer-oriented past.<sup>40</sup>

Postel argued that the Populists, in fact, just had a different vision of progress than the dominant capitalist, business-oriented one. They saw the capitalist system of the United States as being in need of moderation through regulation. They still had a fervent belief in progress, which tied them to the majority of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Americans. It was just a different one in which communal wealth predominated over individual affluence.

Postel's synopsis of Populism was replete with generalizations and largely ignored the huge regional disparity amongst Farmers' Alliances in the United States. It did however, demonstrate something very important: the Populists were not reactionaries. They did not just want to tear down the dominant, largely *laissez-faire* ethos of America; they wanted to enable their own particular view of American progress based on fairness, farming, and oftentimes, religion.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Postel, *Populist Vision*, 5; 10-11.

In situating the Populist movement as part of a more general nineteenth-century belief in inevitable progress, Postel's contribution was both important and flawed. For the most part, he was arguing against Hofstadter. Populists were not, he said, just reactionaries bent on returning America to a largely imaginary Jacksonian past dominated by the yeoman farmer; they were in fact, just interpreting American liberties and progress differently from non-Populists. They believed they were building something new, crafting a path for workers to the benefits of the new modern America.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, there is a fair amount of contention amongst the scholars who have sought to bring greater understanding to the national Populist movement. Whether believing that Populism was the result of shared culture, just shared grievances, or merely a group of reactionaries who sought to reclaim an imagined American past, the actions of the Populists are the best way to evaluate them.

The case of Henry Loucks and South Dakota Populism, as stated earlier, in many ways shares a similar narrative to that which could characterize the movement at the national level. As this shall be the focus of this project, it is necessary to next describe the historiographic background of the South Dakota politics and their context.

The two primary state-level studies were those put forth by Howard Lamar and Herbert Schell who, together, painted the broad strokes of these political movements.<sup>43</sup> Those who colored in those outlined images, however frequently disagreed over the details of the movement.

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<sup>42</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 288-289.

<sup>43</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956); Schell, *History of South Dakota*.

In general, Populism in South Dakota is a subject to which historians have paid scant attention. Kenneth Hendrickson, in his 1967 article “Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota”<sup>44</sup> offered the first attempt at contextualizing the movement in the state. Taking, for the most part, a Hicks-like belief in the economically and socially progressive nature of the movement, Hendrickson traced the Farmers’ Alliance from its early days to its eventual collapse in the late 1890s and wrote at least four pieces, three articles and a Masters’ thesis on the topic.<sup>45</sup>

One of the very important aspects of the South Dakota political movement upon which Hendrickson commented was the reaction of other political players in the state, particularly the dominant Republicans, to the Populists. Hendrickson gave “the combine”, a group of Dakota Republicans, much of the credit for hampering the Populists’ political effectiveness.<sup>46</sup> Despite several articles in scholarly journals appearing over the forty years since Hendrickson’s work on the topic, little was completed on the topic at a state level until fairly recently.

R. Alton Lee’s *Principle over Party*, the first volume dedicated to the study of South Dakota Populism, appeared in 2010.<sup>47</sup> In it, Lee argued that the primary characteristic of the movement and its leader, Henry Loucks, was an unwillingness to put any kind of partisan preference, whether for Democrats or Republicans ahead of the commitment to reform and social change. Results notwithstanding, for Lee, the Populists in South Dakota were more dedicated to principle than they were political organization or discipline.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota," *North Dakota History* 34 (Winter 1967), 70-83.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "The Political Career of Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, 1848-1926," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 34 (1968); Hendrickson, "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota."; Kenneth E., Jr. Hendrickson, "The Populist Movement in South Dakota, 1890-1900." M.A. Thesis, University of South Dakota, 1958.

<sup>46</sup> Hendrickson, "The Populist Movement in South Dakota, 1890-1900", 17-21.

<sup>47</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*.

<sup>48</sup> *The Dakota Ruralist*, April 11 1891, 4.

Generally, Lee viewed the Populists of South Dakota as a rational interest group, driven to politics by their failures to enact the changes they desired, particularly railroad reforms and cooperative business ventures, and by a realization that the changes they felt were needed were so large that they could never be enacted without entering politics directly. In particular, he pointed out, the debate over the subtreasury plan was the event that tipped the Farmers' Alliance into third party advocacy, as in 1890 as the subtreasury debate unfolded, the South Dakota Alliance realized that "both the majority Republicans and the minority Democrats ... had failed to yield to Alliance pressures or enticements ... and [they had attained] few political results."<sup>49</sup> It was from their sense of impotence that the pressure for the Alliance to become political emanated.<sup>50</sup>

Lee's discussion of the Independent Party's failures in Dakota is focused, largely, much like Hendrickson's, on the more organized, more pragmatic Republican Party. Through their appeals to ethnic voters, strategic expropriation of certain Populist policies, and pro-farmers rhetoric, the Republicans succeeded in splitting the farmers' constituency.<sup>51</sup>

Loucks, Lee wrote, "was a cheerful man who could never hate his opponents, no matter how grating they were."<sup>52</sup> Though, like Hendrickson, Lee viewed many of the failures of Loucks and the South Dakota Populists as poor politicking, he also viewed the Progressives of the twentieth century as the direct inheritors of many Populist reform proposals.<sup>53</sup> Echoing to some degree a Hicksian view of South Dakota and national Populism in general, Lee's view of the

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<sup>49</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 68.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–181.



South Dakotans and their leader was positive. They were simply not political enough to succeed, he argued.<sup>54</sup>

Much attention has been devoted to state-level analyses in other locales. Studies of Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas and the varied Populist incarnations in each all deserve mention. In general, these studies all sought to answer two questions typical to all of the national studies as well: who the populists were and how they organized themselves. They did, however, bring new tools to improve their analyses. Their first task was to identify who the populist agitators were and what their goals were.<sup>55</sup> For the most part they continued to view Hicks' and Hofstadter's analyses – that these were individuals beset by a new, increasingly global, economic life that disproportionately victimized them and their families.

One important contribution to the early movement toward state-level case studies was one that arose directly in opposition to Hofstadter's interpretation of the Populists as both regressive and exclusionary. Walter T.K. Nugent's *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* put forth the premise that the Populists were in fact "a pragmatic farmers' movement in search of rational solutions to agrarian depression."<sup>56</sup> Nugent suggested that, at least in Kansas, the Populists were willing to cooperate with almost anyone, without regard for ethnicity or race, if it meant improving their chances of securing the legislation and social reforms they desired.<sup>57</sup>

In the 1970s and 80s state-centric studies became more and more common and these historians also sought a new method, already used in other social sciences, to combine with

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<sup>54</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 189-191.

<sup>55</sup> For an excellent South Dakota example, see John Dibbern, "Who Were The Populists? A Study of Grass-Roots Alliancemen in Dakota," *Agricultural History* 56:4 (October 1982), 677-691.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Worth Miller, *Oklahoma Populism: A History of the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 256.

<sup>57</sup> Walter T.K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

traditional historical study: statistical analysis. Steven Hahn's *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* is an excellent example. In it Hahn identified the areas where Populist support was strongest, in areas with smaller, newer, frontier-area farms. Using voting records, census data and other data, Hahn identified the core of the Populist vote in Georgia as the yeoman farmer. Though who the core Populist supporters were certainly depended on the state, its history, its economy and many other factors, the use of statistical data was, and continues to be, an important contribution to the study of the movement and has enabled deeper analysis of voting patterns, the economic welfare of a particular county or area and even track changes in both over time.<sup>58</sup>

Second, all discussed the particular paths for growth and the eventual collapse of the particular state's movement during the tumultuous economic times of the late 1880s and mid-to-late 1890s. Here there was a great deal of variation. Perhaps the best discussion of the failures of Populism and its political representatives is provided by Peter Argersinger in his *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*.<sup>59</sup> Once again, combining social science methodologies as well as exhaustive primary research, Argersinger demonstrated the important role that particular state political systems and, sometimes, their manipulation could have on third party political action.<sup>60</sup>

Argersinger catalogued the gradual and systematic approach taken by the traditional parties in several states (including South Dakota) to legislate with the goal of reducing the political capacity of third parties. Through major parties' control of the courts, state legislatures,

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974); James Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Miller, *Oklahoma Populism*; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (Lawrence Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

and elections boards, the Populist third parties were frequently subject to onerous and sometimes discriminatory regulation. And, as the national Populist movement grew from the state movements, was the “deck stacked against” them nationally? “[The populists] confronted a Congress that had institutionalized the two-party system and had adopted procedures and norms that simultaneously obstructed . . . and promoted the very power of the very . . . interests against which [third] parties had been organized.”<sup>61</sup>

In his treatment of Colorado Populism, James Wright discussed the evolution of the Colorado movement and its leader, Davis Waite. Interspersing discussions of policy and internal and external political battles with deep analytical looks at elections and their related demographics, Wright observed the electoral impacts of the battles more deeply than those before him. Beyond showing the statistical reverberations of Populist policies and politicking, Wright also focused a good deal on labor’s relationship to the movement. To him, Populism’s “surge” in Colorado enabled labor: “Joseph Buchanan [. . .and] his militant brand of unionism became increasingly manifest.”<sup>62</sup> In Colorado, as in many other locales, labor radicalism accompanied farmers’ radicalism.

There have been relatively few biographies of individual Populist leaders, particularly at the state level. C. Vann Woodward’s *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*<sup>63</sup> did offer a deep and evocative portrayal of a single Populist leader. As one of the few biographies of a single agrarian agitator, its focus on Watson’s personal growth from Democratic partisan to third party rabble-rouser followed Watson from his early days in Georgia to his time as a flame-throwing Populist on the floor of the United States Congress.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>62</sup> Wright, James Edward, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.), 227-230.

<sup>63</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

Woodward's account offers important considerations for any sort of biographical treatment of a Populist leader. *Agrarian Rebel* followed Watson's descent from his role as a laudable, almost post-racial, inclusive Populist firebrand who wanted nothing more than to secure economic fairness for farmers and his tragic fall to racist, angry and anti-Semitic newspaper man.<sup>64</sup>

In many ways, Woodward's treatment of Watson points this study in an important direction: the potential to discuss the construction, evolution, and collapse of a movement through the lens of a single life. Woodward accomplished this with Georgia Populism as he tracked Watson's firebrand style back-and-forth between two political parties, as messenger of a burgeoning new movement all the way to despair and failure. This method lends itself well to Loucks and South Dakota.

Before any clear discussion of Loucks, a Canadian émigré, can begin, it is necessary to introduce another area of historical study that lends itself well to the study of the South Dakota firebrand. The concept of cross-border history, the study of the movement of people, ideas, and goods across borders (in this case between Canada and the United States) cannot be ignored. There is a good deal of important scholarship available in the areas of cross-border political history which provides some insights into the construction and transportation of political ideas.

Varied viewpoints exist on the compatibility of and, indeed the very existence of a cross-border political culture that in some way demonstrates cultural links between American and Canadian political actors and actions. Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat's article "Telling Differences" highlights probably the most important realization brought by cross-border study: "people rather than nature created the differences assumed to exist on either side of [the 49<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 133; 220-222; 442-449.

parallel.] And some of those people were historians.”<sup>65</sup> The notion that an historian’s methodology and perspective, as well as the time at which an account was written can create the illusion of difference between Canadians and Americans is an important methodological consideration.

For the study of Populism, Jameson and Mouat demonstrated both the resilience of the Turnerian paradigm of understanding of the West (and of course, America generally) south of the border as well as the various Canadian and American arguments with it. That both countries’ farmers’ movements emanated from their respective Wests makes the understanding of their historiographic underpinning important. “Telling Differences” also points out the numerous cross-border cousins to Loucks who sought political change on the other side of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Henry Wise Wood, a Missouri-born farmer founded a major reform movement in Alberta and John Leedy, who immigrated to Canada from Kansas are both examples of Americans coming north to undertake political reform in what they saw as a more hospitable environment.<sup>66</sup>

Paul Sharp’s 1950 article “When Our West Moved North” is an important addition that sought to place Canadian agrarian radicalism in perspective with an eye to immigration from the United States: “the mass migration [of Americans] into the Canadian West was the last advance in the long march that had begun on the Atlantic seaboard.”<sup>67</sup> Though this is certainly an adoption of Turnerian language to expose the American migrations north in the 1890s-1910s to exploit cheap and easily available Canadian farm land, Sharp’s analysis of the Populist aspect of this migration is more nuanced.

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, “Telling Differences: The Forty-Ninth Parallel and Historiographies of the West and Nation. *Pacific Historical Review*, 2 (May 2006), 183.

<sup>66</sup> Jameson and Mouat, “Telling Differences.” *Pacific Historical Review*, 205

<sup>67</sup> Paul Sharp, “When Our West Moved North”, *The American Historical Review*, 55:2 (January 1950), 287.

Sharp suggested that Canada was ideologically compatible with the views of American Populists: “hail insurance laws, direct taxes on land values, few taxes on farmers’ personal property, and laws discouraging speculation in land were often cited as examples of reforms advocated by agrarians in the States.”<sup>68</sup> In short, Canada adopted many of the Populist measures that many Americans had sought and that drew former populists north.

Indeed it was in Paul Sharp’s “When Our West North” that this student first heard of Henry Langford Loucks. And it was his suggestion that transfers of knowledge between the Wests of the two countries were more complex than simply an American or Canadian one alone. His call for American historians to “abandon their academic isolationism”<sup>69</sup> was one that brought up an important point: what impacted American history in its West, may not necessarily have always been American in origin. To this point, Loucks is an example. And so a brief review of Canadian agrarian movements is important to establish his context.

Louis Aubrey Wood’s 1924 book *The History of Farmer’s Movements in Canada*,<sup>70</sup> though dated, sought, in some ways, to do what John Hick’s *Populist Revolt* did for the American farmers’ movement. Wood’s treatment of agrarianism in Canada was based upon an important thesis: that Canadian farmers already exhibited a sort of class consciousness at the end of the nineteenth century and that using political language and organization methods *co-opted from its neighbours to the south* came to realize many of their goals in Canada. Wood viewed the farmer’s movement in Canada as an “historical movement” that, like so many others, he said: “had their origin, or at least had their greatest development, in the broad basins of the Mississippi

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<sup>68</sup> Sharp, “When Our West Moved North”, 290.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>70</sup> Louis Aubrey Wood, *A History of Farmers’ Movements in Canada: The Origins and Development of Agrarian Protest, 1872–1924*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press), 1975.

and its confluent streams.”<sup>71</sup> Woods’ discussions of the Grange and Farmer’s Alliances in the United States and (to some degree) their methodological transplantation north coincides well with the same work discussed in Hicks and Saloutos. These progressive-minded folk looked south for transplantable ideas.

Woods’ view of Canadian agrarian agitation was tied closely to the times in which he wrote. In the 1920s Canada still had several provincial and at least one federal agrarian-centred party. It was also a period of historical understanding that began to focus on the mass movements that began to change the world after the Russian Revolution. Ideas of class consciousness, historical movements and broad meta-narratives were major preoccupations in the study of history. Woods painted a picture in this context and drew a line, much as Hicks and Saloutos did, of Canadian agrarian movements contributing to progressive (and Progressive, as in the party) politics in 1920s Canada.<sup>72</sup>

Henry Loucks was, in this way, an apparent anomaly. Both Sharp and Wood catalogued American movements north and suggested that Americans did much to contribute to the agrarian reform movements of early twentieth century Canada. There seems no comparable example of a Canadian moving South and doing the same until Loucks. Loucks’ role in the general path of agrarian reform moving south to north rather than vice versa prompt an important question: why did Loucks seek changes in his new, American, homeland rather than back at home? The historiography in general also prompts other questions: was Loucks’ advocacy of a third party in fact the most effective way to accomplish pro-farmer reforms? What did he accomplish as Alliance leader both in South Dakota and nationally? How was Loucks affected by his

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<sup>71</sup> Wood, *A History of Farmers’ Movements in Canada*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

experience as a leader in both national and state-level movements? These are just some of the questions that this project seeks to answer.

Henry Loucks's ultimate refusal to undertake almost any kind of pragmatic political arrangements had a significant impact on the political growth of the Populist movement in South Dakota. The decision to leave the two-party system and establish a third party was prompted, in large part, by him and also met with complex results. His ideas must have come from somewhere. A more in-depth study of Loucks himself is necessary.

This project will trace Henry Loucks's life and political activities. It will begin with a look at his roots in Canada and his early story in the hope of garnering some understanding of the political and practical experiences he brought with him to Deuel County, Dakota Territory when he and his growing family arrived there in 1884. It will, like C. Vann Woodward's study of Thomas Watson, seek to paint a picture of the trials and tribulations of the Populist political experience by focusing on a significant leader and placing them against the broader backdrop of the national movement that attracted millions.

The second chapter in the project will focus on Loucks' time in Canada, his youth and the political and social environment that gave rise to his political aspirations after his move south of the border.

Loucks' early years as a non-partisan political agitator in Dakota and his gradual realization that it was through national changes that farmers' lives could truly be improved are the subject of the third chapter. Next, the partisan Independent era will be discussed, with emphasis on Loucks's desire to create a third party and his national activities first as National Alliance Vice-President and then, as its increasingly radical chief executive.



The final chapter describes the events and actions that contributed to the political end of the Populist cause. The significance of his personal trajectory for the political movement both at a state and national level will be discussed. Finally, South Dakota will be discussed as so much of the fate of the Populist movement nationally, its growth from a farmers' movement to political group and eventually, political party, can be observed in microcosm there. And many of the factors that led to its collapse in South Dakota occurred nationally as well. This project will attempt, through taking South Dakota's particular Populist movement into account, to provide insights into the growth and collapse of the People's Party as well.

## **Chapter II: Contexts: Northern Preparation**

Henry Loucks came to South Dakota in 1884, a man experienced with America, politics, and to some degree at least, business. He ventured across the U.S. border and back at least twice before finally locating his family in Deuel County. His time in Canada, particularly in the mid-to-late 1870s did much to prepare him for the role he would play as political, religious, and social leader in his adopted homeland. At roughly the same time, events also prepared Dakota for his ideals.

Loucks's political education in Canada engendered in him a need for political action. His activities in the temperance movement north of the border and the successes achieved by that movement created in him a sense that policies could indeed be changed if people organized, mobilized and acted. Political life in 1870s Dakota also took a form that was amenable to his belief in political mobilization. The factional and often dysfunctional politics of the territory, notable almost from its creation, set the stage for a particularly strong "farmers versus the establishment" narrative to which Loucks and others later spoke. This narrative was attractive across the prairies, the mountain states and much of the South as well. But the new Dakota Territory, due to its particularly factional politics was an area particularly ripe for dissent.

Henry Loucks left behind no collection of personal papers or journals for the vast majority of his life for historians to evaluate. Almost all of what is known of him is based on analysis of his acts as Farmers' Alliance leader, candidate for office and, of course, his writings as editor of *The Dakota Ruralist*, convention proceedings and later publications. His time in Canada is also shrouded by a lack of primary records. Nonetheless, piecing together a picture of the culture of Ontario during his youth may be helpful and, combined with his later acts, make possible a fuller view of his life in politics.

Henry Langford Loucks was born in Russell, Ontario<sup>1</sup> on 24 May 1846. He was born at a transformational time in what would, twenty-one years after his birth, become the Dominion of Canada. Religion, schooling, and international trade were all gaining either new or renewed influence on the lives of the region's English-speaking, mostly Protestant populace. Though it is not possible to know for certain the degree to which these things affected Loucks, elements of all three had some link to his political activities years later. And one element of Loucks' political education most certainly did occur in Canada: his involvement in the temperance movement. He joined the International Order of Good Templars in Canada and it was both an experience and an ideal that he carried with him south to Dakota Territory.<sup>2</sup> Always a teetotaler, Loucks and his wife campaigned for temperance throughout their lives in the United States. In 1891, Loucks reminded his fellow People's Party members that he had "voted for prohibition at every opportunity."<sup>3</sup> At the very least, in this area, his Canadian roots conditioned his later American political stance.

Ontario (or Canada West as it was known at the time of his birth) was in a period of transition during Loucks's young life there. Reeling from a recent armed rebellion against governmental authority in 1848, parliamentary self-government was granted later that year. And with a newly opened political system, an expanded immigration policy and a growing transportation system, business boomed, as did social movements.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Several authors have incorrectly suggested that Loucks was, in fact, born in Hull, Quebec. Russell, Ontario was the location of his birth. Loucks himself listed his birthplace as Russell on his marriage certificate. Archives of Ontario, Series MS932, Reel 27.

<sup>2</sup> W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Farmer's Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (St. Louis: C.B. Woodward, 1891), 329.

<sup>3</sup> *The Dakota Ruralist*, June 20 1891.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this period and the later Canadian populist Farmers' movement in Canada see Louis Aubrey Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada: The Origins and Development of Agrarian Protest, 1872–1924*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press), 1975.

Canada West's population, made up mostly of British immigrants, soon demanded greater investment in infrastructure as their economy became more and more reliant on outside trade and business. Rail lines were rapidly built, and Canada West soon joined an increasingly continental transportation system. And the focus, as it would be for most of Canada's existence, was trade with the United States. As Canadian historian H.M.S. Careless stated, the "establishment of reciprocal free trade in national products by the treaty of 1854 [... led to] enlarged north-south traffic as lines funneled Canadian commodities southward to the U.S."<sup>5</sup> Contact between what would become Canada and the northern United States was increasing.

Along with economic changes though, came an influx of public religiosity. Immigration from British Protestant cultures accompanied by a general social angst over the complications of a rapidly urbanizing and technologically-injected society prompted a renewed emphasis on religion in education, health, and public life in general.<sup>6</sup>

Russell, Ontario was a community that found itself at the heart of this new trade-focused society. As a satellite community of the city of York (later Toronto), Russell was near both the ports and rail stations of a bustling area. As it focused more and more on the transportation and sale of goods, the town of Russell was likely both an exciting and challenging place to grow up.

What Henry Loucks witnessed as a child is impossible to know for certain. Yet one social movement that most certainly had an impact on his life was the temperance movement. In 1848, when he was just two years old, the Sons of Temperance took their campaign to Canada. Founded in 1842, the Sons were one of the first such movements to move from the concept of simply "tempering" (that is moderating) alcohol consumption to the gradual support for an

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<sup>5</sup> H.M.S. Careless "Aspects of Urbanization," in James Talman, Ed., *Aspects of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.), 67.

<sup>6</sup> An excellent study of this religious resurgence in Ontario is John Grant, *A Profusion of Spires : Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

outright elimination of all intoxicating products. This message gained strength in Canada just as it did in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Another temperance group moved into Canada as well. The International Order of Good Templars [IOGT]<sup>8</sup>, much like other temperance movements of the era, operated out of a sense of middle-class, Victorian *noblesse oblige*, seeking to save working-class laborers from their own appetites. Yet, the IOGT, according to historian Lynne Marks, was more complicated. It was “not just an association of middle-class social control, but could also serve the interests of the working class.”<sup>9</sup> The IOGT linked its message to many of the increasingly numerous social changes of the time and focused (mostly) on Protestant religious affiliations. For a time it was very successful, achieving a popular option to “go dry” for individual counties under the Dunkin Act of 1864 and eventually a federal Canadian temperance law in 1878.<sup>10</sup>

Religious education likely enabled greater public support for temperance. The mid-nineteenth century and the challenges that urbanization and economic development wrought to more traditional ways of life like farming, prompted a greater focus in Protestant Christianity on improving this new society through earthly acts. Religious groups began participating more than ever before in education, fitness and charitable programs. In the thirty years between 1846 and 1876 the number of children attending school in the region doubled from 49.8 percent to 92.6 percent.<sup>11</sup> And religious schools dominated. In fact, “the 1855 Journal of Education reported that all schools in Canada West cities were opened and closed with the Lord’s Prayer.”<sup>12</sup> It was likely

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<sup>7</sup> David M Fahey, *Temperance and Racism: John Bull, Johnny Reb, and the Good Templars* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 12, 21-56.

<sup>8</sup> The movement was later known as The International Organization of Good Templars.

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Marks in Paul Craven, *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 310.

<sup>10</sup> Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 160-62.

<sup>11</sup> Alison L Prentice, *The School Promoters. Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 1978), 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

one of these schools, tentatively progressive in their enhanced mandates, but vigorously conservative in their religious orthodoxy, that young Henry Loucks attended for a few years before turning to other endeavors.<sup>13</sup>

For Henry Loucks, it seems, adventure also beckoned at a young age. His first foray to the United States occurred in his early twenties as he moved south to Michigan to work in the lumber business at some point in the late 1860s. He remained there for several years, but returned to Canada and began work as a merchant in Hull, Quebec in about 1868.<sup>14</sup> It was there that Loucks first participated in the IOGT's political operations.<sup>15</sup>

It was not only in his professional life that changed. Upon his return to Canada he also met the woman that would become his wife, Florence McCraney, the daughter of a Member of Parliament. Florence and Henry Loucks married in April 1878.<sup>16</sup> An indomitable woman, Florence Loucks combined the roles of wife, political advisor, and fervent suffragist throughout Loucks's entire political life.

In 1877, Henry Loucks joined the IOGT. Raised Presbyterian, he embraced the movement and rose quickly in the brotherhood's ranks.<sup>17</sup> Elected Grand Wizard of the IOGT of Quebec in both 1877 and 1878<sup>18</sup>, Loucks was at the forefront of the temperance movement in Canada at the time that it achieved one of its greatest victories: the Temperance Act of 1878. Again, it is impossible to ascertain what impact that had on him or what role he played in its passage. Yet, his participation in the movement would have demonstrated to Loucks both the

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<sup>13</sup> Larry Remele. "God Helps Those Who Help Themselves" *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 37:4, (Autumn 1987), 22-33.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Fox, *Fox's Who's Who in South Dakota* (Pierre: Statewide Service, 1893), 126.

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Farmer's Alliance*, 329.

