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## The prairie grass dividing: The history of the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance, 1889-1897

John A. Sautter  
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"THE PRAIRIE GRASS DIVIDING"  
THE HISTORY OF THE  
SAUNDERS COUNTY FARMERS' ALLIANCE,  
1889-1897

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Department of History  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by  
John A. Sautter

June 2002

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Committee

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Date June 19, 2002

## ABSTRACT

The Farmers' Alliance was one of the most important agricultural organizations in late nineteenth century America. This thesis traces the history of the Alliance movement in Saunders County, Nebraska, where it was one of the strongest in the state between 1889 and 1892. In addition, it examines the emergence of third party Populist politics, as they relate to this farm organization.

Saunders County, located in eastern Nebraska, developed a strong Alliance movement culture, that included cooperative ventures, an educational program and social activities. Several producer and consumer cooperative ventures were started by members after they joined the organization. In some cases, these cooperatives lasted well into the contemporary era. The Alliance encouraged women's participation in a way that was unlike other agricultural organizations before it. Alliance-sponsored Oyster dinners, picnics, and parades enhanced social interaction among farmers who lived in sparsely populated areas of the county. Political education, which was promoted through the dispersal of reform literature, debates, and discussion, proved central to politicizing Alliance members. The County Alliance also collaborated

with the Knights of Labor in Wahoo to pursue common political and social objectives.

The organization's movement culture created an *Alliance experience*, which altered the political consciousness of its members. As a result, Saunders County became a leading center of Populist activity in Nebraska throughout the 1890s. Coinciding with this development, however, was the decline of the Alliance itself, as many of its members left the organization for the new political movement.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, John Henry Sautter. . . . Soldier, high school FFA teacher, soil conservationist, community builder, husband, father and grandfather. He chased the American dream, but seemed to have found something better in the Sandhills of Nebraska. I would have liked to have shared this piece of Nebraska history with him.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the last year, I have stood on many shoulders in order to complete this thesis. I would like to thank all those who carried me through this project by offering their love, insight and guidance.

Most especially I thank my advisor, Dr. Michael Tate. In the summer of 2001 I came to him and asked if he would support me in attempting to complete my MA in one year. A bit reluctantly, he agreed that it could be done, but that it was not advisable. This, of course, was before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. If Dr. Tate would not have considered my proposal to complete this degree in this fashion, there is a good chance that I would have been in, or near, the World Trade Center Complex during the attacks. Dr. Tate's speed and accuracy in revising chapters were invaluable. His encouragement was what kept me going whenever I doubted myself. Thank you so much, in so many ways, Mike.

This thesis would have been impossible without the expertise and keen eye of Dr. William Pratt. If there is any merit to this project, it is a direct result of Dr. Pratt, who took time out of his year off to give me guidance on this project and to serve on my committee. His



vast knowledge on agrarian radicalism in the 1890's was what really made this thesis work. Thanks for pushing me and always demanding more. I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Gildersleeve of the UNO Geography Department, who has so graciously agreed to serve on my committee. My great thanks go to him for having digested this material in such a short amount of time, and for adding his own insight into my research.

Erin Hauser at the Saunders County Historical Society in Wahoo, Nebraska, was tremendously helpful to me. Thanks to Raymond Screws of the Nebraska Humanities Council for his assistance and direction in the beginning of this project. Also, the staff at the Wahoo Courthouse were particularly helpful in gathering small bits of information hidden in dirty and dark places. Similarly, the folks at the Nebraska State Historical Society were a great help over the last year. Matt Piersal and Terri Raburn not only assisted me greatly in my research, but also offered their friendship as well. Thanks to both of you.

I would like to thank my future employer, Salomon Smith Barney Investment Banking of New York. After I was hired by the firm, they graciously offered to fund my MA in a very generous fashion. My undergraduate mentor Dr. William Caspary deserves great thanks. It was his

inspiration and encouragement that prompted me to decide to complete this degree. I would also like to give a big thank you to Dr. Ward Regan, who initially sparked my interest in late nineteenth century agrarian radicalism during an undergraduate course at New York University.

My warmest and deepest appreciation goes to my loving friends and family. Thanks Ray, Mario, Rupac, Jack, Beth, Becky, Justin and Ramsey, for encouragement and interest during this project. A special thanks to Andy Barry for his insightful comments on the final version of this thesis. Thanks to my best buddy, my little brother Chris, who distracted me when I needed it and kept me from fishing when I needed to work. Thanks to my sister Maryann and her husband Michael for their great encouragement. To my dad, thanks Pappa Bear for believing in me, being interested in my research, and letting me live at home for this last year. Finally, and certainly not least, Mom, thanks ever so much for your loving encouragement and understanding. Your late night help with the graphs and maps, as well as picking up books from the library, was without question a big boost. Mom, I couldn't have done it without you.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE FARMERS' ALLIANCE:  
A COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH  
AMONG A COMMUNITY OF FARMERS

Farmer boys of Saunders County,  
With hearts unknown to Shylock's fear,  
Now the demons are approaching,  
Let us wait, they're coming here,  
Long, too long, hath the oppressor  
Trampled o'er our mortgaged land,  
Till a farm is hardly free,  
From their unholy hand,  
What! My brother in affliction,  
Though we perish in this strife,  
Death is but a blest transition,  
From the hardships of farm life!  
William T. Crow,  
Saunders County Alliance Member,  
Center sub-alliance, #802, Colon, NE.<sup>1</sup>

The Farmers' Alliance was an important organization in the United States in the late nineteenth century. It stressed cooperation and education among farmers as a means to further agricultural class interests. There were two separate Alliance movements. The more powerful and expansive organization existed in the South. Born in Lampasas County, Texas, in 1877, the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union spread throughout the South, establishing state organizations under what came to be known as the

Southern Alliance.<sup>2</sup>

The National Farmers' Alliance, or Northern Alliance, was organized by the Chicago newspaper editor Milton George, in 1879. Through his weekly newspaper, Western Rural, George advertised and chartered Alliance chapters across the Midwest. Organizing its first group in Cook County, Illinois, the Northern Alliance spread to states such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas.<sup>3</sup>

In the post-Civil War era, two very different Americas existed, based upon the regional differences that had been exacerbated by the calamity of war. The two Alliance movements formed to represent these different regional currents, while simultaneously serving the call of reforming government, and promoting cooperative ventures for the agricultural class.<sup>4</sup> Breaking of the lien share-cropping system and the organization of a secret fraternal society were important aims of the Southern Alliance.<sup>5</sup> While focusing less on the secrecy and fraternal aspects of the organization, the smaller Northern Alliance advocated a program encompassing railroad regulation, coinage of silver, and banking reform. At its height, the combined Alliance movement claimed more than three million members nationally.<sup>6</sup>

The Northern and Southern movements formed

specifically as non-partisan groups, with their goals focusing on education in anti-monopoly politics and the establishment of cooperative ventures to advance farmers' financial interests. Most state organizations developed centralized cooperative and bulk purchasing programs. Though the movement was officially non-partisan, it could not avoid politics in its endeavor to promote the interests of farmers. In 1890, the Alliance on the Great Plains entered the political realm. This move created the foundation for the future People's Party, which would be officially established in 1892.<sup>7</sup>

Historians have studied the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party for the past century.<sup>8</sup> There have been many general treatments of the Alliance, which have attempted to identify the reasons why the organization came to be such a large and important national movement. Historian John D. Hicks, in his The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party, pinpoints the source of the Farmers' Alliance in the economic difficulties that farmers faced on the Great Plains and in the South. He contends that falling commodity prices, high railroad freight rates, and an unfair credit system led farmers to blame America's institutions of transportation, commerce and government for their economic distress. In search of

relief, they joined organizations like the Farmers' Alliance and the later People's Party. As Hicks concludes, the "various agrarian movements, particularly the Alliance and People's Party revolts, were but the inevitable attempts of a bewildered people to find relief from a state of economic distress."<sup>9</sup>

While Hicks demonstrates that severe financial strain was a driving force behind the growth of the Alliance, historian Lawrence Goodwyn, in Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America, argues that the movement's success stemmed from the cooperative message that its lecturers and recruiters promoted. He contends that economics was not the only major factor in its success, arguing that a *cooperative experience* educated and radicalized farmers. Through the Alliance's social program, which included activities for the entire farm family, the acceptance of women into the order, and an atmosphere of social reform, members developed a new understanding of their ability to affect change, and a new political consciousness. Once the cooperatives, organized by the Alliance, failed, members entered politics as a result of the new political culture created by the movement.<sup>10</sup>

Goodwyn stresses the *cooperative experience* as the



essential element in the radicalization of members. Because the Nebraska Alliance did not have a centralized state cooperative program, he argues that it did not develop a movement culture. The Nebraska organization, he states, was only a "shadow movement" that appeared as a result of other states' success.<sup>11</sup> Goodwyn, in many respects, was only half correct in his analysis. Though the Alliance did not develop a centralized state cooperative, it did establish an identifiable movement culture that centered not on a *cooperative experience*, but on an *Alliance experience*.<sup>12</sup>

The Nebraska Alliance was established under the Northern Alliance. Its first chapter was organized in 1880, near Filley, in Gage County.<sup>13</sup> The state organization held its first convention in January 1881, in Lincoln. Throughout the 1880s, the organization remained small, but promoted issues such as tougher railroad regulation, inflationary currency policies, and banking reforms, with its stated purpose being "to wage war on capital."<sup>14</sup>

The state organization did not attract a large following prior to 1889. At its convention in January of that year, only fourteen counties were represented, with less than one hundred delegates attending the gathering.<sup>15</sup>

However, this meeting marked a turning point for the organization. The state leadership was aware of the growing economic difficulties that farmers were facing and it wanted to focus that discontent into strengthening the Farmers' Alliance movement. In order to promote the organization, a new full-time office was opened in the state capital by Nebraska Alliance President John H. Powers to coordinate recruiting efforts throughout the state. A new Farmers' Alliance-sponsored newspaper, called the Alliance, was also established in Lincoln by Jay Burrows. Burrows, a former president of the Northern Alliance, exerted considerable influence as a leader in the state organization through his speeches and editorials directed against Republicans and Democrats.<sup>16</sup>

The Nebraska Alliance Declaration of Principles pledged to "labor for the education of the agricultural classes in the science of economical government in a strictly non-partisan spirit."<sup>17</sup> To this end, the Alliance sponsored educational programs and established a State Business Agency to facilitate bulk purchasing by members in order to save money. The Nebraska movement had its own code of secrecy and fraternal rituals, and it claimed the motto, "In things essential, unity; in all things, charity."<sup>18</sup>

Although the Alliance was non-partisan, by 1890 it could not avoid politics. The opposition of the state Republican leadership to farmers' demands in 1889 and early 1890 brought droves of farmers to local Alliance meetings to discuss new strategies for dealing with economic problems. The 1889 harvest exceeded farmers' expectations by producing the largest crop yields in the state's history. However, throughout the previous decade, as yields had increased, crop prices had decreased.<sup>19</sup> By the fall of 1889, crop prices had dropped to their lowest levels ever. For many farmers it was cheaper to heat their homes with corn than to sell the commodity. It cost Nebraska farmers a bushel of wheat to transport another bushel to market.<sup>20</sup> By the winter of 1889, farmers were contemplating how to deal with seventeen-cent corn, fifteen-cent oats and fifty-cent wheat.<sup>21</sup>

The Republican-dominated state government was reluctant to make any substantial changes in railroad rates, or to assist farmers, who were constantly under-represented in the state legislature prior to 1890.<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, the vast majority of state government officials were small town lawyers, bankers and merchants, who often controlled county or town politics in their own localities. These men had so thoroughly dominated state

and local politics through the Republican Party during the 1880s that they saw no need to re-orient state government policies to meet the needs of farmers during late 1889 and early 1890.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the Democratic Party was in a weak minority position. Republican voters outnumbered Democrats two-to-one in Nebraska by 1889. Thus, the Democratic Party offered no real hope to farmers, who during the winter of 1889-90 increasingly began demanding political action to avert further economic hardship.<sup>24</sup>

With few alternatives, thousands of farmers turned to the Alliance for answers. In January 1890, the Nebraska Alliance had 25,000 members. By the summer of 1890, it had more than doubled its membership, to 60,000.<sup>25</sup> At this time the state organization sponsored the formation of a new third party. The Independent Party was primarily an Alliance effort, but it also included other groups such as the Knights of Labor, the Grange and Prohibitionists. Though they failed to elect their gubernatorial candidate, farmers voted in a majority of the new state legislature. The new party would eventually merge with Alliance-backed third parties in other states to form the People's Party in 1892.<sup>26</sup>

The Farmers' Alliance found its greatest recruiting successes in the drought-stricken central and western parts

of Nebraska, areas which experienced rainfall far below normal, and hot searing winds during the spring and summer of 1890. Being farther west also meant higher transportation costs for farm produce. Eastern Nebraska farmers paid less to ship their grain due to shorter distances on lines that generally carried more traffic.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, wheat was the most important crop for central Nebraska farmers. In 1889, wheat was a financially unstable crop, due to wide market fluctuations and high freight costs.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, most eastern Nebraska farmers raised corn and hogs, with their attitude being that "if the price of corn is high, you sell it; if the price of corn is low, you feed it to the hogs and sell them."<sup>29</sup>

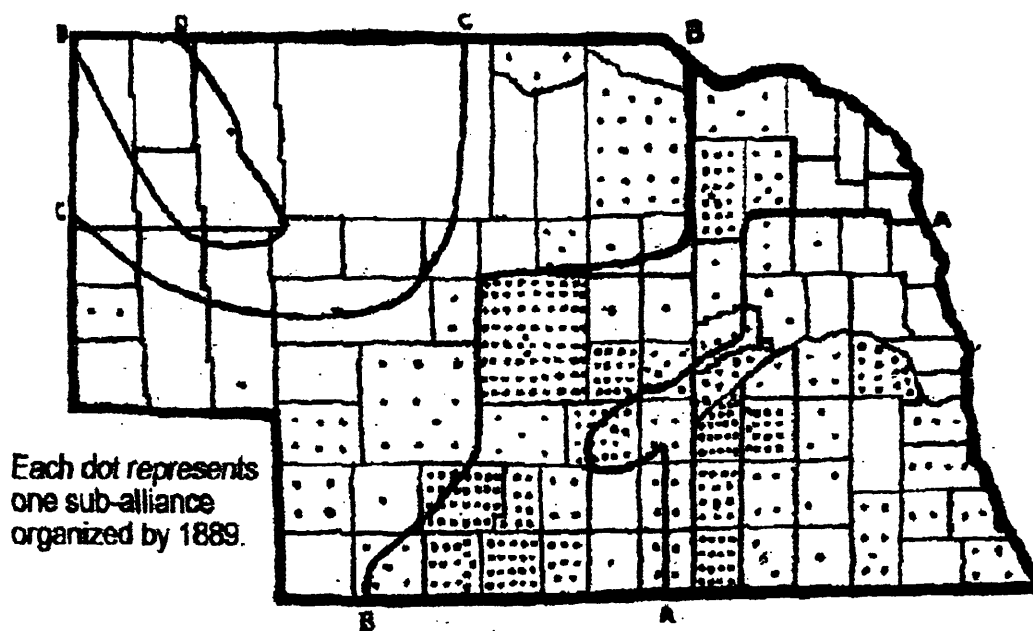
All of the leading county Alliance organizations in Nebraska (as measured by membership and number of sub-alliances) were located in central Nebraska, except for one.<sup>30</sup> Saunders County, which is located thirteen miles north of Lincoln and twenty-five miles west of Omaha, was a leader in the Farmers' Alliance movement. Though it did not suffer the severity of economic hardship experienced by central and western Nebraska counties, Saunders County developed one of the largest, most active, and politically successful Alliance organizations in the state, and

represented, by far, the most important county Alliance in eastern Nebraska.<sup>31</sup>

In 1890, Saunders County had a population of 21,577 people.<sup>32</sup> The major immigrant groups that settled in the county consisted of Bohemians, Swedes and Germans. At this time, more than half of the male population over twenty-one years of age in the county were born in another country, with 2,682 native born and 2,966 foreign born.<sup>33</sup> Saunders county was situated in the heart of Nebraska's corn-hog economy.<sup>34</sup> This agricultural operation differed significantly from other areas that established strong Alliance activity.

Historian Stanley Parsons demonstrates there was a correlation between high levels of Alliance activity and areas where wheat was the dominant cash crop.<sup>35</sup> The county also had one of the lowest debt-to-property-value ratios in the state. This calculation reflects an area's economic hardship by comparing property value to interest rates. Historian Jeffrey Ostler explains that mortgage loans for a relatively low percentage of the property value, even with a higher rate of interest, may not have been as burdensome as loans for a relatively high percentage of the property value, with a lower rate of interest. Saunders's debt-to-property-value in 1890 was under 8.5 percent, making it one

## Sub-alliances In Nebraska Counties Formed By 1889



Line A - A is the northern and western boundary of the area in which more than 18 people had settled to the square mile. Line B - B is a similar boundary for the area that contained 6 - 18 persons per square mile. The rest of the state contained 2 - 6 persons per square mile.

**Figure 1** Sub-alliances in Nebraska Counties Formed by 1889.

From: John D. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Nebraska," (Unpublished ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 200.

Saunders County contained fourteen sub-alliances and was the largest County Alliance in the east.

of the lowest in Nebraska.<sup>36</sup>

The Saunders County Alliance was organized in June of 1889. Farmers initially attended Alliance meetings in the hopes of acquiring financial benefits through the Alliance's State Business Agency, and to hear ideas on cooperative ventures. The organization also offered Saunders County residents a social reform movement that included an educational program and an opportunity for women to participate. By December 1889, the Saunders County Alliance was the largest group in eastern Nebraska, and one of the leading organizations in the state.<sup>37</sup>

In the early summer of 1890, with membership rolls burgeoning, the county organization followed the lead of the Nebraska Alliance and sponsored the formation a new third party in Saunders County. It was hoped that the new Independent Party would carry out the economic and social reforms that the Republican-dominated state government was unwilling to undertake.<sup>38</sup> In the new political movement, Saunders County Alliance members associated with people from other organizations such as the Knights of Labor and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Paralleling the Alliance's entrance into politics were the efforts of Saunders County members who began a variety of cooperative businesses to protect their financial interests.



At its height, the County Alliance numbered over 1,500.<sup>39</sup> From December 1889 to May 1892, members created a strong movement culture based on an *Alliance experience*, which combined education, radical political ideology, cooperative ventures, and social gatherings. This experience, when shared by Alliance members, altered their political consciousness.

Ultimately, the politicization of the movement undercut the organization's distinct social and fraternal nature. Success in politics became the end goal of Alliance members' activity, instead of serving as a means of promoting the organization. As the Farmers' Alliance went into decline during the spring of 1892, independent political clubs formed with the expressed purpose of supporting the People's Party, which was established that year. These groups carried on the educational program of the Alliance movement by debating and discussing political issues. Cooperatives, begun by Alliance members during 1890-91, were not distinctly part of the organization's structure. Once these ventures were formed, individuals did not need to retain their membership in the Alliance in order to use the cooperative. Alternative institutions, such as cooperatives, educational efforts and the new political party, which constituted the base of the

organization's movement culture, moved beyond the sphere of Alliance activity. In these respects, the Farmers' Alliance was made obsolete by the very political, economic and educational programs it sought to promote.

The Saunders County organization would last until 1897.<sup>40</sup> However, by 1892, when the People's Party was officially formed, the movement was already in a steep decline. As a result of the strong Alliance movement culture in the county, Saunders became the only People's Party stronghold during the Populist era in eastern Nebraska. A plurality of its voters consistently voted for the People's Party's gubernatorial candidate, and elected a Populist county government through 1900. In fact, many former County Alliance members took prominent roles in the new party's state organization.<sup>41</sup>

Saunders County's location in relatively economic prosperous eastern Nebraska, emphasizes the important role that its Alliance movement culture played in order for the county to become a Populist stronghold. In view of much of the scholarship on Nebraska Populism, Saunders should not have been a leading county in the movement. All other Populist centers were in central and western Nebraska. By tracing the *Alliance experience*, it will demonstrate the importance of the Farmers' Alliance in the county's

political character in the 1890s. This is not to say that the Saunders County Alliance was not important in its own right. Farmers turned to the organization during difficult economic times, finding solace in an array of social activities and cooperative ventures. Before the Alliance turned to politics in the summer of 1890, its movement culture was already established. Recruiters and county leaders worked throughout 1889 and early 1890, developing the organization and spreading its message of the cooperative commonwealth.<sup>42</sup>

## Notes

- 
1. New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), January 29, 1891, 8.
  2. Robert C. McMath, Populist Vanguard: a History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 34-35.
  3. From this point forward, the National Farmers' Alliance will be referred to as the Northern Alliance, and the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union will be referred to as the Southern Alliance. John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 36-38.
  4. Ibid., 37.
  5. Blacks, who were not accepted into the Southern movement, organized their own separate Colored Farmers' National Alliance, in 1886, in Texas. Within three years, the Colored Alliance had spread throughout the Southeast, from Texas to Virginia. Robert C. McMath, American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 83-85, 92-94.
  6. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 36.
  7. McMath, American Populism, 7-8, 97.
  8. For a comprehensive bibliography of Farmers' Alliance and Populist literature, see Steven Hahn, and Jonathan Prude, eds., The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); William F. Holmes, "Populism: In Search of Context," Agricultural History 68 (1990): 26-58.
  9. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 2. Hicks is not the only historian of the movement that contends Populism was largely the result of economic disparity. See Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Random House Publishers, 1955), 99-100. For

- Nebraska, see Robert W. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 58.
10. Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), chapter 1.
11. Ibid., 91-92.
12. Robert, W. Cherny, "Lawrence Goodwyn and Nebraska Populism," Great Plains Quarterly 1 (Summer 1981): 186-187.
13. John D. Barnhart, "The History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 18.
14. Ibid.
15. James C. Olson, and Ronald C. Naugle, History of Nebraska, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 221.
16. Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: the Land and the People, vol.1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), 671-72; Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 129.
17. Sheldon, Nebraska, 672.
18. Ibid., 671-672. The Nebraska Alliance motto, "In things essential, unity; in all things charity," was adopted from the earlier Patrons of Husbandry, or Granger movement. Solon J. Buck, The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and Its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 64.
19. Olson, and Naugle, History of Nebraska, 224; Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 82-83.
20. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 31.
21. Olson, and Naugle, History of Nebraska, 224.
22. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 16.

23. Ibid., 30-31; Jeffrey Ostler, Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, 1880-1892 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 111.
24. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 31.
25. Ostler, Prairie Populism, 184.
26. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 34-37.
27. Hallie Farmer, "The Railroads and Frontier Populism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 13 (December 1926): 390-91.
28. Stanley B. Parsons, Jr., "Who Were The Populists?" Nebraska History 44 (June 1963): 98-99.
29. Robert C. McMath, American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 28.
30. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 200, 247.
31. Ostler, Prairie Populism, 33; Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 200, 247.
32. Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890. Report on the Population of the United States, vol. 1, part 1, 773.
33. Ibid.
34. Ronald C. Briel, "Preface to Populism: A Social Analysis of Minor Parties in Nebraska Politics, 1876-1890" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1981), 74-75.
35. Parsons, "Who Were The Populists?" 98-99. A study of corn-hog cycles by agricultural historian Fred Shannon demonstrates that in each year but three from 1865 to 1897, farmers who fed corn to their hogs made more money than farmers who sold their grain directly on the market. Consequently, counties such as Saunders that engaged in hog raising, were generally more prosperous than those that grew wheat or marketed their corn directly. Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860-1897

- (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 168.
36. Ostler, Prairie Populism, 33.
  37. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 200.
  38. Ostler, Prairie Populism, 111.
  39. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 565-576, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
  40. New Era, July 27, 1897, 4.
  41. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 82, 87, 119-120; Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 247; Saunders County Office of the County Clerk Election Records, Roll 8, Frames 87-88. Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
  42. The term cooperative commonwealth is adopted from McMath, American Populism, chapter 3.

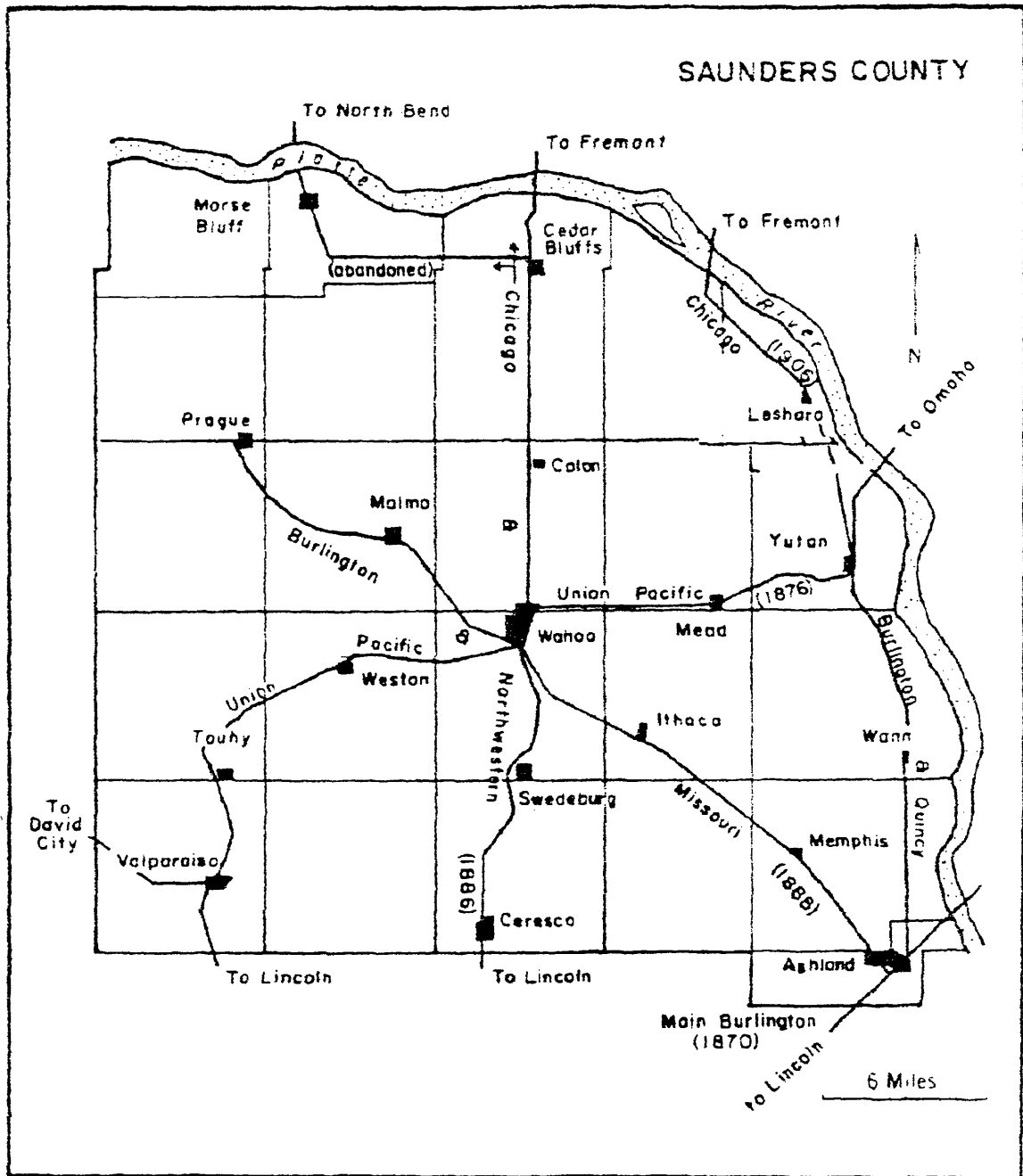
## CHAPTER ONE

PRAIRIE GRASS DIVIDING: FORMATION OF THE  
SAUNDERS COUNTY FARMERS' ALLIANCE

The prairie grass dividing, its special odor  
breathing,  
I demand of it the spiritual corresponding,  
Demand the most copious and close companionship  
of men,  
Demand the blades to rise of words, acts, beings,  
Those of the open atmosphere, coarse, sunlit,  
fresh, nutritious,  
Those that go their own gait, erect, stepping  
with freedom and command, leading not  
following,  
Those with a never-quelled audacity, those with  
sweet and lusty flesh clear of taint,  
Those that look carelessly in the faces of  
Presidents and Governors, as to say *Who are  
you?*  
Those of the earth-born passion, simple, never  
constrain'd, never obedient,  
Those of inland America.<sup>1</sup>  
Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1892).

The first Farmers' Alliance recruiting effort in  
Saunders County occurred in June of 1889, and was led by  
J.M. Swiggert of Buffalo County. Swiggert simultaneously  
founded the Saunders County Farmers' Union Mutual Insurance  
Company, which offered coverage against cyclones,  
lightening strikes and hail damage.<sup>2</sup> The new Alliance-  
sponsored mutual insurance company only collected from its  
members enough money to pay for actual losses and to defray  
necessary expenses. There was no assessor or corporate





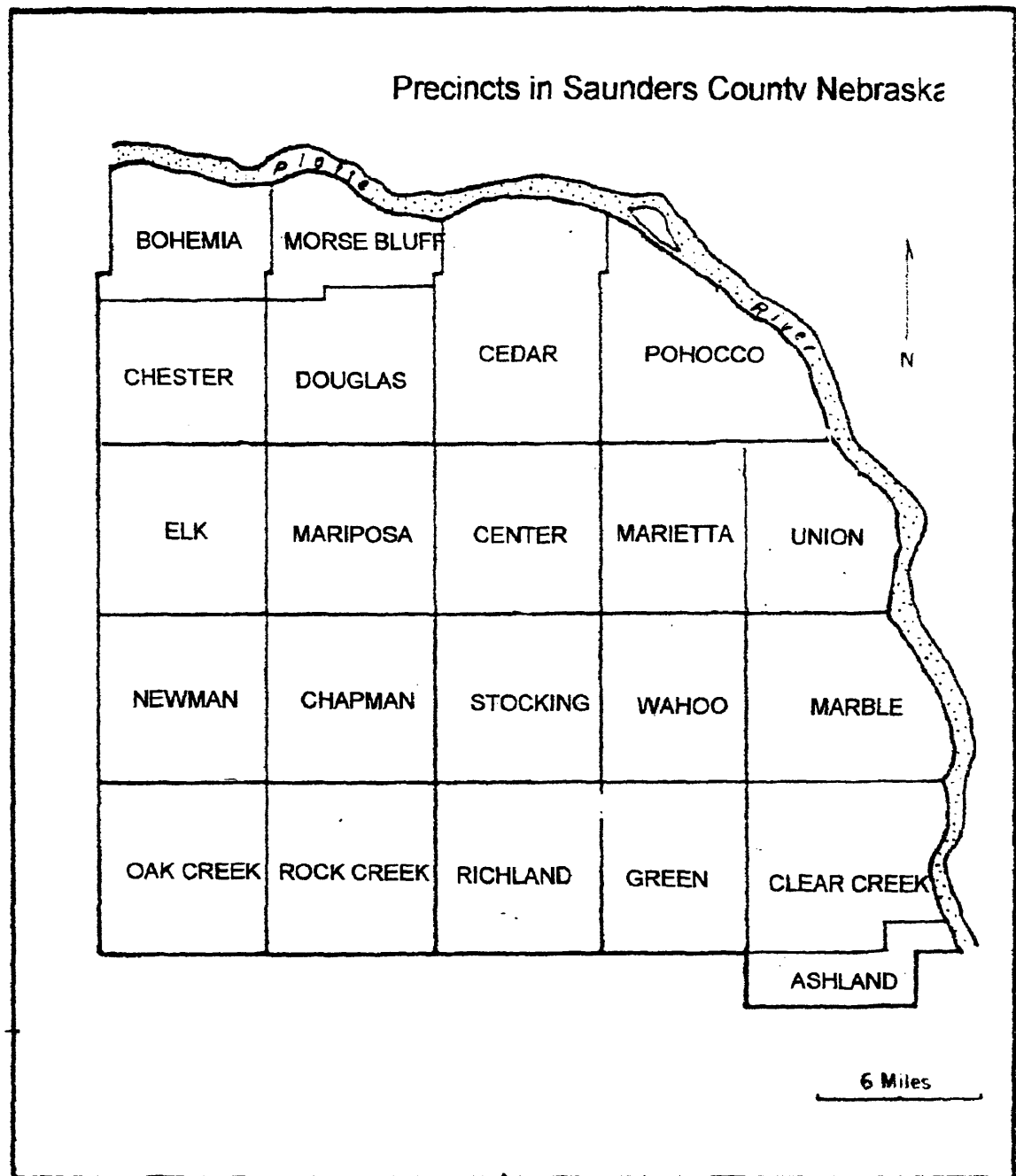
**Figure 2** Towns and Railroads of Saunders County.

From: Gordon M. Riesdesel, "The Cultural Geography of Rural Cemeteries: Saunders County, Nebraska" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1979), 23.

infrastructure to support, so members only paid for actual losses to farm property, hence saving them money on insurance. Swiggert's dual position as Alliance and mutual insurance organizer provided the ideal combination for him, as he traveled across the county enlisting new Alliance members.<sup>3</sup> During the summer 1889, he organized three separate sub-alliances in the eastern region of Saunders County.<sup>4</sup>

The Marble #611 sub-alliance, chartered by the state organization on June 11, 1889, was the first Alliance unit in the county.<sup>5</sup> Located southeast of Mead, it started with twenty-six members.<sup>6</sup> By September, its secretary, James O'Fallen, reported that it had grown to over eighty members, including sixty-five men and twenty-one women.<sup>7</sup> Swiggert organized the Coughman #618 sub-alliance near Memphis on June 20, as well as the Pleasant Valley #693 sub-alliance on August 30, which met north of Ashland. As he recruited new Alliance members, he also promoted the Saunders County Farmers' Union Mutual Insurance Company. By fall 1889, the new insurance company included members from Marble, Marietta, Pohocco, and Union Precincts.<sup>8</sup>

Farmers were not only attracted to the Alliance-sponsored mutual insurance association. In 1889 there was a state-wide shortage of bale twine due to a cartel of



**Figure 3** Precincts of Saunders County, Nebraska.

From: Gordon M. Riesdesel, "The Cultural Geography of Rural Cemeteries: Saunders County, Nebraska"  
 (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1979), 17.

manufacturers, who acting in concert, substantially raised the price of bale twine for Nebraska farmers.<sup>9</sup> The Farmers' Alliance's cooperative purchase plan, through which they could buy bale twine at lower prices, lured farmers to the new organization. Swiggert described the organizing effort in Saunders County by saying, "The twine question seems to be the all-absorbing topic, bringing in farmers who want to discuss what is to be done about the problem."<sup>10</sup>

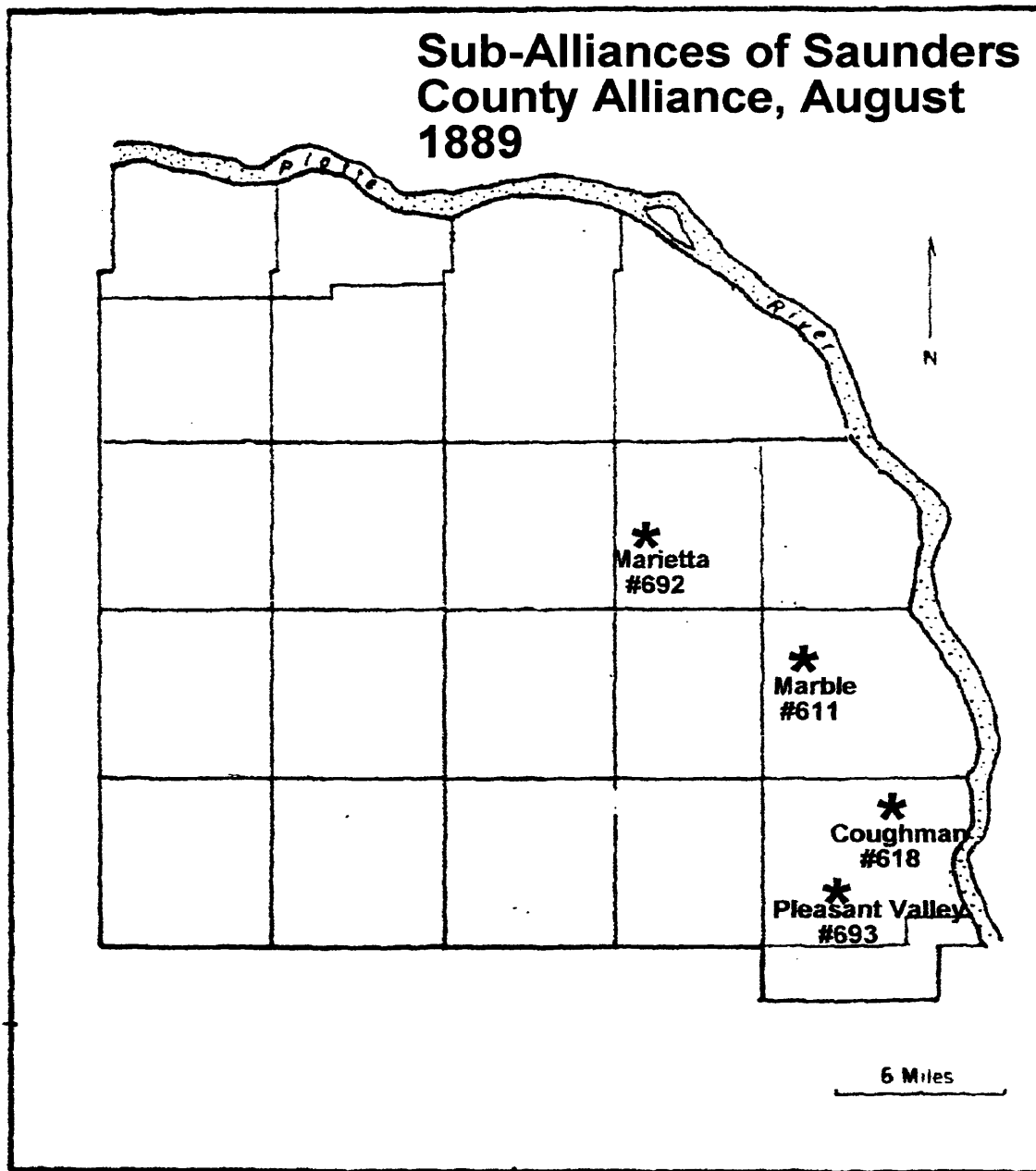
On August 30, 1889, W.O. Rand organized the Marietta #692 sub-alliance, north of Mead. At the meeting, forty-five men and eleven women enlisted in the organization.<sup>11</sup> Rand, a hog farmer who raised Duroc Jersey pigs, lived north of Wahoo in Center Precinct. He was an important local Alliance figure, and was to become the future secretary of the Saunders County organization.<sup>12</sup> While holding its meeting in a local school house, the sub-alliance voted to take the name of the surrounding Precinct. Samuel H. Moss was elected president of the new group. Moss was a German immigrant and a leader in the Saunders County Prohibition Party.<sup>13</sup>

In establishing a sub-alliance, a recruiter would contact area farmers and extol the benefits of joining the Farmers' Alliance. If interested, the local residents

would find a place to hold weekly meetings and elect officers. Offices of a typical sub-alliance included president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, lecturer, chaplain and doorkeeper. In addition to paying individual dues of ten cents every three months, local members were responsible for sending delegates to the county conventions and were encouraged to participate in social activities.<sup>14</sup>

Normal meetings would often follow a ceremony unique to the particular sub-alliance. After matters of business were resolved, there might be a general discussion on a subject of agricultural importance, including cooperative enterprises or politics. Accompanying these discussions were activities ranging from debates and speeches to music and literary performances. Each local sub-alliance elected a lecturer who was responsible for organizing discussions and facilitating educational programs that were based on reading material endorsed by the State Farmers' Alliance.<sup>15</sup> These activities provided intellectual stimulation, as well as practical discussions of farm problems. By expanding the social opportunities of the Alliance farmer, these meetings also helped break the monotony of daily life in sparsely populated areas of the county.<sup>16</sup>

During the months of September and October, three more



**Figure 4** Sub-alliances Organized in Saunders by August 1889.

From: Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 566-567, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

sub-alliances were organized in Saunders County. The Pea Ridge #706 sub-alliance was chartered on September 10, 1889. Thirteen men and one woman joined the new group that elected William Sanders of Clear Creek Precinct president. Sanders had homesteaded in Saunders County in 1863. Since that time he had built up a 1,200-acre farm, one of the largest in the county.<sup>17</sup> One month later, on October 11, the Richland #725 sub-alliance received its charter. It was located northeast of Ceresco, with twenty-seven men.<sup>18</sup> Area farmer John Moyer, who was voted secretary, was one of the local organizers of the new group. Born in 1853 in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, Moyer moved to Saunders County in 1878. There he erected the first grain silo and owned the first cream separator in the county on his 280-acre farm near Ceresco.<sup>19</sup> The Ithaca sub-alliance #724 received its charter on October 11, 1889, as well. Its initial membership was reported as fifty-seven men.<sup>20</sup>

In late October, Saunders County Alliance members sponsored the organization of a Union Labor Party ticket for the fall county election in November.<sup>21</sup> The Union Labor Party was formed in 1886 in Nebraska. Its platform called for measures such as the government ownership of railroads and telegraphs, national banking reforms, prohibition and woman's suffrage.<sup>22</sup> A convention was held

in the Wahoo Courthouse on October 26, two weeks before the county election. The Wahoo Democrat stated its disagreement with the political move, saying,

The Democrats were opposed to this movement coming up at the eleventh hour, and for good reasons. It can be nothing but folly for the hand full of Union-Laborites, or anti-monopolists, or whatever they decide to call themselves. . . . The impression has gone out that this was a Farmers' Alliance affair.<sup>23</sup>