<sup>16</sup> Marriage Certificate, Archives of Ontario, Series MS932, Reel 27.

<sup>17</sup> Notably, unlike most other "orders" and templar movements, women were admitted as equal members to the IOGT.

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Farmer's Alliance*, 329.

capacity of a social movement to achieve political change and his own capacity to participate in it.<sup>19</sup>

Once again, though, in 1878, Loucks headed south to the United States in search of financial success. The next year, he and Florence departed for Jefferson City, Missouri, once again seeking opportunity in the lumber industry. Their first son, Perry, was born in Missouri the following year. Apparently Loucks fared quite well, as in 1884 he was able both to finance a farm in Deuel County, Dakota Territory and to equip it. It is possible that Loucks had been accumulating capital to finance his farming endeavors from his times in Michigan and Quebec; his work seemed to have enabled him to move to Dakota with Florence and Perry in 1884.

Loucks arrived in Dakota Territory to an already well-developed and rather contentious political system. Like many of the new territories admitted to the union after the Civil War, Dakota Territory was dominated by the Republican Party and more particularly by just a privileged few within it.<sup>20</sup>

It is at this point, that it becomes necessary to embark upon a discussion of Dakota politics in the territorial period as there was a good deal of continuity in South Dakota politics from the territorial era all the way to the 1890s. As Kenneth N. Owens wrote, “learning territorial politics has great relevance to the modern period.”<sup>21</sup> And it was in the territorial period that Dakotan farmers first embraced cooperative economic ventures.<sup>22</sup>

The factionalism of Dakota Territorial politics is crucial to any analysis of the Populist movement, the growth of Farmers’ Alliances, and ultimately of the Populist Party there itself.

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<sup>19</sup> The Scott Act of 1878 enabled the creation of local prohibition in Canada and was a huge victory for the temperance movement there. Heron, *Booze*, 97; 171-73.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 160-207.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth N. Owens, “Pattern and Structure in Western Territorial Politics” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 1:4 (October 1970), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 146.

Like all states that emerged from territorial status, as Owens said, much of what occurred politically in South Dakota after statehood was connected to what came before it. This was certainly the case with the movement that gave rise to South Dakota Populists, who began as another faction in a territory whose history was replete with factional movements.

As one of the deans of the history of the Midwest, Howard Lamar, suggested, Dakota Territory “designed its politics in no small part due to the frontier experiences of the forest man.”<sup>23</sup> It was the reactions of “forest men” – the men (and women) who moved west from areas further east – who shaped the initial politics that characterized the territory after its creation in 1861. Along with native Norwegians and those from Minnesota and Wisconsin and more than a few French-speaking Métis, the attraction of open prairie lands brought many to the rough-and-tumble area, still populated predominantly by Indians.<sup>24</sup> Together, they built its politics.

Dakota was founded as an area controlled by the Dakota Land Company which was, for all intents and purposes, a financial adjunct of the newly-minted state Minnesota Democratic Party (Minnesota became a state in 1858). The Dakota Land Company controlled a vast swath of land in what would become southern Dakota Territory.<sup>25</sup> Its focus (as implied by its name) was exclusively land speculation. These speculative activities led the company's financiers to lobby successfully for the Yankton Treaty of 1858, which enabled a further increase in settlement.<sup>26</sup> And with the help of a Democratic White House, its controlling interests – high-ranking Democratic Party officials in Minnesota – hoped eventually to create a new territory where Minnesotans could wield economic power. This business activity at the very founding of

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<sup>23</sup>Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>24</sup>Deuel County, the county to which Henry Loucks moved in 1884, was a sparsely populated area in 1870. Of thirty-seven individuals living there, only five were native born Americans. The rest were either recorded as “Indian” or from Norway. 1870 U.S. Census, Deuel County, <http://files.usgwarchives.org/sd/deuel/census/1870.txt> (August 11 2012.)

<sup>25</sup>Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, 42.

<sup>26</sup>Herbert Samuel Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 1961), 72.



the territory marked the commencement of the business domination of territorial politics in Dakota that the farmers' movements would seek to change.<sup>27</sup>

First applying for full territorial status in 1858, the "squatter government" created by the Dakota Land Company and its Democratic financiers ran into a roadblock in the form of Galusha Grow, the Republican chairman of the House Committee on Territories.<sup>28</sup> Grow opposed the squatter government on two counts: it was controlled by Democrats and, more than anything else, he feared the extension of slavery into any new Democratic-controlled territories.<sup>29</sup> After three years of wrangling and the election of a Republican President, Dakota Territory was created on March 2, 1861.

Howard Lamar described the territorial system, the manner by which, since 1787, new states were forged in a three-step process. First, a territorial act was passed by Congress that named a Governor, Secretary, and others to write the new territory's laws. Next, once the territory reached a population of 5,000 inhabitants it elected a bicameral legislature and a non-voting delegate to Congress.<sup>30</sup> Last, once it reached 60,000 inhabitants, citizens were tasked with writing a constitution, electing a state government and applying for entrance to the Union as a full-fledged state.<sup>31</sup> This system operated more or less as a series of suggestions rather than as federal edict and there was a good deal of room for interpretation within it.

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<sup>27</sup>Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 42-44.

<sup>28</sup>The term used to describe an *ad hoc*, unofficial and unauthorized government formed by settlers themselves, before recognition by the federal government. The federal government had full authority over granting territorial status and, therefore, legitimacy.

<sup>29</sup>After the collapse of the Missouri Compromise with the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the possibility at least of the extension of slavery from its current adherents, Grow, an ardent abolitionist, was not about to take chances. An excellent summary of the collapse is available in Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 154-55.

<sup>30</sup>The 5,000 inhabitants number seemed to have counted a few extra citizens, in 1860 the population of Dakota Territory is listed as just 4,837 in the population summary of the 1870 census. 1870 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1870a.zip> (accessed January 22, 2015.)

<sup>31</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 2-3.

Finally, in 1862, the Republican-passed Homestead Act closed the deal and ensured Republican dominance. With the promise of free land grants to any (including single women and female heads of households and freed slaves) who had not taken up arms against the government, settlers began to flock to Dakota Territory. Most of them owed their place there to the Republican Party and would vote accordingly.<sup>32</sup> Like so many other areas in the North, the Civil War brought ruin to the political fortunes of the Democratic Party in Dakota. As settlement patterns changed and Métis and Norwegians increased proportionately in the population and as new farmers entered the state, old-time Democratic support was further eroded.

Almost before the ink on the act creating Dakota Territory was dry, political arguments began in the region. The first disagreement arose over the location of the capitol. Yankton, in the southeast corner of the state was the choice of the first governor, Dr. William Jayne, President Lincoln's personal physician and friend. In May 1861, the government moved to the “community of less than three hundred souls living in sod huts or rude log cabins.”<sup>33</sup> Yet Democrats were still the dominant political party in the territory as hold-over supporters of the Land Company made up a majority in the area and were not content with their Republican governor. It was not long before they began to dominate local politics once again. Nonetheless, the structure of the federal-territorial relationship empowered the federal government to name nearly all government officials and with a Republican federal government it would not be long before the Republicans took control. As a result, all people in positions of authority in the territory at its inception “received appointment from some influential member of the Republican Party.” Patronage was a key element of all political interactions at the territorial level.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> W. Turrentine Jackson, “Dakota Politics During the Burbank Administration.” *North Dakota History* 12 (July 1945), 111.

<sup>33</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, 72-73.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-76.

The Civil War and the Homestead Act combined to make the Republicans the dominant party in Dakota Territory, as they still are in South Dakota today with only a few exceptions. Non-Republicans have held the office of Governor in South Dakota for only twenty-two of the state's 123 years. And, despite several prominent Democratic politicians who have succeeded there, the vast majority of the state's elected officials have been, and continue to be, Republicans. From the territorial period until the turn of the twentieth century, the dominant Republicans were known collectively in Dakota as either "The Yankton Ring" during the territorial period or "The Combine" in South Dakota. Both groups operated in the same manner. Their memberships, with a good deal of cross-over from one to the other, shifted on occasion in the thirty years from 1870 to 1900. They were essentially the dispensers of Republican patronage throughout the state. Through these patronage appointments and various legislative motions, the group succeeded in entrenching the Republican Party as the "only show in town" before statehood and acquired a near-total stranglehold in elected offices until the 1890s.<sup>35</sup>

Farmers, the most rapidly growing economic group in the burgeoning territory, were also decidedly political and were viewed as an important and numerically significant constituency from the beginning. In fact, eight of the first sixteen members of the Dakota Territory House of Representatives claimed to be farmers, though most were actually land speculators or agents.<sup>36</sup> Their exaggeration notwithstanding, these claims demonstrated two important aspects of Dakota Territory political culture: first, that it was politically necessary to claim affinity to the farmers' cause from the early territorial era; and second, that those with the political power in this era

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<sup>35</sup> R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 71.

<sup>36</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 80.

were disproportionately also those speculating in land. That so many sought to *appear*, like their constituents, as farmers, would become an enduring landmark on the Dakota political landscape.

For the first two years after gaining territorial status, the placement of the capitol was the most contentious issue facing the new territory's political establishment. Factions and their alignments altered frequently, but the Republicans of the town of Bon Homme essentially held the balance of power between those supporting Yankton (the aforementioned "Yankton Ring") as the capital and others. In the first ten years of its existence "party identification was either not well defined or was obfuscated by factional feuds."<sup>37</sup> The capitol issue was largely settled by circumstances rather than politics, when the Sioux Rebellion of 1862 spread from Minnesota to Dakota and nearly all settlements save Yankton were abandoned temporarily.<sup>38</sup>

Yankton, as one of the few untouched settlements after the Indian insurgency, grew quickly and became the center of political power in Dakota. The Yankton Ring came further to dominate territorial politics as the combination of patronage appointments and land speculation at a time of rapid growth supported profitable politically-sponsored business ventures. Yet its successes also created some electoral enmity in the form of a kind of mini-sectionalism. One of the first factions to emerge in the Territory was the bloc voting apparent in election returns with Sioux Falls often voting *en masse* against the candidates of the Yankton Ring as early as 1878.<sup>39</sup> This inter-town political tension would also continue throughout the Populist period.

Land claims increased after the Homestead Act was passed and agrarian settlement was facilitated by members of the legislative assembly who had a vested interest in land

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<sup>37</sup>Schell, *The History of South Dakota*, 103.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>39</sup>Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 173.

speculation.<sup>40</sup> Territorial immigration doubled in 1867.<sup>41</sup> Farmers began to flow into the territory as Indian raids had largely abated and a long dry cycle in the region finally ended. In 1868 a large number of Swedish settlers also arrived in the territory.<sup>42</sup> While most took up farming, some moved further south toward the population centers to start businesses. By 1880, there were over 135,000 people in the territory. Large Mennonite, Hutterite, and German migrations to the area in 1873 and several Scandinavian migrations in the late 1860s provided a great deal of the growth in the territory's farming population. By the early 1880s, agriculturalists made up the bulk of the Dakota population.<sup>43</sup> Whites made up the dominant group that migrated into the area after 1860 as their population increased five-fold from 2,576 in 1860 to 12,887 a decade later.<sup>44</sup> This change was enabled largely by the reduction in grasshopper plagues until 1874 as well as a wet weather cycle<sup>45</sup> that made farming more appealing than it had been in years past.

Another factor during this period was the significant impact of "boosterism" on migration. Land speculators, railroad companies and others sought to attract potential settlers to the region through positive newspaper accounts and advertisements that highlighted, and more often than not exaggerated the fertility of the land and the facilities available in the "new West". One example of such coverage appeared in a local South Dakota newspaper: "Just as Good Farm Land as Ever lay out of Doors [sic]" read the headline. "\$15.00 to \$25.00 per acre and Prices are

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<sup>40</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 85, mentioned that nearly "all assembly members had invested in and/or profited from land transactions."

<sup>41</sup>Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 113.

<sup>42</sup>Schell, *The History of South Dakota*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr., "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota." *South Dakota History* 24, (Winter 1967), 78.

<sup>44</sup> 1870 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1870a.zip> (accessed January 22, 2015.)

<sup>45</sup> Lamar suggested that the farmers that moved to Dakota Territory from 1878-86 were "misled" by these conditions and that their misunderstanding about the nature of their surroundings led to a great deal of the unrest of the agrarian class later. Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, 275.

going up, UP! GET BUSY RIGHT NOW!”<sup>46</sup> These ads appeared in newspapers around the United States and sought to bring still more settlers to the rapidly expanding region.

Whether completely honest or not, the advertisements brought results. Huge numbers of settlers arrived in Dakota Territory seeking fertile land and a new life. As a result, the social and political structure of the region was forever altered. Their political predilections will be discussed later, yet their impacts on the socio-political landscape were felt quickly. As land ownership became more common and farming communities increased in number, there was a shift in power that would not be fully realized until the early 1880s.

The other major impetus for “the boom” in Dakota was the discovery of vast gold deposits in the Black Hills. Once General George Armstrong Custer surveyed the area in 1874 and confirmed that rumors of gold were true, the area was flooded with miners, prospectors, and hangers-on seeking to make it rich. In breach of the agreement the government of the United States had made with local Indian tribes at Fort Laramie in 1868, ceding the area to them, gold miners flooded the area. By the next year there were over 15,000 European American settlers in the Black Hills, more than all the previous settlement in the area during the previous decade, as new settlers were allowed in due to a temporary improvement in relations with local Indians.<sup>47</sup>

Eventually several Indian groups began resisting this encroachment into their territories. What came to be known as the Great Sioux War of 1876 began that year as the American government battled Indians across the territories, after Indians began revolting against the violations of previous treaties by white settlers. Culminating in the famous attack on U.S. forces

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<sup>46</sup> Smithsonian Institution Archives, Sampson & Gintner Land & Loan Co. ad (1891), *Smithsonian American History*, South Dakota, Box 60.5.

<sup>47</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 150. Fascinatingly, Lamar discussed the work of H.H. Bancroft, who ascribed to the mining communities of Dakota Territory and others as incubators for democratic self-government, a very interesting pre-Turnerian (he wrote in the 1880s) view of this particular frontier. Discussed in Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, 150-57.

at Little Big Horn and the defeat and death of George Armstrong Custer, Indian raids on the Black Hills and other areas finally pushed the government to escalate the conflict. Sending more troops, they eventually forced the surrender of the Sioux and their capitulation to the near total annexation of their lands and the creation of reservations. The near-uninterrupted migration of whites into the territory began soon after.<sup>48</sup>

Farmers and miners made up the majority of the newcomers to the territory from 1880-1890; the end to the Great Sioux War made settlers more secure and during that period, the population of Dakota increased quickly from 135,000 to 500,000.<sup>49</sup> Boosterism, railroads, gold and land continued to bring a new constituency into Dakota politics.

The politics of the state were, of course, not the only changes prompted by development. In the decades of the 1880s and 1890s, Dakota Territory and then South Dakota struggled to adapt to the large number of farmers that had come to settle there. Though with some dips, settlement in what would become South Dakota continued at a rapid pace throughout this period.<sup>50</sup> “In southeastern Dakota, commercialized farming and eventual ‘bonanza farming’ techniques as well as mining in the Black Hills in the southwestern part of the territory”<sup>51</sup> also altered the physical landscape dramatically.

Significant economic changes came to Dakota Territory in the 1860s and 1870s, largely spurred by the expansion of the railroad into the area. The Yankton Ring figured large, as it was the group of Yankton businessmen that lobbied for and financed the Minnesota and Missouri Railroad system and created their own, the Missouri and Niobara Valley Railroad Company. The

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>50</sup> A return of grasshopper infestations from 1874-76 would prompt a gubernatorial conference in October, 1876 at Omaha and drought conditions returned later in 1886. Both of these natural phenomena would slow settlement, though only briefly.

<sup>51</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, xii-xiii.

Ring was, in many ways, further empowered by its railroad speculation. Its continued success depended on the ability to take advantage of political and financial opportunities. Without question, the Yankton Ring's (and more broadly, the Republicans') preference for railroad interests over many others was a major contributor to farmers' groups like the Grange seeking cooperative action in the 1870s and the Populists' search for the same in the 1890s.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the courses of action sought by the Yankton Ring in the case of railroads can be seen as a continuation of previous land-focused policies undertaken in the 1850s and, broadly, further demonstrates the not unusual or specifically-Dakotan focus, at the time, on business expansion through companies rather than economic expansion through farming.

As the transcontinental railroad and its various legs were completed in the early 1880s, railroad companies battled over control of key routes and, emboldened by federal land grants, sought to maximize their profits. Like much of the West at this time, Dakota Territory used many of the "tools of state" to facilitate its infrastructure development. As was common across the entire developing West in this period, railroads received enormous public support. On top of public land grants from the U.S. government which could be sold to finance the growth of the railroads, many states offered greater financial assistance in the form of loans, favorable legislation, and further land grants. In South Dakota, public financing became a major issue. South Dakota would also, in the face of much political turmoil, borrow a great deal of money from its citizenry to finance a stretch of rail from Sioux Falls to Yankton.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 83-84. Eventually an Iowa group secured the Union Pacific connection between Sioux City, Iowa and Chicago. Dakota languished without a direct connection, and much political and financial capital was expended in the territory. John Hicks demonstrated that railroads and their corporate allies were a major target of populist anger both in the 1890s. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 60-67.

<sup>53</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 134-140; Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Sacramento: University of California Press, 2005), 65. Interestingly, Orsi notes that in some states farmers were openly prevented from acquiring lands ear-marked for railroad development.



The economy began to boom as the generous government financing of railroad endeavors, the acceleration of settlement west after the Civil War, greater river traffic, the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, and the growth of military roads in the early 1860s to facilitate actions against Indians all contributed to rapid economic development in the territory. Dealing with these changes brought with it differences of opinion about how the Territory should manage its growth.

As a result of disagreements about the treatment of Indians and alleged corruption in the handling of treaty funds by mid-1865, a new faction began to form in response to a perceived Democratic takeover of the local government. The Liberal Republicans opposed President Andrew Johnson, and more importantly the formation of a Territorial government.<sup>54</sup> Governor Newton Edmunds and Delegate Walter Burleigh split on the question of Johnson's Indian policy, as Burleigh accused Edmunds of plotting to steal Indian Bureau funds and of being party to ineffective policies intended to achieve peace with local bands. The split of the Republican Party into two parties essentially gave the Democrats the balance of power for the first time since the creation of the territory.<sup>55</sup> Until the territorial Republican Party was once again united, the Democrats had either a majority or the controlling bloc in the state legislature. In 1866 and 1868, they supported Republican nominees for the Territory's Congressional Delegate in exchange for patronage appointments. Then in 1870 and 1872 they elected Democrats to the post. This type of strategic party action, the best example of which was the re-branding of a Democrat, John Blair Smith Todd (brother-in law of Mary Todd Lincoln) as a member of the People's Union Party, that actually won him the position of Territorial Delegate.

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<sup>54</sup>These two animosities can largely be viewed as simply anti-federal as the Governor, Secretary and other major territorial government officials were still named by the Federal Government.

<sup>55</sup>Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 112.

This was the first of many successful strategic moves by an unpopular party to re-brand itself in Dakota. This type of move would become a frequent occurrence in the fragmented political culture of Dakota Territory, one that only became more pronounced once the Populists were on the scene. The arguments over Indian policies enable insight into the political environment the Populists found themselves in some twenty years later. If non-Republicans were going to be victorious, it would be necessary for the dominant GOP to be split.

Recognizing this danger, the schism in the Republican Party's ranks was soon addressed.<sup>56</sup> Pressure was placed on both sides to attend a joint convention in the spring of 1870. The refusal of either side to compromise resulted in both sides again choosing different delegate candidates and a newspaper battle between the groups broke out.<sup>57</sup> The Liberal Republicans weathered the storm and it was not until 1873 that the GOP was briefly united once again.<sup>58</sup>

In 1872-73 a theme that frequently re-emerged in Dakota politics became evident: extra-legal use of government funds for corporate gain. The territorial government announced its intention to further finance the Dakota Southern Railroad Company with an additional \$200,000 in territorial bonds originally borrowed two years earlier. Governor John Burbank, it was soon revealed, held over \$121,000 in stock in the company for which he had paid nothing, and stood to gain handsomely from the transaction.<sup>59</sup> Farmers, and the Dakota populace at large, were enraged. Even members of the Yankton ring, in which Burbank was a major player, were irate. A territorial judge soon ruled the mortgage deal illegal.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jackson, "Dakota Politics During the Burbank Administration", 118.

<sup>57</sup>As in so many other places in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, newspapers figured very prominently in the political activities and disagreements of the times. Lamar noted that by 1880, there were over 350 newspapers in Dakota Territory. Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 246.

<sup>58</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 139-144.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson, "Dakota Politics During the Burbank Administration", 123.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 122-24.

Yet Burbank and other Republicans insisted on passing the bill nonetheless. Things came to a head in September 1873 when, in Burbank's absence on state business, Acting Governor Edwin McCook was shot and killed in the Yankton government house after an altercation with an anti-bond-deal activist.<sup>61</sup> Once again, the GOP split took the form of Liberal Republicans versus conservative Republicans and by 1877, they had found a new name – the People's Party (not to be confused with the later People's Party of America). Predominantly immigrants and farmers, the People's Party advocated essentially the same policies as the Republican Party of the period, but was not influenced by the Yankton Ring.<sup>62</sup>

Headed by Seth Bullock (a Canadian immigrant to the territory, it is worth noting)<sup>63</sup>, the People's Party was essentially the Liberal Republicans with a new name. They did very well in local legislative elections and capitalized on the weakness of the Republican brand and its association with the Yankton Ring and the railroad bond controversy in particular. Though short-lived, the People's Party in Dakota demonstrated the potential appeal of a populist economic message directed against entrenched wealth. It proved that a third party could indeed become a factor in the region's politics. It also demonstrated that balance of power became an important electoral calculus for many of the rather "sophisticated voters in Dakota Territory" – when more than two parties were present, at least – as party coalitions regularly shifted on religious, ethnic, and economic lines. And the fact that many People's Party supporters were farmers, demonstrates that farmers' faith in their government had likely already begun to erode.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Jackson, "Dakota Politics During the Burbank Administration", 125; Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 144.

<sup>62</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 164.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 173; Lamar also mentions that the farmers, miners, and settlers were surprisingly sophisticated political actors. Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, xiv.

Farming had been central to economics and politics, but farmers were largely left out of political considerations until the mid-1870s. Yet, with the Scandinavian, German, Hutterite and other farmers<sup>65</sup> arriving in the territory, the traditional political calculus soon had to change.

The first farmers to move into politics were the Grangers in 1872. Formed first in Vermillion, the Grangers signed up members and began pressuring the government to regulate grain elevators, railroad rates, and wheat grading. The large number of farmers present in the state swept the Grange movement to prominence in 1872, and by September 1874 there were fifty-six local lodges in Dakota Territory.<sup>66</sup> The membership of the Grange in Dakota has not been studied in isolation, yet it is worth noting that the majority of its membership appeared to have been predominantly native-born Americans, and German and Norwegian immigrants.<sup>67</sup>

Ethnicity was a major factor in the voting patterns of Dakota residents. As Lamar noted, the Democratic Party was supported largely by Irish Catholics, German and French settlers and “the poorer and less respectable.” The Republicans were supported largely by German-speaking Russian and Scandinavian settlers. There was also a strong vocational element to voting as farmers and other rural actors voted Republican and business owners, merchants, and miners generally supported Democrats.<sup>68</sup>

Of course economic factors also played a major role in the politics of farmers and their actions together. The economic crisis of 1873 and the bank failures that resulted led to protectionist impulses and a collapse in trade of goods, disproportionately affecting farmers. This was when farmers began to find their collective voice on economic issues.

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<sup>65</sup> Kenneth N. Owens, “Pattern and Structure in Western Territorial Politics” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 1:4 (October 1970), 82.

<sup>66</sup> Schell, *The History of South Dakota*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 174. Lamar relied on the 1878 election to support this information, as it was an election that took place at the height of the Dakota boom, his generalizations should more or less be relied upon, at least for the period concerned here.

The Grange movement in and of itself was not unique. Fighting against interest rates that, in some cases, were as high as 20 percent<sup>69</sup>, the Grange sought to provide farmers with at least some protection from the onerous debts and obligations to which they were subjected, particularly after the economic downturn of 1873. The Grange was, for some time, very successful in that it was able to reduce some prices through cooperative actions it was able to bring some prices down. However, as with much of the co-operative movement that sprang up amongst farmers in the 1870s, its attempts to unify farmers into a cohesive economic system largely failed. But the Grange in Dakota did serve another important purpose that it did not fulfill in some other parts of the country. In many ways, it demonstrated to Dakota farmers the potential of cooperative action. That potential paved the way for Henry Loucks's political success in 1884. And with his time in the IOGT and participation in reform movements in Ontario and Quebec, he was also ready for a new social movement.

With the People's Party and the Grange movement in the 1870s, farmers in Dakota worked together for cooperative, largely non-political, economic action in the pursuit of a better life within a largely corporate-focused territorial system. The participation of the farmers of Dakota Territory in these cooperative endeavors suggests that they were willing to listen to a reform-minded teetotaler like Henry Loucks. That Loucks's intellectual experiences north of the border so closely paralleled many of the reforms sought by the Grange and others makes his rapid rise in Dakota politics more understandable. With a diverse immigrant population, many of them farmers, and a dominant political elite focused on business and corporate enablement, the area was ripe for a new political message. Loucks, thanks in part to his experiences in Canada,

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<sup>69</sup> Herbert S. Schell, "The Grange and the Credit Problem in Dakota Territory," *Agricultural History* 10:2 (April 1936), 63.

was able to speak to the desires of many Dakota farmers. But that was most likely due to his confidence in reform and the farmers of Dakota Territory simply being prepared to hear it.