George Cornell, who was a member of both the Farmers' Alliance and the Wahoo Knights of Labor assembly, acted as chairman for the meeting. Though he farmed in northern Stocking Precinct, Cornell also operated an auction business in Wahoo. At the meeting Alliance members nominated a slate, including: W.O. Rand of Center Precinct for county judge, William Sanders of Clear Creek Precinct for county commissioner, Samuel H. Moss of Marietta Precinct for county sheriff, William M. Crow of Center Precinct for county treasurer, and Charles Pirtle of Wahoo for county clerk.<sup>24</sup> Candidates issued a joint statement condemning both the Republican and Democratic Parties, as well as called upon "all of the farmers and others interested in the public welfare to lend us your aid before the election and at the polls."<sup>25</sup> The Alliance-sponsored Union Labor Party did poorly in the election, with each candidate polling only about eighty votes.<sup>26</sup>



Though no new sub-alliances were chartered during November, W.O. Rand organized a county-wide meeting aimed at bolstering recruiting efforts. The meeting was held in the Ithaca Lutheran Church on November 16, 1889.<sup>27</sup> Members focused on preparations for their first county convention the following month and on arranging recruiting efforts. Prior to the evening meeting which was open to the public, a secret session for members only was held at two o'clock in the afternoon. The appearance of former Northern Alliance President Jay Burrows, probably assisted recruiting efforts by attracting farmers to hear him speak.<sup>28</sup>

Burrows, a former Granger and Civil War veteran, had originally settled in Gage County, Nebraska.<sup>29</sup> After being elected state secretary at the first Nebraska Alliance meeting in 1881, he subsequently became president of the Northern Alliance in 1887. Two years later, Burrows moved to Lincoln, where he established the Alliance weekly newspaper.<sup>30</sup> The Alliance played a vital role in the development of the movement throughout the state, especially in local areas such as Lancaster and Saunders Counties, where coverage of events was easily reported to the larger population.<sup>31</sup>

During December, the Saunders County Alliance added

six new sub-alliances, bringing its total to thirteen. W.O. Rand organized the Center #806 sub-alliance on December 2, 1889, with twenty-seven men, in Center Precinct.<sup>32</sup> The Lothair #804 sub-alliance was chartered on December 2, as well. Meeting in northern Marietta Precinct, the sub-alliance included sixteen men and two women.<sup>33</sup> Other sub-alliances organized included Wahoo #861, Union #866, Eureka #871, and Pohocco #883. By the end of December 1889, the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance included 371 men and 41 women, with a total of thirteen sub-alliances. Aside from the Wahoo sub-alliance in Chapman Precinct, the organization was limited to the eastern half of Saunders County.<sup>34</sup>

Saunders County's southern border is thirteen miles north of Lincoln, and the eastern border lies twenty-five miles west of Omaha, thus allowing the nearby State Alliance leadership to make periodic appearances at county and local meetings. On Saturday, December 21, 1889, the Saunders County Alliance held its first county-wide convention at the Saunders County School House, located three miles north of Ashland. Business included election of officers, and discussion of shipping products through State Alliance Business Agent Allen Root, of Omaha.<sup>35</sup> Traveling from Lincoln to address the convention, Burrows

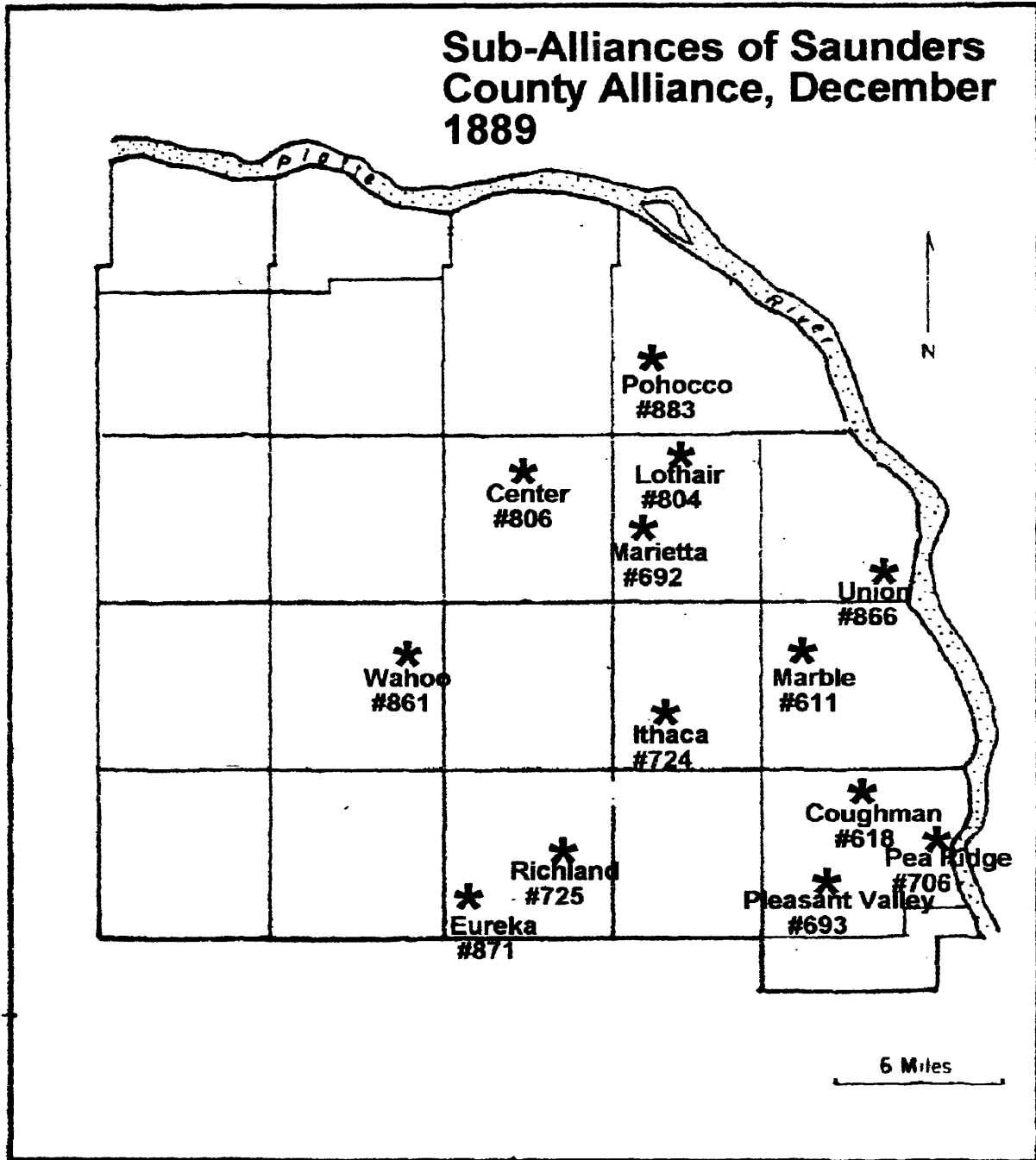
praised the Saunders County Alliance, saying,

They are making preparations to follow their products as far on their road to the consumer as it is possible to do with profit, and to go to the first hand for their goods. In short, they are doing just as all other classes are doing viz: organizing to promote their own interests.<sup>36</sup>

After Burrows's speech, Root discussed methods for purchasing lower priced products in bulk through the State Business Agency. Samuel H. Moss was elected president and W.O. Rand was elected secretary of the county organization.<sup>37</sup>

In January 1890, only one sub-alliance was organized, while established groups regularly added new members. On January 28, 1890, the Eagle #938 sub-alliance was organized by Jonas Bender in Union Precinct north of Yutan, with sixteen male members.<sup>38</sup> Bender, who had been born in Ohio in 1837, had moved to Saunders County in 1882. Although mainly raising corn and hogs on his 427-acre farm, he took special pride in breeding Thoroughbred Shorthorn cattle. Bender served as a Democratic state representative for the county.<sup>39</sup>

The Saunders County Farmers' Alliance swelled to twenty-three sub-alliances in February, chartering nine new local organizations.<sup>40</sup> Rock Creek #1077 was organized on February 11, 1890, in Rock Creek Precinct, and elected Gus



**Figure 5** Sub-alliances of the Saunders County Alliance in December 1889.

From: Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 566-569, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

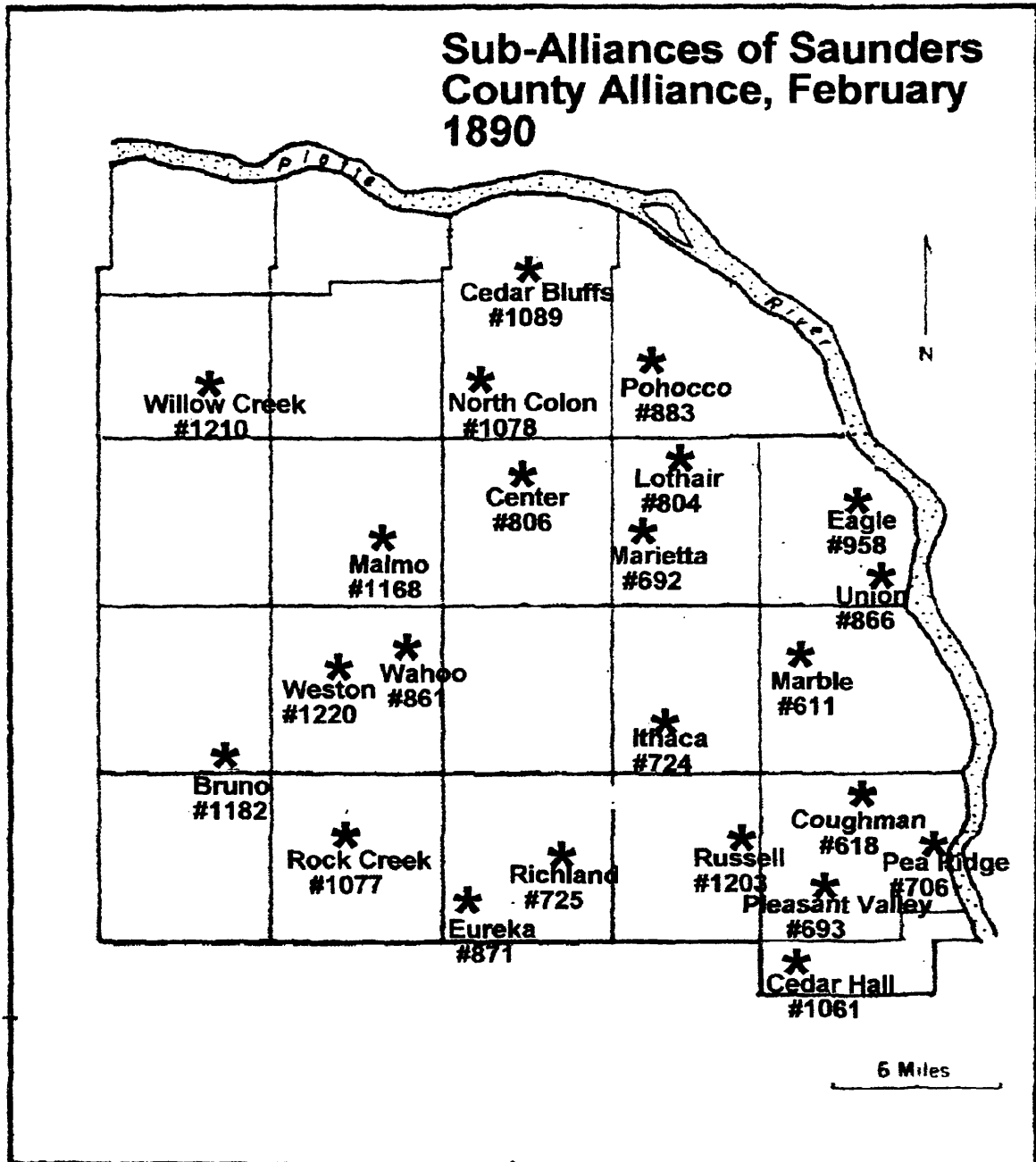
Lambert president. Lambert had homesteaded in Saunders County in 1873. Farming his 240 acres during the summer months, Lambert taught at the Rock Creek School House during the winter. As a devout Baptist, he served as president of the Saunders County Sunday School Association during the 1890s. Lambert joined twelve other men in founding the new sub-alliance.<sup>41</sup>

The Malmo #1168 sub-alliance formed on February 19, 1890, with forty-eight male members. It elected Peter B. Olson as secretary.<sup>42</sup> Olson was known for his oratorical skill in both the Swedish and English languages, and he would be elected to the state legislature later that year on the Independent Party ticket.<sup>43</sup> The Alliance welcomed immigrants such as Olson into the organization. In Chapman Precinct, Nicholas Nelson, Hans F. Blunk and Joseph Bartek took part in organizing the Weston #1220 sub-alliance on February 26, 1890.<sup>44</sup> Nelson had been born in Sweden in 1843, and had homesteaded in Saunders County in 1880. He mainly raised cattle on his 480-acre farm near Weston, and was known for shipping a car load of fattened steers annually.<sup>45</sup> Blunk, born in Germany in 1852, came to the United States at the age of fifteen. A carpenter by trade, he had only moved to Weston early in 1889, in search of work. Both Nelson and Blunk were members of the Lutheran

Church in Weston.<sup>46</sup> Joseph Bartek was the first Moravian to immigrate to Saunders County, homesteading there in 1867. Expanding his original 160-acre claim to 340 acres, Bartek was a successful farmer who built one of the earliest windmills in the county. Aside from being a member of the Weston Catholic Church Society, he was also a member of the Wahoo Knights of Labor assembly.<sup>47</sup> Other sub-alliances chartered in February included Cedar Hall #1061, North Colon #1078, Cedar Bluffs #1089, Bruno #1182, Russell #1203, and Willow Creek #1210.<sup>48</sup>

On February 15, 1890, Saunders County held its largest county-wide meeting to date in Ithaca, with over 1,000 members present, including sixty-two official delegates representing nineteen sub-alliances. Following its usual routine of a business session at two o'clock, a public gathering commenced at seven o'clock. A choir and several soloists "discoursed sweet music," before speakers addressed the packed "standing room only" audience.<sup>49</sup>

Local farmer William H. Dech addressed the meeting as the keynote speaker. As a Republican, he was elected as the Saunders County state representative in 1873. Later, he was elected District Five (Saunders and Sarpy County) State Senator, a position that he held until 1886.<sup>50</sup> At that time, he left the Republican Party and helped found the



**Figure 6** Sub-alliances of the Saunders County Alliance in February 1890.

From: Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 566-574, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

Union Labor Party of Nebraska.<sup>51</sup> Dech, known as "Honest Bill" to his constituents, was well known in the county because he had served as a state senator.<sup>52</sup> A former Granger, and a master workman of the Wahoo Knights of Labor assembly, he served as a county delegate for the Ithaca sub-alliance.<sup>53</sup>

Dech provided leadership for the movement by writing editorials in Alliance newspapers and by speaking at Alliance gatherings.<sup>54</sup> At this February meeting, he argued that tax reform was needed to ease the plight of farmers. He also stated that political agitation was the only outlet available to financially burdened Alliancemen.<sup>55</sup> Two weeks earlier, he had written an editorial in the Farmers' Alliance, stating his excitement about the movement and encouraging all readers to only purchase newspapers that printed pro-Farmers' Alliance information. In another editorial he made the provocative statement,

there will never be a balance of wealth in society so long as the statesmanship presently in power continues to live off the working classes of the farmer and laborer.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the address he gave to the county convention echoed these same sentiments.

During March, Saunders County farmers organized four more sub-alliances. The Lane #1246 sub-alliance formed



southwest of Valparaiso on March 5, 1890, with fifteen men.<sup>57</sup> William A. Jamison, this group's first secretary, had homesteaded in Saunders County in 1870, moving from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His farm spanned 240 acres in southern Oak Creek Precinct. Other sub-alliances chartered by the State Alliance in March included Valparaiso #1258, Morse Bluff #1264, and Newman #1273.

By April 1, earlier established sub-alliances were flooded with new members. The Marble sub-alliance increased to over ninety members, including twenty-three women. Nearly doubling its membership, the Marietta sub-alliance increased to seventy-one men and twenty-two women. The Rock Creek sub-alliance quadrupled its membership since its organization, including nine new women members.<sup>58</sup> The Saunders County Farmers' Alliance was spreading like a wildfire through the county.

Its ranks continued to grow during April, adding the Centennial #1426, Stocking #1455, and Sand Creek #1486 sub-alliances. At the next Saunders County convention, held in mid-April, twenty-eight sub-alliances were represented, with delegates arriving from nearly every precinct in the county. Over 1,500 members attended the gathering held at the Wahoo Courthouse. Commenting on the potential influence of the Saunders County movement in the up-coming

election, Secretary W.O. Rand noted that 4,379 votes had been cast in the 1888 state election. With the county membership now numbering over 1,500, he felt that the Alliance had established a broad base of support and "should make some waves" in the coming election.<sup>59</sup>

In May and June, no new sub-alliances were formed, but the overall county membership continued to grow. The organization by this time had become more involved in politics and now supported the formation of a new third party: the Independent Party. The increasing political focus of the Alliance attracted new members to the organization. In July, four new sub-alliances were chartered in Saunders County, the Platteville #1515, Estina #1541, Elk #1886, and Mead #1890. By the end of the month, the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance numbered 1,454 members, with 1,229 men and 225 women.<sup>60</sup>

Though the Farmers' Alliance was founded as a nonpartisan organization, by the spring of 1890, political action by the order was an important issue. Recruiters organized new members by combining a message of reform in politics with the establishment of collective financial strategies, such as mutual insurance and bulk purchasing, for farmers. The Alliance's first political action, under the auspices of the Union Labor Party, failed. In the fall

of 1889, members were not interested in leaving their traditional political party for a new third party. Farmers flocked to the organization in hopes that it could press for reforms in state and national government economic policies through the Republican or Democratic parties.<sup>61</sup> In only one year, from June 1889 to June 1890, the Alliance had spread across the county. This growth set the stage for the movement to successfully enter politics on its own.

## Notes

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1. Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (New York: Bantam Books, reprinted, 1983), 104.
  2. Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), July 3, 1889, 2.
  3. New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), May 21, 1891, 8.
  4. Alliance, June 12, 1889, 4; June 19, 1889, 4; July 3, 1889, 2.
  5. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frame 565, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. The number following the sub-alliance name reflects the number of sub-alliances organized before it, minus one hundred. The state organization numbered sub-alliances beginning with the #100. Thus, Marble #611, was the five-hundred-eleventh sub-alliance organized in Nebraska. For an analysis of Nebraska Farmers' Alliance membership journals, see Jeffrey Ostler, Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, 1880-1892 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 181-184.
  6. Alliance, June 19, 1889, 4.
  7. Ibid., September 14, 1889, 4; Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 565.
  8. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 565.
  9. Robert C. McMath, American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 95.
  10. Alliance, July 3, 1889, 2.
  11. Ibid., October 12, 1889, 3; Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 565.
  12. Alliance, October 12, 1889, 3.

13. Ibid., October 12, 1889, 3; December 28, 1889, 4; Wahoo Democrat (Wahoo, Nebraska), October 26, 1889, 2.

14. It is not explicitly stated how much the dues were for members. This number was calculated by taking the amount of money that a sub-alliance submitted to the state organization, quarterly per member for the Center sub-alliance in Saunders County, Nebraska. "Quarterly Report and Correspondence of Center #806 sub-alliance (Colon, NE) to Luna E. Kellie, Secretary State Farmers' Alliance, December 30, 1894", in the Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 3, Frame 2656.

15. For a description a typical sub-alliance meeting, see John D. Barnhart, "The History of The Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party of Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 132. For a description of the importance of the position of Alliance Lecturer, see John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 129.

16. Barnhart, "The History of The Farmers' Alliance," 133.

17. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 566; New Era, October 9, 1890, 1.

18. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 566.

19. Ibid.; Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record (Chicago: George Richmond Press, 1900), 84.

20. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 566.

21. Wahoo Democrat, October 31, 1889, 2. Antelope, Custer, Hamilton and Sherman Counties also ran their own Alliance ticket in the fall county elections of 1889. Annabel L. Beal, "The Populist Party in Custer County, Nebraska: Its Role in Local, State, and National Politics, 1889-1906" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1965), 37.

22. Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: the Land and the People, vol. 1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), 636; Robert W. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics from 1885-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 24-25.

23. Wahoo Democrat, October 31, 1889, 2.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., November 14, 1889, 2.
27. Alliance, November 9, 1889, 3.
28. Ibid.
29. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 117-119.
30. For a discussion of Burrows and his editorship at the Alliance, see Samuel E. Walker, "Populism and Industrialism: the Ideology of the Official Organ of the Nebraska Populist Movement" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1970), 24.
31. The Alliance and its successor, the Farmers' Alliance, provided weekly information for Saunders County Alliance members through the printing of letters, resolutions and dates for meetings, from its first issue on June 12, 1889 until the premiere of the New Era on August 9, 1889, which then acted as the official organ of the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance. For an examination of the issues and effectiveness of the Alliance and Farmers' Alliance during this period, see Walker, "Populism and Industrialism," chapter 1. For a detailed discussion of Alliance and Populist newspaper coverage in Nebraska from 1885-1900, see Ernst Clifford Bowman, "The Populist Press in Nebraska," (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1936).
32. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 566.
33. Ibid., Roll 4, Frame 567.
34. Ibid., Roll 4, Frames 565, 566, 567.
35. Farmers' Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), December 28, 1889, 3.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., March 1, 1890, 4.

38. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 567.
39. Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record, 236; Wahoo Democrat, November 14, 1889, 2.
40. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frames 565-568.
41. Ibid., Roll 4, Frame 567; Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record, 57.
42. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 567.
43. New Era, October 9, 1890, 3.
44. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 568.
45. Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record, 147.
46. Ibid., 335.
47. Ibid., 543.
48. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frames 570-574.
49. Farmers' Alliance, February 22, 1890, 2.
50. New Era, June 25, 1891, 6.
51. Sheldon, Nebraska, 636.
52. New Era, June 25, 1891, 6.
53. Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record, 93. A Master Workman in the Wahoo Knights of Labor was a position similar to being president of the organization.
54. Farmers' Alliance, August 9, 1890, 2.
55. Ibid., January 25, 1890, 1.
56. Ibid., March 15, 1890, 3.
57. The Lane school house was actually located one mile south of the Saunders County border within Lancaster County, however, members associated with the Saunders County Alliance. See Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers,

Roll 4, Frame 569.

58. Ibid., Roll 4, Frames 565-571.

59. Farmers' Alliance, April 26, 1890, 3.

60. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frames 565-570.

61. Alliance, June 19, 1889, 4; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 36-37; Hicks, Populist Revolt, 83-84.



## CHAPTER TWO

## THE ALLIANCE NEIGHBORHOOD: BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The Alliance has become as it ought always be, the county neighborhood center of social entertainment and influence. It is the common ground upon which churchman and skeptic can meet in social accord, learn one another's disposition and temper, become mutual teachers, and cultivate that charity which has its fruitage in place and social union. The Alliance makes room for everybody, it is the literary circle, debating club, the cultivator of good fellowship, the cementer of good will tempered with rivalry. God bless the Alliance, it is the neighborhood home.<sup>1</sup>

Editorial, New Era, January 1891.

At the April 1890 county convention, members flocked to the gathering to hear author Venior Valdo, who had recently published the popular book, Our Republican Monarchy. The Farmers' Alliance, the state organization's paper, gave the book a favorable review by saying, "we want all our subscribers to read Our Republican Monarchy. This book is a scathing portrayal of the monstrosly unequal and unjust conditions now existing in the United States."<sup>2</sup> As an extra inducement for subscribers to buy the book, the Farmers' Alliance offered copies as a premium, in return

for a new annual subscription to the newspaper.<sup>3</sup>

The enthusiasm surrounding Valdo's appearance at the meeting reflects the strong emphasis that the Alliance placed on reform-minded books dealing with educational, agricultural and economic issues. Publishing a monthly manual for sub-alliance lecturers to serve as a guide to suggested readings, the State Farmers' Alliance Committee emphasized educational programs as a way to develop all aspects of agricultural life.<sup>4</sup> Interested in more than pursuing financial and social interests, the Farmers' Alliance also wanted to foster a culturally astute membership that could make their own decisions in political matters.

Education was an important element in the radicalization of Alliance members. The political education that members received was directed at the goal of rural women and men finding their own voices on issues concerning political economy. Discussions that were initiated in the "sub-alliance-school" helped members explore the meaning of an alternative movement culture, thus empowering sub-alliances to engage economic questions that previously seemed out of reach.<sup>5</sup> An observer of the time noted,

People commenced to think who had never thought

before, and people talked who had seldom spoken. On the mild days they gathered on the street corners, on cold days they congregated in shops and offices. Everyone was talking and everyone was thinking. . . . Little by little they commenced to theorize upon their condition. Despite the poverty of the country, the books of Henry George, Bellamy, and other economic writers were bought as fast as the dealers could supply them. They were bought to be read greedily; and nourished by the fascination of novelty and the zeal of enthusiasm, thoughts and theories sprouted like weeds after a May shower. . . . They discussed income tax and single tax; they talked of government ownership and the abolition of private property; fiat money, and the unity of labor.<sup>6</sup>

By stimulating social and intellectual interaction among members, the Alliance's educational crusade proved highly effective in energizing the order. Ultimately, it brought a sense of hope and possibility to members.

Until the establishment of the New Era on August 7, 1890, Saunders County Alliance members normally relied on the Farmers' Alliance of Lincoln for their information.<sup>7</sup> Published in Wahoo, the New Era became the official organ of the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance. Though more than ten newspapers were located in Saunders County at this time, all of the other papers typically endorsed either Republican or Democratic principles and candidates, as well as served only the small number of readers residing in or around the smaller towns of the county.<sup>8</sup> However, the Alliance-Independent New Era committed itself to covering

Farmers' Alliance and Independent Party functions county-wide, claiming in 1892 it had the "largest and widest readership out of any newspaper in the county."<sup>9</sup>

The New Era provided a means by which Alliance members could communicate on any subject that was deemed important. Weekly accounts about current activities in lodges were provided by sub-alliance secretaries. Resolutions were printed, meeting dates were given, and social gatherings were announced. In this manner the New Era not only informed members of Alliance activities, but it also became an intricate part of Alliance life itself. The paper's editors Peter Longfellow and John Miller optimistically concluded that "the New Era is a presage of victory in Saunders County. We hail every additional champion of the peoples' rights."<sup>10</sup>

Jay Burrows, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance leader and editor of the Farmers' Alliance, focused on educational efforts as a way to inform members about political and economic issues. He advocated the establishment of "a general system of home culture, somewhat on the plan of the Chautauqua," to be combined with regular classes and supervised courses of study.<sup>11</sup> The State Alliance sponsored a cadre of lecturers whose work consisted of traveling across the state, giving speeches, and organizing

educational programs for county- and sub-alliances. Such lectures and educational exercises were designed to promote discussion and questioning, rather than passive learning.<sup>12</sup> New reading guides and study manuals were sent out monthly to every county organization.<sup>13</sup> The confidence that Nebraska Alliance leaders had in educational programs was demonstrated in May of 1893 when the Alliance State Central Committee attempted to use education as an agent to revive the order. It voted to commit all funds accrued by the Farmers' Mutual Cyclone and Hail Damage Insurance Company to purchase books for traveling libraries in each sub-alliance. J. M. Swiggert, the manager of the state-wide mutual insurance company, noted that "education is a high priority and a good investment."<sup>14</sup>

Speaking in Weston, at a Saunders County Farmers' Alliance monthly meeting in May of 1891, State Lecturer Oliver Hull recommended that every sub-alliance in the county have a circulating library. He told the audience that "there is no excuse for farmers not having more good literature." With small contributions from all the lodge members, Hull suggested that a sub-alliance could secure the entire list of books and periodicals it needed. He ended by saying, "Go at it farmers and get up a library of good literature of all kinds of books, especially upon

economic questions. Do this! Educate yourselves, and the solution of the problem is attained."<sup>15</sup>

The Saunders County Alliance did establish a traveling library managed by the local organizer and County Library Agent T. C. Cook, of Ashland. By the summer of 1891, it had purchased enough books to necessitate the printing of over 2,000 catalogues that listed all of the books in the library that could be distributed among Alliance members in the county. Cook concluded that "the Alliance wants every farmer to have a library to read from in order to educate and build a strong union of farmers."<sup>16</sup>

During the winter of 1891-1892, the County Alliance organized a massive education initiative to keep sub-alliances active. County Lecturer Jerry Fischer felt it most important that sub-alliances take up the money question for discussion and then move on to debate land as well as transportation issues. Showing his faith in educationally-based efforts as a means to invigorate members, Fischer remarked that "there is no better way of arousing the people than by the diffusion of facts on political conditions."<sup>17</sup> Local members echoed these sentiments in letters written to the press, which supplied numerous examples of success with the educational efforts.<sup>18</sup> In October of 1891, Jonas Yoder, the librarian

of the Richland sub-alliance, informed his constituents that there were now over 140 volumes in their library. He proudly stated that "this is a free institution, and is being taken advantage of by many that would not get to read and learn the true object and aims of the people's party."<sup>19</sup>

Sub-alliances constantly reported the acquisition of new books and the formation of new libraries. Books were either passed around, or, in some sub-alliances, kept in an Alliance library, which often consisted of a locked cabinet located at the meeting hall or school house. Collections frequently included books such as W. H. Harvey's Coin's Financial School, and Henry George's Progress and Poverty.<sup>20</sup>

In August of 1891, the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance passed an education resolution supporting the New Era and the state central committee in their efforts to inform the people of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. It insisted that "the principles taught by the Alliance have awakened in the people a new thought and have caused them to see their relation to their fellow man in an entirely new and different light."<sup>21</sup> Education provided the foremost tool in changing the social dynamics of rural life by modifying the way that individuals perceived

themselves in an economic and political context.

Education and discussion often brought out difficult questions about controversial subjects, including the rights of women, who were encouraged to partake in Alliance activities. Few other organizations offered women the opportunity to serve as fellow participants with their male counterparts, or to discuss political and economic issues on an equal basis.<sup>22</sup> The Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist and Catholic churches, which were the prominent denominations in Saunders County in 1890, supported the traditional view that women ought to remain home, although some did encourage women to partake in female church benefit organizations. Saunders County was a leader in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) in Nebraska. In 1891, it hosted the W.C.T.U. State Convention in Ashland. However, women's church groups and the W.C.T.U. did not offer women the chance to establish working relationships with men as the Farmers' Alliance could.<sup>23</sup>

Within the Saunders County Alliance, women and men worked together closely. Both sexes voted, held office and discussed important political and economic issues at meetings. Members frequently referred to each other as "brother" or "sister" in correspondence, as well as in discussions at meetings.<sup>24</sup> As a result, one might expect



that women's rights would emerge as a political issue because of the experience that Alliance women and men shared. Yet, no resolutions or platforms published by the Saunders County organization mentioned women's suffrage.<sup>25</sup> The Alliance did offer new roles and organizational possibilities for women, however, as historian Julie Roy Jeffery notes, "the issue of women's equality was probably undercut by the movement's strong emphasis on revitalizing the agricultural class."<sup>26</sup>

Nationally, one in four members were women; however, in Nebraska, it was closer to one in five. In January of 1891, according to a calculation by historian Jeffrey Ostler, women numbered 13,875 members out of a total Alliance membership of 69,375.<sup>27</sup> Though many women only participated in auxiliary events like oyster dinners and ice-cream socials, some took advantage of opportunities to get involved in the organizational features of the Alliance. For example, Alliancwoman Isabel Jenks organized the Ashland #2215 sub-alliance in June of 1891, with sixteen men and fifteen women.<sup>28</sup>

Individuals such as Eva McDonald of Minnesota, Mary E. Lease of Kansas, and Luna E. Kellie of Nebraska, demonstrated the significant role that women could play in state and national organizations.<sup>29</sup> State Alliance leaders

implored male members to interest their wives in the organization. While in most instances, women were expected to cook, raise children, and take care of the home, a man's traditional role allotted more freedom for social and political activities. A Man's position as head of the family and farm operator meant that the most important decisions were left to him to decide. However, these were the realities faced by women on the plains in the late 1880's and early 1890's.<sup>30</sup> State Alliance leaders considered that husbands and wives were an agricultural unit. As Burrows remarked at a Saunders County Alliance meeting, "the men who are neglecting to induce their wives to join the Alliance, and take an interest in its meetings, are not doing their whole duty to the society."<sup>31</sup>

Though women were not charged quarterly dues, and married women were often omitted from records since couples counted as one member, women were not necessarily marginalized.<sup>32</sup> By being able to hold the same offices as men, women could be as involved in carrying out their official responsibilities when called upon to do so. They assisted in drafting resolutions, spoke regularly at county- or sub-alliance meetings, and drafted sub-alliance reports printed in the New Era. School teacher and Alliancewoman Minnie Eassom, of the Pohocco sub-alliance,

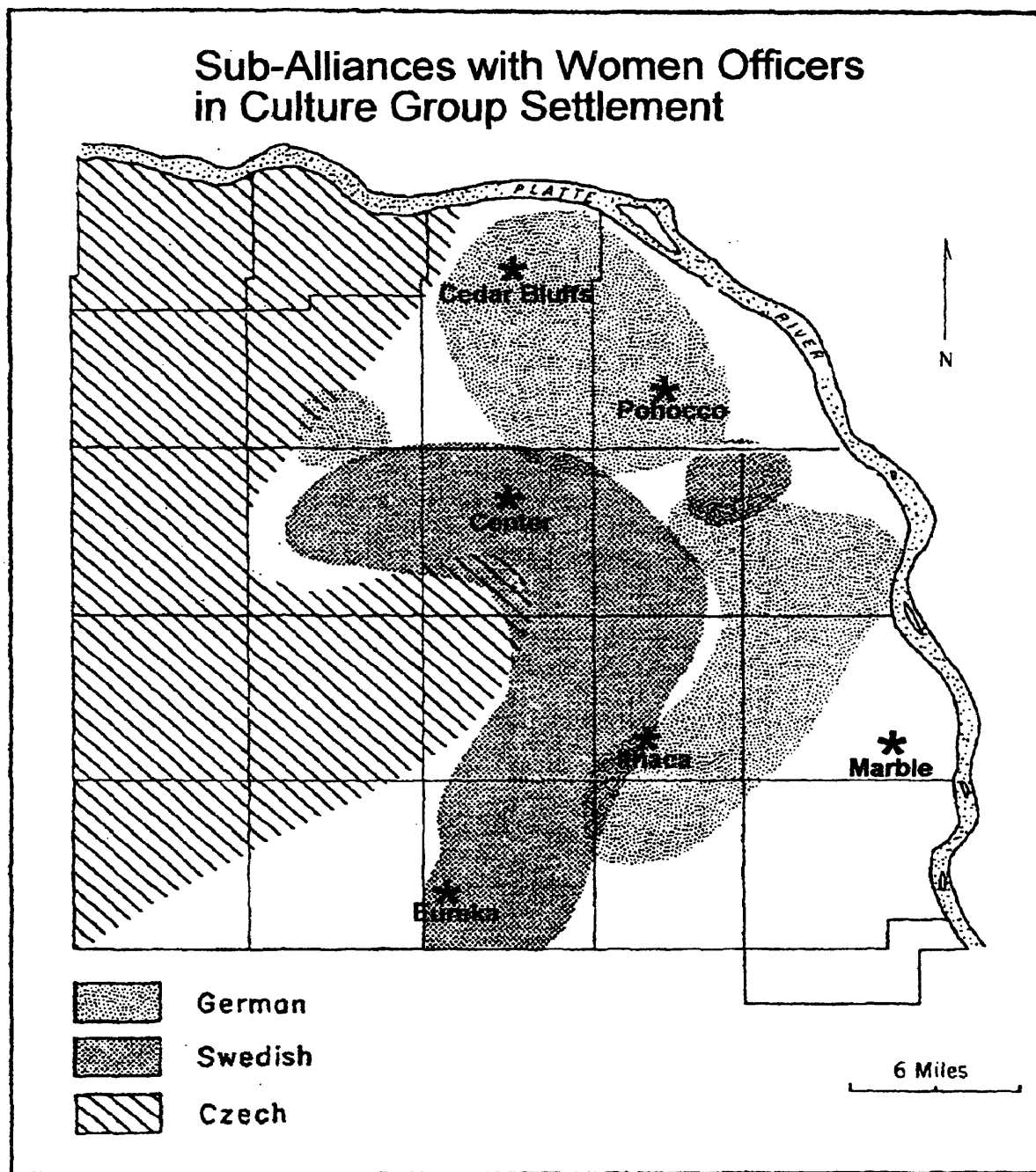
co-authored the group's first resolution that condemned the two main political parties and called for railroad reform.<sup>33</sup> Women often provided the entertainment at Alliance meetings by singing choral hymns, playing musical instruments, and conducting literary expositions. The Pohocco sub-alliance's women's quartet performed at a number of Alliance picnics and meetings.<sup>34</sup> One Alliance-woman, who only signed her name "Jane," wrote a weekly report for the Marble sub-alliance in the New Era. Jane's communications were often enthusiastic and colorful, giving descriptions of Alliance members' activities. In one instance she chastised Marble sub-alliance members for not attending weekly meetings by saying,

There is no use of this slip shod way of doing business. If we are going to do anything let us do it with a determination that will win. After all, if there is going to be a show in town or a horse buyer is to be there, then you will scamper off to town without fail, no matter how busy you are. But let us see if you will show up this Saturday for the Alliance meeting! That will tell the tale!<sup>35</sup>

Jay Burrows, visiting a Saunders County Alliance meeting in December of 1889, provided insight into women's roles, but lamented that "there were several lady delegates present, but not so many as there should have been." Burrows went on to compliment a speech given by a young Alliancwoman that was "exactly to the point, contained

just words enough to state the point clearly, and no more." The speech apparently struck Burrows by its directness, as it had "brevity and force, and was the best address of the afternoon."<sup>36</sup>

Sub-alliance quarterly elections were recorded sporadically, especially in local newspapers and the membership journal of the Nebraska State Farmers' Alliance. An assessment of the available records reveals two patterns of women's participation as officers in sub-alliances. First, there is a definitive correlation between the number of women reported in local office and the activity of the sub-alliance, with higher levels of women's participation paralleling a higher degree of sub-alliance activity. Second, sub-alliances located in precincts heavily populated by Bohemians did not have women officers. The Lane, Newman, and Willow Creek sub-alliances represent a group of sub-alliances, that while active, report fewer events, less involvement, no woman officers and reside in Bohemian precincts. In contrast, the Center, Pohocco and Marble sub-alliances were among the most active groups, each of them electing at least one woman to office. Women's involvement in a particular sub-alliance probably depended on whether or not male members fostered an environment open to their participation.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 7** Sub-alliances with Women Officers in Culture Group Settlement in Saunders County.

From: Gordon M. Riesdesel, "The Cultural Geography of Rural Cemeteries: Saunders County, Nebraska" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1979), 19.