### Chapter III: Interest Group Disappointment

What Henry Loucks and his growing family saw when they first arrived in Dakota Territory was likely not dissimilar to what an individual approaching from the south would see today: prairie land, lush, green and flat as far as the eye can see. Only in west central South Dakota does the land become hilly and rocky as one nears the famed Black Hills. Flat prairie land is what Loucks had purchased in Deuel County in eastern Dakota Territory in 1884. Farming land was still quite plentiful in this period and the land boom and land boosting brought a near-constant flow of newcomers. The economy was growing rapidly in the Territory and a relatively wet period (a somewhat anomalous one, it would turn out) made farming appear a very promising enterprise.<sup>1</sup> That thwarted promise set the stage for the Dakota agrarian movement and for Loucks' rapid rise to power within it.

Many factors made it possible for Henry Langford Loucks to rise to a position of political leadership in Dakota Territory: cooperation amongst farmers, their increasing dissatisfaction with political elites, poor economic conditions in the late 1870s, and the fear of another depression. But others factors mattered as well. Loucks did not simply show up and walk into the office of “*de facto* Populist leader.”

Loucks's rise from newcomer to Farmers' Alliance leader was rapid; it took less than a year. Within three, he was the President of the Dakota Farmers' Alliance. Much of his rise can be credited to local economic and political factors. His ability to communicate a broad economic message was rooted in a sense of moralistic and religious necessity and also prompted action from his audiences. His message resonated with farmers and his ability to simplify complex

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<sup>1</sup> R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 9.

economic theories and express his prescriptions in moral terms brought religious individuals to the fore. These two groups, farmers and religiously motivated advocates of social change, were a large part of the Farmers' Alliance's rapid ascension to power and to Loucks's power in the organization.

Loucks's experiences in Canada and his previous work in the IOGT likely enabled him to approach many potential supporters from a point of relative common ground. Religious rhetoric focused on moral improvement, fairness and redemption inspired early cooperative actions both in South Dakota and in Loucks's native Ontario. From 1884 to 1889, Loucks and the Farmers' Alliance began a move to independent politics, though not in affiliation with any political party. This period was characterized by consolidation as the Alliance built its infrastructure through its local community outreach and education initiatives. Powered by an insurance program that harkened to the Grange cooperative programs of the 1870s, the Alliance built its membership by offering ordinary farmers the capacity to collectivize cost and individualize benefit, providing markets for crops, protection against acts of God, and the promise of protection against the "great injustice" of circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

There is some debate as to when exactly the first Farmers' Alliance was formed in Dakota Territory. Herbert Schell suggested that the first Alliance in Dakota Territory received its charter in 1881, when a group of Yankton-area farmers formed the first local Alliance. Howard Lamar, Robert McMath and others gave the credit to Loucks and the Deuel County Alliance, formed in 1884 as the first. Whether or not Loucks's Alliance chapter was first, there can be no doubt that it was the first to grow beyond being a purely local organization.

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<sup>2</sup> Loucks, letter to the editor, *The Ruralist*, January 12 1889.



When the tall, bearded and stone-faced Henry Loucks arrived in Deuel County he was already a politically ambitious person.<sup>3</sup> In less than a year, he involved himself in the politics of his new home. Almost immediately he decided to get a group of farmers together primarily for educational purposes, “to learn more about farming from his neighbors.”<sup>4</sup> The Deuel County Farmers’ Alliance developed from earlier cooperative causes in which his neighbors had been involved, and from such meetings at which farmers shared experiences, disappointments, and strategies to improve their lot. They focused on education and cooperative pricing and other business arrangements. Similar clubs soon sprang up all throughout Dakota Territory and by July 1885 there were 163 such clubs there.<sup>5</sup>

Loucks’s particular type of Alliance chapter was the first, but definitely not the last. Based on the organizational model of a brotherhood like the IOGT that Loucks had belonged to north of the border, a club society originally focused on education brought farmers together to discuss matters of common interest such as growing techniques, technical knowledge and, of course, concerns over pricing. A sense of community developed among farmers and evolved into a sense of shared grievance and even anger. Their common concerns with debt and prices and their struggles to change them began to prompt more and more discussion.<sup>6</sup>

During 1884-89, the Alliance continued to grow in both popularity and membership. Dissension within the organization also increased, as the group grappled with how most effectively to wield its increasing political clout. As early as 1885, the Alliance began to

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Samuel Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), 224; McMath, *American Populism: A Social History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993.), 100-101. It is worth noting that Lamar, Kenneth E Hendrickson Jr., and the American Biographical Index (938-39) all give Loucks the credit for being the first to start an Alliance chapter in Dakota. Regardless, it was the first in the Territory to advocate its particular brand of radical political change rather than being a strictly social organization.

<sup>4</sup>Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>6</sup>McMath, *American Populism: A Social History*, 100-104.

undertake actions designed to improve access to capital and market share for Dakota farmers. They sought collective bargaining in insurance rates, better freight pricing, and fairer grain quality standards. Initially quite successful, these measures soon attracted both attention and opposition. The Alliance's reactions to the efforts of those aligned against it soon forced it to make a choice: accept occasional minor successes in the face of a determined and organized opposition or take on its political enemies head on and engage more directly in politics to advance a broader set of reforms. These discussions propelled Loucks' rise to leadership in the organization.

For Loucks, the question of political engagement was not difficult. He reacted to opposition to the cooperative reforms the Alliance sought by becoming increasingly radical. He came to believe that the only way to defeat corporate influence in Dakota politics and to bring about essential change was to launch the Alliance full-bore into the political arena as an independent political party. Eventually, in a final break with the Republican Party, Loucks's more direct approach won out. The Alliance formed the new Independent Party in 1890. The Independents largely echoed Loucks's increasingly far-reaching policy prescriptions with focus on railroad legislation to bring down freight charges, exchanges to collectively market grain and greater oversight of railroad companies and their connections to elected officials. Yet he did not accomplish this without alienating some of the moderates in the Alliance.<sup>7</sup> More than anything else, the period from 1884 to 1890 marked the time during which Loucks helped to build the Alliance and move it into politics. This chapter will focus on the discussions and plans surrounding the construction of the Alliance as cooperative group and, eventually, its mobilization as a political party.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 70-76.

It is likely that a sense of shared grievances is also related to the farmers' increased sense of community. And farmers in the area had plenty to be upset about. First and foremost, the farmers who joined the Alliance were overwhelmingly those faced with high debt. In the study of one Dakota county Alliance movement, members of the Alliance in Marshall County were more likely to be Scandinavian or British immigrants than German or Russian and were far more likely to be foreign-born, than they were to be Americans – 51 percent of the members were foreign born; 31 percent were native born.<sup>8</sup> In the United States as a whole, foreign born citizens were much lower, just 16 percent of the population with 84 percent native.<sup>9</sup> In South Dakota, at least, the number of foreign-born versus native-born members of the Alliance flies in the face of Richard Hofstadter's contention that the Populists were predominantly nativists, partly motivated by a wish to exclude foreign-born immigrants from America's economic activities. In fact, this one group of South Dakotans had little in common other than the obvious: farming. Ninety-six percent of Alliance members in Marshall County were farmers.<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting, that in the 1890 census, those designated "Foreign White" or "Native white [with] foreign parents" equaled 109,988 compared to only 59,334 "Native white [with] native parents" in South Dakota.<sup>11</sup>

Of the forty-nine South Dakota counties represented in the Alliance between 1890 and 1894 (the period for which dues records are available), 734 Marshall County residents were members of the Alliance during at least one of those years. Only 111 came from Loucks's home,

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<sup>8</sup> John Dibbern. "Who Were the Populists? A Study of Grass-Roots Alliacemen in Dakota", *Agricultural History*, (56:4), Oct. 1982, 679. It is also worth noting that Howard Lamar suggested that there was in fact a large German contingent in the Alliance. Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 280.

<sup>9</sup> 1890 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing  
[http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a\\_v1-19.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v1-19.pdf) (accessed January 22 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Dibbern, "Who Were the Populists", 681.

<sup>11</sup> 1890 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing  
[http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a\\_v1-19.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v1-19.pdf) (accessed January 22 2015)

the less-populous Deuel County.<sup>12</sup> Anecdotally, it appears – based solely on last names<sup>13</sup> – that more Deuel County residents appeared to have been English or Irish or Canadian born as a percentage of the membership group than in Marshall. Though roughly the same size in population, Deuel and Marshall Counties did exhibit differences in foreign-born population according to the 1890 U.S. Census, with Deuel having about thirty percent more foreigners and greater numbers of virtually all immigrant groups. In Deuel County Norwegians represented nearly half of foreigners there with 48.2 percent of the foreign-born population. Canadians were just 7.1 percent with Germans at 20.1 percent.<sup>14</sup> Dibbern’s research showing that more members of the Alliance were either Scandinavian or British than German or Russian held true for Loucks’s area as well.

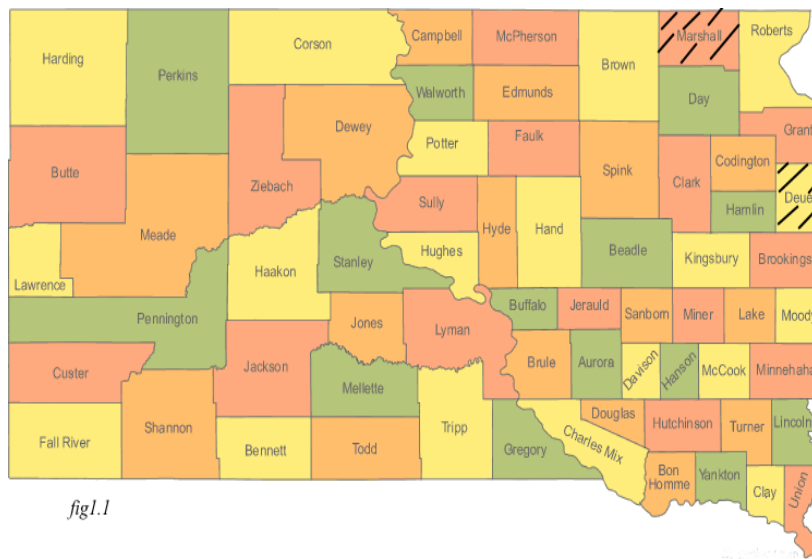


fig1.1

1 South Dakota County Map, c. 1889

<sup>12</sup> South Dakota Historical Association, Farmer’s Alliance Dues Records, <http://sddigitalarchives.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/> (accessed February 25 2013.)

<sup>13</sup> Only names, county and dues payment information are available. It is therefore impossible, with this data set, to determine whether members in Deuel were immigrants or native born using the data set above.

<sup>14</sup> Deuel had 1,568 foreign born residents to Marshall’s 1,202. Interesting enough, the only group of non-American born settlers in the area that was more represented in Marshall than Deuel were Canadians. 1890 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing [http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a\\_v1-16.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v1-16.pdf) (accessed January 22 2015.)

As farmers, members shared a common antipathy to both railroads and monopolies. Their earliest political positions favored the taxation of bank mortgages and the regulation of monopolies.<sup>15</sup> They targeted the grain elevators and railway companies that many felt were colluding to prevent them from receiving the best possible prices for their crops. Almost immediately, unlike in many other areas, the Farmers' Alliances of Dakota began direct political advocacy as it offered "farmer's blocs" tickets to voters on Election Day in 1884, recommending to voters which of the major parties' candidates would best represent farmers' interests.<sup>16</sup> In the 1884 election, just months after the Deuel County Alliance was formed, the Alliance's presence was felt and a significant "farmer's bloc" was elected to the Dakota Legislature. Though not yet organized as a separate political party, the Alliance utilized Dakota's pre-existing factional interest-group methods to elect those that it felt would best represent its unique interests.

Dakota Territory, as earlier discussed, was experiencing a great boom both economically and demographically in the 1880s. As the pain of the depression of the late seventies faded, farming and mining made Dakota Territory attractive for those seeking a better life. Henry Loucks was merely one of many men who, along with their families, brought both capital and a desire to improve their lot to the burgeoning territory. Yet their desire alone was not enough, and both the climate and the marketplace soon became less hospitable to the farmer.

Many, like Loucks, had achieved some previous financial success. Others just sought to feed their families principally through their farming. They all faced challenges that compelled them to act. Those in the most precarious positions because of debt likely were more willing to volunteer and to become active members of their local farming clubs. Indeed, John Dibbern

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<sup>15</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr., "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota." *South Dakota History*, 24, (Winter 1967), 78

<sup>16</sup> Schell, *the History of South Dakota*, 225.

found that 87 percent of members of the Marshall County Alliance had outstanding debts in 1890.<sup>17</sup> In the words of Herbert Schell, “the absence of a free market for their produce together with a declining income made the farmers receptive to organization.”<sup>18</sup> It was not just their debts that made them willing to take action, it was the difficulty they had servicing them.

The group met with its first political success in late 1885. Through a variety of means like the “farmer’s bloc’s” success in electing a more amenable legislature, they were able to pressure the territorial government to create a Railroad Commission to regulate freight pricing and elevator practices.<sup>19</sup>

Designed to deal with one of the major sources of its constituents’ discontent, the Railroad Commission was to cure the “notorious discrimination” with which railroad companies favored large shippers over small producers through proportionally lower rates and other preferential treatments.<sup>20</sup> Yet the Commission soon proved to be a hollow reform. Created by an act of the Territorial Legislature, its members were appointed by Arthur Mellette, the Republican Territorial Governor, who also served as its head. With the power to control the appointments and mandate of the commission, Mellette stacked the Commission with members friendly to some of the very interests farmers sought to control with it. And since Mellette’s interests in the Combine were also closely aligned with the pro-business groups that made up its base, Mellette appointed “three railroad men to the board” and essentially nullified the new body’s capacity to rule against any measure favored by the railroads and their investors.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as *The Ruralist* would claim in 1889, Mellette “trains with a crowd of politicians, who if elected to office. . .

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<sup>17</sup> Dibbern “Who Were the Populists?”, 685.

<sup>18</sup> Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 224.

<sup>19</sup> For more on railroads in Dakota in this period see R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 19-20; Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 140-42; 232-33.

<sup>20</sup> John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of The Farmers’ Alliance and The People’s Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1931), 67.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 58.

would not only neglect to protect our interests but would sacrifice them at every opportunity.”<sup>22</sup> Despite Mellette’s political desire to appear on the side of farmers, his actions made Loucks and the Alliance doubt his true intentions.

The need for Mellette to wade in and change the makeup of a government committee makes clear the seriousness with which the politicians of the territory began to take the farmers. For Loucks and the Alliance, this was just another instance of a dysfunctional political system that favored business interests while paying lip service to the cause of farmers. Continuing in the tradition of the Yankton capital debate and the acrimony of the mid-1870s, Alliance members felt disenchanting and ignored by a system more intent on perpetuating itself than in correcting policies they considered unfair.

Originally, the Alliances in Dakota sought the broad education of farmers, greater access to railroads and the regulation of the transport of their goods to market. They emphasized cooperative methods and they eschewed partisanship. They undertook book exchanges, the writing of letters to legislators, and cooperative sales endeavors. Later, attacks on the cooperative marketing and crop sales forced the Alliance into more direct political action.

The years 1885-1888 marked a period of initial growth and consolidation of the Alliance movement in Dakota Territory. With Loucks as its leader, the movement doubled in size between 1884 and 1885.<sup>23</sup> By late 1885, the Dakota Territory Farmers’ Alliance had more than 160 local sub-alliances<sup>24</sup> modeled on the club originally created in 1884. Effectively, all were equal parts of a whole with no real central authority. The need to organize these geographically-diverse groups necessitated the first territory-wide executive committee meeting of the Alliance. Loucks

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<sup>22</sup> *The Ruralist*, August 17 1889.

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Schell. *The History of South Dakota*, 225

<sup>24</sup> R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 19

was officially elected President of the Territorial Alliance in January of 1886, a post that for all intents and purposes he had already held for nearly two years. From then on, he would be the central figure of the movement across Dakota.<sup>25</sup>

President Loucks saw economic issues as the primary problems confronting the Alliance. Also, he continued to view cooperation as the primary means by which farmers could improve their lives in the immediate term. Beginning in 1885, he encouraged members to purchase both books and farm equipment with their pooled resources and share these amongst themselves.<sup>26</sup> The project was intended to reduce the onus placed on struggling farmers by the new and highly costly industrial farming reality. At the same time the book exchange would educate farmers about their plight at the hands of moneyed interests. The project was successful and soon expanded to the entire territory. Loucks and other Alliance officers saw the benefit in simultaneously achieving fiscal improvements for farmers while politicizing them by exposing them to books and other reform platforms detailing plans for potential economic and political changes. Frequently, Loucks used *The Ruralist*, the unofficial Alliance newspaper, to encourage farmers to read radical economic literature as well as books critical of politicians both local and national.<sup>27</sup> Loucks frequently featured discussions and advertisements for these books in *The Ruralist*. Among the books discussed were Ignatius Donnelly's dystopic novel *Caesar's Column* as well as Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, which highlighted the need for tax reform in the form of a single tax designed to encourage communal land ownership. These ads and articles appeared in *The Ruralist* often for years.

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<sup>25</sup> When the territory achieved statehood in 1889, North Dakota's Alliance followed the leadership of Walter Muir. They met with a very different end than their allies in South Dakota under Loucks.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, R. Alton, *Principle Over Party*. 24-25; Thomas Guarnieri., "H.L. Loucks and the Dakota Ruralist: Voices of Reform." (M.A. Thesis, South Dakota State University, 1981), 55-58.

<sup>27</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 14, 1889; September 5, 1891; October 15 1891.



It was, essentially, a two-pronged assault, designed to enable greater political education for the future and economic amelioration more immediately. Whether this politicization was undertaken with the intention of becoming partisan is unknown, but most likely Loucks and other Alliance members saw increased political education as a means to further persuade more members to support their initiatives.

Loucks had already experienced some success in Ontario reversing policies he thought immoral or wrong. As the economy deteriorated in 1887-88, he decided to expand cooperative actions. Though successful in the first four years of Alliance activity, it was still a small time, local organization. In an effort to expand, the Alliance sought greater capital to launch its biggest challenge yet to corporate power over farming. In January of 1888 the Alliance of Dakota Territory opened a joint stock cooperative agency, issuing stock certificates to farmers and other investors in order to expand their operations. Cooperatives were a major force in rural communities. From sewing bees to cooperatively marketed grain and butter, to the collective purchase of threshing machines and sewing machines, they ameliorated the impacts of difficult rural economies.<sup>28</sup> Cooperative activities provided excellent social opportunities for groups of people far from major population centers.<sup>29</sup> And as they got together to sew or thresh, they discussed common grievances and potential solutions, thus generating what Goodwyn called a “mass movement of protest.”<sup>30</sup>

But protest alone was not all that the Alliance addressed. It began to construct alternative financial options for its membership. In 1886, Alonzo Wardall assumed the role of Alliance

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.), 103-133.

<sup>29</sup> For more on how social groups influenced politics in the Populist movement, see Allan Bogue, “Social Theory and The Pioneer”, *Agricultural History* 34:1 (January 1960), 21-34.

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn. *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.), 194.

business manager and became increasingly involved in the group's activities as the business actions of the Alliance became more and more a public undertaking. Wardall was Henry Loucks's neighbor. Living near Loucks in Grant County, the men were close ideologically as well as geographically. Wardall was born in Wisconsin and grew up in Iowa. After fighting with the Iowa Volunteers in the Civil War, Wardall joined the Grange in the 1870s and attended seminary. He was a shrewd salesman of both Alliance insurance stock certificates and political ideals. Loucks frequently dispatched Wardall to advocate for Alliance economic policies across the country.<sup>31</sup>

Later that year, Loucks and Wardall, along with several investors, founded the Scandinavian Elevator Company, a cooperative institution dedicated to removing railroad companies and grain inspectors from the marketing and transportation of farmers' grain. This was an innovative exercise. "Loucks [undertook] a seldom-attempted experiment in terminal grain marketing" and also undertook a clever marketing technique by naming the elevator company after an influential group of farmers in the Dakota community.<sup>32</sup> In 1888 through 1889, using the Alliance's *Dakota Ruralist* and other local papers, Loucks and Wardall built the Elevator Company into quite the formidable enterprise.<sup>33</sup>

*The Ruralist* was founded in 1886. Originally edited by J.C McManima it acted as the official organ of the Farmers' Alliance from its inception.<sup>34</sup> Loucks did not assume the duties of editor until 1889, but was an active contributor well before that. His articles in defense of

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<sup>31</sup> W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Farmer's Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (St. Louis: C.B Woodward, 1891.), 302

<sup>32</sup> Guarnieri, "H.L. Loucks and the Dakota Ruralist", 56.

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 36-41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

cooperatives in 1888 and 1889 influenced the Alliance and encouraged its members to take advantage of the enterprises he and Wardall had built up and towards direct political action.<sup>35</sup>

Loucks remained a largely extra-political actor until late 1888. And, until the next year, despite its brief foray into electoral politics in 1884, so did the Alliance. In his address to the Alliance at their annual convention in Huron on December 13, 1887, Loucks argued for laws against usury, for railroad price controls, and other minor reforms at the territorial level, but he was clear about his desire to work within the existing party structure not outside of it. “The remedy is not political, though some legislation is required,” he said.<sup>36</sup> Concluding with a statement that access to cheap credit must be extended and that railroads and grain elevator companies would not come to realize the need for reform until they were forced to, Loucks challenged his audience to seek cooperative actions like those he had already initiated, as well as to lobby legislators.<sup>37</sup> The focus of the Alliance must be “dollars and cents,” he argued.<sup>38</sup> Economic and financial matters were his priority and would remain so for the next thirty years.

The Elevator Company’s work was not limited to Dakota Territory. As would be his trademark, upon achieving the success of a program in Dakota, Loucks immediately moved to expand it. He even moved his family to Minneapolis briefly in 1889 to work full-time, with Wardall and the help of British investors, to build the elevator company into the primary grain marketer for South Dakota and Minnesota grain growers. This move was intended to keep railroad companies and their local grain elevators out of the economic lives of hard grain farmers by providing price certainty for farmers in their negotiations with railroads.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>36</sup>Address of President Loucks to Dakota Alliance 1887. Henry L. Loucks Letters, South Dakota State University, Brookings, S.D.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 10-13.

Railroad companies, grain elevators and their allies in the Republican Party, most of whom were allied with “the Combine,” were not about to go quietly, however. In 1888 they began a determined media and political crusade against the Scandinavian Elevator Company, primarily through a newspaper battle between their *Great Falls Leader* and the Alliance’s *Ruralist*.<sup>40</sup>

By 1889, with the Scandinavian Elevator Company and other cooperative Alliance ventures gaining steam under Wardall’s stewardship, the Alliance was forced to enter political action to defend its cooperatives against the onslaught of a negative press. Loucks and *The Ruralist* began to argue forcefully that the time had come for action. In 1888, Loucks wrote a letter arguing for the complete “public ownership and operation of public utilities and necessities.” No doubt conscious of the organization’s failure to achieve railroad regulation in 1884 and given increasing attacks on the Elevator Company, Loucks began to escalate his rhetoric. He argued in a *Ruralist* piece that the Republican administration in the territory was “not truly progressive” and that the Alliance would allow “no concession [and] no compromise” in its efforts to reform Dakota’s economy.<sup>41</sup> Loucks also began to call for farmers to do more than merely cooperate economically. Loucks was gradually beginning to advocate determined political effort.

By September 1889, Loucks’ calls for political engagement became more focused. Rather than arguing for a political movement through the militant, though vague, rhetorical tools of refusing concession and suggesting broad plans for improvement, he made a new case. On September 7, 1889, *The Ruralist* blazoned the following headline: “Why The Republican Party is the Farmers’ Party.” Loucks wrote the dissent. In a response to those who thought it wrong to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

<sup>41</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 26 1888; *Dakota Ruralist*, October 24 1888.

advocate specific political positions, he wrote: “You claim that it is wrong for me to advocate farmers for certain political positions. Out of eleven places on the state ticket I claim only three for the farmers. What is your position?”<sup>42</sup> With this rhetorical question, Loucks voiced his own dissatisfaction and asked farmers if they were happy with their representation through mainstream political parties. And if not, he pushed, what were they really planning to do about it?

For the remainder of the decade Loucks remained convinced that cooperative action was the only way to defeat the moneyed interests and achieve the Alliance’s causes of railroad reform, cooperative enterprise, and increased access to capital. From this core belief he generated increasingly radical proposals for change and further pulled the Alliance toward outright political stances in response to attacks against it.

The Alliance moved toward acting as a political interest group with the adoption of the Alliance constitution in October 1888, which argued for broad government action and financial reforms. Demanding more government ownership of the means of transportation, statehood for Dakota Territory, railroad regulation and soft-money (that is, the coinage of silver or the use of fiat money), the Alliance began to advocate political reforms far beyond the mere sharing of resources. In mid-1889, *The Ruralist* began to feature more policy prescriptions than just pressure on politicians to ameliorate farmers’ concerns. “An open market is one of the pressing needs of Dakota farmers,” it said on August 17.<sup>43</sup> On the issue of railroads, it went even further than regulations at times: “How are we to resolve the problems [with the railroads]?” Loucks asked on the front page of *The Ruralist*, “By the government owning the railroad, telegraph and

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<sup>42</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 7 1889.

<sup>43</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 17 1889.

other common carriers, or direct control of them by congress.”<sup>44</sup> Patronage, particularly with regard to the railroads, should be “managed under the supervision of a board of practical and operative farmers.”<sup>45</sup> In his letter to the editor of August 24, 1889, Loucks encouraged the paper’s readers to “read over our platform of principles, and point out if they can, a single plank that will injure them.”<sup>46</sup>

The Alliance Constitution also called for the adoption of George Macune’s subtreasury plan.<sup>47</sup> Macune, a populist leader in Illinois and popular national figure argued that a series of mini-treasuries would enable the farmers to garner more stability financially. Dedicated to the local storage of grain and furnishing capital to farmers through a system of cash-for-crop loans, the plan, though not Loucks’s preferred approach, was the logical extension of Loucks’s own ideas regarding grain elevators and the sharing of wealth through the Scandinavian Elevator Company. For the rest of his life, the subtreasury plan, currency reform, and soft money formed the core of Loucks’s intellectual pursuits.

As Loucks’s pursuits gained steam, a new member of the Dakota political elite joined the Combine in 1887: R.F. Pettigrew of Sioux Falls. In the 1870s and 80s, Pettigrew was an ardent supporter of statehood for Dakota and helped to re-create the success of the Combine (of which he’d been a junior member before 1889) in the new state of South Dakota. And build it he did, with himself at its center. Back in the days of the Yankton Ring, led by Governor Ordway, Pettigrew made a name for himself facing off against the Governor over the question of where the territorial capital should be. Running for the territorial legislature and then for Congressional

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<sup>44</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, June 15 1889.

<sup>45</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 17 1889.

<sup>46</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 24 1889.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the subtreasury plan see: Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 190-94; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 90-91; Soloutos, *Farmers’ Movements in the South: 1865-1933*, 120-22.

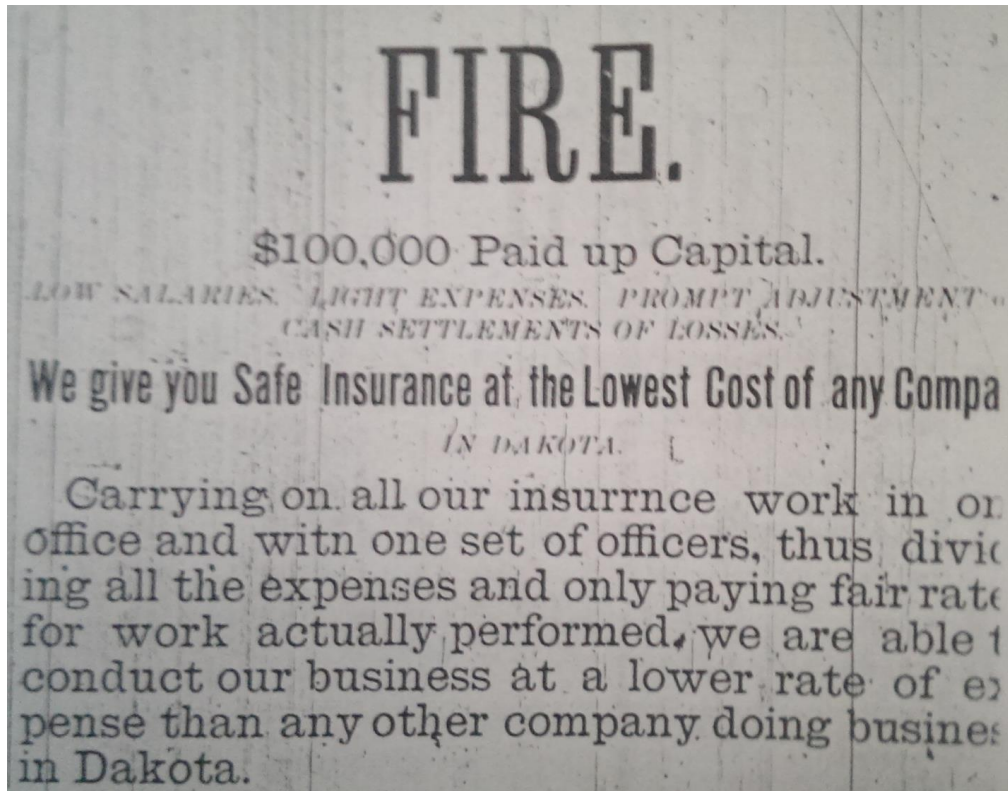
Delegate from Dakota Territory in 1881-83. Thereafter Pettigrew focused on increasing his influence within the South Dakota Republican Party.<sup>48</sup>

Since the Scandinavian Elevator Company and the Alliance insurance companies had originally garnered support in 1886, Republican members of the Combine, and particularly Pettigrew, saw these organizations as threatening to the corporate railroad and banking interests that the Combine represented. Pettigrew's newspaper, *The Sioux Falls Press*, began attacks against both the cooperative companies and against Loucks personally. Back and forth attacks between *The Press* and *The Ruralist* flared periodically for three years. Beginning in the January 22, 1889 issue of *The Ruralist*, with a large ad focused on battling the criticism that had been building in the Republican press, the paper began running both advertisements and letters to the editor singing the praises of the insurance plans.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, 197-99; Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 45-48.

<sup>49</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 22 1889.



2 Ad for the Alliance Fire Insurance program. *The Ruralist*, January 22 1889

But finally, in 1890, these attacks grew from occasional attacks on the veracity and efficiency of these Alliance cooperatives to increasingly personal attacks on Loucks and Wardall. Finally, via a rival newspaper, Loucks's enemies accused him of corruption and profiting disproportionately from his management of the Elevator Company and its investments. Loucks replied by, brilliantly, offering up all his stocks "for just what it cost me in hard cash", and continued to offer them "all the dividends and profits [I've] received to date." Indeed, he called the bluff by saying that "if your statement and 'figures' are correct, this is very soft snap for you."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, April 27, 1889.



Loucks went further in the pages of *The Ruralist*, attacking Pettigrew and the GOP. In July 1889 he declared that the press arguments had escalated to “war” and that the unscrupulous Republican press’s unfair attacks “pushed [the Alliance] into politics.”<sup>51</sup>

In 1889, Loucks became the official editor of *The Ruralist* and continued to be the primary mouthpiece of Dakota’s radical farmers. He returned to Dakota in late 1889, the year that South Dakota became a state. He returned to face a crisis, as investors fled the Scandinavian Elevator Company after a funding scandal beset its British investors who had, along with local farmers, been its key financiers. New investors could not be found, likely due in part to the opposition of local banks, political bosses and railroad officials. By 1891, the Elevator Company was bankrupt.<sup>52</sup>

Republican newspapers continued to attack the company and Loucks himself, arguing that the reason for the company’s failure was Loucks’s own mismanagement. Loucks became increasingly angry. More than likely, since Loucks had lost much of his own money in the Elevator Company’s bankruptcy<sup>53</sup>, his personal anger contributed strongly to his desire to take his conflict with the Republicans to the next level. Loucks defended himself with a full-page article in October 1891. In an article titled “Another Pettigrew Trick”, Loucks dismissed the Republican powerbroker and his newspaper attacks as “dastardly... and concocted to steal an election.” He defended the benevolent stewardship of Wardall and outlined the costs of everything from printing, rent and the employment of a clerk. “They may ruin me financially,” he wrote, “but they can never silence me as long as I have the strength to move a pen or use my tongue.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, July 6, 1889.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 34-35.

<sup>53</sup> Guarnieri, “H.L. Loucks and the Dakota Ruralist”, 58.

<sup>54</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, October 29 1891; November 12 1891.

As historian Robert McMath observed, “Loucks was radicalized by his struggle with the railroads and grain elevator companies.”<sup>55</sup> A more radical political analysis began to take a shape in Loucks’s mind and was expressed more and more often in his writings, particularly as he battled Pettigrew in the press. A fully political Farmers’ Alliance, aligned with no interest but its own reform agenda, became his goal.

Before the bankruptcy, though, as the attacks on him in the Republican press mounted, Loucks launched himself into his work full-bore. Even before the bankruptcy, he had begun to feel the push to politics in his battles with the moneyed interests. Under the leadership of Wardall and Loucks the Alliance increased its commitment to cooperative endeavors by expanding its already successful Farmers Insurance Program that offered hail and fire insurance to include life insurance, offering these services at affordable prices. Whether a political move designed to entrench Loucks and Wardall as the organization’s leaders or just an attempt to expand the organization’s efforts to help farmers, the insurance program’s successes secured the popularity of the Alliance and of Loucks and Wardall. But it also increased the ferocity with which its opponents fought back. Wardall immediately began to travel out of state to Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska, extolling the virtues of cooperative insurance – and selling shares in the insurance company – all while seeking support for the subtreasury plan and other Alliance initiatives.<sup>56</sup>

Wardall’s travels were but one instance of growing inter-state cooperation in the Populist movement. By the end of the 1880s populist farmers and their leaders were learning from the actions and methods of their “brethren”<sup>57</sup> in other states. The formation of the Reform Press in

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<sup>55</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Lee, *Principle over Party*, 37-38.

<sup>57</sup> Despite the inclusion of women in many of the Alliances, including South Dakota’s, the term brother was nearly always that used in Alliance speeches and writing.

the late 1880s did much to encourage this cooperation. The new organization facilitated sharing political and economic thought through sophisticated newspaper cooperation and through sharing stories profiling reformers and reforms. The developing rail system also facilitated meetings between populist leaders. Attempts to organize Alliance endeavors like the Scandinavian Elevator Company and Dakota Alliance insurance proposals across state lines also became increasingly common. Farmers with common grievances, regardless of region, began to arrive at the same conclusion that Loucks expressed at Huron in 1887: they could succeed only through cooperation. Local Alliances saw the need for cooperation within their own states, and, like Wardall and Loucks, populist leaders throughout the United States moved beyond their own state boundaries to cooperate across state lines.

This cooperation amongst reform movements served to radicalize Loucks and the Dakota Alliance still further, pushing them towards greater participation in politics. In 1889-1890, with Loucks as editor, *The Dakota Ruralist*, addressed a wide array of causes. Loucks's experience as a temperance advocate in Canada certainly contributed to the *Ruralist*'s periodic publication throughout 1889 supportive of prohibition. In August 1889, as Republicans became more strident in their rhetorical attempts to court moderate farmers, Loucks's *Ruralist* wrote about the need "to organize for self-defence" in cooperation with the Minnesota Territorial Alliance.<sup>58</sup> In 1890, the *Ruralist* published a poem dedicated to women's rights advocate and suffragist Susan B. Anthony.<sup>59</sup> *The Ruralist* also strongly supported the Knights of Labor and the Women's

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<sup>58</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 24 1889.

<sup>59</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, April 4 1890.

Christian Temperance Union (WCTU),<sup>60</sup> and offered to share its meeting halls with local women's temperance advocates.<sup>61</sup>

Loucks's activities and correspondence outside the state reflected the national pattern. In general, 1889-90 was devoted to "consolidation before action" nationally as well as at the state-level as Alliances grew in size, cooperated with one another and became increasingly radicalized.

By 1889, Loucks had fully embraced direct political action. That year, the Alliance was restructured and its foray into politics was well underway. Prompted by North and South Dakota's achievement of statehood in 1889 and several successes in encouraging Republicans, and to a lesser extent, Democrats to incorporate some Alliance policies, he was emboldened. The Republicans acceptance of the railroad commission (however weak) as well as several financial inducements designed to reduce farmers' cost, albeit modestly, to bring product to market<sup>62</sup>, provided Loucks the success he felt he needed to take the Alliance still further.

He expressed his desire to mobilize farmers to unseat Republican governor Arthur Mellette in 1889 and Mellette's Republicans found reluctant allies amongst many farmers. With the help of the Combine and its careful effort to placate both *The Ruralist* and South Dakota farmers through the adoption of several minor Alliance measures in the Republican platform like support for a railroad commission, Mellette kept the farmers on the GOP's side.<sup>63</sup> In North

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, August 24 1889; June 15 1889.

<sup>61</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, November 24 1888; *The Ruralist* also featured a piece later on its support for the WCTU's 1892 declarations signed by Mrs. H.L. Loucks, *Dakota Ruralist*, April 7 1892.

<sup>62</sup> Herbert Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 225.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Dakota, the Alliance was more successful in 1889, electing a Republican Alliance member, John Miller, as governor.<sup>64</sup>

The shrewdness with which the Combine, and the Republican leadership of the new state of South Dakota dealt with the Farmers' Alliance was quite remarkable. Adopting the rhetoric of the farmers without endorsing the Alliance's more radical policies, Mellette and the Combine promised railroad reforms and towed the Alliance line that the 1885 Sioux City Constitution (a document from a previous attempt at statehood) promised the best future for the new state and a state's rights perspective. They sometimes supported pro-farmer rhetoric in railroads, farm tool pricing, and free trade. Essentially, they talked the Alliance talk while actually ignoring any substantial reforms.<sup>65</sup>

*The Ruralist* opposed the Republican line and Mellette in his campaign for governor in 1889.<sup>66</sup> As it would again later, the Combine out-flanked Loucks. Mellette was easily elected to a one-year term as the first governor of South Dakota. Alliance members had not been united in their opposition to Mellette at the ballot box. In 1890, the legislature approved and ratified the new state constitution. But the post-election political machinations and the actions of the new Republican-dominated legislature became a cautionary tale, as the effects of the election on farmers became manifest and farmers drifted further from the Republicans in future elections.

Two weeks after Governor Mellette was elected, the state legislature met to elect United States Senators. The ensuing legislative discussion of potential candidates finally pushed Loucks and the Alliance to seek action outside the Republican Party as GOP legislators demonstrated

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<sup>64</sup> From this point, 1889, the fates of North and South Dakota's Farmers' Alliances diverged radically. D. Jerome Tweton, "Considering Why Populism Succeeded in South Dakota and Failed in North Dakota", *South Dakota History*, 22:4 (Winter 1992), 330-334.

<sup>65</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 68.

<sup>66</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, February 26 1889; August 17 1889; September 1 1889.

that their interests and those of the Farmers' Alliance were entirely different, offering Gideon Moody and Pettigrew to represent the new state for the GOP. Those seeking the offices had also included two Alliance nominees: Alonzo Wardall, the erstwhile hard-working salesman of Alliance cooperative ventures and Alonzo Edgerton, a frequent writer for the *Ruralist*. Allegations were later put forth by Loucks against the Combine and Edgerton revolving around an apparent *quid pro quo*. Loucks' allegations, later corroborated by research conducted by Dakota political historian Kenneth Hendrickson,<sup>67</sup> charged that Mellette promised Edgerton a federal judgeship if Edgerton got out of the race after the first ballot and allowed Pettigrew to cruise to victory.<sup>68</sup> The Combine, it appears, sought to split the Alliance vote between Wardall and Edgerton early on in order to deny them either available seat. Pettigrew and fellow Republican Gideon Moody (another member of the Combine) swept up the leftovers and won the two seats.<sup>69</sup> The apparent treachery of Edgerton and his manipulation by the Combine, combined with their distrust of Mellette finally prompted Loucks and other Alliance members to conclude that their interests just could not be served within the existing, Republican-dominated party system of South Dakota.

Loucks already opposed Moody before the Senate controversy. He had also, clearly, already begun flirting with the concept of greater political action and perhaps even outright partisanship. He wrote in February 1889 (eight months before the senatorial elections) that it might be necessary for the Alliance to "go outside of party lines."<sup>70</sup> After witnessing the failures of the railroad commission and observing the clever Republican politicking in the lead-up to the

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<sup>67</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr., "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota." *South Dakota History*, 24 (Winter 1967), 36.

<sup>68</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 59-60; Guarnieri, "Loucks and the Voices of Reform.", 71.

<sup>69</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 60.

<sup>70</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, February 26 1889.

election of Governor Mellette and the relative passivity of farmers in the face of the Republicans appeals to moderation, Loucks concluded that “politics can’t wait” and that farmers had to become more involved in the politics of their state. For Loucks, the Senate “betrayal” was the last straw.<sup>71</sup>

Loucks began to argue for an independent political party after the Senate debacle, at first privately, but he soon went public. On December 3, 1889, an increasingly contentious debate inside the Alliance hit the pages of *The Ruralist*. Although the front page announced that Henry Loucks had been re-elected President of the Alliance, the anonymous author of the piece wrote that “although we don’t agree [with his position] for a third party, he is the ablest.”<sup>72</sup> Foreshadowing the battle between Loucks and some of the more moderate and cautious Dakota Alliance members who were not in favour a third party, this was the first of many times that Loucks would provoke disagreement with his policies and his belief in partisanship.

The period from 1884 to 1890 marked the transition of Loucks and the Dakota Farmers’ Alliance from social club to political interest group and finally, toward organized political action. Through its collectivization of cost, its membership grew through shared risk and individualized reward. Originally just a place to exchange ideas and books about farming and its difficulties (both literal and political), the Alliance moved toward political advocacy through its support for cooperative financial endeavors and in response to the virulent attacks against those efforts. Through its relationships with other reform movements in Dakota and beyond, the Alliance also began to build its own political infrastructure, not yet completely mobilized for independent partisan purposes.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., August 24 1889.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., December 3 1889.

Finally, through the Alliance's political dealings with the established parties, many of its members came, gradually, to the realization that it could not fulfill its promises without altering its relationship to the Dakota political machine. Its support for a railroad commission was perhaps its only victory—and it was a victory in name only as the Commission was actually structured to serve the interests of the railroads. Its attempts to elect an Alliance man to the U.S. Senate were thwarted by the Republican political machine. And its financial efforts were met with false allegations of embezzlement and scorn in the press. These battles pushed the Alliance to re-examine its political activities. For Henry Langford Loucks, that re-examination led to only one possible conclusion: a new and independent political party.



## Chapter IV: Partisan Escalation

Henry Loucks, angry and dejected after the Alliance's defeat in the U.S. Senate race, became convinced that real reforms could occur only through doing partisan political battle against both Republicans and Democrats. "Prepare for war", he exhorted his readers, "[and] watch out for the press."<sup>1</sup> After all, the Farmer's Alliance had tried to act as an interest group and all it had gotten was a vicious Republican press and a single empty victory in the toothless 1886 Railroad Commission.

But as late as 1889, the Alliance still relied on the Republican Party: "the comparative strength of the two great parties is such that there is no doubt of the results: hence the Alliance must expect to obtain legislative relief within the republican [sic] party."<sup>2</sup> But as expectations met with increasing disappointment, Loucks and the Alliance would soon waiver from this calculation, and after several failures to secure desired policy relief, Loucks decided to act. Beginning in 1890, he set about convincing the members of the Farmer's Alliance that they needed to move into partisan politics.

Loucks began a three-pronged strategy to reach his goal of a new political party by mid-year. The farmers' political goals, he argued, could be won through a combination of education, cooperation with like-minded reform groups, and leveraging their existing economic programs. By playing from their already-popular policies and cooperative financial projects, and through increased cooperation with other reform groups, the Alliance gradually began to participate in political competition at the partisan level. Engaging in its continuing newspaper war with *The*

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<sup>1</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, April 18 1891.

<sup>2</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 7 1889.

*Sioux Falls Press* and other anti-Alliance paper, Henry Loucks and the Farmers' Alliance were building a political party in all but name.

Loucks's plan brought with it a host of new pressures, and new policy ideas. Eventually, it resulted in policy additions that were more and more disconnected from the lives of South Dakota voters. For Loucks, the national movement's pull toward partisanship became a major force and increased his zeal for that project in South Dakota. His actions there became more and more a reflection of his role as national Alliance president rather than of his role as local leader. The increased emphasis on national issues divided the South Dakota Alliance and alienated local followers from national Alliance goals as the leadership focused more on national economic redistribution than on the programs that had attracted members to the local South Dakota Alliances in the first place. And without a commensurate adjustment to the communication of these national policies and their alignment with local concerns, the South Dakota Alliance harmed its own political future.

What set the stage for these later issues, though, were the events of 1889 to 1890. In that period, the Alliance was enabled by several local successes. The popularity of Loucks and the Farmers' Alliance continued to grow in 1890 as he used the new coordination amongst reformers to build a formidable mobilization apparatus both inside and outside South Dakota. Focused on education and mass communication and made possible by the populist press, Loucks and the South Dakota Alliance undertook an aggressive growth strategy in 1889. And with the betrayal they felt they had endured in October 1889, their growth strategy was quickly transformed into one for third-party advocacy.

They were most successful when they played to their strengths. *The Dakota Ruralist* began, after October 1889, to feature an even greater number of ads than previously promoting

the Alliance's insurance programs and the Scandinavian Elevator Company, which were already suffering under the onslaught of the Republican press. Alliance members' strategy seemed to begin with the idea that reminding farmers and citizens of the programs that had been most popular might translate into more direct political support. From 1889 to 1890 ads to that effect dominated the inner pages of the *Ruralist*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Loucks himself admitted in the *Ruralist* on January 12, 1889 that the Alliance was "built ... by that organization [the cooperative program]."<sup>4</sup>

The second part of Loucks's strategy began in early 1890, but was largely an extension of an already-growing trend among reform groups. Cooperation among reform newspapers and low-cost telegraph communication enabled the Dakota Alliance and its allies in other states to share news and propaganda both quickly and effectively. Beginning in February 1889, *The Ruralist* began re-printing the addresses of Ignatius Donnelly, leader of the Minnesota Alliance.<sup>5</sup> In Donnelly, Loucks had found a kindred spirit. Both saw the world through a Christian lens (despite their denominational difference, Loucks being Presbyterian and Donnelly a Catholic) and perceived a need to correct the corrupt and self-serving nature of contemporary American politics. Allies for the next decade and a half, Donnelly and Loucks collaborated on both local and national reform issues, and frequently reprinted each other's work and worked together when Loucks was in Minnesota on Scandinavian Elevator Company business.<sup>6</sup> *The Ruralist* also began running ads for reform book exchanges and frequently ran stories about the successes of Alliances in Minnesota, Kansas and North Dakota.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 22 1889; February 16 1889; March 1 1889; September 7 1889; December 3 1889.

<sup>4</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 12 1889.

<sup>5</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, February 23 1889.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Ignatius Donnelly see Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 22 1889; February 23 1889; May 4 1889; July 13 1889; December 3 1889.

The cooperation among the various Alliances and reform groups in the shared articles in newspapers and newsletters served to radicalize many reformers across the country. The cooperative enterprises that they engaged in brought many Alliance members together from different parts of the country and exposed many to new ideas like the subtreasury plan, changes to tax laws, and railroad regulation.<sup>8</sup> In many ways, for Loucks, re-printing out-of-state news and speeches served to underline positions he had often already taken. For example, in the 31 January 1891 issue of *The Ruralist* Loucks reprinted the *Minneapolis Times* article which reiterated his own suggestion for tax reform: “if land were taxed to the full amount of what it will bring without labor, private ownership of land will cease.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps more than anyone else in the Farmers’ Alliance of South Dakota, Henry Loucks nurtured and expanded this cooperation with the broader widespread reform movement. In 1889 he invited Knights of Labor leader Terrence Powderly to address the South Dakota Farmers’ Alliance general meeting and in March of that year published the declarations and principles of the Knights of Labor in *The Ruralist*. The new series began with a call to laborers and farmers alike: “The alarming development and aggressiveness of the power of great capitalists and corporations under the present industrial system will inevitably lead to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses.”<sup>10</sup> With this, Loucks and Powderly were both focused on growing their respective political machines and to encourage farmers and labourers to arrive at the realization that they were both victims of corporate America.

Loucks continued to bring out-of-state reformers to South Dakota for visits and lectures throughout the 1890s. Donnelly, Terrance Powderly of the Knights of Labour and the President

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<sup>8</sup> Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993.), 72-74; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.), 45-67.

<sup>9</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 31 1891.

<sup>10</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, Knights of Labor. Preamble and Declaration of Principles, March 2 1889.

of the National Alliance, Leonidas Polk all visited Dakota Alliance meetings.<sup>11</sup> Later, as National Alliance president himself, Loucks continued to nurture inter-state visits and encouraged inter-state education initiatives and book exchanges. Many would continue to be centred on the idea of growing the Independents to include supporters beyond farmers.

During Powderly's visit, Loucks was exposed to labour advocacy and the time-tested methods of the Knights of Labor like its hierarchical structure and open membership policies.<sup>12</sup> He saw the political value of the Knights' discussions of the issues facing both producers and laborers, who the Knights still saw as a "producing class", alike. The Knights' overarching principle was the creation of "industrial worth [rather than] wealth," which it sought to do through "government organization of exchanges and deposit areas for the peoples' savings", and by advocating that "cooperative institutions be made part of the industrial system". Further, it was progressive socially, but did not go as far publicly as the Independents did in demanding that "both sexes are provided equal pay for equal work" as well as the more traditional labor demands for an eight-hour work day and the acceptance of collective bargaining.<sup>13</sup>

This was certainly a case in which Loucks' own philosophy was affected by cooperation with another reform group. It is likely that, with Powderly as with Donnelly, Loucks saw a way to bring more to the fold – to unite union members and farmers. Indeed, labour began to appear more actively in his writings immediately thereafter.<sup>14</sup>

Just one week later, on March 16, 1889, Loucks began his own series of declarations in *The Ruralist*, taking up many of the proposals of the Knights of Labor and others that he had

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<sup>11</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 2 1889; March 1 1891; July 7 1891.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the Knights of Labor see: Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics*. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1983.)

<sup>13</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 2 1889.

<sup>14</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, June 15 1889; July 13 1889; January 28 1892; March 23 1893.

reprinted earlier. Lumping all the “workingmen” and “producing classes” together, he stated that “legislation in our interest is in the interest of the whole people.”<sup>15</sup> This was just one of many “special circulars” Loucks would write for the paper over the next several years. It marked the beginning of his more open advocacy for farmers’ political action, which grew over the next eighteen months. In Loucks’s own declarations and those he chose from others he chose to repeat, a policy platform began to take shape.<sup>16</sup>

Loucks took the entire front page of *The Ruralist* on March 16 to outline the keys for what he saw as the Alliance’s strategy. First and foremost, he put forth that “every member of the Alliance, and all farmers, mechanics and laboring men should consider it their duty to attend all primaries in their respective districts.”<sup>17</sup> He insisted that “a financial system that will allow or permit the exaction of usury is radically wrong”, and that “the true solution of the transportation problem lay in the government owning and operating our railroads.”<sup>18</sup>

Loucks also began cleverly to show his support for a third party. Though initially saying “[we] propose trying to secure these reforms through the present parties”, he later seemed to attempt to plant the seeds of doubt in the minds of his readers with regard to the existing two-party system. He pointed out that “in the event of the failure of either party to put in nomination such candidates as are worthy of our support, and are pledged to advocate our measures, then it shall be the duty [of the Alliance] to call a convention in such district, for the purpose of putting in nomination men whom we can consistently support.”<sup>19</sup> Essentially, when displeased with their options, the Alliance should be willing field their own candidate.