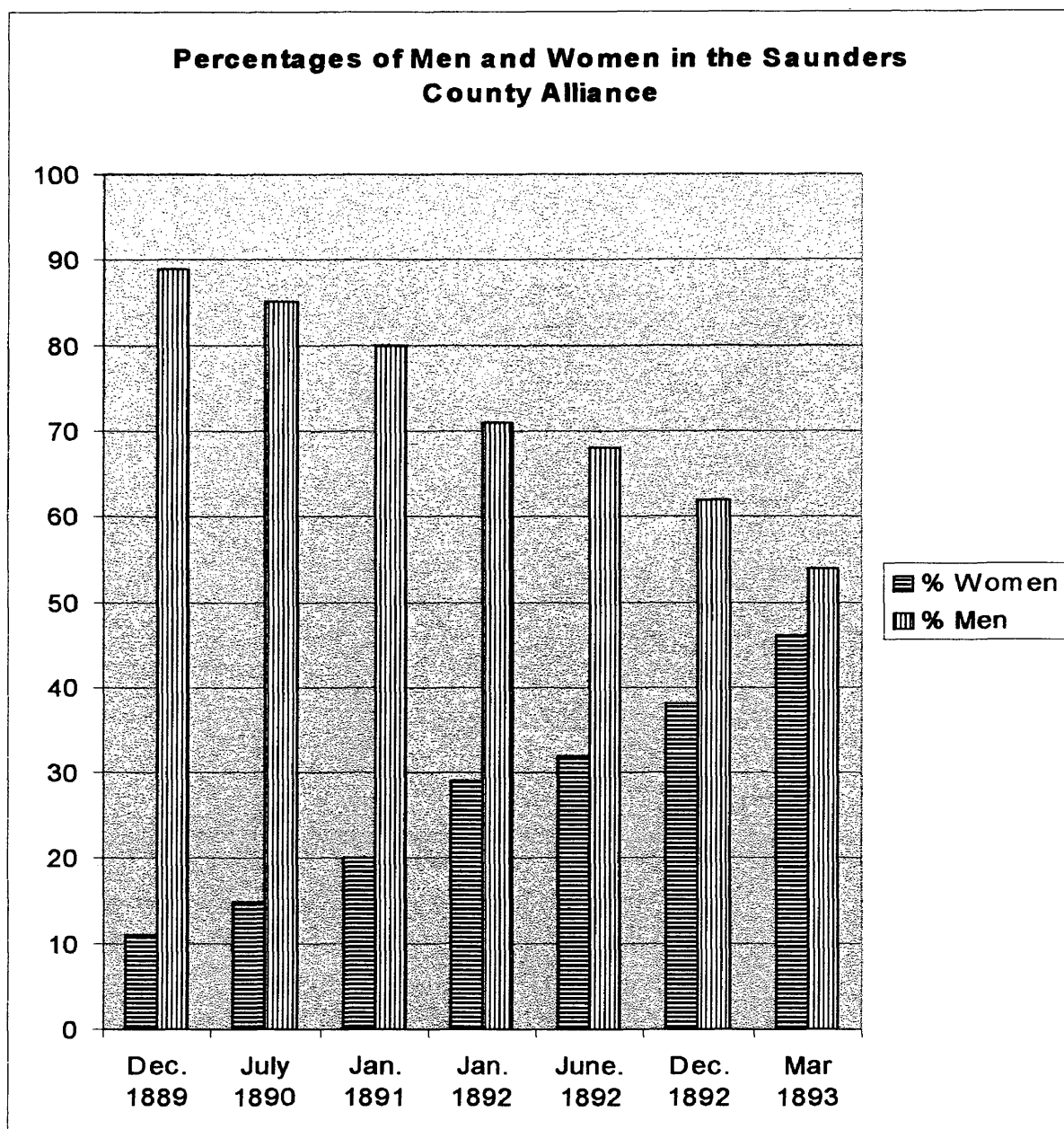
Even if not elected to office, women found other ways to involve themselves in Alliance activity. Meetings, fund-raising events, and social gatherings were frequently co-sponsored by other organizations such as the W.C.T.U., a women's choral group, or a local women's church group. For example, the Lothair sub-alliance of northern Marietta Precinct organized a benefit concert for drought-suffering counties to the west in February of 1891. Assisting them were the W.C.T.U., which provided all of the food; the local Presbyterian church provided the space, and the Pohocco Women's Quartet sang. Charging fifteen cents for adults and ten cents for children, the Lothair sub-alliance raised over twenty dollars to send to drought-sufferers.<sup>38</sup>

Historian Mary Jo Wagner estimated that fifty-two percent of women officers in the Nebraska Farmers' Alliance were not related to other members of their local sub-alliance, but rather had joined on their own initiative. In her study of 105 sub-alliances across the state, she found that only twenty-six percent had women officers, with only two sub-alliances reporting more than one woman officer.<sup>39</sup> In Saunders County, there were seven sub-alliances known to have had female officers, out of thirty-six total groups, or 20 percent. Out of thirteen

known women officers, seven were related to another member of their respective sub-alliance, or 54 percent.<sup>40</sup>

The Center sub-alliance, located in Center Precinct north of Wahoo, elected women to all of the local offices in December 1891. In fact, it was the only group to elect more than one woman to office. With one exception, all of the women who were elected were related to other male members of the sub-alliance. President- Mrs. J.N. Gaffin, vice-president- Mrs. James Moss, secretary- Fannie Verrell, assistant secretary- Jennie Leese, treasurer- Eva Moss, lecturer- Mrs. Presba, and chaplain- Mrs. D. Frazier. However, while the regular offices were entirely filled with women, W.O. Rand remained purchasing agent.<sup>41</sup> At the time of the election in December 1891, the Center sub-alliance, unlike other sub-alliances, contained a higher percentage of females, with 42 women and 36 men. In fact, as men's membership numbers fell, women's membership stayed constant. By March 1893, its membership consisted of 42 women and 21 men.<sup>42</sup>

While the Center sub-alliance was atypical in that its membership was predominately female, on average, all sub-alliances experienced a sharp increase in the percentage of women to men from 1889-1892. In December of 1889, 11 percent of Saunders County Alliance members were



**Figure 8** Percentages of Women and Men, in the Total Membership of the Saunders County Alliance.

From: Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 566-574, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.



female. By December of 1892, the percentage of women in the total membership had grown to 38 percent. Thus, women were more likely to have retained their membership as their brethren dropped out of the organization.<sup>43</sup> The example of Saunders County therefore supports what Jeffrey Ostler suggests,

The proportion of women in the Alliance increased as it was eclipsed by the People's Party beginning in 1891, since males (as voters) were able to participate directly in the new People's Party organizations and dropped out of the Alliance (over-all membership declined substantially from 1891 to 1893); women, unable to vote, maintained their membership.<sup>44</sup>

Women clearly played an important role in the Saunders County Alliance. Their support of the movement was manifested in many different ways. Though they were not treated equally with men in all circumstances, the Alliance still afforded women opportunities that were not available prior to the existence of the organization. The earlier Granger movement was open to women's participation, but it did not admit them on an equal standing as did the Farmers' Alliance. Unlike the Alliance, the Grange reserved certain offices and degrees for women. Though this curtailed the leadership roles of women, it did guarantee them an office, albeit not on the same level as men.<sup>45</sup> Historian Julie Roy Jeffery noted this unique aspect when she observed,

The Alliance did not last long enough to change the traditional views of women's social role, but its attempts to work out a new place for her in practical positions of responsibility and importance suggest that its reform agenda extended beyond questions of economics and politics. Though it fell short of offering full equality, the Alliance challenged traditional views of women's domestic and public roles like no other organization before it.<sup>46</sup>

The organization's openness toward women paralleled the Farmers' Alliance's approach to welcoming all types of individuals into its ranks. There were no religious or ethnic requirements; to join, one had to have been raised on a farm and pledge an oath to follow Alliance principles. The ethnic and religious diversity of Saunders County provided challenges to the Alliance. Bohemians, Swedes and Germans were the three main ethnic groups that settled in Saunders. German immigrants seemingly were more acculturated than the Bohemians and Swedes, who seldom attended social events or married outside of their own ethnic group.<sup>47</sup>

In 1890, more than half of the male population over twenty-one years of age in Saunders County were born in another country, with 2,682 native born, and 2,966 foreign born.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the Farmers' Alliance often recruited its own members to translate at meetings and rallies. Eric Johnson of Swedeburg translated the Swedish

language, while native Bohemians Frank Dolezal and John Hospodsky, both of Wahoo, interpreted for Czech speakers at Alliance meetings.<sup>49</sup>

To this end, the County Alliance and the Knights of Labor in Wahoo sponsored the development of an Alliance-Independent newspaper to serve the large Czech constituency in western Saunders County.<sup>50</sup> On March 29, 1891, both organizations co-sponsored a resolution pledging support for a Bohemian newspaper.<sup>51</sup> Later the two orders issued a statement describing their reasons for starting the new paper,

If we are now posted on our duties as citizens, is it right for us to remain indifferent to the welfare of our Bohemian-Americans, who have not an opportunity of acquiring knowledge of those principles which are essential in order that an honest and intelligent ballot may be cast in the interest of the commonwealth.<sup>52</sup>

After organizing a joint stock company in April of 1891, supporters purchased all of the necessary equipment from the Great Western Type Foundry in Omaha and hired E. J. Jonas of Atchinson, Nebraska, to be the superintendent. With general support from "the best Bohemian farmers and businessmen in Saunders County", and from the editors of the New Era, the newspaper was an assured success.<sup>53</sup> However, backers could not find an editor for the newspaper venture, so they turned to John Rosicky, owner and editor

of the Pokrok Zapadu (*Progress of the West*) newspaper in Omaha, during the summer of 1891, about starting a new paper in Wahoo to serve Bohemian readers.<sup>54</sup>

The Pokrok Zapadu, founded in 1877, was the longest running Czech newspaper in the country. Rosicky assisted the new independent paper, the Pritel Lidu (*The People's Friend*), by convincing a protege of his, John Hospodsky, to run the paper as its editor and publisher.<sup>55</sup> The Pritel Lidu experienced initial success as the only Bohemian Alliance-Independent newspaper in Nebraska. Eventually, however, interest in the paper waned and Hospodsky decided to move the paper to Wilber, Nebraska, in 1893.<sup>56</sup>

During the summer of 1890, the Saunders County Alliance added another sphere of activity to its operations by gaining control of the Saunders County Agricultural Society. While Alliance members had always attended society meetings regularly, they had never acted as a group to implement changes in the board's program. This changed when the question of sending an exhibit from Saunders County to the Nebraska State Fair came up before the county agricultural society. Because of political differences among its membership, the organization decided not to send an exhibit. Alliance members, who thought the county ought to be represented at the State Fair, were upset over the

decision. They quickly brought the matter before the County Alliance. The Saunders County Agricultural Society was supposed to be a non-partisan organization composed of farmers who were only interested in the welfare of the county. When the County Alliance learned of the society's decision, it appointed a committee to oversee the construction of a display for the State Fair.<sup>57</sup>

The Alliance committee sent the display to the Nebraska State Fair at the beginning of September, 1890, entering it as the "Saunders County Exhibit," but not claiming any credit for the Saunders County Alliance.<sup>58</sup> It came to the attention of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture that the Alliance was instrumental in constructing the exhibit. It therefore deprived the credit due to the county, both in prize money and recognition. As the Farmers' Alliance concluded, "the board allowed political narrow-minded jealousy to induce them to do a great injustice to the Saunders County people."<sup>59</sup>

At the annual elections of the county agricultural society in February of 1891, the Alliance took control of the organization by electing an Alliance member to every office and board position.<sup>60</sup> From this point forward, the Saunders County Alliance controlled the county agricultural society, using it to bring Alliance members together during

the week-long county fair in Wahoo. The New Era noted that "the association is now controlled by farmers! The people of Saunders County should expect a REAL agricultural fair, instead of a 'Hoss Ross' as usual."<sup>61</sup>

The fair held contests among sub-alliances for booth displays, crop quality and art exhibits. These contests and activities were held before the Alliance assumed the planning of the county fair. However, the event took on new life as members, who had not come before, came to show their support for the Alliance-sponsored event.<sup>62</sup>

President John H. Powers of the State Farmers' Alliance, along with Eva McDonald of Minnesota, the Northern Alliance Assistant Lecturer, both spoke to crowds numbering in the hundreds during the county fair. One visitor exclaimed that "under the new [Alliance] management Saunders County had a very successful and interesting display of farm products, the attendance was good too, scoring them a financial success."<sup>63</sup> The county fair epitomized the goal of Alliance leaders because it brought together family, farm and community under the aegis of the County Alliance.

The Alliance community carried out its own educational program to teach members about politics and economics. These education-based efforts were aimed at getting farmers more active in politics. Women were fellow members in the

movement, in many cases sharing the responsibilities with men. By using translators and establishing a new Bohemian newspaper, Alliance members were able to extend the organization to include Swedes and Bohemians. Ultimately, through these activities the movement fostered an *Alliance experience*, which was based on the premise that farmers should cooperate in order to pursue their collective interest above all else.

## Notes

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1. New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), January 8, 1891, 1. The title of this chapter is adapted from Robert C. McMath, Populist Vanguard, A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), chapter 5, "Brothers and Sisters: the Alliance as Community."
  2. Farmers' Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), June 7, 1890, 4.
  3. Ibid., July 5, 1890, 3.
  4. John D. Barnhart, "The History of The Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 126.
  5. For a discussion of political education in the Farmers' Alliance, see Theodore Mitchell, Political Education in the Southern Farmers' Alliance, 1887-1900 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). Mitchell uses Paulo Freire's idea of the 'banking concept of education' as a means to explain empowerment of class-based education. See Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 1970), chapter 2.
  6. Quoted from Elizabeth Higgins, Out of The West, in John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 132.
  7. Farmers' Alliance, August 16, 1890, 2.
  8. Index to 'the Newspapers of Saunders County (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1991), 48-59.
  9. New Era, January 14, 1892, 4.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 129.



12. Barnhart, "The History of the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party of Nebraska," 134.
13. Ibid., 126.
14. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 1, Frame 172, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
15. New Era, June 4, 1891, 8.
16. Ibid., July 9, 1891, 5.
17. Ibid., December, 1891, 4.
18. Ibid., August 9, 1890, 2; October 23, 1890, 3; October 30, 1890, 4; March 26, 1891, 5; August 13, 1891, 5.
19. Ibid., October 22, 1891, 7.
20. For a description of sub-alliance activities in Rock Creek Precinct, which was located in northern Lancaster County, see Mary L. Jeffery, "Young Radicals of the Nineties," Nebraska History 38 (Spring 1957): 36. The Morse Bluff sub-alliance reported an 85 volume "circulating" library "without walls," circulated among the membership. See New Era, May 28, 1891, 8.
21. New Era, August 6, 1891, 8.
22. Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance: A Reconsideration of the Role and Status of Women in the Late Nineteenth Century South," Feminist Studies 3 (Fall 1975): 74.
23. New Era, June 4, 1891, 5; Ruth Bordin, Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 8-9; Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance," 78.
24. Alliance, June 12, 1889, 4; New Era, October 23, 1890, 5.
25. Farmers' Alliance, March 1, 1890, 4; May 24, 1890, 2; June 28, 1890, 3; July 5, 1890, 3; November 22, 1890, 3; New Era, January 22, 1891, 6; February 12, 1891, 6; August 13, 1891, 1. The Declaration of Principals and Popular Call for a People's Independent Party, which was adopted as the platform at the Independent Party State Convention July 29,

- 1890, did not contain a women's suffrage plank. Farmers' Alliance, May 24, 1890, 2. Historian John D. Hicks noted that Women's Suffrage "was a delicate question, for it was closely identified with the politically hazardous matter of temperance legislation." Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 406.
26. Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance," 74.
27. Jeffrey Ostler, Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, 1880-1892 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 184.
28. New Era, August 20, 1891, 7; Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 574.
29. Farmers' Alliance, June 25, 1891, 4; Gene Clanton, Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 73-78; Douglas Bakken, ed., "Luna E. Kellie and the Farmers' Alliance," Nebraska History 50 (Summer 1969): 185-206.
30. Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance," 79; Jane Taylor Nelson, ed., A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 138-145.
31. Burrows made this comment in reference to a County Alliance meeting he had attended on December 21, 1889 at the Saunders County School House located three miles North of Ashland. Farmers' Alliance, December 28, 1889, 3.
32. Mary Jo Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reforms: Women in the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1986), 48-49.
33. Farmers' Alliance, December 28, 1889, 3; June 14, 1890, 4; New Era, February 26, 1891, 1; March 26, 1891, 5.
34. New Era, February 26, 1891, 1; March 5, 1891, 5; July 16, 1891, 11.
35. New Era, June 14, 1891, 9.
36. Farmers' Alliance, December 28, 1889, 3.
37. New Era, September 4, 1890, 6; June 25, 1891, 5; November 19, 1891, 4; December 10, 1891, 6; also see,

Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 1, Frames 631, 708, and Roll 3, Frame 240.

38. New Era, February 26, 1891, 1; March 5, 1891, 5; June 25, 1891, 4.

39. Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reforms," 49. Wagner uses a sampling of 105 sub-alliance quarterly reports, submitted between September 1890 through January 1894. She notes that female secretaries frequently sent in signed quarterly reports omitting women members entirely. Luna E. Kellie, the future state secretary, did this herself. In later quarterly reports she listed female members, but did not list them on other forms, making it difficult after 1894 to gather information on women in the Nebraska Alliance.

40. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frames 566-583; Farmers' Alliance, June 14, 1890, 4; New Era, December 10, 1891, 6; June 14, 1891, 9.

41. New Era, December 10, 1891, 6.

42. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 567.

43. Ibid., Roll 4, Frames 566-583.

44. Ostler, Prairie Populism, 182. Ostler disagrees with Mary Jo Wagner's conclusion that women consisted of one-third of the Nebraska Alliance membership throughout the state organization's existence. Wagner contends that the earlier quarterly sub-alliance reports did not truly reflect the sexual composition of the Alliance because they failed to list women. However, Ostler suggests that there is no reason to doubt these quarterly reports. Furthermore, he states that "increases in women's membership in relation to men should not be surprising considering the lack of opportunity for women in the People's Party." See Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reforms," 51; Ostler, Prairie Populism, 182-183.

45. Solon J. Buck, The Granger Movement (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 41-43; Donald B. Marti, Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920 (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991), 23-25.

46. Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance," 86.

47. Raymond Screws states that "Germans seemed to have blended into American society early on in the county, the Swedes and Czechs maintained a strong hold on their culture and ethnic identity." Raymond D. Screws, "Not a Melting Pot: A Comparative Study of Swedes and Czechs in Saunders County, Nebraska, 1880-1910," Heritage of the Great Plains 35 (Spring/Summer 2002): 5. Though Screws contends that in Saunders County German immigrants "blended" into American society more than other ethnic groups, in other Nebraska counties Germans strongly maintained their ethnic identity. For a discussion of German immigrants in Nebraska during the Populist era, see Frederick C. Luebke, Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969).

48. 1890 Census of the United States, vol. 1, part 1, 773.

49. New Era, May 21, 1891, 8; March 3, 1891, 5; September 8, 1892, 5.

50. Ibid., April 2, 1891, 5.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., June 18, 1891, 4.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., June 4, 1891, 5.

55. Rose Rosicky, A History of Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska (Omaha: Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, 1929), 388.

56. Ibid.

57. Farmers' Alliance, September 20, 1890, 2.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Serving on the newly elected Saunders County Agricultural Society Board were S.H. Moss, Samuel Negley, W.O. Rand, George Cornell, and James Moss. See New Era,

February 12, 1891, 8.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., August 13, 1891, 5.

63. Farmers' Alliance, October 1, 1891, 5.

## CHAPTER THREE

FROM PLOWSHARES TO SWORDS:  
POLITICIZATION OF THE SAUNDERS COUNTY FARMERS' ALLIANCE,

It does not seem that the people of Nebraska need another demonstration of the determination of corporate power to hold its clutch upon the production and industry of the state. But if they do, they probably will not have long to wait. *So wait. Let the grass grow [sic]. . . .* The Alliance should have at least one hundred thousand farmer members in Nebraska by the ides of November.<sup>1</sup>

Farmers' Alliance, May 1890.

From March to July 1890, the Saunders County Alliance nearly tripled its membership, rising from 585 to 1,454 members. Sub-alliances increased during this time as well, growing to a total of thirty-three.<sup>2</sup> The social dynamics underlying the Farmers' Alliance were important facets of the organization's movement culture, but during the spring of 1890, popular interest in the organization focused on its political agenda. Though Saunders County Alliance members ran a county ticket under the Union Labor Party in the fall of 1889, the action had not been endorsed by the Alliance State Committee. County leaders organized the effort only two weeks before the election. The limited

support that the Alliance ticket received, resulted from a lack of preparation and the absence of a strong campaign message to farmers. The Alliance candidates did not establish good reasons for members to leave the Republican and Democratic parties.<sup>3</sup>

A severe drought occurred in the spring of 1890, which compounded the already difficult economic conditions. With the Republican-controlled state government unwilling to pass legislation to alleviate farmers' problems, hundreds of farmers in the county turned to the Alliance in the hope that it would bring change. Initially, members believed that the Alliance could work through the traditional two parties in pressing its demands; however, by May 1890, such wishful thinking had evaporated. The Republican Party State Convention nominated Lucius D. Richards for governor. As a banker, real estate broker, and a man known to have strong connections with the railroads, Richards epitomized everything that farmers were rallying against. With seemingly no hope of relief from the current political leadership, farmers felt they had no other choice but to enter politics themselves.<sup>4</sup>

In March, collective political action was not deemed appropriate by the Alliance State Committee. Still, local sub-alliances published resolutions, allowing them to state

their political beliefs and objectives as a matter of public record.