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<sup>15</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 16 1889.

<sup>16</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 16 1889; May 1 1889; June 15 1889; July 13 1889; July 27 1889; August 10 1889.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

He defended this option with rhetorical skill: “Some of our good Republican brethren will say, as they have said, ‘I cordially approve of every plank in your platform, but I am afraid you fellows who talk independence in politics are trying to injure the Republican party,’ etc.” His answer was clever. “The best friends of their party are those who try to make their party best” he said. He summarized his view and that of the Alliance simply and with clear intent to go outside the two-party system or to support parts of both parties if needed: “our motto is that we place principles before party and men above platforms.”<sup>20</sup>

The ideas Loucks articulated in *The Ruralist* between 1889 and 1890 echoed many of those put forth by Powderly. They suggested that there was an issue in American taxation, which would result in nothing but increasing disparities between America’s classes. Loucks published The Knights of Labor’s Declaration of Principles.<sup>21</sup> Among them were many of the policies he had already been encouraging, combined with a new focus on labor. Yet, it was not only from the labor movement that Loucks sought guidance and ideas.

In February of 1889, *The Ruralist* also printed the Annual Address of the President of the Minnesota State Farmer’s Alliance, E.H. Atwood.<sup>22</sup> Many of the important South Dakota Alliance policies were also contained therein. The address went for two full pages, in smaller than typical font, outlining the details of the entire Minnesota Alliance’s platform. Divided into titled sections, the address began with a call for cooperation and unity under its proposed reforms. “It will be the duty of this body to make every effort in their power to formulate some plan that will unite this vast aggregation of farmers in their efforts for their own protection against centralized capital.”<sup>23</sup> The address also called for electoral reforms like the secret (or

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 2 1889.

<sup>22</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, February 23 1889.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Australian) ballot. Importantly, President Atwood also argued against the financial connections so prevalent in voting at the time. The votes of a large number of railroad employees, “paid and transported into any election district”, he said, were being used to “defeat the popular will of the resident inhabitants.”<sup>24</sup>

Atwood went on to note that although farmers supported the railroads’ capacity to charge “rates and tariffs as would insure to the railroad companies a fair return”<sup>25</sup>, that the profit motive should be moderated by the interests of producers as well. Finally, the platform called for the maintenance and expansion of the Inter-State Commerce Act as crucial for maintaining producers’ rights in the face of the railroad companies and capitalist influence in general.<sup>26</sup>

Financial connections between politics and business would occupy Loucks’s attention for the rest of his life. Fiscal reforms, such as the agricultural boards and their capacity to grow farmers’ capital holdings and changes to the Interstate Commerce Act, mirrored many of Loucks’ own proposals. The “financial question” was always Loucks’s major policy concern. For him, the issue of whether to coin silver as well as gold for use as currency was a simple one. Loucks wrote about the topic as early as 1887; by mid-1889, he was openly advocating massive currency expansion and re-organization. In his own article in *The Ruralist* titled “Why Money is Scarce”, he argued that America’s currency laws were immoral and persecuted the producers upon whom the economy was truly dependent. He also believed that the “combined monopolies have control of our U.S. senate and our house of representatives by which they are curtailing the circulation of our money each year and for no other purpose than to get a big rent for their

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 was passed by Congress in response to the Supreme Court of the United States 1886 ruling that state regulation of the railroad industry was unconstitutional without Congressional action. It lacked enforcement powers, however.



own.”<sup>27</sup> Though determined to discuss these financial issues and including them often, Loucks seemed focused most of his editorial energy during 1889-91 into attacking R.F. Pettigrew and defending the Scandinavian Elevator Company.

Though the Elevator Company was bankrupt by 1891, its treatment in headlines the next year pushed Loucks still further from Pettigrew and *The Sioux Falls Press*. The Republican press could just not resist casting Loucks as benefiting inappropriately from his position. Even after the death of his ten-year old son Willie in 1892, it pressed on, in the *Estelline Press* this time, suggesting that it “env[ied] Mr. Loucks for his position, or the \$5,000 a year salary, but when a man is so pressed with business that he cannot attend the funeral of his own son, the man who would envy him is not far enough from the animal creation to do him any harm.”<sup>28</sup> Loucks was away on campaign business and was unable to return home in time for the unexpected funeral. His angry retort was limited to politics and avoided discussions of the personal nature of the attack against him. But the anger that had built in him for the Republican Party was clear: It “is not journalism”, he said. “It is ghoulish vandalism peculiar to South Dakota republicanism.”<sup>29</sup> From 1889 to 1891, Loucks’s anger at the Republican Party and its officeholders continued to grow.

He did have one thing to be pleased about, the strategies undertaken by the Alliance leadership appeared to be succeeding. Leveraging their already popular social programs, growing their base by cooperating with other movements and educating their readers via information circulars, and fighting rhetorical fire with fire in the pages of *The Ruralist*, the Alliance grew in both membership and support. And they prepared to create a political party. Indeed, when it

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<sup>27</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 14 1889.

<sup>28</sup> *Estelline Press* quoted in Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 93.

<sup>29</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 8 1892.

came time to write a political platform, much of Loucks' post-1889 writings were influenced by the ideas of Powderly and several of the other platforms exemplified in *The Ruralist* by the Minnesota Alliance's Presidential address. Ideas like currency reform, the "demand for greater representation of [farmers'] interests in the halls of legislation", and the suggestion to garner representation for farmers and workers according to population were all key planks discussed in *The Ruralist*. Simply, as the Alliance paper put it: they were "organizing for self-defence, to wipe out the special privileges already secured by other classes."<sup>30</sup>

After the defeat in the Senate vote of 1889, a greater emphasis on cooperatives and policy issues was used to spur direct political action. Many Alliance members began to realize that there was simply no way that any of the programs they viewed as necessary would be implemented by the Republican Party at the time. That the Republican Party was apparently willing to engage in the type of actions seen at the legislature in October 1889 and in the press throughout the Elevator Company period indicated that they would never see their ideals adopted by the party in charge. Therefore, many members of the Alliance began to undertake the formation of a third party. Though always insisting, Loucks said, that "membership in the Alliance does not preclude [its members] from seeking office"<sup>31</sup>, he was becoming more convinced that running for office might be the best way to advance his ideals.

But before Loucks would be able to secure a third party, he would have to convince a majority of Alliance members. Loucks had become President of the Dakota Alliance in 1886, but still he did not have absolute power of the group and its sub-Alliances. In September 1889, Loucks argued in *The Ruralist* for a greater role for the Alliance in the politics of the state. But his article appeared beside another one by an anonymous author who argued that the Alliance

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<sup>30</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 24 1889.

<sup>31</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, July 13 1889.

should remain non-partisan and that the GOP was the primary means by which farmers could maintain their livelihoods.<sup>32</sup> Loucks was still not the sole editor and evidently, other managers of the paper sought balance in the argument.

In December 1889, a significant event altered the future of the Alliance in South Dakota and elsewhere. In an attempt to create a broad-based national umbrella organization for all Alliances across America, the two dominant interstate groups – the Northern Farmers’ Alliance and the (Southern) National Farmer’s Alliance and Industrial Union [NFAIU] met in St. Louis to discuss uniting for common cause. But the meeting ultimately resulted in weakening the northern group and the expansion of the NFAIU.<sup>33</sup>

At St. Louis, the two groups agreed to cooperate on a great many things: common education plans for their memberships, several financial reforms plans, and political support based on reform plans regarding the public ownership of railroads and changes to banking laws. They also codified their cooperation with the Knight of Labor.<sup>34</sup> Yet, in the areas of secrecy and racial integration, the proposals of the northern group fell on deaf ears. The southern NFAIU insisted on secret membership and rituals, largely based upon the traditions of its local chapters. The Northern Alliance held that secrecy was anti-democratic and regressive. The southerners refused to budge.<sup>35</sup>

The real disagreement came over racial integration. Northerners wanted African Americans to be able to join the Alliance as full members with the same rights and obligations as white farmers. For white Southerners less than a generation removed from the Civil War, this

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<sup>32</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 7 1889.

<sup>33</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 85-89.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.), 82-83.

was simply a non-starter. The meeting resulted in no agreement on unity and the Northern Alliance remained the weaker and less radical on economic and political tactics of the two groups, while the NFAIU became more radical in its calls for public ownership of transportation and communication and its aggressive growth strategies.<sup>36</sup>

It was the more aggressive stances of the NFAIU on public ownership, the subtreasury plan, cooperative farmers' business action, secrecy rules, and cooperation with the Knights of Labor that made the Southern group more attractive to Loucks and the South Dakota Alliance among others. In late 1889, the South Dakota Alliance switched its allegiance from the Northern to the Southern group, citing the Southern organization's "more cohesive territorial organization" and the more effective policy plans of the NFAIU compared to the "loosely knit state bodies elsewhere."<sup>37</sup> The other strong Midwestern Alliances from Kansas and North Dakota did the same. Kansas first, then South Dakota and finally North Dakota in 1890. The greater support that the Southern Alliance offered cooperative business activities came from a history of activity against the twine and jute-bagging trusts in the South. These differences and its greater cohesion made it attractive to the more cooperative-driven Alliances of the Midwest.

This move was the next step toward a more radical South Dakota Alliance. Between Loucks's financial and social plans, the reactions of the Republican power holders to the cooperative endeavours of the Alliance and the bitter press battles over the Elevator Company, the more militant, organized and determined Southern Alliance seemed the simple choice.<sup>38</sup>

As demonstrated by the failed attempt at a union of the two Farmers' Alliances in St. Louis, many of the reasons for the divide between Alliance members went back to the Civil War.

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<sup>36</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 119-121; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 88.

<sup>37</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 85.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

Generally, members of the Alliances of the South were former Democrats, unhappy with the party's embrace of rail companies and opposition to the financial reforms that would benefit farmers.<sup>39</sup> In the North, the vast majority of Alliance members were, like Loucks, Republican supporters who simply tired of Republican opposition to tariff, financial and railroad reforms. This sectional division endured throughout the existence of the national People's Party and was never truly resolved; it remained an electoral obstacle throughout its short history.

After St. Louis, the issue of uniting the two Farmers' Alliances was put on hold. But one important issue had been resolved. Polk, Donnelly, and others successfully pushed for the further politicization of the movement. As Polk, Charles Macune, and Donnelly joined allies in South Dakota and Kansas to push their respective Alliances toward open partisanship, the need for greater coordination became increasingly apparent and accepted. The meetings at the St. Louis Exposition Building in early December 1889 also achieved basic agreements on key principles and a broad plan for greater cooperation. Most of all, though, events there set the stage for the numerous meetings over the next three years that culminated in the formation of the People's Party of America.

After securing a place for itself in the NFAIU and battling in *The Ruralist* over partisanship, the South Dakota Alliance became the first to become an independent political party on June 5, 1890.<sup>40</sup> Assembling Alliance members, reformers, and suffragists in Huron on June 3, 1890, Loucks brought his request for a third party directly to the Alliance's core membership. Debates over policies, proposals, and the third party issue took more than two days.

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<sup>39</sup> See C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) for more on the transition from Democrat to Populist in a biographical framework.

<sup>40</sup> The South Dakotans preceded their Kansan Alliance brothers and sisters by one week in their creation of a political party. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898*, 137.

Finally, the group did agree on several key policy prescriptions and voted 413 to 83 in favour of forming a third party.<sup>41</sup>

The Huron convention did more than launch the Independent Party, however. At its conclusion, a party platform was released and a resolution adopted in favour of Huron's hosting the new party's convention the following month. Promising state ownership of the means of transportation and utilities, cooperative financial organizations (a promise that would remain vague for over a year), direct election of United States Senators, and initiation of referenda, the Independent platform was a broad selection of reform policies. Notably absent, though, were policies regarding both woman suffrage and prohibition. That July, the new Independent Party met again in Huron and, with Leonidas L. Polk, the President of the Southern Farmers' Alliance in attendance, nominated its candidates for the coming election. It was the party convention in July rather than the Alliance convention in June that truly demonstrated the desires and expectations of the new party.<sup>42</sup>

In order to win a third party, Loucks was willing to compromise some of his own policy desires. After all, the need to appeal to the German, Norwegian and British immigrants in the state meant that a more traditional approach in certain areas – particularly with regard to social issues such as the use of alcohol and the acceptance of women as voters – had to take a back seat as these groups could not be relied upon to support these positions, particularly temperance. More support would be possible from these groups if the party focused strictly on improving the lives of farmers rather than seeking to change generations' old drinking habits.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>R Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 69.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>43</sup>Lori Ann Lahlum, "Hurrah for Bryan': Gender and Agrarian Politics in Eastern South Dakota Norwegian American Communities, 1880-1910," paper presented at Western History Association Conference, October 14 2010. Cited with permission.

The Independent Party's first convention in July 1890 nominated Loucks for governor, but did not nominate any other candidates. Loucks campaigned as the redeemer of the farmer. His June convention speech promised a return to the "glory days" of farming. Echoing his own "Why Money Is Scarce"<sup>44</sup> article, he undertook a systematic and historical evaluation of how, when and where the economy had failed farmers. In his address, Loucks relied predominantly on statistics and focused on economic reforms that, he promised, would improve farmers' lives. He announced that "fifty years earlier farmers had owned 75 percent of the nation's wealth, but presently they only owned fifteen."<sup>45</sup> The "moneyed interests", he said, controlled politicians of both major parties. "Will the great forces of the nation rally to our aid and assist us in saving the republic by the ballot ere the masses, driven to desperation, destroy civilization, and erect a 'Caesar's Column'?"<sup>46</sup> He apparently believed that by changing the amount of available capital, farmers could achieve their independence through access to easier credit and better prices for their goods and services.

The 1890 election was successful for the Independents, but it also exposed a most serious problem. Forty-three Independents were elected to the legislature and the Prohibition Party had cooperated actively with them. Considering the mere four months the new party had to prepare it was a fantastic showing. Combined with the seventeen Democrats elected, the Independents found themselves the arbiters of power in the legislature. But Henry Loucks was not as fortunate. Though he received more than 24,000 votes, he lost to Arthur Mellette, the Republican, who won nearly 35,000 votes. As R. Alton Lee noted "Democrat Maris Taylor

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<sup>44</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, September 14 1889.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 72, quoting Loucks's address from *Great West*, September 12, 1890. Loucks referred to *Caesar's Column*, the dystopic novel by Minnesota Allianceman Ignatius Donnelly in which "Caesar's column" was a pile of corpses of the capitalist oligarchs that were overthrown and killed in a revolution.

received only 18,484 votes. If both the Independents and Democrats had supported Loucks, he would have defeated Mellette.”<sup>47</sup>

Historians were not the only observers keen to seize upon the “split” in the vote between Democrats and Independents. Many began to speak of greater cooperation between the parties, as the desire of farmers and others to oust the Republicans overwhelmed some typical partisan entrenchment. Indeed, as early as October 1890, talk of fusion was reported among county Independent leaders.<sup>48</sup>

The idea of fusion haunted the new party in South Dakota and the People’s Party nationally. Certainly, many readers of *The Ruralist* found it appealing, but Loucks was unfazed in his desire to remain independent in action and in name. In April 1891, as he proceeded to defend cooperation with labor and with Charles Macune, the ideological leader of the NFAIU, Loucks wrote in *The Ruralist*: “we need to go Independent [in future elections]”.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, despite the hopes and expectations of many Independent leaders, Loucks was not interested in joining with the Democrats. In fact, he said, the creation of the Independent Party was “forcing the old parties to learn [to] attend the public business.”<sup>50</sup> Loucks remained an opponent of fusion throughout his years in the Alliance, as he continued to believe that an independent party would force the big parties to change.

But it was not the issue of fusion that would be the first test for the South Dakota Independents, it was the Senate. Upon statehood, South Dakota’s two Senators had both been Republicans, but in order to stagger the terms of the two Senators, Gideon Moody’s initial term was limited to two of the typical six-year Senate term. With the new Independents controlling the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, April 11 1891.

<sup>50</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 7 1891.



state legislature which elected the Senators, the Independents were particularly determined to elect their choice for the Senate after the debacle of 1888. But the Republicans of the state, led by R.F. Pettigrew, Moody and Mellette were spoiling for a fight.

Originally, Henry Loucks was the Independents' choice for the Senate nomination. Loucks, however, refused. He wished to stay home, he said.<sup>51</sup> It is also possible that he was concerned that his foreign birth would be a potential issue in the election. Indeed, in the August 17 1889 *Ruralist* a piece titled "Something About Loucks" appeared on page five of the paper. Referring to a piece that had appeared in The *Omaha Republican* which apparently had "been making merry over dispatches from South Dakota that President Loucks of the state Farmers' Alliance was found to be ineligible to the office of United States senator, that he was a Canadian, that he had not been a resident of the United States the time required by constitution, etc."<sup>52</sup> Alonzo Wardall had replied with a letter of this own, printed directly under the reference to *The Republican* wherein he stated that Loucks: "was born in Canada, emigrated to the states about 12 years ago, had been naturalized over ten years, [...] has always voted Republican [...] and] if that doesn't render him eligible to a seat in the United States senate than I see no other way for us to do than to import some line land thieves from Wisconsin or Minnesota."<sup>53</sup>

In the end, without Loucks on the ballot, the Independents achieved their greatest victory in South Dakota with the election of James Kyle, a minister from Aberdeen, as the junior Senator from South Dakota. Loucks, elated with the victory, named his new son Daniel Kyle Loucks, born on March 4 1891 in Kyle's honour.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 10 1891.

<sup>52</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 17 1889.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 85.

James Kyle had come to prominence in South Dakota's reform movement as an itinerant preacher who had achieved fame through a series of lectures in 1890 focused on religious support for equality, social mobility and redressing the plight of the farmer. Though formerly a Republican, Kyle crossed to the Independents in 1890 and began working actively for Independent candidates almost as soon as the party was formed. In the debates among the Independents in the state legislature who sought to elect a Senator in 1890, Kyle's name emerged as a compromise among Independents who supported Wardall and those who supported two Independent county leaders, George Crose and J.W. Harden. Kyle, with his great oratory, religious piety and charisma was the only candidate upon whom they could all agree; he was announced as a surprise candidate in mid-February.<sup>55</sup>

The 1890 Senate election marked the beginning of the South Dakota cooperation rollercoaster. James Kyle was elected Senator through an agreement between the reform parties of the South Dakota and Illinois legislatures. The Independent Party of Illinois, a populist group there, experienced success in the previous election and, like the group in South Dakota were in a controlling position in the legislature. Deadlocks in both legislatures ensued and set the stage for the cross-border agreement. After some negotiations the Democrats and the Independents of both states agreed to a compromise. The Democrats would receive reform support for their candidate in the Illinois legislature and the Democrats of South Dakota would support Kyle.<sup>56</sup>

With Democratic support, Kyle's election was secured, but initial Independent exuberance soon gave way to a need to consolidate and plan. The burgeoning national populist movement required attention and the years 1890-92 can be characterized largely as a period of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 77.

consolidation, cooperation and planning amongst populists nationally and in South Dakota specifically.

The Populist movement across the country was split much as the Independents of South Dakota had been. At first, the debate was whether or not to become directly involved in politics at all. In South Dakota, Henry Loucks led the Farmers' Alliance into politics. Nationally, it was Loucks allies Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota and Leonidas Polk of North Carolina along with dissatisfied Republicans and Democrats who helped turn the disparate Farmers' Alliances into an organized political force.<sup>57</sup>

Leonidas Polk was a former Confederate army officer who became active in North Carolina agrarian reform in the 1880s, first in the Grange and then in the Farmers' Alliance. The state's first Agriculture Commissioner, Polk rose to prominence with his *Progressive Farmer* newspaper that, much like *The Dakota Ruralist*, was the voice of agrarian reform in North Carolina. Polk, a gifted organizer and an imposing figure with his flowing grey beard, was seen as one of the most important leaders of the Populist movement. As a farmer and former Whig politician, his conversion to the more radical strain of agrarian politics exemplified, in many ways, the core political hope of the movement. Many hoped that he could close the divide between the Northern and Southern Alliances and bring the Alliance to the mainstream.<sup>58</sup>

The first major meeting that resulted in concrete policy for the national group was held in Ocala, Florida in December 1890. Originally called to devise a plan for the 1892 election and harness the political actions of 1889-90 into a coherent partisan plan, Ocala turned into a policy extravaganza and *de facto* party convention where a detailed policy plan was hammered out in

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<sup>57</sup> For more about the national politicization of the agrarian movement, see McMath, *American Populism*; Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933*.

<sup>58</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 114-118.

just a few days. Ocala was not like St. Louis, where, as John Hicks wrote, “the Alliance demands were not consciously designed to be the platform of a new political party.”<sup>59</sup> Without question, the demands issued at Ocala were to be the foundation for a much larger endeavor.

The conference in Ocala was, according to Robert McMath, focused principally on “how—not if—the Alliance and kindred organizations should enter national politics in 1892.”<sup>60</sup> Though not agreeing completely on a new political party, Charles Macune was empowered to undertake national education initiatives and to plan for an 1892 convention. Yet, it was in its demands for policy change that Ocala was most important. Low-interest loans by the federal government, lower tariffs, the expansion of the national currency, the abolition of national banks, government regulation of railroads, and the direct election of United States Senators were also demands re-iterated for a national audience at Ocala.<sup>61</sup> Lastly, Ocala and its endorsement and financing of lecturing, education and itinerant speaking series meant that the plan of education and cooperation was now officially national in focus.<sup>62</sup>

The Ocala demands reflected in many ways the policies already endorsed on the pages of the *Ruralist* by Loucks and the Farmers’ Alliance of South Dakota. First and foremost, Ocala marked the official endorsement, by the majority of farmers’ groups, of Charles Macune’s subtreasury plan. The plan to increase the capital available to farmers through a loan system based on future crop sales had been a core of the Dakota Alliances’ policy proposals and a major issue in their congressional campaigns from 1889 on. The subtreasury plan proposed that farmers could have up to 80 percent of the value of their crops provided to them in advance at a series of

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<sup>59</sup> John Hicks, *The Populist Revolt : a History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 125.

<sup>60</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 140.

<sup>61</sup> Saloutos, *Farmer Movements In the South 1865-1933*, 118-119.

<sup>62</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 199-204.

treasury offices. This injection of capital would allow the farmers to better service their debts, improve their methods with new equipment and to increase their yields, and would enable them to plant their next crops while waiting for agricultural markets to improve.<sup>63</sup> Indeed many viewed this plan as the key differentiator between the Populists and the other two parties: “Without it, both political parties would have given the Alliance all it asked long ago. But without it there was no relief for the people”, said Charles Macune.<sup>64</sup> For Macune, the subtreasury plan was a panacea to be fought for at all costs. Though it is unclear that it was the only thing that blocked Populist political successes, it certainly was a source of disagreement between the Populists and traditional Republicans and Democrats. The adoption of the plan at Ocala, in many ways, further encouraged Loucks in his search for fiscal solutions to the plight of farmers. He strongly pushed for the subtreasury plan from this point forward<sup>65</sup> and Alonzo Wardall himself resigned his directorship in the South Dakota Alliance to pursue its national adoption as leader of the National Aid Association, an organization created by the Populists to pursue policy change at the federal level.<sup>66</sup>

Yet Ocala was not just about the subtreasury plan. It was the first step toward the creation of the People’s Party and its platform. And the platform’s formulation was viewed as a potential cure-all for the North-South divide so evident at St. Louis. As one of the primary advocates of

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<sup>63</sup> Macune himself, as well as Alonzo Wardall, testified about the plan before a House of Representatives committee. Although eventually abandoned by Congress due to questions about its constitutionality as it sought greatly to expand the role of the federal government in granting credit and controlling currency, there was much debate in the 1890s over its potential implementation at the committee level. For more see: Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 186-202.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Macune quoted in Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: a History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, 194.

<sup>65</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 22 1891. Beginning with a piece printed titled “Ten reasons why the Subtreasury should be adopted.” *Dakota Ruralist*, September 5 1891; September 12 1891; January 28 1892; May 5 1892.

<sup>66</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 21 1892.

the third party, another Loucks newspaper ally, William Peffer of Kansas, suggested an “Alliance-sponsored party [is the potential uniter] of North and South.”<sup>67</sup>

As Loucks and many others had already done, the leaders at Ocala approved key organizational changes designed to encourage the exchange of information and further cooperation among Alliance groups. “At the request of President Leonidas Polk, the council adopted a plan for putting full-time lecturers in each congressional district.”<sup>68</sup> As Loucks’ friend and ally, Polk evidently liked the system that Loucks was already employing in South Dakota. Loucks’ prescription for the national movement’s growth was fourfold: “first, social; second, educational; third, financial; fourth, political.”<sup>69</sup> The Ocala meeting embraced these principles, greater cooperation and the official endorsement of the subtreasury plan. It is worth noting, that in an early push for greater racial integration in the Alliances, the South Dakota delegation put forth an official endorsement of the Lodge Bill, then being hotly debated by Congress. The bill would have given important powers to the federal government to guarantee and protect voting rights. Viewed by Southerners as threatening the Jim Crow laws by which African American voting rights were denied, many Southerners at Ocala were irate with the South Dakota delegation’s support of it, and the vote at Ocala ended up reflecting a North-South divide.<sup>70</sup>

After Ocala, Henry Loucks did his part. The pages of *The Ruralist* focused on education, the subtreasury plan and, increasingly, on other fiscal matters as well. Loucks apparently took the adoptions of the subtreasury plan as a green light to launch into a series of other fiscal policy suggestions. Beginning in January 1890 when *The Ruralist* termed the coming political fight

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<sup>67</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 106.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>69</sup> H.L. Loucks, “Alliance Business Effort in Dakota,” *National Economist*, 1:21 (March 14 1889) quoted in Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 128.