On March 1, the Saunders County Alliance published its first preamble and list of resolutions. Beginning with an attack on Nebraska railroads, the preamble claimed that Nebraskans "have been unbearably burdened with extortionate rates" by all of the railroad companies in the state. Accusing the state government of being a tool of oppression controlled by the railroads, the county organization pointed to the State Transportation Commission as delinquent in not using the powers granted it, through the state courts, to lower rates. It concluded that "after a number of years have elapsed we have comparatively received no relief, thus proving the said commission recreant to its trust."<sup>5</sup> Though railroad rates had been declining in the state since the mid-1880s, the Saunders County Alliance viewed the disproportionate freight prices between Iowa and Nebraska as proof that Nebraska railroad rates were too high.<sup>6</sup>

The resolution stated that Saunders County farmers wanted relief through state government intervention by setting maximum railroad freight rates. It reflected the dissatisfaction and sense of victimization that members felt at the hand of the Union Pacific Railroad, which



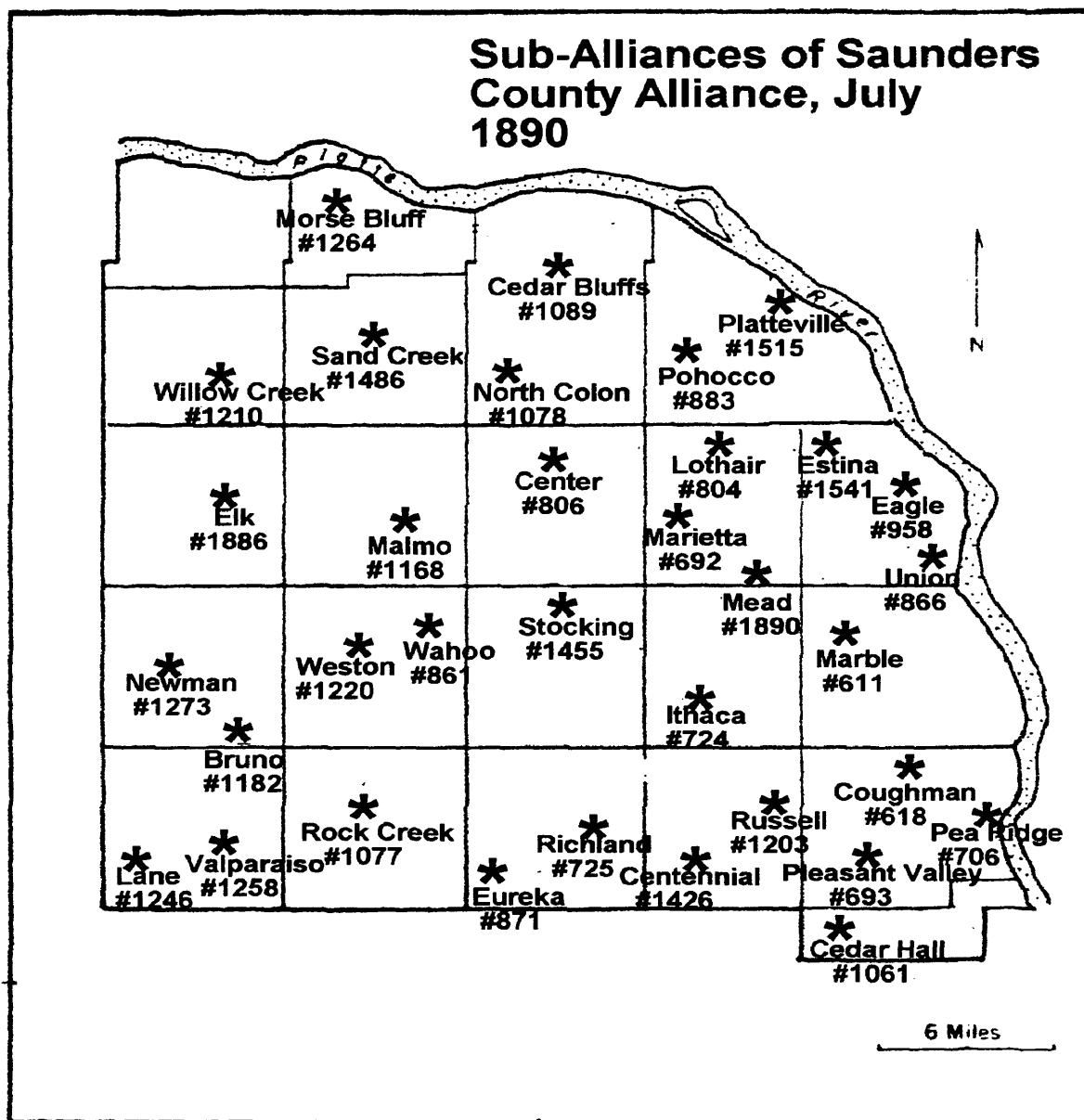
provided the main line in the county. One of the most important aspects of this declaration was the awareness of these matters in the class context, pitting the farmer and laborer on one side, and the railroad corporations, as well as the state legislature, on the other. This ideology, known as producerism, held that farmers and workers should collaborate as a class of producers in political matters against capitalist or business interests.<sup>7</sup>

The last resolution referred to Nebraska State Attorney General William Leese who had written an editorial two weeks earlier, alleging fraudulent claims made by the Union Pacific Railroad concerning the cost of building and operating track.<sup>8</sup> Leese demonstrated how the Union Pacific inflated its costs to receive more bonds from the government. He noted that most of the Nebraska railroads were financed by cash received from bonds, which cost the company nothing except annual interest. Thus, by over-estimating costs, the railroad was acquiring unneeded state government subsidies which were costing tax payers tens of thousands of dollars.<sup>9</sup>

Following the lead of the Saunders County Alliance, its sub-alliances were active in adopting similar resolutions. The Cedar Bluffs unit passed a resolution in mid-May. Though paralleling similar themes present in the

county resolutions, it was far more radical and explicitly class-oriented. Members expressed their indignation at mistreatment from the railroads by stating "we feel we have been wronged, cheated and robbed by the great transportation companies." Calling the previous State Transportation Commission decision to lower rates by 10 percent inadequate, this resolution suggested that the commission could have lowered rates by as much as thirty percent. The main thrust of the grievances was aimed at the disparity of freight costs between Nebraska and Iowa, noting that "the majority of the state board of transportation have failed to entertain a resolution towards the reduction of local railroad rates, which are now nearly twice as great in Nebraska as in our sister state of Iowa."<sup>10</sup>

Recognizing that in the previous year Nebraska grain prices had fallen just as state and national taxes had increased, the group argued that farmers should receive a higher share of the profits that were being siphoned off by the railroads.<sup>11</sup> Saunders County Alliance members demonstrated that they were not interested in reform for predominantly utopian ideals. They simply wanted to reform government and railroads in a way that granted more monetary income to the producer class.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 9** Sub-alliances of Saunders County Alliance in July 1890.

From: Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4  
 Frames 566-576, Nebraska State Historical Society,  
 Lincoln.

Defining the struggle as "the great interest now manifested for the agriculturalists," the sub-alliance made clear that it intended to pursue political action that would depose "those who have been silent or willfully neglectful of our material welfare, who deserve our scorn and will receive only our contempt." Finally, the Cedar Bluffs sub-alliance vowed to vote for only those "true to the agricultural interests of the state."<sup>13</sup> This lodge was directly attacking the Republican-controlled state government, which had not taken action to alleviate farmers' economic hardship.

Republican leaders in the state were not sympathetic to the reforms Alliance members wanted. Consequently, many farmers felt that the only means by which they could obtain changes in government was to enter the political arena themselves.<sup>14</sup> The Nebraska Independent Party was formed for these reasons. It adopted reform measures expressed by farmers across the state. Inheriting the vigor and grass-roots activism mobilized by the Alliance, the Independent Party was initially viewed by members as a political extension of the organization.<sup>15</sup> Even though the Saunders County resolutions, passed in the spring of 1890, made political statements (such as promoting their own members then as candidates for county and state offices), members

still expected to elect them through the traditional two parties. As an editorial, published in May 1890, in the hope of preventing a call for the new Independent Party, suggested,

Any premature step by a few extremists who think a new party is a cureall [sic] for our financial and economic ills will be worse than useless. It will be mischievous in the last degree. New parties are not made by resolutions. *They grow upon ruins. Provide the ruins,* and the time will be ripe to train the new growth. . . . See that every man who is not a member in your precinct and vicinity is talked to by a member. Is he a democrat, send a democrat to him; is he a republican, send a republican to him; is he a prohibitionist, send a prohibitionist to him; a U.L. [Union-Labor Party] man, send a U.L. man to him. Gather them in- gather them in!<sup>16</sup>

The State Alliance leadership wanted to create an inclusive organization, regardless of ethnicity, religion or partisan affiliation.<sup>17</sup>

Becoming explicitly political meant the risk of alienating members who were loyal to the two traditional parties. Such a move, it was feared, would redirect Alliance energy from its main goals of fraternity and economic collaboration. Yet, by May 1890, it was apparent that recent recruits were drawn to the organization's new politically-active tone that it espoused.<sup>18</sup>

This increased political concern and the formation of a Nebraska State Independent Party emanated from the grass-

roots level. Alliance State Secretary J.M. Thompson, later recalled that in 1890, "the State Alliance gave a call to the formation of an Independent Party, because local members were clamoring for political action."<sup>19</sup> The president of the state committee, John H. Powers, stated at the time of the call for the Independent Party convention, "I was not consulted about it. But put my name on the call at once. The movement has my sincerest wishes, and I trust that all true Alliance men will support it."<sup>20</sup> The state leadership could not hold back the rising tide of political discontent on the local level.

Saunders County native and Alliance member, Charles H. Pirtle, served as state secretary of the fledgling party. Pirtle farmed near Wahoo and had run in the 1889 Saunders County elections for county clerk under the Alliance-sponsored Union Labor Party.<sup>21</sup> He promoted the Independent Party State Convention through state-wide advertisements in Alliance newspapers and leaflets mailed to county Alliances.<sup>22</sup> The literature dispersed by the Independent Party organizing committee asked Alliances to spread the word in their communities and garner signatures for the People's Declaration of Principles, which had been issued on May 15, 1890. Pirtle was one of the main authors of the declaration. It contained language demanding government

ownership of railroad and telegraph lines, the coinage of silver, tax-relief for farmers, and nothing short of recall for the state legislature.<sup>23</sup> The organizers of the new party, including Burrows, Pirtle and Thompson, were all Alliancemen and were essential to the formation of the Independent Party. Through its state-wide network of politically active sub-alliances, the Farmers' Alliance fomented the political upheaval of 1890. Fittingly, Pirtle represented Saunders County as a delegate at the state convention in July of 1890.<sup>24</sup>

Saunders County Alliance members exhibited enthusiasm for the new Independent Party. The Pohocco sub-alliance, located in the northeastern corner of the county, issued a resolution outlining its main concerns and aims for organizing the new party. It did not want to nominate anybody but Alliance and Knights of Labor members for office. The lodge vowed to only vote for a man who would "pledge himself to adhere strictly to the full principles of the Alliance." Extolling the belief that the old parties were not to be trusted, it would not support any individual who was nominated by either the Republicans or Democrats. By further stating "we will uphold and support the leaders of our order in regard to the course that should be pursued," the sub-alliance promoted the new party

as an extension of Alliance activity.<sup>25</sup>

Pointing to the large disparity between Iowa and Nebraska, the Pohocco resolution demanded immediate reduction of rail rates "not to exceed those now in use in the state of Iowa." Declaring the need for debt relief, it endorsed the proposition by U.S. Senator Leland Stanford of California, who proposed that the federal government loan money on farm mortgages at a rate of 1 to 2 percent interest.<sup>26</sup>

Samuel Rockafellor, secretary of the Weston sub-alliance, wrote a letter to the editor of the Farmers' Alliance, answering those in Saunders County "harping about the people's convention." Describing his sub-alliance as "in favor of the movement to a man heart and soul," he claimed that the agricultural class had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Demonstrating the local fervor for political action, he stated, "let us have liberty even if we have to fight for it." He ended by describing the enthusiasm of Saunders County Alliance members, saying, "We are getting pretty strong in this county, and all or very near all are ready for a break loose from the parties, and go it alone or not go it at all."<sup>27</sup> Rockafellor's sentiments provided insight into the dramatic role that he and other Saunders County Alliance members were playing in



the local formation of the Independent Party.

The Saunders County Alliance held a general meeting in Valparaiso, located in the southwest part of the county, on June 21, 1890, officially endorsing the Independent movement. Twenty-four sub-alliances gathered in the Valparaiso Opera House for the meeting. County Alliance members listened to State President John H. Powers give an hour and a half speech, "expounding the truth about the independent movement."<sup>28</sup> The Valparaiso sub-alliance hosted the event by preparing outdoor festivities in a nearby grove.

At a second session that evening, members deliberated over resolutions concerning county-wide endorsement of the Independent Party. After deciding to hold a Fourth of July mass meeting in Wahoo in two weeks, the Alliance delegates decided to place their "own ticket in the field," vowing to "not support any man that accepts a nomination from either of the old parties."<sup>29</sup> The meeting marked a turning point for the Saunders County Alliance. By June, 1890, the County Alliance was in full support of the Independent Party. As Secretary Rand stated after the meeting, "You can set Saunders County down solid for the independent movement."<sup>30</sup>

An estimated 5,000 individuals assembled at Wahoo on

the Fourth of July, some traveling from neighboring Dodge and Sarpy Counties to attend. By this time the County Alliance had added four new sub-alliances: Platteville #1515, Estina #1541, Mead #1890, and Elk #1886, bringing it to a total of thirty-three units.<sup>31</sup> During the celebration former Civil War General James B. Weaver spoke to the enthusiastic crowd, rallying them to the Independent Party.<sup>32</sup> Weaver, an Iowa resident and former Greenback Party presidential candidate in 1880, had recently published a book entitled A Call To Action, condemning the Republican and Democratic parties.<sup>33</sup> A Farmers' Alliance-sponsored celebration ensued, including a parade, fireworks and basket dinners for everyone. Since the focus of the new movement was not exclusively agricultural, laborers and small businessmen also attended, showing their support for the political movement.<sup>34</sup>

The Alliance was the organizing force on the state and county level, but the State Independent convention included other reform organizations such as the Knights of Labor, Grangers, Prohibitionists and Union-Laborites. These groups sought many of the same reforms as the Farmers' Alliance, including regulation of railroads, a currency backed by silver, and anti-monopoly legislation to curb corporate power. The collaboration of these organizations

strengthened and diversified the movement, as it could now count on votes from members and individuals who identified with each group.<sup>35</sup>

Saunders County followed the same pattern, as the Alliance, Knights of Labor and other groups joined together under the banner of the Independent Party. Rand, in a report to the Farmers' Alliance, dated June 30, stated that in Saunders County, "the merchants say, 'if its good for the farmer, it is good for me.' The lawyers and politicians say 'that's my sentiments too.'"<sup>36</sup> Alliance members became partners with townspeople in support of the reform movement. Alliamceman A. Carr of Ashland reported that he had found a large number of that town's businessmen who had signed or would sign the People's Declaration of Principles, a necessary step to joining the movement. Although not specifying the number of names on the list, he suggested that he could collect over 100 more signatures if adequate time was available before the county convention. He added that the Alliance in southeastern Saunders County was in full support of Alliance State President John H. Powers for governor. Carr also referred to the prohibition issue, by saying "we [area Alliance members in Saunders County] think it policy to keep prohibition out of this convention, or at least out of the platform."<sup>37</sup> Carr and

Rand both emphasized the Farmers' Alliance had to accommodate other views. Unfortunately, the original fraternal aspect of the order was weakened by the inclusion of these new groups in Alliance activity.

Saunders County Independents next called their own county convention. Working with Alliance members W.O. Rand and George Parmenter, State Independent Party Organizer and Saunders County resident Charles Pirtle was elected central committee chairman of the Saunders County Independent Party. The organizers set the convention date for July 26. Everybody who had signed the People's Declaration of Principles was eligible to participate regardless of prior political affiliation in the precinct primaries. These occurred on July 24, with each precinct entitled to five delegates who would be responsible for nominating county-level candidates and delegates to the state convention.<sup>38</sup>

The Independent Party did not follow the same protocol as the other two parties. The county nominating process, unlike with the Republicans, applied an egalitarian method of choosing candidates. The Saunders County Republican Party Convention used a system that elected a committee of three to discuss, examine and choose candidates for local office and delegates to represent the county at the state convention. Delegates representing Republican precincts

could only vote on the slate selected by the committee, which did not give them any real decision-making power. Some local Republican Party members were reportedly distraught about the annual re-election of the same delegates to the Republican State Convention.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast, the precinct delegates for the Saunders County Independent Party convention directly elected candidates for local office and delegates to the state Independent Party convention.<sup>40</sup> The Independent State Organizing Committee, of which Pirtle was secretary, also proposed to county committee organizers that they ensure that towns did not have too much power at the county level. It advised them to weight the proportion of delegates to the county convention in favor of rural precincts. Stating that "in all ratios based on votes, and generally by design, the towns have a voice in county conventions out of all proportion to their rights, and this should be avoided."<sup>41</sup> The committee sought to make its county convention more fair than the two major parties had done in the past.

Members of the newly chartered Mead sub-alliance, in Marietta Precinct, adopted a resolution on July 19, a week before the Independent County convention, formally endorsing the party. With a strong membership of over

100, the sub-alliance declared "hurrah for the Alliance is our whoop!"<sup>42</sup> After a lengthy discussion, all members pledged to "not support any man for office accepting a nomination by either of the old parties".<sup>43</sup>

Allianceman D.M. Roberts described the Wahoo Precinct Independent Party Caucus held in Ithaca. Apparently, much of the town, as well as the Ithaca sub-alliance, was behind the county Independent ticket. The Independent caucus had thirty voters turn out, with the Republicans in that area only having half that number, and the Democrats not even holding a meeting. Out of the 140 voters located in the precinct, Roberts estimated that over 100 were faithful Alliance members. He observed that "these few straws serve to show which way the wind blows" in Saunders County.<sup>44</sup>

The Saunders County Independent Convention convened on July 26, 1890, in the county courthouse at Wahoo. The first order of business was the election of James Moss of Center Precinct as chairman, and George H. Cornell of Wahoo as secretary.<sup>45</sup> Following the designation of officers, the delegates elected candidates for local offices. The two county-level positions included nominees for county attorney and county commissioner. In selecting B.F. Hines of Wahoo for county attorney, the Independents nominated an individual who had resided in the county for less than a

year. Hines was a Cleveland, Ohio native, who had previously practiced law in Newton, Iowa, before moving to Wahoo in 1889.<sup>46</sup> The convention next chose Alliance member John Cunningham, a resident of Chapman Precinct west of Wahoo, as candidate for County Commissioner.<sup>47</sup> For the state legislature, the Independents nominated Alliancemen Peter B. Olson of Mariposa Precinct and James N. Gaffin. Gaffin, who had been born and raised in Illinois, formerly resided in Douglas County and had only recently moved to Saunders County to operate a small grain elevator business in Wahoo. He resided just north of Wahoo, in Center Precinct.<sup>48</sup>

In early August, Independents from Sarpy and Saunders counties met at the District Five convention in Ashland to elect a candidate for State Senator.<sup>49</sup> It selected William Sanders, an Alliance member who owned a 1,200 acre farm in Clear Creek Precinct north of Ashland. Having homesteaded his original Saunders County claim in 1863, Sanders was an established man well known in both counties.<sup>50</sup>

Following the Saunders County primary, the first People's Independent Party State Convention was held in Lincoln. Lasting from July 29, to August 2, 1890, it drew together delegates from every county in Nebraska except two. William H. Dech, serving as a county delegate to the

convention, was nominated for lieutenant governor. He played a major role in the coming election by giving speeches throughout the state, and by rallying support in Saunders County for the Independent movement.<sup>51</sup> With its twenty-five delegates, Saunders County (matched only by Douglas and Custer), comprised one of the largest delegations at the convention.<sup>52</sup> Representation at the convention was determined by the number of members in a particular county's Farmers' Alliance and labor organizations. Though Douglas County had a population of over 160,000, it was only allotted twenty-five delegates. When compared to Saunders, which had a population just over 21,000, this apportionment suggested a bias in favor of rural areas. Republican and Democratic conventions based their representation on the number of votes received in the previous election. In 1890, there was no such guide for the Independents to use.<sup>53</sup>

The Nebraska Independent Party adopted a platform with a political scope that was much broader than the Farmers' Alliance agenda. Including provisions such as an eight-hour work day, reform of the tax system, government ownership of railroads, and free coinage of silver, this document contained essentially the same demands outlined under the People's Declaration issued in May. The



convention also demanded that the state government adopt the Australian Ballot system and pay a liberal pension to Union veterans of the Civil War.<sup>54</sup> Finally, it stated,

We hereby invite all men, without regard to past or present political affiliations, to join us in this our effort for pure government, for relief from the shackles of party politics and the domination of corporate power in our public affairs.<sup>55</sup>

In time, the politicization of the Alliance would prove lethal to the order by altering Alliance goals and pulling members from its ranks.

In the Fall of 1890, however, there was no thought to the future demise of the order. Alliance members were enthusiastic about the new movement, hoping it would deliver on its promises. In Saunders County, Independent candidates traveled constantly during the campaign, giving speeches, holding rallies, and drawing on the strength of the Alliance for support at every turn.<sup>56</sup> Most of the outlying regions of the county could only be reached by attending the weekly Alliance meeting in that area. During October, the county candidates literally spent every evening in a different place attempting to rally support. Traveling to private homes, Alliance and town halls, and to school houses, the campaigners focused their energy on reaching voters who in the past had not often been

contacted by representatives of the other two parties.<sup>57</sup>

County Independent candidates traveled to Malmo in Mariposa Precinct on October 17, 1890. Addressing a meeting of the Precinct Independent Party held in the Alliance Hall, candidates Hines, Olson and Gaffin gave speeches addressing the issues of the Independent movement. The chairman of the Mariposa Independent Caucus exclaimed in a military analogy, "The Malmo Alliance is no longer on dress parade. They have loaded their guns with the dynamite of ballots. Look for the old party corpses after they are brought in after the explosion on November 4."<sup>58</sup>

Having to cover two separate counties in his bid for the state senate, William Sanders used the New Era to publish editorials outlining his views. His major issue was railroad reform and regulation. Less than a week before the election, he stated, "the transportation question and the labor question can be settled by the Government building about ten thousand miles of railroad, consisting of two lines across the continent."<sup>59</sup> Sanders estimated that building the two lines running from New York and Washington, D.C. straight west, would cost \$600 million. In order to pay for the new roads, he believed the government should issue legal tender notes in the amount needed, to be backed by silver. The government, he

said, did not need to own all railroads, but only "a few miles in the right place."<sup>60</sup> Sanders's scheme emphasized two of the major points of the campaign: free silver and regulation of the railroads.

On November 3, 1890, the day before the election, the local Independent Party held a major rally in Wahoo, attracting hundreds of supporters from outlying areas. The New Era described the climactic event,

Last Monday the Independents captured the city. They assembled from all directions, near the fair grounds and came up through the city. The procession was estimated to be three miles in length. Marshall J. A. Moss led the procession up Linden and returned to 5<sup>th</sup> street thence to the court house. The Mead Band came next followed by the young ladies from Marble and Marietta, representing all the states in the Union. After these came footmen, carriages and wagons. Alliance County President Sam Moss was there with his six horses and hayseed wagon. Parties carrying banners were in the procession. Then the people gathered in the court yard and ate their dinner. After dinner the band played and the famous Pohocco Alliance Quartet sang some stirring songs. Mr. Dech spoke first and then Mr. Voldo. The latter re-buffed the old party press of the state for the vile slanders hurled against the people's ticket, then he discussed political issues. Both gentlemen spoke in the evening. Mr. Dech standing in the presence of all the old friends and neighbors, probably made the greatest effort of his life. It was a grand speech. There were 1,500 people in the city that day and nearly all heard the afternoon speeches. In the evening the courthouse was packed with a crowd that reached downstairs into the hall. The meeting broke up with three rousing cheers for the Independent ticket and for W. H. Dech. Then was sung the doxology of 'No Bonds, No Bonds'.<sup>61</sup>

The Independents proved themselves masters of Saunders County in the election of 1890, by winning every county office and out-polling the Democrats and Republicans in state contests.<sup>62</sup> The Farmers' Alliance was the essential element in the new party's success. Through utilizing the Alliance's network of sub-alliances, the Saunders County Independent Party was able to reach more voters and run a highly effective campaign. The Alliance was responsible for framing the issues that the Independent candidates discussed, putting them in the context of benefits that the agricultural class could expect by taking political action. By cultivating a membership that was aware of current events in state and national politics, the Alliance fostered political agitation in response to difficult economic conditions. While the election was a great success for the Alliance, in many respects it would prove fleeting. During the next two years, Saunders County residents would lose interest in the order, preferring the future People's Party to the old order of farmers. By 1896, a key year in Populist history, the Farmers' Alliance would be nearly forgotten in Saunders County.<sup>63</sup>

## Notes

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1. Farmers' Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), May 3, 1890, 2.
  2. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 566-576, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
  3. Wahoo Democrat (Wahoo, Nebraska), October 31, 1889, 2; November 14, 1889, 2.
  4. Jeffrey Ostler, Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, 1880-1892 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 125.
  5. Farmers' Alliance, March 1, 1890, 4.
  6. Ibid.; Stanley B. Parsons, The Populist Context: Rural Versus Urban Power on a Great Plains Frontier (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 133-134.
  7. Farmers' Alliance, March 1, 1890, 4; For a discussion on producerism, see Robert C. McMath, American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 51.
  8. Farmers' Alliance, February 22, 1890, 2. Attorney General Leese, a well-known critic of railroad activities, went so far as to publish information that the railroads carried many people upon their backs whose only duty was to manipulate state politics in their favor. See The Biennial Report of the Attorney General of the State of Nebraska, 1889-1890. For a description of Leese's record as a Republican and Populist, see John D. Barnhart, "The History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 189-190.
  9. Farmers' Alliance, February 22, 1890, 2.
  10. Ibid., May 24, 1890, 2.
  11. Ibid.

12. For a discussion of agricultural class interest as a deciding factor in Alliance and Populist political agitation, see Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York: Random House Publishers, 1955), 58. He states, "It was an effort on the part of a few important segments of a highly heterogeneous capitalistic agriculture to restore profits in the face of much exploitation and under unfavorable market and price conditions."
13. Farmers' Alliance, May 24, 1890, 2.
14. Robert W. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 34-35; Ostler, Prairie Populism, 130.
15. Farmers' Alliance, May 3, 1890, 2; May 17, 1890, 3.
16. Ibid., May 3, 1890 2.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 33.
19. J.M. Thompson, "The Farmers' Alliance in Nebraska: Something of its Origin, Growth and Influence," Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society 10 (1902): 201.
20. Farmers' Alliance, May 17, 1890, 2-3.
21. Wahoo Democrat (Wahoo, Nebraska), October 23, 1889, 2.
22. Farmers' Alliance, May 24, 1890, 2.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., August 2, 1890, 2.
25. Ibid., June 14, 1890, 4.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., June 28, 1890, 3.
28. Ibid., July 5, 1890, 3.

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frames 575-576.
32. Farmers' Alliance, July 12, 1890, 2.
33. John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 235. For a biographical account of Weaver during the Farmers' Alliance era, see Fred E. Haynes, James Baird Weaver (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1919), 291-307.
34. Farmers' Alliance, July 12, 1890, 2.
35. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, 157; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 33-34.
36. Farmers' Alliance, July 5, 1890, 3.
37. Ibid., July 26, 1890, 2.
38. Ibid., July 5, 1890, 3.
39. New Era, June 25, 1896, 1.
40. Ibid.
41. Farmers' Alliance, July 12, 1890, 2.
42. New Era, August 16, 1890, 3.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., August 9, 1890, 4.
45. New Era, October 23, 1890, 3.
46. Ibid., October 9, 1890, 3.
47. Ibid., October 23, 1890, 3.
48. Ibid., October 9, 1890, 3.
49. Ibid., August 9, 1890, 2.

50. Ibid., October 9, 1890, 1.
51. Farmers' Alliance, January 25, 1890, 1; New Era, August 9, 1890, 2.
52. Farmers' Alliance, July 5, 1890, 2.
53. Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: the Land and the People, vol.1 (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), 683.
54. Farmers' Alliance, August 2, 1890, 2.
55. Ibid.
56. The New Era posted a schedule of meeting dates for the month of October 1890, at which Independent Party candidates would speak. The schedule was as follows: Oct. 10- Chester precinct school house, Oct. 12- Wahoo Courthouse, Oct. 12- Mead sub-alliance, Oct. 13- Yutan, Oct. 13- Pohocco sub-alliance, Oct. 14- Marble sub-alliance, Oct. 14- Cedar Bluffs sub-alliance, Oct. 15- Ithaca sub-alliance, Oct. 15- Prague, Oct. 16- Meese school house in Green precinct, Oct. 16- Center sub-alliance, Oct. 17- Malmo sub-alliance, Oct. 17- Ceresco, Oct. 19- Valparaiso sub-alliance, Oct. 19- Memphis school house, Oct. 20- Ashland, Oct. 20 Eureka sub-alliance, Oct. 21- Weston sub-alliance, Oct. 21- Marietta sub-alliance, Oct. 22- Morse Bluff, Oct. 22- Estina sub-alliance, Oct. 23- Crowder school house in Newman precinct, Oct. 23- Eagle sub-alliance, and Oct. 24- Wahoo Courthouse. See New Era, October 23, 1890, 4.
57. New Era, October 23, 1890, 4.
58. Ibid., October 23, 1890, 1.
59. Ibid., October 30, 1890, 4.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., November 6, 1890, 1.
62. Ibid., November 13, 1890, 3.
63. Correspondence of Luna E. Kellie, acting as the 1896 State Farmers' Alliance Secretary. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 3, Frame 3118.



## CHAPTER FOUR

BREAKING THE CHAINS OF DEPENDENCE:  
COOPERATIVE VENTURES IN THE SAUNDERS COUNTY ALLIANCE

"A class of itself, to a class for itself."<sup>1</sup>  
Karl Marx, The Coming Upheaval.

The vision of a community of farmers working towards fraternity and economic mutual assistance was what originally appealed to farmers when the Farmers' Alliance began in Saunders County. Organizers, such as J.M. Swiggert and W.O. Rand, often discussed the benefits of bulk purchasing through the State Alliance Business Agency as a way to interest prospective members.<sup>2</sup> Unlike several other states, the Nebraska Alliance did not operate a state-wide cooperative or exchange system.<sup>3</sup> While the state business agency offered items such as agricultural implements, wagons, buggies and twine, it acted as more of a bulk-shipping service for consumer goods, from which sub-alliances could order collectively.<sup>4</sup>

In Nebraska, local farmers formed smaller, localized cooperatives, independent of the State Alliance in order to market their grain and livestock. A rural-versus-urban split spurred the development of these enterprises as members felt that town-based merchants and professionals

not only controlled local politics, but also dominated institutions of trade and finance to the detriment of farmers.<sup>5</sup> An examination of cooperative ventures in Saunders County illustrates how Alliance members created their own locally-operated enterprises as a means to revitalize the county's agricultural class. There were two types of cooperative ventures used by Saunders County farmers. Consumer co-ops allowed members to buy products at a less expensive price than at a privately-owned store. In contrast, producer co-ops were formed in order that farmers could sell their grain or livestock and receive the highest price possible.

Alliance members learned about cooperative strategies by attending conventions and local meetings, where they listened to State Alliance representatives give talks on proper methods of organizing a cooperative.<sup>6</sup> Alliance-Independent newspapers encouraged the proliferation of these operations by publishing success stories, and by offering advice to communities on how to start their own.<sup>7</sup> An article, appearing in the Farmers' Alliance, on May 10, 1890, presented a sub-alliance with all of the necessary information to begin a consumer co-op.<sup>8</sup> It suggested that a group needed at least twenty-five farmers to start. These members were to purchase all of their goods from the

cooperative store. The article stated that the initial investment amount should be two months of what it cost to operate the co-op. This financial requirement was a minimum that most lodges of moderate size could meet.<sup>9</sup>

A farmer-owned enterprise offered its members multiple benefits, in addition to the initial attraction of lower priced goods. Cooperative stores furnished farmers a method of breaking away from private financial institutions they felt had extorted them in the past. The Alliance cooperative movement represented an attempt by farmers to construct social and economic alternatives to serve the needs of agriculture that were outside of the traditional local trade and finance operations that they were rebelling against.<sup>10</sup>

The Ithaca sub-alliance and two Ceresco area sub-alliances established cooperative stores. The People's Cooperative Meat Market Association of Ithaca, was organized by Samuel Negley and William Dech, Jr., son of the local Alliance leader, W.H. Dech. Planning for the venture began in October of 1890, at an Ithaca sub-alliance meeting.<sup>11</sup> Dech, an Ithaca area Farmers' Allianceman, convinced other members of the need to construct a facility where area farmers could sell beef, pork, fish and poultry.<sup>12</sup> After six months of discussion, the articles of

incorporation were adopted in June of 1891. A board of directors, consisting entirely of Alliance members, was elected to oversee the building of the store. The articles of incorporation approved the issuance of 100 shares, sold for ten dollars each, thus constituting a capital base of \$1,000.<sup>13</sup> Using this start-up capital, the cooperative purchased a store on Main Street in Ithaca for forty-five dollars and began conducting business.<sup>14</sup>

By November of 1891, financial shortages forced the board of directors to seek additional capital. Board member Albert D. Fellows extended the association a loan of \$123, which was paid off by March 1, 1892.<sup>15</sup> Later that year, the association, needing more money, took out a mortgage of \$250, a loan which would prove fatal. In March of 1893, the People's Cooperative Meat Market Association disbanded and the property was sold at auction for \$280, just enough to pay off its loan and the interest still owed.<sup>16</sup>

The Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco was organized by the Richland and Eureka sub-alliances in January, 1891.<sup>17</sup> Alliance members formed the market in the same fashion as the Ithaca sub-alliance, establishing a joint stock company in which members bought shares. Alliance member John Beaman sold his farm and moved to Ceresco in order to

manage the store, noting that "if the dressed beef combine wants to drive us out of business, all right, competition is the life of trade."<sup>18</sup> Ceresco businessmen organized a boycott of the store by townspeople, initially putting financial strain on the cooperative.<sup>19</sup> Yet, by mid-summer the cooperative store boasted that business was so good that another Alliance member began a second shift to keep up with demand. According to the New Era, Jonas Yoder, the butcher of the Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco, made "the best bologna anywhere!"<sup>20</sup> The cooperative continued in operation until April of 1892, when the association asked all individuals owing money to settle accounts promptly since the Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco was closing.<sup>21</sup> The two meat market cooperatives also dealt in consumer household goods, which sought to save farmers money on small-item purchases.

In addition, the County Alliance arranged business partnerships in an effort to minimize costs. The Stocking sub-alliance began the Alliance Livery and Feed Barn in Wahoo, providing a place for Alliance members to leave their horses and wagons when they visited the town.<sup>22</sup> These operations, while small in scale, demonstrated the amount of time and energy that sub-alliances were willing to devote to develop alternative enterprises that would

service members. M.F. Elliot, who owned a fruit tree nursery, operated as the Saunders County Alliance nursery agent. He extended credit, as well as gave discounts to members who bought trees from him. The county organization endorsed Elliot by printing in the New Era that "all Alliance men would do well to give him a call and purchase from a home nursery rather than from an Eastern man."<sup>23</sup> County Alliance members also bought basic food items, seed and bale twine in bulk through the Alliance State Business Agency. County Purchasing Agent William T. Crow received monthly shipments of Alliance-flour, sometimes amounting to as much as three railroad cars.<sup>24</sup>

Though bulk purchasing did save farmers money, it sometimes failed to work properly because of members who took advantage of the trusting nature of the system. The Lane sub-alliance, located to the southwest of Valparaiso, reported that member A. Delamand had failed to pay for his share of the last shipment. The sub-alliance did not have enough money to cover the expense and could not order further products until Delamand's debt was paid.<sup>25</sup> However, most joint stock companies prevented members from taking advantage of cooperative stores by forcing partial payments up-front.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to bulk purchasing and consumer co-ops,

Alliance members incorporated joint-stock producer co-ops, usually on a much larger scale, in order to ship grain and livestock. Using a system similar to the Rochdale plan to operate the cooperative association, Alliance members followed the same design that the earlier Grange had used to launch cooperative enterprises.<sup>27</sup> The principal features of the Rochdale plan were the organization of a joint-stock company, with shares to be held by individuals in limited amounts. Each shareholder of one or multiple shares of stock counted as a member of the association, and had an equal voice in its management regardless of the amount of stock held.<sup>28</sup> Sales normally were for cash only. Profits were distributed to purchasers in proportion to the amount of money spent at the cooperative. These producer co-ops provided a new alternative to the privately-owned local elevators.<sup>29</sup>

According to Joseph G. Knapp, in The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise, the majority of Alliance cooperatives in states other than Nebraska were not organized along the Rochdale joint-stock plan. Rather, they were organized to give benefits to all individuals who purchased or sold products at the cooperative, not merely to stock holders. This principle held that the co-op existed to benefit the entire agricultural class, whether

they were members or not. These ventures existed under a centralized state cooperative, which the Nebraska Alliance did not have. Therefore, the best alternative for Saunders County sub-alliances was to use the Rochdale system, which some members were probably familiar with from the Grange.<sup>30</sup> In organizing cooperatives, the Grange limited stock ownership of the association to Grange members only. The Weston Grain and Stock Company, as well as the Prague Farmers' Grain and Stock Company, did not stipulate that non-Farmers' Alliance members could not own stock. Yet, it is probable that only, or mostly, Alliance members were stockholders, as the boards of directors were dominated by Alliancemen.<sup>31</sup>

The Weston Grain and Stock Company represents how Alliance members utilized democratic decision-making to manage their co-op. Initially selling 320 shares at twenty-five dollars each, the co-op began with \$8,000 in startup capital.<sup>32</sup> Its articles of incorporation put a limit of six shares per person. Each member could only cast one vote in co-op business meetings, regardless of the number of shares he or she owned. This feature prevented a minority of members from holding sway over a majority.<sup>33</sup>

Organized by area Farmers' Alliance members Hans F. Blunk, Joseph Bartek and Samuel Rockafellor, the Weston



co-op opened for business on September 15, 1890.<sup>34</sup> When it began, two other privately-owned grain elevators were already operating in Weston. Advertisements stated that the cooperative was supported by the County Alliance, and that it provided everything a farmer needed, from buying lumber to selling hogs.<sup>35</sup>

By December, the farmers' cooperative was prospering, and was described as "doing a rushing business!"<sup>36</sup> At this time the co-op had not yet built an elevator. Farmers sold their grain at the Weston Grain and Stock Company anyway. By storing the grain in large cribs, the cooperative waited until the elevator could be constructed in the spring for grain loading.<sup>37</sup> The New Era stated that, "they [Weston Stock and Grain Company] have been buying an immense amount of corn, which they can shell and ship any time prices suit them."<sup>38</sup> This remark underscored the important aspects that ventures such as the Weston coop could provide farmers. Essentially, it gave them more control over the shipping and pricing of their grain. During the fall season, grain prices were generally lower than at other times in the year, as most farmers attempted to sell their grain once it was harvested. By holding the product off of the market until prices went up in the spring, member farmers of the cooperative could realize a higher profit on

their grain.<sup>39</sup>

Alliance members organized similar grain and stock co-ops in Prague and Colon. In both cases, the boards of directors, as with the Weston Grain and Stock Company, were comprised of Farmers' Alliance members.<sup>40</sup> The Farmers' Stock and Elevator Company of Colon incorporated on December 16, 1889, the same month that the Center sub-alliance, which met in Colon, was chartered.<sup>41</sup> This cooperative's officers and board of directors were the same individuals as many of the officers of the Center sub-alliance.<sup>42</sup> The Prague Farmers Stock and Grain Company, founded by Farmers' Alliance members, incorporated on August 1, 1893.<sup>43</sup> After 1888, when the Burlington Missouri Railroad built a new connecting line, the town of Prague was established, and became a hub for the four precinct-area surrounding the town. The cooperative was formed to provide everything that local farmers needed, with the general nature of business being the "buying and selling of grain and all kinds of products of the farm, live stock, also wire, coal, stone, fencing, salt, lime, lumber, and all kinds of agricultural implements and machinery."<sup>44</sup>

The Wahoo Creamery Association differed from most cooperative operations of the 1890s. With the original startup capital amounting to \$25,000, divided between 250

\$100 shares, the Wahoo Creamery Association achieved success on a scale that most locally-owned cooperatives would not reach until the twentieth century. The general business of the creamery was to "establish, erect and operate a corporate enterprise locally owned in order to produce, sell and store dairy products."<sup>45</sup> Incorporated on March 19, 1892, the creamery would continue in operation well into the next century. Paul A. Olson, who grew up in Wahoo, recalled how the Swedish-influenced cooperative operated by saying,

I recall in my childhood the Saturday afternoon at the coop creamery, where the farmers brought in the cream cans, puffed corn cobs, and talked about the weather and whether they ought to keep the same butter maker next year. The scene was peaceful enough. The men knew they owned the place. Like Marxism and Populism, cultural nationalism and cooperation were phenomena significant to the reform movements in all the Scandinavian groups.<sup>46</sup>

Mutual insurance constituted another means by which Saunders County Farmers' Alliance members were able to collaborate in creating alternative economic institutions to reduce costs. A mutual insurance company only collected from its members sufficient money to pay for actual losses and to defray necessary expenses.<sup>47</sup> There was no assessor or corporate infrastructure to support, so members only paid for actual losses to farm property, livestock and

crops.

Nebraska law virtually prohibited such companies from incorporating by requiring all mutual insurance plans to have 200 paying members, with at least \$5,000 cash in its treasury. These requirements were supposed to ensure that the company could meet its obligations. The Farmers' Alliance alleged that the law had been enacted in the interest of eastern insurance corporations that loaned money in Nebraska and wanted to prevent farmers from insuring each other.<sup>48</sup> This particular state law was repealed in the spring of 1891 by the Independent Party-controlled state legislature, leading state and local mutual insurance companies to legally incorporate throughout Nebraska.<sup>49</sup>

Two separate mutual insurance associations were begun by Alliance farmers in Saunders County. J.M. Swiggert, who had organized sub-alliances in eastern Saunders County, began a mutual insurance company among farmers in Marble, Marietta, Pohocco, and Union Precincts in the summer and fall of 1889.<sup>50</sup> The other association was begun by members James Moss and Samuel Negley. They organized a county-wide mutual insurance association on June 18, 1890. Swiggert's organization operated independently of the one begun by Moss and Negley, though both were developed by Alliance

initiatives. These two organizations merged in 1891, to form a larger county-wide mutual insurance association, taking the name, Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company.<sup>51</sup>

In 1890, farmers avoided the restrictive state mutual insurance law by not legally incorporating either association. Moss and Negley began their association in June, 1890, with an estimated \$50,000 of insured property. In one year's time the organization expanded to 158 members, covering \$162,730 of insured property.<sup>52</sup> By mid-July, 1891, the association had adjusted only three losses in just over a year since its founding. This proved to its members that it was an effective means to insure farmers at low cost.<sup>53</sup>

The secretary of the Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company, Samuel F. Negley, had planned to merge all of the county's mutual insurance companies together, thus economizing and reducing the cost to every member. There were two other mutual insurance associations, both Swedish. The Scandinavian Mutual Company was established by C. Carlson of Swedeburg in 1878. By 1891, it contained 220 members, with \$304,353 in insured property. The Svea Mutual Insurance Company was established by Gus Rosengren of Wahoo in 1888. In May of 1891, it included 209 members,

with just over \$330,000 in insured property. The Scandinavian Co. operated in the southern half of the county, and the Svea Co. operated in the northern half, with the dividing line at Wahoo. Despite his efforts, Negley was unable to arrange a county-wide merger as "the Swedes could not be induced to give up their organization."<sup>54</sup>

Apparently the Swedish companies felt that the size of such an enterprise would make it more susceptible to deceptive measures and increased costs, comparable to a mainstream insurance company.<sup>55</sup> Negley wanted to merge all four organizations in order to have a larger, more powerful and county-centralized mutual insurance organization. Ultimately, his plan for county-wide merger failed, as the Swedes would not concede, though he was able to persuade the Farmers' Mutual group to join. Negley stated his reasons as "the more members, and the greater the amount of risk we cover, the less each assessment will be, as the losses do not increase with the increase of risks; and as there are officers and other oversight processes, there is no 'show' or 'do up members' as some people may think."<sup>56</sup>

By May of 1892, the Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company had grown to 267 members, had been legally incorporated, and had established an office with

two full-time insurance assessors.<sup>57</sup> The association charged members a one-time, five year membership fee. If a member were to record a loss, there would be an immediate assessment of all members to cover the insurance money due to the owner of the lost property. As the association's secretary, Negley stated, "Money is kept in the county instead of being sent back east to a larger insurance company".<sup>58</sup> The board of directors, including such notables as W. O. Rand, George Cornell and William H. Dech, consisted entirely of Farmers' Alliance members.<sup>59</sup>

Cooperatives were a very important part of Alliance work, especially in the sub-alliances that created their own. In fact, some coops outlived the Farmers' Alliance. The Weston Grain and Stock Company, as well as the Prague Farmers Stock and Grain Company, lasted well into the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup>

Saunders County cooperatives were begun by individuals such as James Gaffin in Colon, Joseph Bartek in Weston, William Dech Jr. in Ithaca, Jonas Yoder in Ceresco, and Samuel Negley of Ithaca in mutual insurance. All of these men played key roles in the Alliance and in the new Independent Party. Gaffin was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1890; Bartek was elected county sheriff the same year; Yoder was the Richland sub-alliance

librarian; and Negley served as secretary of the Independent County Central Committee in 1890. There was a connection between organizing cooperative ventures and activity in the Alliance-Independent movement. In all instances of cooperative activity, sub-alliances were chartered prior to the formation of cooperatives. It was in Alliance meetings that plans were made to take cooperative action in business. In Saunders County, the Alliance experience prompted members to forge new business relationships in order to promote their collective economic interests.