<sup>70</sup> Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South*, 119; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 109.

over the economic basis of the republic as “a battle for human rights”<sup>71</sup>, its rhetoric escalated from that point forward. Between January and April 1891, Loucks and other *Ruralist* authors<sup>72</sup> wrote passionately in favour of the subtreasury plan, Henry George’s single tax on land, the free coinage of silver, and for reductions in all government spending.<sup>73</sup>

Yet, with a new emphasis on economics, politics did not disappear from the pages of the *Ruralist* either. In February, 1891 as the battle that eventually resulted in James Kyle’s election as U.S. Senator came to an end, Loucks took to *The Ruralist*’s pages to insist disingenuously that there “had been no trade with the Democrats” to secure Kyle’s election.<sup>74</sup> Though it is likely that Loucks was well aware of the exchange that occurred between the Democrats and Independents of South Dakota and Illinois, the period before the national People’s Party was founded marked a time during which, dedicated to building the national party, Loucks can be described as truly playing politics.

Over the next six months, the reformers around the United States consolidated various state Alliances into a semi-coherent national party. The first step to that end was taken at Ocala; the second was taken in Cincinnati, Ohio in mid-1891. Henry Loucks did not attend the Cincinnati convention. He did, however, write a letter to the readers of *The Ruralist*, explaining the meeting, and though fervent in his support of it, did air his fears: “I regret to see [...] too much division of opinion amongst friends of the movement. Herein is the greatest danger in the successful launching of the new party.”<sup>75</sup> He took the opportunity to express his personal support for Charles Macune, Terrance Powderly and the other attendees. Though it was not until June

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<sup>71</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 10 1890.

<sup>72</sup> Loucks became the primary editorialist of the paper in January 1890 (An article celebrating one year since he took over appeared in *The Ruralist*, January 10 1891.)

<sup>73</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, January 31 1891; April 4 1891; April 11 1891.

<sup>74</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, February 21 1891.

<sup>75</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, April 11 1891.

that *The Ruralist* published the platform adopted at Cincinnati, Loucks's began to grow concerned over the division amongst members of the movement.

Southerners were conspicuous by their absence from Cincinnati. Still reluctant to embrace a party that might allow Republicans to gain ground in the South through increased African American voting, they stayed away. Charles Macune, an influential Texas reformer, resisted the third party advocates and insisted on a compromise focused on holding the existing parties accountable rather than advocating independent political action. Macune battled Polk (who was not actually present, but was represented by several go-betweens), Alonzo Wardall and many others who pushed hard for partisanship. Though they won the battle, Wardall and other political independents could not secure the enthusiasm of Macune or the majority of Southerners.<sup>76</sup> In fact, many of the Southerners "fears were confirmed" by the high participation of African Americans at the convention.<sup>77</sup> White southerners' lack of enthusiasm was to always be a serious issue for the Populists as their votes and support would have been crucial for any national success.

Loucks and the Independents embraced the policies of Cincinnati. First and foremost, Loucks's position on the creation of a third party became a primary focus at the convention. *The Ruralist* published the entire Cincinnati Platform in its June 13 issue. The first principle adopted at the convention was designed to solve the debate over the creation of a third party. "In view of the great social, industrial and economic revolution dawning upon the civilized world . . . [w]e believe that the time has come for a crystallization of political reform forces of our country and the formation of what should be known as the People's Party of the United States of America."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 130-42; Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South*, 122-23.

<sup>77</sup> Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South*, 123.

<sup>78</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, June 13 1891.



The third party Loucks had been pushing for more than two years was now official policy.

Without question there were still many, particularly in the South, who objected to the Cincinnati Platform's creation of a third party. Anxious that a third party might lead to Republican (and, in the minds of some, "Negro") victories, many Southerners were hesitant to embrace the third party ideal.<sup>79</sup>

The policies and ideals of the new party were announced at another convention in Omaha the next month. There, with "a sort of religious sanction"<sup>80</sup>, they announced the new party's principles. In economics, they demanded the free and unlimited coinage of silver, and increase in money in circulation and a graduated income tax. Politically, they expressed their demands for the public ownership of transportation infrastructure, the reclamation of unused railroad land for use by the public, support for the initiative and referendum, term limits for President and Vice-President and the direct election of U.S. Senators. Known as the Omaha Platform, these policy prescriptions, introduced there by Ignatius Donnelly in a meeting chaired by Loucks<sup>81</sup>, captured the audience who, according to John Hicks, "were beginning the last phase of a long and perhaps a losing struggle – the struggle to save agricultural America from the devouring jaws of industrial America."<sup>82</sup>

Loucks's advocacy of an independent political party had won out, not only in his own home of South Dakota, but nationally as well. Through cooperation with leaders like Powderly, Leonidas Polk and Charles Macune, Loucks and state Alliance leaders elsewhere had assembled a platform and a party in cooperation with free-silverites and labor to contend the 1892 election.

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<sup>79</sup> McMath, *The Populist Vanguard*, 115.

<sup>80</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 232.

<sup>81</sup> Jon Lauck, John E. Miller, and Edward Hogan. "Historical Musings: The Contours of South Dakota Political Culture," *South Dakota History* 42:2 (Summer 2012), 161.

<sup>82</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 237.

Yet the South Dakota Populists did not fare so well in 1892. Only six Independent delegates out of forty-five were elected to the State Senate and eleven to the legislature. The Independent candidate for Governor, Abraham Van Ostel, lost by over 10,000 votes. The People's Party candidate for President, James Weaver, did not carry the state. In the words of R. Alton Lee: "it was a disaster for the Populists."<sup>83</sup> Despite the work in developing a plan for growth and a platform he believed would bring success, Loucks's plan failed.

Indeed, the membership rolls of the Farmers' Alliance indicate that independent political action brought failure. Memberships in the Alliance in South Dakota were recorded at 8,279 dues paying members in 1890. They declined to 6,321 a year later and in the election year of 1892, dropped to just 3,178.<sup>84</sup> Though this decline was most likely due to the fact that many simply joined the Independent Party or other political organizations rather than maintaining their Alliance memberships, the drop is still indicative of something important. Farmers did not feel mobilized or as connected to the political strain of the movement as they had in the Alliance that so effectively collectivized losses and individualized gains through cooperative insurance and pricing models.

Loucks's plans for South Dakota politics were largely lost in the shuffle of the national political winds that blew the movement to and fro. As his and Wardall's focus turned increasingly to the national issue of the subtreasury and economic policy issues, much of what had made the Alliance popular in South Dakota was abandoned for National Alliance initiatives – indeed Wardall's departure from his previous role as insurance advocate and manager to go to Washington to testify and work to win Congress to the subtreasury plan demonstrates as much.

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<sup>83</sup> Lee, *Party Over Principle*, 98.

<sup>84</sup> South Dakota University Archives Online, <http://history.sd.gov/Archives/farmers/>, (accessed: February 3, 2013)

Further demonstrating the “nationalization” of the South Dakota party was an editorial that appeared just below the announcement of the Cincinnati platform in *The Ruralist*. Written by W.R. Patterson of Scatterwood, the letter suggested that “there are no more unselfish and self-sacrificing men in America than T.V. Powderly and Ignatius Donnelly.”<sup>85</sup> It was through such cooperation among labour leaders like Powderly and other reformers like Donnelly that Loucks had brought the South Dakota Populists into a growing national movement.

It was in this cooperation that the Alliance in South Dakota began to falter. Loucks and the Alliance had, after all, gained an early victory in electing James Kyle to the United States Senate through a deal with Illinois populists. Yet by 1891 and 1892, as Loucks and others assembled and cooperated in St. Louis, Ocala, and Omaha, the Alliance of South Dakota became, more and more, merely an adjunct to the larger interests of the national People’s Party. This transition – from being centered in South Dakota and focused on responding to the economic and political needs of South Dakotans to an adjunct, or in fact a mere satellite of a national political party, eroded the support South Dakotans had previously expressed for the Alliance and by extension, the Independents. For Loucks, cooperation with the reform movements in other states had secured support at home for an independent political party and its Senator, but his focus on those reform movements beyond Dakota harmed his support back home and endangered future of the movement he had fought so hard to build.

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<sup>85</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, June 13 1891.

## Chapter V: Fusion and Collapse

After meetings at Ocala, St. Louis, Cincinnati and Omaha, the Populists brought their platform to the American people in the 1892 presidential election. As it did in South Dakota, it fared poorly. Demands for the abolition of national banks, the free and unlimited coinage of silver and the creation of a national graduated income tax system that was “just and equitable”<sup>1</sup> were the primary economic concerns they had merged into their policy platform along with many political reforms. They were rejected when the American people chose the Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland over Populist James Weaver and the Republican Benjamin Harrison. In reaction, calls emerged for moderation of the People’s Party’s more radical stances such as government ownership of transportation infrastructure. Talks of cooperation with one of the major parties also grew louder. “Fusion”, the strategic alignment with one of the two major parties to achieve greater electoral success, was talked of more.<sup>2</sup> Loucks, though, saw it another way. For him, the loss meant a need to go still further and a refusal to be pragmatic, whether it be in his refusal to contemplate fusion or his insistence that Alliance members, committed to their local group, commit to every aspect of Populist Party policies.

Loucks who, by 1891, was walking into local community halls to harangue crowds with a cane after losing his leg in an 1891 farming accident, continued to focus on education programs as National Alliance leader just as he had back home in South Dakota. His belief that education could be an important tool in the Alliance’s program began with “education libraries,” essentially a system of book exchanges and the sale of reform literature, along with active lecture tours; these formed the core of his education program. Advertisements for the libraries appeared

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<sup>1</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, June 13 1891.

<sup>2</sup> R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers’ Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 109.

weekly in *The Ruralist*. Loucks also continued to try to educate his followers to favor the subtreasury plan and defended it as the actions reasonable men had taken in response to their “discovery of the cause of agrarian depression.”<sup>3</sup> Educating his readers about the complex subtreasury plan, Loucks simplified it and emphasized what the plan meant for farmers in their daily lives. “It destroys the ‘power of money to oppress’”, “it will enable the farmer to hold his wheat until the rush is over, giving an even, stable market the year round.”<sup>4</sup> Loucks was all-in in his support of the Ocala demands. Going as far as testifying in support of the plan before a rival paper’s editorial board, Loucks was steadfast in his support for the new national Populist fiscal policies and proposals.<sup>5</sup>

Loucks followed up his support for the subtreasury plan with general support for continued interstate cooperation. He authored a piece supporting Leonidas Polk’s plan to send Alliance speakers from the South on speaking tours to northern states (and vice-versa).<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on national cooperation, education and political advocacy remained the focus of *The Ruralist* and its editor for much of the remaining decade. Loucks also continued his cooperation with the labor movement and support of an eight-hour work day and a minimum wage.<sup>7</sup>

The People’s Party of the United States had been formally launched in Omaha, Nebraska on July 4, 1892. Uniting labor advocates and reformers from around the United States, Omaha drew suffragists, socialists, and evangelicals looking to form the “Kingdom of God on Earth.” Henry Loucks was elected permanent Chairman of the convention “almost unanimously.”<sup>8</sup> Leonidas Polk had died in June and his absence caused quite the uproar amongst the delegates as

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., July 11 1891.

<sup>4</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 22 1891.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., September 5 1891.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., July 11 1891.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., June 13 1891.

<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times*, July 4 1892.

Loucks took the lead and immediately undertook several steps to strengthen the presence of the more committed members at the convention.

Loucks' ascension was likely. To some degree it was a sympathy vote favoring the dominant Ignatius Donnelly's close friend and political ally. Selecting the state leader of an early reform movement that had started outside of the NFA&IU was likely a deliberate choice to cement new members in the group, particularly from labor organizations and the north into the broader, originally Southern, Populist coalition. Loucks had, after all, been a preeminent bridge-builder between the North and the South within the movement, and his close friendship with Polk signified a continuity in that trans-regional cooperation to the group's membership.

Loucks held a great deal of power as chairman. He favoured James Kyle as presidential nominee for the People's Party. Yet Kyle had neither the personal history nor connections to win the day. In those, the Iowan James Weaver dominated. A member of the U.S. House of Representatives for the state of Iowa, the Union veteran and previous Greenback Presidential nominee was a known name amongst pro-producer reform groups for over a decade already in 1892. A hoped for compromise candidate to Southerners, James Field's for Vice President did not satisfy all. Field, it was hoped would bring Southerners to the fold, he was a former Confederate officer and hailed from Virginia. But after the party codified its Ocala and Cincinnati platforms it emerged, for a time, relatively united in its quest for electoral success against Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland. Yet reluctance in the South persisted in the background. Whether over membership rules, African American inclusion, or Weaver's background as a Union General, issues remained.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Weaver, in fact, delayed accepting the party's nomination until September after he had spent time "studying the Southern situation". Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.), 134.

As a result, many areas of potential strength resulted in only scattered Populist victories. In Colorado, a Populist governor, Davis Waite and his ticket were elected in, what James Wright called “the exten[sion] of economic polarization [between producers, workers and farmers and business] to the mining counties.”<sup>10</sup> In short, Waite was able to unite farmers’, laborers and miners in a coalition calling for economic inclusiveness. Weaver carried the state with 57.07 percent of the state’s vote to Harrison’s 41 percent. Waite easily defeated the “White Wing” Democratic Party (a group that rejected Populism), which received slightly less than ten percent of the vote there.<sup>11</sup> But the Colorado experience was not repeated elsewhere. When all was said and done, the 1892 election was a disappointment for Populists both in South Dakota and nationally.

Despite the optimism that American Populist supporters brought to their convention in July, vote-splitting and internal arguments derailed the People’s Party on Election Day. Of course, it was not just underhandedness and electoral structures that got in their way; many just did not agree with their prescriptions or chose to vote for the party or candidate they saw as the lesser of two evils.

In the South, the Democratic Party won every state. Though finishing second in most of the former Confederacy, Populist candidate Weaver won 30 percent or more of the vote only in Alabama. The fears voiced in Cincinnati and elsewhere were clearly never far from the minds of southern voters and Democrats won the day there. In South Dakota and through much of the Midwest, the Republican Party won a plurality. Weaver was successful in winning the electoral

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<sup>10</sup> James Edward Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 153.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

votes of North Dakota along with Kansas, Nevada, Idaho and Colorado, the only five states he won.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these numbers it is important to note that the Populist Party in 1892 was the most successful third party in American history. Though it failed to win the White House, it won five states and 22 electoral votes, a significant achievement, but still well below the hopes of its followers. Democrat Grover Cleveland carried the Presidency with 277 electoral votes to Benjamin Harrison's 145 and Weaver's 22.<sup>13</sup>

South Dakota was largely split between Republicans and Populists at the state level. The Democratic Party remained just enough of a factor, however. Vote-splitting between Democratic candidates and Independents reduced the party's strength in the state's lower house to just eleven representatives. "The towns proved to be the Republicans' strongholds," according to R. Alton Lee and the split between Independents and Democrats gave much of the smaller, less-populated areas to Democrats while cities went overwhelmingly Republican. The 1892 election was "a disaster" for the Independents and would provide a major impetus for later attempts at fusion with another party.<sup>14</sup>

Henry Loucks, for his part, was simultaneously angered and radicalized by the defeats of 1892. The people of South Dakota, he wrote, "liked to be fooled by the Republicans."<sup>15</sup> He immediately pivoted to say "the contest for 1896 is now on!"<sup>16</sup> Loucks had argued in 1891 for a more minimalist platform for the Populists at all levels, focusing on fiscal concerns to the exclusion of many of the social policies, like prohibition, that many Populists supported.<sup>17</sup> He

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<sup>12</sup>An excellent source for historical election data is Dave Leips *Atlas of U.S. Elections*, <http://uselectionatlas.org>, (Accessed June 30 2012.)

<sup>13</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, November 17 1892.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., November 10 1892.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., November 7 1891; December 9 1892.



believed that after education had to come a focus on Populist unanimity on the subtreasury plan, fiscal reform, and the causes of labor. He decided to fight still harder for voting reforms, the subtreasury and the public ownership of railroads and utilities.<sup>18</sup>

Loucks articulated his all-or-nothing policy prescriptions in a speech before the post-election Memphis NFA&IU convention. His anger was evident to all in attendance. First, he eulogized his friend Leonidas Polk. Then, he launched into a diatribe against those he felt had harmed the Populist cause in 1892: “[W]e have been passing through a crucial test, a winnowing process, a separation of the wheat from the chaff and foul seeds that grew up with the order. The result will be a reduction in numbers, but a great improvement in quality.”<sup>19</sup> Loucks believed that the issue in the previous election had been the number of hangers-on in the National Alliance. For him, the future of the NFA&IU and, by extension, the People’s Party was with the true believers, not the pragmatists.

Loucks specified the issue he viewed as the key to the Populists’ struggle: “We have learned, and the census report of 1890 affirms the proposition, that the trouble is not with the production of wealth, but with its unjust distribution through special privileges conferred on favored industries and private corporations.”<sup>20</sup> This middle-ground statement that it was not the capitalist system and its capacity to generate wealth that he opposed, but its unfair incarnation in the 1890s, was coupled with a demand for adherence from those who were not true to the cause. “Many joined our ranks for selfish reasons, hoping to use the political upheaval to their own advantage . . . or prostitute it to the political parties with which they were affiliated.”<sup>21</sup> His anger

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., November 10 1892.

<sup>19</sup> Transcript of Loucks’s speech to NFA&IU convention, November 15 1892, *Dakota Ruralist*, November 24 1892.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

spilled over, as he called for a test of loyalty for all members.<sup>22</sup> “Our organization will stand by those proven true to their trust as surely as they will repudiate the unfaithful”, Loucks said.<sup>23</sup> For the remainder of his career, Loucks would not entertain political compromise as he had in the early days of the Independent party in South Dakota when he passively allowed and grudgingly defended excising woman suffrage and prohibition from the 1890 Independent platform. He warned against those not completely committed to the cause as he saw it: “the enemy from within will prove more dangerous than those from without.”<sup>24</sup>

Loucks’ anger was a product of factors both internal and external to the Alliance. Personally, he had believed that the Alliance had accomplished its goal of uniting the western and southern Populists in the lead-up to the 1892 election. He came to believe that disloyalty and dissension had produced the 1892 election loss.<sup>25</sup> His reaction was to enforce ideology, believing that through it, the Alliance could influence the actions of its membership.

Internally, Loucks turned his focus on “the untrue” members of the party. This, to some degree at least, was related to his ongoing battle with Charles Macune. During 1891-1892, Loucks turned against Macune, whose reluctance to endorse a third party had not endeared him to Loucks. Worst of all, Macune was accused of conspiring with J.F. Tillman, another member of the NFA&IU executive board, with essentially conspiring with the Democratic Party. This distrust, combined with Macune’s somewhat suspicious fundraising methods and his ostentatious lifestyle eventually pushed Loucks to call openly for Macune’s removal from the Alliance’s board.<sup>26</sup> Led by Leonidas Polk, the anti-Macune group viewed Macune’s lifestyle as only one

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<sup>22</sup> Saloutos, *Farmer’s Movements in the South*, 136.

<sup>23</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, November 24 1892.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of The Farmers’ Alliance and The People’s Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1931), 272.

element of his disloyalty to the movement. Beginning at Ocala, Polk's group, with which Loucks was aligned, viewed Macune's stance against open partisanship as a great weakness. Through the party's new legislative council, established to build a policy platform for the next election, Polk built a base of support to leverage against Macune. Loucks jumped in as well and helped turn the council against Macune. After realizing his defeat was imminent, Macune removed himself from all Alliance posts, citing Loucks's maneuvers against him as a major reason for his exit.<sup>27</sup> With Polk's death, the bridge between the West and the South was largely gone and Macune, the Texan who had devised the subtreasury plan, was no longer Populist enough for Loucks who assumed Polk's role in the Alliance. Macune and his southern supporters had, in the eyes of Loucks and others, betrayed the cause by cooperating with Democrats and opposing the formation of a third party. Any chance for a true western and southern marriage in the People's Party, the one thing that could promise any sort of electoral success was likely gone after Memphis, if it had ever been possible.

After the NFA&IU convention, Loucks's rhetoric also increasingly took on imagery related to issues of fidelity and conspiracy. His constant preoccupation with fiscal and banking reform took on a conspiratorial and sometimes anti-Semitic tone. *The Ruralist* increasingly pictured "King Shylock" (a character that began appearing as early as January 1892) and featured exposés on the banking conspiracy focusing on Jews (or Shylocks), Rothschilds, and foreigners.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Robert McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (New York: Norton, 1977), 145-46.

<sup>28</sup> The best example of Loucks's flirtations with anti-Semitism appeared in *The Ruralist* on December 7 1893, "Shylock May Rob and Be a Patriot," *The Ruralist*, December 7 1893, and "Shylock's Game," which linked Republicans and Rothschilds together into a giant conspiracy against the producing man, *The Ruralist*, January 4 1894.



<sup>3</sup> The first appearance of “King Shylock” was on the front page of *The Ruralist* on January 7, 1892.

In the article titled “Shylock’s Game”, which appeared on the fourth page of *The Ruralist* on January 4, 1894, the writer outlined the “Rothschild’s Cleveland-Republican combine”<sup>29</sup> and its desire to keep the circulation of money as small as possible. Using a table, simplistically referencing all gold and silver in circulation per capita by country, it suggested that, through deliberate reduction in currency, the “Game” was one specifically designed to inhibit the ordinary man’s quest for wealth and limit available resources for the benefit of the few.<sup>30</sup> Without question, Loucks as author of this piece certainly assumed that this “combine” was powerful. He would continue to presume a conspiracy against the “ordinary man” by powerful shadowy forces for the next twenty-five years.

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<sup>29</sup> An interesting name, perhaps also calling into question the Pettigrew-led combine in South Dakota.

<sup>30</sup> *The Ruralist*, January 4 1894.

SPECIE.		
Country.	Gold.	Silver.
United States.....	702	482
United Kingdom.....	550	100
France.....	900	700
Germany.....	500	145
Belgium.....	65	55
Italy.....	140	60
Switzerland.....	15	15
Greece.....	2	4
Spain.....	100	125
Portugal.....	40	10
Austria-Hungary.....	40	90
Netherlands.....	25	65
Scandinavian Union.....	32	10
Russia.....	190	60
Turkey.....	50	45
Australia.....	100	15
Mexico.....	5	50
Central America.....		$\frac{1}{2}$
South America.....	45	25
Japan.....	90	50
India.....		900
China.....		700
The Straits.....		100
Canada.....	16	5
Cuba, Hayti, etc.....	20	2
Totals.....	3,727	3,820
POPULATION OF THE EARTH:		
Europe.....	357,379,000	
Asia.....	825,954,000	
Africa.....	163,953,000	
America.....	121,713,000	
Australia.....	3,230,000	
Oceanic Islands.....	7,420,000	
Polar Regions.....	80,000	
Total.....	1,479,729,000	
The total gold of the world in coin and bullion used as money amounts to \$2.51 per capita.		
The total silver of the world in coin and bullion used as money amounts to \$2.58 per capita.		

4 Per capita money, *The Ruralist*, January 4, 1894.

Despite the increasingly alarmist and paranoid rhetoric employed by Loucks after 1892, he did not necessarily demonstrate the “paranoid style” put forth by Richard Hofstadter.<sup>31</sup> In fact, as David B. Griffiths pointed out in his analysis of anti-Jewish expression in Populism, the term “Shylock” was often employed as an all-encompassing term reflecting a more emotional anti-British or anti-banking catch-all rather than one of pure anti-Semitism.<sup>32</sup> Without knowing

<sup>31</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform : From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 70.; Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, David B. *Populism in the Western United States, 1890-1900*, vol. 1. (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 644-648.

Loucks's personal beliefs on the matter, it is not possible to label him an anti-Semite. It is possible to say, however, that he employed anti-Semitic language in his explanations of the United States' economic predicament.

Further bringing Hofstadter's interpretation of Populist anti-Semitism into question, in 1892, Loucks actually applauded a Jewish Populist in *The Ruralist*. He re-printed a very positive story about a populist Rabbi in which the Jewish religion was praised as supporting "equal rights for all."<sup>33</sup> For Loucks, ideological alignment apparently trumped negative stereotypes and religious prejudice.

The leadership of the People's Party soon realized that the ideologically pure third-party model to which Loucks clung at Memphis would not suffice. Echoing what Loucks had fought against in 1890 in South Dakota, many began to call for "fusion" with a major party, likely the Democratic Party at the national level. Though resultant fusion was a complex matter, dependent on state-level support for any given party and its particular support base, generally it was the Democratic Party that was favored in most discussions. The belief that they could essentially co-opt the Democratic Party in the South and the West and establish a Populist-Democratic alliance was not especially new. As early as 1888, many in South Dakota had believed that cooperating with the Democrats was the way to success there as well. Nationally, as Populists absorbed the national loss of 1892 and the silver issue took on more and more salience after the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893, the calls grew louder.

Originally, silver coinage had been a fringe issue except for in the Rocky Mountain States where silver mining stood to gain from its addition to the pool of commodities that formed the basis of the American currency, which at the time was tied exclusively to the exchange of

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<sup>33</sup> *The Ruralist*, November 9 1892.

dollars for gold. From 1890 to 1893, the U.S. government had allowed a greater amount of silver to contribute to that pool of currency, but after economic disruptions, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was repealed. Many agrarian reformers, including Loucks, saw the coinage of silver as a necessary means by which the amount of currency in the American economy could be inflated and indebted farmers could find relief. Their goal was to ensure that the dollars they borrowed were not always worth less than the dollars they had to pay back.<sup>34</sup>

At first fusion occurred at the state level. Kansas, Nebraska, Montana, Idaho and Washington all experienced some successes with fusion, either between the Populists and Democrats or, most commonly in the West, Republicans. But, to Loucks, fusion was still a disturbing option. “We are anti-fusion” began an anonymous letter (most likely by Loucks himself as his writing style was usually quite conspicuous compared to other writers for the paper) to *The Ruralist*. “NO FUSION and NO OFFICE *at the sacrifice of principle.*”<sup>35</sup> Loucks saw the potential for the single issue of silver to completely obscure and dominate the social causes to which he had held since his time in Canada. He continued to want the silver issue to be only part of the Populist playbook, not its be-all and end-all.

Yet the potential for greater electoral success made fusion inevitable. In state after state Alliance and Populist groups began openly cooperating with the dominant party of their particular areas. They believed that winning would enable silver coinage and modest social reforms and that that was better than losing and realizing nothing as they had in 1892. One by one, steadfast Populists fled to the silver argument believing that it would lead to electoral victory. After 1894 and the success of fusion in Colorado, for example, where the Democratic

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<sup>34</sup> Discussions of both the help that silver coinage might bring as well as the perceived conspiracy against it shared by many Populists have been best summarized in Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 150-153.

<sup>35</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, May 11 1893. Emphasis in original.

Party had fused with the Populists and won state-wide offices, many more Populists began to see fusion as the recipe for success.

But those moves to fusion did not come without costs. As Richard Hofstadter wrote: “[O]ne of the ironic problems confronting reformers . . . was that the very activities they pursued in attempting to defend or restore the individualistic values they admired brought them closer to the techniques of organization they feared.”<sup>36</sup> Their “individualistic values”, an emphasis on the empowerment of individual farmers and laborers using government action, became just another point in their party repertoire rather than the basis for cooperative action. The Populists were now focused on party politics and the back-room deals that went with it, rather than on cooperatives. After all, fusion had worked for Kansans in 1892 and it seemed to have worked well in Nebraska and Minnesota as well, so, the Populists asked, why not nationally? By 1896, the forces of fusion predominated among the party leadership.

The Populist leadership also came to believe that, outside of fusion, silver was the issue with which they could pry the majority of Americans from the dominant parties. By adding the silver issue to their platform and emphasizing it almost to the exclusion of all else, they hoped to attract the votes of Republicans from the Northeast and Midwest and Democrats from the South. Yet when the Democratic Party embraced “the silver panacea” and coopted the Populist’s proposal, to paraphrase Hofstadter, rather than becoming a bridge for Democrats and Republican to join the Populists, the move created a bridge from the People’s Party to the Democrats.<sup>37</sup> The Populists and Democrats both nominated Nebraska Senator William Jennings Bryan for President in 1896. For all intents and purposes, at the national level, the People’s Party became a satellite of the Democratic Party. Loucks was almost certainly dispirited by this choice as he

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<sup>36</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 104-109.



continued to stand against any type of fusion at the state level from day one. He sensed, maybe for the first time, that things were not going the way he had intended.

Things did not go the way that many other Populists had intended leading up to 1896 either. With the exit of Grover Cleveland from politics, the Democratic Party was largely directionless with no one man to lead the party. With his famous “Cross of Gold” speech, William Jennings Bryan claimed victory at the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago and threw the People’s Party into disarray. With Bryan’s strong populist credentials and the firm pro-farmer and pro-silver stance demonstrated in the “Cross of Gold” speech, the Populists had little choice but to nominate Bryan themselves. After all, it was their best chance for victory. A major party had nominated a pro-reform candidate. Nominating Georgian firebrand Thomas Watson as their own Vice-Presidential candidate under Bryan, they still put forth the different decision as some evidence of their remaining independence.

Between the 1892 and 1896 elections, both nationally and in South Dakota, events continued to anger Henry Loucks outside of party politics. One of the primary Populist reform agenda items, more government ownership and control of the railroads, was hurt by the Supreme Court, which upheld its 1886 decision in *Wabash, St. Louis & Pacific Railway Co. v. Illinois* that confirmed that the federal government held authority over interstate commerce and limited the states capacity to regulate commerce that occurred between them. Any chance to change railroad regulation would have to happen at the national level rather than at the state one going forward.

Though 1892 had, in many ways, spelled the end of the Independents as a true alternative to the Republicans in South Dakota, the GOP was still frightened by the success that the Independent Party had achieved. Using the politics of ethnicity, obstructionist policy-making,

and outright dishonesty, after 1890 the Republicans embarked on a mission to annihilate the Independents and to marginalize Henry Langford Loucks himself.

Senator R.F. Pettigrew led the charge as the leader of a reformed Combine. Originally more inclined to lead from the background, Pettigrew took a major role during the 1892 election and after. His animosity toward Loucks was a motivating factor. “That man Loucks has wrecked almost every institution with which he has ever been connected”, Pettigrew said from Washington.<sup>38</sup> Whether based on his Canadian heritage, his personal failings as a farmer, or his supposed corruption as head of the Scandinavian Elevator Company, Pettigrew and the Combine continued to fight mercilessly against both Loucks and the Alliance.

The Republicans wielded a new weapon against the Independents as well. Focusing on the voters who might “split their ticket” between Democratic candidates and Independents, a group that had been a major force in both 1890 and 1892, the Republicans sought to change the rules of the ballot box through what Peter Argersinger, discussing the rules in various states including South Dakota, called a “conscious effort to disrupt opposition parties.”<sup>39</sup>

State legislatures regulated elections in their jurisdictions and, in a time of Jim Crow laws and nearly eighty years before the 1965 Voting Rights Act that enforced legal rights in the South, there was little if any recourse for those groups penalized by state legislators seeking a partisan advantage at the ballot box. And Republicans in South Dakota were quick to exploit their power after the growth of the Independents had threatened their pre-eminence. The election of James Kyle through the cooperation of Democrats and Independents had cost the Republicans a Senate seat. Pettigrew would not accept such a result again. And he had the ability to prevent it.

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<sup>38</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 94.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Argersinger. “A Place on the Ballot?: Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws,” *American Historical Review*, 85:2 (1980), 287.

Parties in South Dakota used separate ballot tickets. Ballots were divided by party and then sub-divided by candidate. In fusion agreements, the parties simply chose to nominate the same candidates so that whichever party was preferred, both slates of votes would go to one candidate. The Republicans used this system to their advantage. After using existing election law to prevent the Prohibition Party of South Dakota from appearing on the ballot after the Prohibitionists and Independents successfully fused in 1890 and double-balloted for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, they saw the success ballot measures could have against smaller parties. Through a successful restriction on fusion in 1892, the GOP launched a campaign to further alter South Dakota election law in 1893, this time directly against the Independents.<sup>40</sup> And with Loucks having left the role of President of the South Dakota Alliance to focus on his national responsibilities, The Alliance was “incapable of offering the needed leadership” against the election law changes and the other crises that befell them.<sup>41</sup>

The Republican plan for what would come to be called the anti-fusion law stated that “the name of no candidate shall appear more than once on the ballot for the same office.” The Republicans also replaced the balloting system that had existed with one listing candidates by column rather than listed separately by party as they desired to make party affiliation less clear at the voting booth. They also passed laws mandating that when parties cooperated, their judicial and committee appointments would be pooled, diluting their strength.<sup>42</sup> Republican governor Charles H. Shelton, a former member of the Alliance, signed the law after it was passed by the state legislature in 1893, harming the partisan hopes of many of his former compatriots.

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (Lawrence Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 289; Argersinger, “A Place on the Ballot”, 288-89.

<sup>41</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 110.

<sup>42</sup> Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*, 163-169.

Between 1892 and 1896, R.F. Pettigrew also undertook a detailed plan of ethnic politicking to undermine the Independents. Using the Independent policy of banning the alien ownership of land in arguments to the state's large German and Scandinavian voting blocs who favored these changes, and using the British and German voters' antipathy to prohibition, Pettigrew successfully painted the Independents as both anti-immigrant and anti-beer. Eroding the Independent farmer base by focusing its messages to specific voters with whom certain parts of the Independent platform were much less popular was a successful tactic. The selective targeting of certain blocs kept the Independents from ever regaining their hold on the state legislature and reinforced Republican dominance.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, when it came to attracting ethnic voters, Republicans focused their attention on German, British, and Irish immigrants to South Dakota. These groups favoured keeping liquor legal and, though often in favour of the Populists' calls for greater economic equality, were largely kept in the Republican camp through fears that their beer or whiskey could be confiscated.

Pettigrew, trying to keep the GOP popular with certain ethnic blocs, then did something unusual. In 1896, after an apparent change of heart, Pettigrew embraced silver and became a Populist supporter.<sup>44</sup> Likely motivated, at least in part, by self-interest and a desire to retain his Senate seat, Pettigrew reacted to the poor economic circumstances facing the nation after the panic of 1893, and through what appears to have been a pragmatic observation about the politics before him, bucked the Republican establishment. Loucks had spent almost all of 1894 denying

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<sup>43</sup> For more on ethnic voting blocs in the state see Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889*, 173-180; 200; Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 73; Lori Ann Lahlum, "'Hurrah for Bryan': Gender and Agrarian Politics in Eastern South Dakota Norwegian American Communities, 1880-1910," paper presented at Western History Association conference, October 14, 2010. Cited with permission.

<sup>44</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 128-129.

rumours of fusion between Democrats and Independents.<sup>45</sup> Then, suddenly, he was faced with a Republican heavyweight and previous political foe that joined the party that he had helped found.

Pettigrew's switch began with his support for a measure that the Republican Party had steadfastly opposed in 1895: Populist rail legislation that sought to establish greater regulation and a litigation fund enabling suits against railroad companies. Increasingly he came to believe that moderating the existing system with legislation such as railroad regulation and the coinage of silver could alleviate the plight of many who had suffered since the crash of 1893. To what degree this was a calculus born out of principle versus a pragmatic sense of the political winds is difficult to say. For all intents and purposes, Pettigrew saw his party moving further away from moderation, particularly on the silver question. His own position in the party was also weakened as employees of the Milwaukee Road railroad company, Alfred Kittridge and Nye Phillips, expanded their hold over the state GOP with their own more conservative message.<sup>46</sup> He began clandestinely corresponding with Loucks in 1895 and eventually won him over. At least grudgingly. Loucks, likely seeing the writing on the wall, was forced to accept Pettigrew.<sup>47</sup>

In June 1896 Pettigrew led a new party, the Silver Republicans, into fusion with the Populists. The Silver Republicans grew nationally out of dissatisfaction with the Republican adherence to the gold standard after they had united with Democrats to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Founded by Senator Henry Teller of Colorado, the Silver Republicans united Republicans that supported silver as a basis for U.S. currency, and in some places fused with the Populists. Essentially, the Silver Republicans were a fusionist construct meant to bring like-

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<sup>45</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, March 29 1894.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 128.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth E., Jr. Hendrickson, "The Political Career of Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, 1848-1926," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 34 (1968), 241.

mindful Democrats, Republicans and Populists from the Midwest and Mountain states together to pressure for the adoption of the minting of silver along with gold.<sup>48</sup> In South Dakota at least, Pettigrew led the Silverites to join under the Independent banner, so as to avoid the 1893 anti-fusion law.

At the 1896 People's Party convention Loucks remained an ardent anti-fusionist, but he lost the day as the exuberance brought by Pettigrew, the Silver Republicans, and the keynote speech of the other Senator from South Dakota, James Kyle, brought official fusion to South Dakota. Loucks was pushed aside and the South Dakota Populists supported William Jennings Bryan, the silver panacea and fusion.<sup>49</sup> Loucks's support would only drop from then.

The final nail in the political coffin of Henry Langford Loucks was hammered into place by James Kyle. With R.F. Pettigrew whispering of opportunity and support for silver in one ear and Loucks screaming more radical ideas still focused on government ownership and the subtreasury in the other, Kyle was forced to make a choice.

Despite his loss at the 1896 convention, Loucks did not stop pursuing his own brand of social and political change afterward. He continued to advocate for the public ownership of utilities, railroads and the reform of all U.S. banks and taxation. Pettigrew, on the other hand, brought conservatism to the Populist cause, supporting the coinage of silver and railroad regulation, but little else.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Argersinger. *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, s.v. "Silver Republicans." Encyclopaedia of the Great Plains. <http://plainhumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.pg.075.xml> (accessed February 5 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Terrence J. Lindell, "Populists in Power: The Problems of the Andrew E. Lee Administration in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 22:4 (Winter 1992), 347.

<sup>50</sup> Lee, *Principle over Party*, 128-129.

Loucks, according to D. Jerome Tweton, “viewed capitalism as a stage through which society must go. . . [before] it yield [end] to a more humanitarian system.”<sup>51</sup> That more humanitarian stage, where the financial system rewarded producers as well as speculators was Loucks’s goal. James Kyle, the former Republican and conservative preacher became increasingly uncomfortable with this ideal and “the radical socialist tinge to South Dakota Populism.”<sup>52</sup> The Republican Party began appealing to Kyle’s discomfort as a new Senate election cycle commenced. With a newly elected Independent governor, Andrew E. Lee, brought to office with Silver Republican support and Pettigrew’s, many believed that the Populists’ resurgence was under way. And things seemed to be looking up for them, as they won a majority of nineteen seats and were poised, headed into the legislature’s deliberations over a United States Senate seat.

There were four Populist candidates for the Senate seat: Loucks, still holding some support amongst a less traditional, less pragmatic group of supporters, F.M. Goodykoontz, A.J. Plowman, and – of course – James Kyle. At first, the Populists believed that the seat was theirs for the taking. Pettigrew, for his part, knew that the party would have no hope of achieving success if it kept five candidates in consideration. Loucks, upon Pettigrew’s suggestion, bowed out of the race. But it was all for nought. The Republicans capitalized on Kyle’s increasing discomfort with the Populists and enticed him to their side. This also weakened Pettigrew’s hopes for Kyle as a conduit to the patronage a Senator controlled.<sup>53</sup> With fifty-four Republicans,

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<sup>51</sup> D. Jerome Tweton, “Considering Why Populism Succeeded in South Dakota and Failed in North Dakota,” *South Dakota History* 22 (Winter 1992), 340

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Kyle resigned from the board of directors of a Populist newspaper citing its “radical position” on government ownership.

<sup>53</sup> Hendrickson, “The Political Career of Richard F. Pettigrew,” 251.

ten Populists and three Democrat votes in the House, Kyle was re-elected – this time, as a Republican and Pettigrew turned further toward local Populists as a source of power.<sup>54</sup>

Loucks was furious. He forbade any to call his son, whom he had named after the Senator, by the name Kyle.<sup>55</sup> Loucks had fallen so far in the eyes of the Populists themselves that there seemed to have been little argument with his decision to remove himself from consideration. Once the party's primary choice for Senate and Governor, he was now relegated to sitting on the sidelines.

In a series of letters between the ever-tighter cabal of Pettigrew and Governor Lee about the Senate battle, the near-complete marginalization of Loucks by the more conservative Senator and Governor was clear. Essentially a play-by-play between the Governor at home and the Senator in Washington, the letters showed practically no consideration for Loucks as a political force any longer. He was treated as a mere annoyance. "Loucks [and others] are acting very inconsistent with the party"<sup>56</sup> wrote Lee to Pettigrew. Loucks, said Lee, wanted to "dictate a man from outside"; though he "withdrew from the race, he wants to kill everybody else."<sup>57</sup> Lee and Pettigrew believed that Loucks, embittered by his own personal loss of power was apparently unaware that he could no longer dictate anything in the larger, vastly altered, South Dakota Independent party.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the party had become an umbrella organization of farmers, labor union members, silverites and supportive ethnic groups, particularly immigrants of Scandinavian origin of whom most were farmers and some miners. The Independent movement was vastly changed from the group of farmers Loucks had commanded in 1884. The former party leader,

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<sup>54</sup> Lee, *Principle over Party*, 141-43.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Lee to Pettigrew, February 10 1897, Andrew E. Lee letters, Lee Collection, South Dakota State University, Brookings, S.D.

<sup>57</sup> Lee to Pettigrew, February 5 1897.

<sup>58</sup> Lindell, "Populists in Power", 346-347.



sadly, had just become an obstacle to the party organization he had created. With the Silver Republicans in control of much of the Populists and often supported by the minority Republicans and their 53 seats in the legislature, many of the Populist policies were watered down and moderated.<sup>59</sup> After the Kyle defection, and holding a majority in the state house, these Republicans held Governor Lee hostage as a solo Populist in a sea of moderates.

The Lee years meant the moderation of the Independent party and the sacrifice of the more radical Populist goals like the subtreasury and government ownership of the railroad and telegraph for the pursuit of more immediate change. They also made Lee's governorship one of the more successful Populist administrations. Though hampered by his fusion alliance, which made it impossible to pass some of the more radical solutions that Populists alone would have preferred, he was able to accomplish several important reforms: the secret ballot, the repeal of the anti-fusion ballot laws<sup>60</sup>, the direct election of Senators by popular vote and the initiative and referendum were all passed in his administration.<sup>61</sup>

More than anything else though, the period from 1889 to 1898 in South Dakota politics marked the rise, apogee and collapse in the support for Henry Langford Loucks and his Independent Party. Built upon a strategy of social programs, education, reform-minded cooperation and a political plan focused on newspaper advocacy, the Independents rose to become a major factor in South Dakota politics. Their early foray into third party politics was, in many ways, the local beginning of the national Populist Party.

But with success came greater attention from opposition parties in the form of policy replication and political manipulation. Slowly but surely Loucks's plan of graduating from

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<sup>59</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 151.

<sup>60</sup> Lee was re-elected in 1900 on a fusion ballot.

<sup>61</sup> Terrence J. Lindell, "Populists in Power: The Problems of the Andrew E. Lee Administration in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 22:4 (Winter, 1992), 347; 363-5.

“social, educational, financial and political”<sup>62</sup> advocacy in that order further exacerbated regional splits at the national level. The gap between North and South was widened as he insisted upon “tests of truth” for the Alliance’s diverse national membership. Gradually, his attention to national issues (and national in-fighting) prompted his increasing radicalization on fiscal matters, his support for government ownership of the railway and telegraph and his more inflammatory rhetoric soon cost him his support locally in South Dakota. Finally, he was outflanked on issues of policy as colleagues across the aisle, led at first by Republican lawmaker R.F. Pettigrew and later by Republican Alfred B. Kittredge, identified the most popular Independent policies least offensive to their own ideological positions and appropriated them.

Battles inside the party in South Dakota were best exemplified by the differences between Senator James Kyle and Loucks and nationally between Macune and Polk. Both undermined Populist efforts. Arguments nationally about whether to abandon economic and social policies in favour of fusion with another party and the adoption of a single-issue silver platform distracted the Populists from what had made them successful in the first place – attention to farmers and the working class. National pressures pushed Loucks further and further away from the community-focused politics that had brought him and the Dakota Alliance’s successes locally. National pressures also pulled Loucks toward more complex policy stances and opened up the possibility for the Republicans of South Dakota to win support from the Independents and co-opt that party. The Republican pilfering of James Kyle from the Populists, due at least in part to a split brought by Loucks’s more socialist policy prescriptions like his continued calls for outright government ownership of communication and transportation

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<sup>62</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 21.

infrastructure, marked the true end of the Independents in South Dakota politics. Loucks, on a personal level, fared no better.

## Chapter VI: Conclusions

For all intents and purposes, Henry Loucks's political life ended with the Kyle Senate victory in 1897 and the creation of Pettigrew's Silver Republicans. The letters exchanged between Governor Lee and Senator Pettigrew surrounding the Kyle Senate battle demonstrate that not only had Loucks's importance to the movement essentially ended, but that his interpretation of his own capacity to affect events was disconnected from reality. In a letter from Governor Lee to Senator Pettigrew dated February 5 1897, Lee indicated his belief that Loucks did not understand his true position in the political machinations of the Populist coalition. "[Loucks] wants to kill off [the Combine's choice for the Senate race] and may undertake to dictate a man from the outside."<sup>1</sup> He continued: "I can now readily see why you have opposed him and why you feel as you do toward him."<sup>2</sup> Finally, Lee discussed threats Loucks had made to force the Governor to support then-still-Populist Kyle. "He is now threatening to hold up all appointments and measures that I want passed for the good of our state... this I do not think he will be able to accomplish."<sup>3</sup> That the two most powerful men in South Dakota politics no longer saw Loucks as anything more than an annoyance says much about his political strength at the time. Given Kyle's defection to the Republicans, Loucks' failure to influence events, and the reality that the Independent Party had essentially been absorbed into the Silver Republicans, Loucks returned to the Republican Party in 1898.<sup>4</sup>

For the next thirty years, until his death in 1928, Loucks continued to write, speak and advocate for his uncompromising brand of radical social change and banking reform. He

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<sup>1</sup> Pettigrew to Lee, February 6 1897. Andrew E. Lee letters, Lee Collection, South Dakota State University, Brookings, S.D.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> R Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 173.

persisted, despite the near-complete loss of a political base as farmers abandoned Loucks's view of Populism at the local level. Membership in the South Dakota Farmers' Alliance dropped from 8,279 paying members in 1890 to just 181 in 1894<sup>5</sup> as members left in droves for more timid, Republican-dominated state politics. Loucks ran for office twice more after 1900, contesting a Republican Senate nomination in 1914 and running for Senate in 1924, where he "garnered less than fourteen hundred votes".<sup>6</sup>

The post-political life of Henry Langford Loucks was also a rather tragic one. On top of losing his leg in an accident in 1891, he also lost three of his children before they reached adulthood. Between running for office and writing myriad books and articles about the conspiratorial and "oppressive banking system", he attempted to get many of his works published, writing and visiting printing firms. After 1910 though, even the letters he sent seeking publication for the works he had compiled on the conspiracies of the Shylocks and the Rothschilds took on increasingly defeatist tones. "I am handicapped for want of means", he wrote in reference to his desire to publish a new book in 1917.<sup>7</sup> Frequently complaining about his lack of personal finances (it appears that his finances never fully recovered from the collapse of the Elevator Company in 1891), his letters were often written on bleached newspapers.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, even new paper was too costly for him by this period.<sup>9</sup> His words, though, were memorable if a bit repetitive.

Under the tagline "Equal Opportunity For All. That's All" Loucks wrote several pamphlets between 1915 and 1920. In one pamphlet he described "our medium of exchange,

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<sup>5</sup> Farmers' Alliance Membership Records. South Dakota University Archives Online, <http://history.sd.gov/Archives/farmers/> (Accessed February 3 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 178.

<sup>7</sup> Loucks to Vincent, 1917. Loucks Correspondence, Letters 1917-24, Archives of the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S.D.

<sup>8</sup> Loucks Correspondence, Letters 1917-24, Archives of the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S.D.

<sup>9</sup> Loucks Correspondence, Letters 1917-24, Archives of the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S.D.

whether of metal or paper, is a public utility.... It should be administered without special favor, and without private profit.”<sup>10</sup> Loucks’s enduring beliefs surrounding currency and the economy were encompassed in this sentence. In 1919, the follow-up to his book, *The Conspiracy of the House of Morgan and How to Defeat It*, which he had written in 1916, was released as a booklet, again under the same title. In *How To Maintain Our Government Bonds At Par*, Loucks focused once again on the conspiracy he saw in how currency and credit were manipulated by what he called “The House of Morgan”, which was his code for “wealthy businessmen and corporations.”<sup>11</sup> He said so directly in describing “The System” that allowed for such economic manipulation to occur. He wrote: “for brevity we call [it] The House of Morgan.”<sup>12</sup>

In *How To Maintain Our Government Bonds At Par*, Loucks suggested that the Great War had allowed for the completion of the conspiracy and the ability of the wealthy and connected to take still more profits from producers. While artificially reducing the amount of currency in circulation kept interest rates and debts high for farmers, it also provided greater returns on the capital of the wealthy. In the chapter “Aims of the House of Morgan”, Loucks argued that the government decision not to tax the profits made by corporations and individuals during the war was an intentional hand out to them. In his mind, the system was determined to perpetuate the wealth of the corporation and the robber baron.<sup>13</sup>

Loucks’s economic views, if it is possible to summarize them succinctly, would likely be best explained by his own summary of the “money problem” as it appeared in the article titled “Would Review Several of the Old Promises” in the *South Dakota United Farmer* newspaper on May 21, 1924. “First: By the contraction of our money, or currency in circulation, now in

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<sup>10</sup> Loucks, *Rural Credits and Social Development*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> King Shylock, in many ways, was a stand-in term for the same.

<sup>12</sup> Loucks, *How To Maintain Our Government Bonds At Par*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

process, as I will show later, both by decreased amount, and in increased demand, they will increase the purchasing power of the money which they control.”<sup>14</sup> His belief, that the moneyed interests were manipulating the amount of currency in the economy and intentionally creating scarcity for their own benefit was a key factor in Loucks’s thinking from the very beginning. It was also the basis for the Grangers’, Greenbackers’ and Populists’ ideals. It was Loucks’s personal anger over what he saw, justifiably, as the inequitable treatment of farmers that pushed him to become political in the first place.

This anger and the move from political interest group and agitator to partisanship was what was largely responsible for the collapse of the original populist movement in South Dakota. Loucks’s reaction to the loss of 1892, that pushed him to more extreme attitudes and a demand for strict adherence to specific policy prescriptions just made the party smaller, alienating those who did not agree with every single one of his ideas.

But what else accounts for Loucks’s rise as Populist leader and his fall from a high level of political power in the Farmers’ Alliance in 1892 to near-complete irrelevance in 1897? An evaluation of Loucks’s life and activities reveal two likely answers. First and foremost he was, at his heart, a radical dedicated to greater government intervention. Conditioned by his early religious and political life in Canada, Loucks was used to bringing people with him and achieving results. The success he experienced while a member of the IOGT in Canada demonstrated this as did his early successes as a farmers’ leader in South Dakota. Though at first experiencing success there as cooperative leader and educator, the game of politics largely eluded him and he was either unable or unwilling to adapt to the strategies and back-room deals of R.F. Pettigrew and the Republican politicians in the state. His radicalism was enhanced and

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<sup>14</sup> *South Dakota United Farmer*, May 21 1924.

fed through vocal, like-minded Populist leaders with whom he worked in cooperation. But when confronted with the difficulties inherent to politics, like the loss of 1892, he responded with greater ideological entrenchment and enforcement and, as a result, alienated many of those supporters who had made up an important part of his political support. His openness to partner with other parties or groups, as he had with the Prohibitionists in 1890, had disappeared. For all intents and purposes, he moved too far for the ultimately pragmatic South Dakotans.

Loucks's political activities between 1890 and 1897 also reveal a somewhat paradoxical relationship between national and state-level actions. As William Pratt stated in his summary of South Dakota historiography, "the Independent political movement basically killed off the organizations that gave it birth."<sup>15</sup> Between 1884 and 1890, the Farmers' Alliance, acting as an interest group rather than a political party, accomplished quite a bit. It forced the established parties to adopt a railroad commission, elected to office many men friendly to the organization, and educated farmers about their plight. Though becoming a party gave it a brief boost in 1890-91, it was all downhill from there.

A look at Loucks's political life adds to the paradox that Pratt observed. The national party was established in 1891-92 and, at least in the case of South Dakota and Loucks, killed off the state-level Alliance that gave it birth. Alliance membership records indicate as much. Loucks's increasing focus on cooperating with the movements of Kansas, North Carolina and Minnesota distracted him from what had made the Independents successful in 1890 – a focus on the needs of South Dakotans. Focusing on politics rather than community action, things changed. Although state-level actions alone may not have achieved the macro-level changes some of the economic issues facing South Dakota farmers' needed in the long-term, a focus on the things that

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<sup>15</sup> William Pratt, "South Dakota Populism and Its Historians." *South Dakota History*, 22:4, (Winter 1992), 309-329.



could have been done locally, like grain quality regulations, railroad commission regulation and electoral and legislative reforms, might have made the Alliance a longer lasting organization.

When Loucks reacted to national issues as President of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union at Memphis, he attempted to force all Alliance members into one ideological box. This was simply impossible; the needs of Texas farmers and Southern white supremacists were fundamentally different from those of multiethnic South Dakota farmers. Loucks's focus on government ownership of the railroads and telegraph and his refusal to entertain compromise on issues related to currency inflation and economic reform did not resonate everywhere with everyone. Certainly, in the South, economic reforms did not have the same salience they did in the Mountain states or Midwest where silver was much more of an issue. Nonetheless, in the South, money concerns were still a significant factor. A reconciliation between Southerners and the Mountain and Midwestern Populists under virtually any circumstances would prove impossible; particularly after the party chairman demanded that they all swear allegiance to a precise set of political principles. His work as editor of the *Dakota Ruralist* and his increasing focus on national issues in its pages reflected his belief that the national party must encompass specific political ideals, but that desire ended up obscuring the paper's original function to advocate for and grow the South Dakota Alliance. Loucks failed to connect the local conditions faced by his readers and supporters and the national-level policy prescriptions that he came to emphasize. His attempt to explain the subtreasury plan in August 1891 is instructive. In it, he listed the ways a farmers' hold on his future would be strengthened by the plan. He argued that it would "enable the farmer to hold his wheat until the rush is over, giving an even, stable market the year round."<sup>16</sup> Statements like these tied the desires of his

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<sup>16</sup> *Dakota Ruralist*, August 22 1891.

readers to the national plan for the subtreasury. What is fascinating though, is how rarely this tack was taken by Loucks in *The Ruralist*. Most of the time, he attacked his enemies or described why his enemies were against the Alliance's plans. Rarely did he spend time as he did in August 1891 making the Populists' policies real to his readers.

Loucks' tragic political life is instructive in many other ways as well. First, he was a true believer. His priority above all else was to enact dramatic social and economic reforms. Despite playing politics with prohibition and suffrage measures in the creation of the Independent platform in 1890, he was never a real pragmatist. In the pursuit of banking reform, currency reform, and social education, he was willing to compromise almost nothing, yet was seemingly willing to sacrifice his own financial and personal advancement when necessary.

Loucks's actions and those of the Populists in South Dakota prompt several interesting questions. To what degree does a political party and its size matter in achieving changes in policy and altering the status quo? Loucks and his followers certainly achieved greater success as an interest group outside politics than they ever did as a political party on their own. In South Dakota, at the state level, they accomplished more as a small party than they did once they were a larger national one.

Political parties are an exercise in pragmatism and seldom, if ever, does a party occupy positions one hundred percent in alignment with the goals of its individual members. Those that endure are, both today and at the end of the Gilded Age, big-tent organizations that seek to amalgamate a great many varied interests. Loucks neither understood nor desired to compromise his ideals for pragmatic gains. And after the 1892 election, when Loucks felt that the principles of the People's Party had been abandoned by Southerners who feared African Americans and those who simply sought personal gain, he abandoned all pretense of pragmatism.

From then on, Loucks slipped increasingly into conspiracy-laden diatribes about King Shylock and the Rothschilds. Culminating in his 1916 book, *The Conspiracy of the House of Morgan and How to Defeat It*, he appears in many ways to resemble the paranoid style put forth by Richard Hofstadter.<sup>17</sup> His potentially anti-Semitic and nativist explanations for much of America's ills are somewhat disturbing to read today but were hardly unique. As C. Vann Woodward described in his biography of Tom Watson of Georgia, anti-Semitism and conspiratorial messages both direct and implied were not unique to Loucks. Woodward recounted Watson's attacks on Leo Frank, a Jewish shop owner accused of murder under dubious evidence in 1914, when Watson "assured his readers that there was 'a gigantic conspiracy of Big money' organized to corrupt the state's courts, its governor [and] its papers."<sup>18</sup> Yet, in Loucks's case, conspiracy theories seem more to have just been the best explanation that he could come up with. He had believed that, as he had witnessed in Canada with the International Order of Good Templars, assembling a like-minded group of people who were dedicated to the same end and who petitioned tirelessly for change could achieve significant reforms. In America though, he went farther, and sought a political party. For that, like-mindedness and agreement on basic grievances was not sufficient to maintain a cohesive movement. To explain, he looked to the extraordinary (and the somewhat ridiculous) to explain Populists' difficulties.

But what does the Loucks story tell us about the Populists more broadly? And what does his story say about the various interpretations of Populism? John Hicks and Theodore Soloutos situated the Populists as economic actors: men and women whose ideals were stimulated by their

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 438.

debt and their hardship at the hands of railroad companies, monopolies and an international economic system unsympathetic to their lives.<sup>19</sup> Both scholars viewed the Populists' plans as precursors to the later reforms enacted by the Progressives, particularly in the political arena.<sup>20</sup> The story of Henry Loucks and the South Dakota Farmers' Alliance fits into this narrative in many ways. Certainly, economic worries and a sense of discontent and unfairness in a system that seemed to ignore them contributed to the farmers' desires to seek political means to deal with their issues. Yet, the fact that the Populists under Andrew E. Lee were able to secure the initiative and referendum as early as they did, in 1898, does suggest that maybe Hicks and Soloutos did not give the Populists, at least in South Dakota, their due as the progressives were not yet a force at that time.

The South Dakota Alliance's growth during a period of significant immigration into the territory, which also demonstrates that there was a post-frontier factor in its growth. Immigration into the territory (and later state) helped the Alliance grow. Out of 328,808 persons listed in the 1890 census, only 128,750 were Americans going back more than a generation. The rest were either born outside of the United States (90,843) or were born in America of foreign parents (109,215.)<sup>21</sup> Almost two thirds of South Dakotans were immigrants or first-generation Americans. But approximately 11 percent, or 9,493 out of 91,055 South Dakotans, reported their home country as Canada or Newfoundland on the 1890 Census.<sup>22</sup> A total of 70,839 of 114,003

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<sup>19</sup> John Hicks, *The Populist Revolt : a History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931); Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.)

<sup>20</sup> Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.), 285-287.

<sup>21</sup> 1890 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing, Occupations  
[http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a\\_v1p2-05.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v1p2-05.pdf) (accessed January 22, 2015.)

<sup>22</sup> 1890 U.S. Census, Census of Population and Housing, Country of Birth  
[http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a\\_v1-16.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v1-16.pdf) (accessed January 22, 2015.)

South Dakotans who reported occupations, said they were involved in agriculture or mining.<sup>23</sup> More farmers in the territory meant more discontented people when the high number of debtor farmers are considered<sup>24</sup> and, in the case of Loucks, brought a leader to the discontented. The diverse nature of South Dakota's population brought people likely to feel the pain of the period's economic reality as well as those likely to listen to another immigrant who promised help. Yet, the fact that that leader was Canadian does not, on its own, seem to have been a factor in his selection.

Richard Hofstadter would point to Loucks's use of King Shylock as evidence that the Populists represented an anti-Semitic, nativist strain in American politics. Ever present and occasionally enflamed, the paranoid style was, for Hofstadter, the fascist reality behind the American extreme right that he saw in Senator Joseph McCarthy and the John Birch Society of 1950s and 1960s America.<sup>25</sup> Loucks does not fit easily here either. Loucks's flattering portrait of a Rabbi, his focus on his political stance rather than religion and his use of broad terms without focus on their meaning (as he did with The House of Morgan) belie a purely "Paranoid Style" interpretation of the leader of the South Dakota Alliance.

Thomas Watson and his portrayal by C. Vann Woodward does certainly, in some manner, factor into Hofstadter's thesis. Watson, the People's Party candidate for Vice President in 1892, in his later years became a virulent anti-Semite and racist. Previously supportive of African American rights, Watson called for "a reversal of deeply rooted racial prejudices and firmly fixed traditions as old as Southern history."<sup>26</sup> He eventually turned on his own more progressive

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> John Dibbern, "Who Were The Populists? A Study of Grass-Roots Alliancemen in Dakota, " *Agricultural History* 56:4 (October 1982), 686.

<sup>25</sup> Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 70-72.

<sup>26</sup> Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, 220.

political roots and, through journalism, contributed to the lynching of the accused Jewish shop owner, Leo Frank, outside Atlanta in 1915.<sup>27</sup> Here Hofstadter had a point. Watson, perhaps for political expediency and his desire for greater support from Georgians, or perhaps out of the bitterness of defeat, did give in to the paranoid style.

Loucks, despite his later political writings, financial troubles, and clear conspiratorial beliefs did not cleanly fit into the paranoid style, at least with regard to nativism and anti-Semitism. His persistent belief in a worldwide conspiracy that controlled the economic systems of the United States and the world certainly represents what Hofstadter called belief in “some single conspiratorial force.”<sup>28</sup> But, and herein lies perhaps a bit too much psychology, Loucks did not cling to these conspiracy theories when the Populists had their greatest successes. They were not the core of his belief system. He did certainly believe, with some definite justification, that the wealthy were intentionally stacking the deck for their own benefit. And he did turn to conspiracies with increasing vehemence in the time between his success and later writings. Might he have just been desperate to explain why he and his movement had, for the most part, lost? Might the loss of his leg, a child, his beloved elevator company and an election between 1891 and 1892 have pushed him further than he might have otherwise gone? Perhaps these are too much psychological questions, but they should not be ignored entirely.

On their economic concerns, Hofstadter dismissed the Populists. Loucks and the Alliance, though, were not purely ideological in their approach to financial issues. They built businesses designed to deal with their constituents’ precise concerns over price, transportation and inflation. To paraphrase Charles Postel, Hofstadter’s disregard for Populists’ economic policies was incomplete: “Hofstadter was only half right about agrarian protest. . . their ideas

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform : From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 17.

were not born of some ‘soft-headed delusions’, but their convictions about state monopolies and political action flowed directly from business strategies based on commercial interest.”<sup>29</sup> Loucks’ and Wardall’s elevator and insurance endeavors definitely qualified as business strategies based on commercial interests and their successes challenge Hofstadter’s belief that the Populists lacked financial acumen.

Lawrence Goodwyn’s work in Populist history used the Populist movement as a means to discuss mass movements as a whole. Goodwyn outlined four phases to the growth of a movement:

The sequential process of democratic movement-building will be seen to involve four stages: (1) the creation of an autonomous institution where new interpretations can materialize that run counter to those of prevailing authority—a development which, for the sake of simplicity, we may describe as “the movement forming”; (2) the creation of a tactical means to attract masses of people—“the movement recruiting”; (3) the achievement of a heretofore culturally unsanctioned level of social analysis—“the movement educating”; and (4) the creation of an institutional means whereby the new ideas, shared now by the rank and file of the mass movement, can be expressed in an autonomous political way—“the movement politicized.”<sup>30</sup>

Goodwyn’s sequence definitely applied to Loucks and the Dakota Alliance. The formation of the Alliance in 1884 and its recruitment through cooperative insurance and sales initiatives marked the first two phases. Loucks’s focus early in *The Ruralist* on education and interest group tactics from 1884-1890 fit Goodwyn’s suggestions of step three. The movement became politicized with the advent of the Independent Party in 1890 and thus achieved the fourth stage in Goodwyn’s progression. Indeed, Loucks’s own description of his plans was indicative of a

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision*. (New York: Oxford University Press 2009.), 133.

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment : A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), xviii.

consciousness of this progression. Loucks himself believed in going from “first, social; second, educational; third, financial; and forth, political” phases of development.<sup>31</sup>

Goodwyn, in his evident sadness at the fate of the Populists also suggested that in many ways, the years 1892-96 marked the era when, faced with the realities of going from movement to pure political party, it essentially lost its nerve. “The ‘money question’ passed out of American politics essentially through self-censorship.”<sup>32</sup> In their pursuit of partisan success and their acceptance of fusion, the Populists had voluntarily abandoned the ideal that might have made the greatest impact for the movement, the abandonment of gold (or silver)-backed currency.<sup>33</sup> In his lament, Goodwyn summarized the tragedy of the movement: “The victory won by goldbugs in the 1890’s thus was consolidated by the New Deal reforms. These policies had the twin effects of sanctioning peonage and penalizing family farmers. The end result was a loss of autonomy by millions of Americans on the land.”<sup>34</sup> Goodwyn could not have summed up Loucks’s feelings and writings about the years after 1896 better. He was also challenging John Hicks’ suggestion that the Progressive movement and the Populists were directly linked and helped usher in the New Deal. Loucks seemed to believe as much, at least in regards to his apparent disgust with the post-war financial arrangements in his adopted country. And Loucks’s actions seem to confirm Goodwyn’s suggestion that the Populists lost their nerve and gave in on their core principle, a belief that the entire economic system was fundamentally rigged and had to be changed.

Besides the economic side, though, in the area of democratic reforms, lines between the Alliance and the Independents of South Dakota and the progressive reforms in the early-

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<sup>31</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 268-69.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.



twentieth century are more visible. Though not directly tied to the New Deal as Hicks and Soloutos argued, the reforms enacted or desired by Andrew Lee and the populist organization of South Dakota after 1898 were, in some ways, connected to the political reforms that were implemented nationally in the 1910s like the direct election of U.S. senators, and the initiative and referendum. The movement culture Goodwyn discussed and Loucks helped to create did lend itself to some changes after the Alliance and Independents no longer existed.

For Goodwyn, that movement culture was created through these four steps of creation, recruitment, education and politicization. But, as Goodwyn said, the “movement culture of Populism was not, and could not be, as intense as the movement culture originally generated within the Alliance cooperative crusade.”<sup>35</sup> Goodwyn, again, might as well have been speaking about Loucks and the Dakota Alliance specifically. Their time as the Independents – true political actors – lacked the strength and intensity of the cooperative era before 1890.

R. Alton Lee’s *Principle over Party* focused on the South Dakota Alliance as a group that saw political change being achieved only by committed individuals, and not by institutions or political parties.<sup>36</sup> Essentially agreeing with Hicks and Saloutos that the primary motivator of the Alliance was economic and founded in the experience of farmers arriving at a new place.<sup>37</sup> Lee’s focus on Wardall and Loucks as actors whose efforts were built on cooperative business and radical politics was an important account, demonstrating the skill with which Loucks and Wardall in particular established the cooperative insurance, elevator and farm equipment businesses and improved the lives of many farmers. This cannot be forgotten and Lee was perhaps the first to give them their due credit.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 178-181.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 187.

Lee focused on Loucks as a man who, above all else, favored ideals over politics.<sup>38</sup> In this, he was undoubtedly correct. The research demonstrated that for Loucks the man was less important than his ideas. Observing his reaction to the defection of Kyle or to the duplicity of Pettigrew, it is clear that Loucks saw a man's principles as paramount. He viewed their support or animosity toward his policy ideals as the measure of their morality. His 1892 reaction to the liars that "prostituted" themselves for their own ambition and the moralistic tones with which he characterized the "unfaithful" demonstrates his view that adherence to the party was tantamount to moral goodness.<sup>39</sup> Basically, *Principle over Party*, though a title that definitely represents Loucks's behaviors and attitudes well, was not the whole story. Perhaps *Principle over All Else* might better have represented Lee's excellent research.

Henry Loucks's Farmers' Alliance brought many changes to the way that political business was conducted in South Dakota. After all, without the Alliance, the initiative and referendum might never have been adopted there. Andrew E. Lee's administration and the changes it made in these matters would not have been possible were it not for Loucks, the Alliance or the Independents.<sup>40</sup>

If nothing else, Henry Langford Loucks demonstrates that it was not only Americans that have influenced Canadian politics as in Alberta with Henry Wise Wood, but that a Canadian had much to do with an important period in American political history. In fact, Loucks's time in Canada with the IOGT likely did much to make possible the successes he had in the United

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>39</sup> Transcript of Loucks's speech to NFA&IU convention, November 15, 1892, *Dakota Ruralist*, November 24, 1892.

<sup>40</sup> Terrence J. Lindell,, "Populists in Power: The Problems of the Andrew E. Lee Administration in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 22:4 (Winter, 1992), 345-365.

States and prompts discussion of what impacts social and political movements internationally may have had on those in the United States.

Henry Loucks, the Farmers' Alliance and the Independent Party of South Dakota represent in many ways a microcosm of the Populists and the People's Party nationally in the United States. Its growth from Farmers' Alliance into an interest group that pressured government and then finally into a political party, was mirrored in many states, including Kansas, Minnesota, and North Dakota. The movement's growth and the pains that accompanied its early successes were also present in many other state movements.<sup>41</sup> In short, South Dakota and the rise of its Populist movement were not especially unique. Dakota Territory claimed the first official Farmer's Alliance chapter<sup>42</sup>, but beyond that it was more typical than not.

Dakota's Alliance is most informative through the history of its failures rather than its successes. Loucks and Wardall, through their business dealings and cooperative organizations built a coalition and organization by appealing to their constituents' bottom lines. They focused all of their energies on improving the economic wellbeing of their core constituency. Once they deviated from that purpose and sought to expand into electoral politics, they stopped what had been their core focus and the source of their success. The Elevator Company collapsed as foreign investors pulled their support, and while the insurance program continued, it did so with much less emphasis as Wardall left to push the subtreasury nationally. It failed to grow as quickly after 1892. Combined with Loucks's departure from his position as South Dakota Alliance President, both men clearly turned to national politics exclusively. The leadership of the Dakota Alliance

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<sup>41</sup> For a focus on Texas see McMath, *Populist Vanguard*; Worth Robert Miller, on Oklahoma: *Oklahoma Populism*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.); on Kansas: Gene Clanton, "Populism, Progressivism, and Equality: The Kansas Paradigm." *Agricultural History* 51 (1977), 559-581.

<sup>42</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 79.

had turned its energy to winning national races rather than winning greater sales margins for its local constituents' wheat.

Nationally, the People's Party suffered much the same. When focused at the local level, on the needs of its core constituencies and on pressuring state government rather than trying to win national office, it grew and accomplished changes. Limited changes, but changes nonetheless. Once Populists began to seek a larger, tighter coalition as they did at Ocala, Cincinnati, St. Louis and Omaha, the cracks formed in their organization. Tying together the disparate sections of the South, North, Mountain and Midwest proved impossible. There were just too many differing economic interests and desires to satisfy them all broadly. And, in the search for broad ideological means to unite these disparate groups, the Populists began to focus on one policy issue, the silver issue, at the expense of their previous successful local and broader regulatory initiatives. Loucks was distracted from his local initiatives as well, as can be seen in the pages of *The Ruralist*, as he grew more and more focused on national issues rather than South Dakota ones. His emphasis on ensuring adherence to National Alliance policies meant virtually no discussions of the cooperative insurance or purchasing plans that had made the Farmers' Alliance popular with South Dakotans. After 1892, there was almost no mention of the plans in *The Ruralist*, as Loucks left his role as Alliance president in 1893 to pursue his national role. Robert McMath, in his *Populist Vanguard*, disagreed with the notion that "the Alliance destroyed itself by shifting from economic cooperation to radical political action" and emphasized that "this is not supported by the evidence, particularly in the South."<sup>43</sup> In South Dakota, though, the evidence is that it most certainly did.

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<sup>43</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 154.

In an effort to tie an unnatural national coalition together between the South, North, Midwest and Mountain states, the Alliance stopped focusing on the local coalitions among farmers and other labourers. And they all paid for it at the ballot box. Without the stronger, more developed party structures of the Republicans or Democrats, and their reliance on the state and county Alliances themselves for organization, the Populists were just not able to hold their disparate constituents together nationally, especially after having their focus split between the maintenance of their crucial, local groups and their growth as a big one.

This may come across as though the movement was doomed from the beginning. That may be true. Yet, more likely, it points to the fact that the Populists just moved too quickly. Had they continued to focus on local education and cooperation, they might have been able to build ties among the Southern and Northern Alliances more gradually, bringing together the disparate groups for the longer term. Once economic and political ties were formed across regional and social boundaries, they could have been strengthened and then a foray into politics might have been more successful had a culture of cooperation between them been built. Yet Henry Loucks made that impossible. His demand for a clear declaration from all members of the NFA&IO at Memphis stands as an example of the rush to politics and the fourth phase of Goodwyn's progression without the corresponding movement culture creation in the first three phases.<sup>44</sup>

Yet rushing to build a political party without constructing an organization under common, pragmatic principles is not the only thing that Loucks's political career demonstrates. The fact that a new immigrant to the area arrived and built an organization that challenged the political *status quo* in so short a time speaks to the political vacuum present in the territory. It also shows the discontent present amongst farmers and that they did not feel that their political

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<sup>44</sup> Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*, xviii.

system in 1884 was responsive to their needs. Loucks's legacy was that he formed a political coalition of farmers, often immigrant ones, and countered the Combine – forcing it to become more responsive to the needs of its agricultural constituents.

Finally, Kenneth Owen's statement<sup>45</sup> that in observing territorial politics we can find out a great deal about later state-level systems rings true. The factions present in the Republican Party and their occasional separation from the greater party, to a large extent, dictated the ascension of the Populists under Andrew E. Lee as they had the success of the Liberal Republicans thirty years earlier. Factionalism carried over from the territorial era to the state period.

Henry Loucks and his story also encourages greater reflection about cross-border politics. In Canada, Loucks learned about organizations and pressure group tactics. He brought that with him south to the United States and contributed to the political future of South Dakota and the nation. It speaks to the commonalities amongst Canadian and American farmers as well as European immigrant farmers of the time. They all felt the pain of their economic position and the diverse immigrant community in South Dakota listened to a fellow immigrant in his calls to create a farmers' club.

Indeed, that a political group built and led by a Canadian in America was, by any evaluation, one of the more successful state farmers' organization speaks volumes. To this day, South Dakota has the initiative and referendum and was one of the first states to adopt these measures, in 1898. Though the railroad commission was rather toothless, it still marked more progress than that achieved in many other states. And, the initiative and referendum, achieved with the populist structure Loucks helped create left a significant legacy: “in 1998, South

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<sup>45</sup> Kenneth N. Owens, “Pattern and Structure in Western Territorial Politics” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 1:4 (October 1970), 75.

Dakotans used the Populist party-inspired initiative process to enact a constitutional amendment outlawing corporate ownership of farms.”<sup>46</sup> Henry Loucks, the Canadian-educated radical helped to accomplish this and his actions reverberate to recent times. This fact alone must change in some way the oft-held popular view of Canada as principally as a receiver of political ideals from the United States rather than as a provider to them. As Henry Loucks shows, Canada has sometimes also delivered them.

Of course, Henry Loucks’s experience in South Dakota speaks to the diverse politics and social changes that were realized through an influx of immigration. South Dakota in 1884, when Loucks arrived, was a borderland. It was not a point on a map that divided two countries in the traditional sense, but it was one of the many points in the late-nineteenth-century United States where native-born Americans, and Canadian, Scandinavian, German, Irish and English immigrant men’s and women’s ideals and demands collided and coalesced. Loucks’s other story – beyond the political one – is one of an immigrant who brought with him ideas of politics and organization. That he was so quickly able to communicate with a diverse group that was two-thirds immigrants or second-generation Americans and form a club to pressure their government to respond to their needs says much about the community he joined. He was not able to do so because he was Canadian specifically, but he was able to because he was not that different from others in his community. His story speaks to the need for a more complete study of the political repercussions of immigration in the territory of South Dakota and into Western North America more generally. The factions of Dakota Territory and later South Dakota politics frequently re-ordered themselves to account for the desires of their new residents. Clearly, though, as the story

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<sup>46</sup> John Lauck, John E. Miller, and Edward Hogan. “Historical Musings: The Contours of South Dakota Political Culture,” *South Dakota History* 42:2 (Summer 2012), 161.

of the growth of the Dakota Alliance tells us, many of the immigrants that arrived in South Dakota in the 1880s, despite their differences, had a good deal that united them.



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