According to historian Lawrence Goodwyn, in Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America, the "cooperative experience" was what led to a political education of Alliance members.<sup>61</sup> Nebraska, Goodwyn argues, did not have a genuine Alliance or Populist movement. It contained only an imitative "shadow movement" of Populism, organized as a result of the successes of other states, but devoid of issues and substance. Goodwyn claims that,

The ultimate problem in Nebraska was the absence of the kind of statewide cooperative infrastructure that elsewhere provided the agrarian movement with its vehicle of organization, its schoolroom ideology, and its culture of self-respect.<sup>62</sup>

However, historian Robert Cherney demonstrates that



not only did the cooperative experience exist in Nebraska, but also Populism certainly was a genuine force within the state. Citing efforts by local and state officers to initiate mutual insurance, and to begin cooperative stores and grain elevators, he shows that a movement experience did actively influence the Nebraska State Farmers' Alliance.<sup>63</sup> It was Alliance meetings, which created an environment conducive to political education and social cohesion, that gradually sparked the organization of cooperatives.

Furthermore, Goodwyn claims that the Populist movement culture, which was derived from the "cooperative experience", only became radicalized after cooperatives had failed. Thus, political action resulted from the demise of the cooperative effort.<sup>64</sup> Contrary to Goodwyn's thesis, Saunders County Alliance members were already politically active before they formed cooperatives. This suggests, as historian Stanley Parsons and others show, that the Alliance cooperative movement, the radicalizing of political goals, and the political insurgency, occurred within the same time period, from December of 1890 to the spring of 1892.<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately, cooperatives were an extension of Alliance activity into business. The irony is that farmers adopted

quasi-collectivist measures in order to compete with large corporations in the marketplace. Farmers were responding to industrialists of the late nineteenth century, who, though they espoused a rhetoric of free market competition and Social Darwinism, were actually eliminating competition in practice.<sup>66</sup>

## Notes

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1. Karl Marx, "The Coming Upheaval," The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 218.
  2. Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), June 12, 1889, 4; June 19, 1889, 4; July 3, 1889, 2; September 14, 1889, 4; Farmers' Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), December 28, 1889, 3.
  3. Robert C. McMath, Populist Vanguard: a History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 54; Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise: Populist Moment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 91-92, 98-99. For a discussion of the Texas Alliance state-wide cooperative exchange, see Donna A. Barnes, Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), chapter 6.
  4. Farmers' Alliance, March 1, 1890, 4.
  5. Stanley B. Parsons, Jr., The Populist Context: Rural Versus Urban Power on a Great Plains Frontier (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 5-7; Robert C. McMath, American Populism: a Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 104-106.
  6. Alliance, June 12, 1889, 4; June 19, 1889, 4; Farmers' Alliance, December 28, 1889, 3; New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), October 16, 1890, 5.
  7. Farmers' Alliance, May 10, 1890, 2; New Era, October 30, 1890, 4.
  8. Farmers' Alliance, May 10, 1890, 2.
  9. Ibid.
  10. McMath, American Populism, 106.
  11. New Era, October 23, 1890, 4.

12. Ibid., November 27, 1890, 4.
13. Ibid., June 25, 1891, 5.
14. Record of Deeds, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebraska.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. New Era, January 29, 1891, 5.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., June 4, 1891, 8.
20. Ibid., June 25, 1891, 7.
21. Ibid., April 7, 1892, 5.
22. Ibid., December 18, 1890, 6.
23. Ibid., September 4, 1890, 6.
24. Ibid., March 26, 1891, 5; July 30, 1891, 9.
25. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 1, Frame 631.
26. Joseph G. Knapp, The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise (Chicago: Interstate Printers and Publishers Inc., 1969), 65.
27. Ibid., 65-66.
28. Solon J. Buck, The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and Its Political, Economic and Social Manifestations (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 259.
29. Ibid.
30. Knapp, The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise, 66.

31. Record of Articles of Association, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebraska; New Era, April 23, 1891, 1; July 30, 1891, 1.
32. New Era, October 30, 1890, 4.
33. Buck, The Granger Movement, 259.
34. New Era, October 30, 1890, 4.
35. Ibid., December 18, 1890, 8.
36. Ibid., November 6, 1890, 5.
37. Ibid., November 13, 1890, 5.
38. Ibid., December 25, 1890, 10.
39. John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 193.
40. Record of Articles of Association, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebraska; New Era, April 23, 1891, 1; July 30, 1891, 1.
41. Record of Articles of Association, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebraska; New Era, April 23, 1891, 1; Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 566.
42. Record of Articles of Association, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebraska. The Farmers' Stock and Elevator Company of Colon's board of directors consisted of: president- James Gaffin, secretary- Jacob Keifer, treasurer- W.O. Rand, as well as, J.M. Lee, W.T. Crow, and Frank Barry, who were members at large. Though it is not known if the secretary, Jacob Keifer, was an Alliance member, the rest of the board were members of the Center sub-alliance. See New Era, July 30, 1891, 1.
43. Record of Articles of Association, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebraska.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.

46. Paul A. Olson, "Scandinavians: The Search for Zion", in Broken Hoops and Plains People, ed., Paul A. Olson (Lincoln: The Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, 1976), 250.
47. Farmers' Alliance, March 29, 1890, 2.
48. Ibid.
49. Laws, Joint Resolutions and Memorials, Passed at the Twenty Second Session, 1891. Lincoln, Nebraska, 1891, Chapter 33.
50. Alliance, June 19, 1889 4; July 3, 1889, 2; September 14, 1889, 4; October 12, 1889, 3.
51. New Era, May 26, 1892, 6.
52. Ibid., June 18, 1891, 1.
53. Ibid., July 16, 1891, 5.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., May 31, 1891, 8.
56. Ibid., May 31, 1891, 8; May 26, 1892, 6.
57. Ibid., April 6, 1892, 6; May 26, 1892, 6.
58. Ibid., May 31, 1891, 8.
59. Ibid., April 6, 1892.
60. Jim and Arnold Fencl, The Prague Centennial: Celebrating a Century of Czech Heritage (Waterloo: Publication Printing of Nebraska, 1987), 27-28; Virginia Pokorny, Weston Centennial Celebration: 1876-1976 (Weston: Weston Centennial Committee, Nebraska, 1976), 33.
61. Goodwyn, Democratic Promise, 110-111.
62. Ibid.
63. Robert W. Cherny, "Lawrence Goodwyn and Nebraska Populism," Great Plains Quarterly 1 (Summer 1981): 186-187.

64. Goodwyn, Democratic Promise, 149.
65. Stanley B. Parsons, Karen Toombs Parsons, Walter Killilae, and Beverly Borges, "The Role of Cooperatives in the Development of the Movement Culture of Populism," Journal of American History 69 (Fall 1983): 868.
66. Norman Pollack, The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism and Democracy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 177; Theodore Saloutos, "The Agricultural Problem and Nineteenth Century Industrialism," Agricultural History 22 (July 1948): 166.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE POLITICS OF THE SAUNDERS COUNTY FARMERS' ALLIANCE:  
REFORM AND ACTION

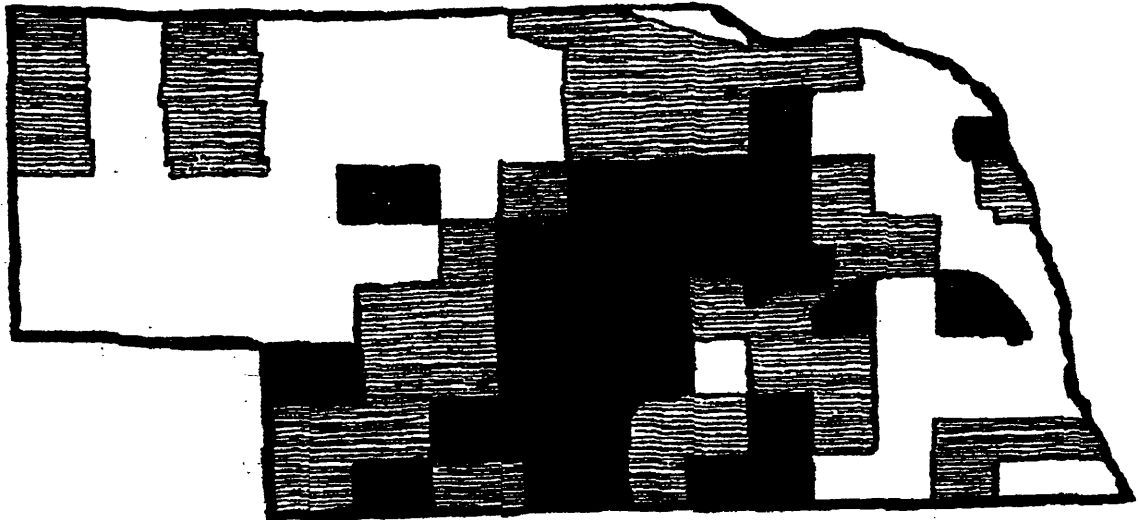
The farmers basked in the sunshine on election day. No cloud obstructed the straight and steady dropping of the independent ballot. It was a complete victory for the Farmers' Alliance in Saunders County. Every man on the Independent Ticket was elected by majorities that are emphatic and not to be mistaken.<sup>1</sup>

Editorial, Wahoo Democrat,  
November 1890.

The Alliance-backed Independent Party swept the Nebraska polls on November 4, 1890. In just six months, the movement organized a new third party, ran an effective campaign, and wrested control of the State House of Representatives and Senate from the Republicans. Independents in Saunders County polled enough votes to elect every county candidate, as well as contributing 2,433 votes to gubernatorial candidate and Farmers' Alliance State President John Powers. In Saunders County, Democrat James Boyd received 1,286 votes, while Republican Lucius Richards garnered 1,132 votes.<sup>2</sup> Across the state, similar results occurred in other Alliance-dominated counties,



## 1890 Independent Vote For Governor: County Percentages Cast In Favor Of Independent Party In Nebraska



- - Counties with election returns with over 50% Independent vote.
- ▨ - Counties with election returns with 33% to 49% Independent vote
- - Counties with election returns with less than 33% Independent vote.

**Figure 10** Percentage of Total Vote Cast for Independent Party by County.

From: John D. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Nebraska," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 247.

especially in central Nebraska, thus sending a strong message to the traditional two parties.<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning of the campaign, the Alliance assumed the leadership position among the reform organizations of the Independent movement. Now that electoral success had been achieved, the New Era praised the organization by saying "the Farmers' Alliance is the great motive power through which the producing classes of America are going to be emancipated."<sup>4</sup> Jay Burrows, editor of the Farmers' Alliance of Lincoln, reminded members,

while the Alliance itself is not a political party, and while its organization is distinct from the Independent organization, it is still true that your membership forms the backbone of the party.<sup>5</sup>

Its leadership role in the Independent Party encouraged the Saunders County Alliance to closely observe its new representatives in the state legislature, therefore making political affairs a priority over its other activities.

Although political matters absorbed a large amount of members' energy, the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance still found time to come to the aid of struggling Alliance members in the central and western parts of the state. The severe drought conditions of 1890 produced poor crop yields, sending many County Alliance leaders across the state asking for help. At a County Alliance meeting in

November of 1890, President A. Hickox of the Harlan County Alliance addressed members about their severe shortage of food and money.<sup>6</sup> The Saunders County group responded within one week by donating a railroad car full of food and clothing.<sup>7</sup> On another occasion it sent a railroad car load of seed corn to the Dundy County Alliance. James Knox of Benkleman sent a letter in the spring thanking Saunders County members for the corn, saying that "my own precinct received 75 bushels of corn, with the rest being distributed throughout the county allowing us to plant crops and bet again this year."<sup>8</sup> Saunders County provided similar aid to Furnas and Custer Counties during the winter of 1891.<sup>9</sup> These efforts demonstrated that while the Alliance sought state government intervention to relieve economic disparity, it also contributed to the relief effort.

The Ithaca sub-alliance passed a resolution concerning the Homestead Act in early January 1891. It expressed concern for the failure of crops in western Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado and Wyoming, which was caused by "an unprecedented drought in the year 1890 and necessitated the abandonment of claims by a large number of homesteaders," who had left their farms before they had proved their claims.<sup>10</sup> The Ithaca group argued that land speculators

would buy up the property at deflated rates. Therefore, it urged both the U.S. Congress and the Nebraska legislature to pass emergency legislation which would allow homesteaders to leave their claims for one year without penalty or loss of land. It explained that "a prolonged absence from claims, was necessary in order that farmers may gain subsistence for their families," and that the majority of these homesteaders had "honesty in purpose, and with commendable enterprise sought to build themselves homes on the prairies of the west."<sup>11</sup> The Ithaca sub-alliance further stated its belief that if the government allowed the situation to continue, there would be "great and irreparable loss" to farmers everywhere.<sup>12</sup>

In the same spirit of advocacy, the Richland sub-alliance, in October of 1890, condemned a lockout of the Saddle and Harness Makers Union #19 of Omaha. It resolved to organize a county-wide boycott of the Mark's Brothers saddle manufacturer's products until "they are willing to grant to their employees the same privileges as they request." The Alliance members expressed their deep resentment and strong support of "our workingmen and consumers of our products", urging all to stand together until "equality and justice prevail."<sup>13</sup> The Richland sub-alliance stated its grievances with the Mark's Brothers

saddle makers by saying,

the contract is one of the most contemptible and tyrannical instruments man was ever asked to put his signature to. It was in substance as follows: That the employee must place himself in the position with his employer worse than that of the serfs of Russia and is required to deposit with his employer twenty five dollars to insure said employer against damages.<sup>14</sup>

The collaboration of urban workers and farmers became an important facet of the Independent movement. Following the election of new officers in December, the Saunders County Alliance held a joint session with the Wahoo Knights of Labor to discuss the upcoming legislative session and the gubernatorial dispute.<sup>15</sup> Though the November election gave the Independent Party a majority in the Nebraska House of Representatives and in the Senate, it also produced heated controversy surrounding the election of Democrat James Boyd as governor over John Powers, who was also Alliance State President. Furthermore, William H. Dech was only narrowly defeated in the lieutenant governor's race. Both instances had the Independents calling for a recount because vote fraud was highly suspected.<sup>16</sup> The joint session held in the Wahoo Opera House was open to all members of both organizations, who discussed possible resolutions and actions to deal with the vote contestation.<sup>17</sup>

The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor was America's largest nineteenth century labor organization, reaching over 700,000 members at its peak in the mid-1880s. Originally founded in Philadelphia in 1869 as a secret society, it focused on promoting the rights of the industrial class.<sup>18</sup> It recruited both men and women of various trades and occupations, including farmers, as it was interested in organizing all the laboring classes in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1890 election, the Saunders County Knights of Labor supported the Independent ticket.<sup>20</sup> Though the Knights were officially nonpartisan, as was the Farmers' Alliance, this did not stop the Wahoo assembly from making political statements or passing resolutions in support of the Independent movement. In Saunders County the order acted as an urban equivalent to the Alliance by organizing Independent voters in Wahoo. During March 1891, the Knights of Labor organized an Independent ticket for the Wahoo city elections. Yet, none of the Independent candidates were elected in the city campaign.<sup>21</sup> The Wahoo Independent Party nominated a blacksmith, George Melvin, for mayor, a mechanic named John S. Crawford as treasurer, and John J. Wilson, a Union Pacific locomotive engineer, for city engineer. The new party also nominated the

seamstress and Knights of Labor member Millie Longfellow, wife of the New Era co-owner John Longfellow, for the city board of education. Mrs. Longfellow was the only woman to campaign for an office in the election. Though women did not have the right to vote in the city election, ironically, they could run for a limited number of public offices.<sup>22</sup> The Wahoo Knights of Labor Master Workman William N. Silver, a local lawyer, was nominated for city clerk. Though the National Order of the Knights of Labor officially forbade lawyers from joining the order, apparently the Wahoo assembly was not concerned with Silver's occupation.<sup>23</sup>

During a joint session of the Wahoo Knights of Labor and the Center sub-alliance on February 19, both organizations adopted a resolution condemning newspapers opposed to the Independent movement. Citing the false reports that opposition papers had spread throughout the past campaign and in the current session of the legislature, they both denounced the positions taken by the Omaha Bee, Omaha World Herald and Lincoln Journal.<sup>24</sup> It was common for sub-alliances to pass resolutions condemning newspapers that opposed the Farmers' Alliance or the Independent majority in the legislature.

Their contempt for these papers was illustrated by a

resolution adopted by the Newman sub-alliance in late February. This sub-alliance resolved to boycott the Bouk and Hupert Seed Company of Greenwood, Nebraska, because it offered free subscriptions to the Omaha Bee with every two dollar purchase of seed corn.<sup>25</sup> The sub-alliance considered the company as nothing more than a tool for the railroads, stating that it "must be working for the corporations, money and trusts, and against the cause of the farmer." Furthermore, the Newman sub-alliance encouraged other sub-alliances to boycott as well, declaring, "no one should patronize any firm that will try to sneak such a rotten paper by us, and into the homes of farmers!"<sup>26</sup>

On February 14, National Grand Master Workman Terence V. Powderly visited the state convention of the Knights of Labor in Lincoln, to preside over the selection of state officers. The Knights elected William H. Dech to be Nebraska's Grand Master Workman. Though a farmer, Dech's political credentials and history with the Knights in Wahoo made him an ideal man for the job.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, the Ithaca sub-alliance (representing Dech's home town) passed a resolution the following month, offering congratulations to both the Knights and Dech. It stated that "the Knights are to be commended on their choice of leader in the person



of W.H. Dech, a man who lives close to the people, a man who has given years of study to questions of labor and political economies."<sup>28</sup>

Both the Farmers' Alliance and the Knights of Labor supported the Saunders County Independent Party legislators during the 1891 state legislative session. Though the Independent Party captured a majority in both houses, it remained difficult to pass important reform bills that the party had promised during the 1890 campaign. Most of the newly-elected legislators who arrived on January 6, 1891, at the Nebraska State House, were untrained and inexperienced in political matters. Out of 133 legislators, 99 were newly-elected farmers whose sense of individualism and varying degrees of radicalism, made them difficult to lead.<sup>29</sup> Their failure to elect John Powers as governor hindered their legislative efforts since Democratic Governor James Boyd was antagonistic to their cause. Consequently, he vetoed most reform measures passed by Independent-controlled legislature.<sup>30</sup>

When the House and Senate met in joint session to take up the matter of recounting the votes in the gubernatorial contest, a number of Independent representatives, led by George F. Collins of Gage County, joined with the opposition to adjourn the session, effectively making the

new party powerless to demand a recount. Immediately following the legislative debacle, the Nebraska Supreme Court was asked to make a ruling on the matter. It decided against the Independent Party's call for a recount of votes in early February.<sup>31</sup>

The Eureka sub-alliance of Richland precinct immediately passed a resolution that regarded "them [the state supreme court] in the same light as the Dred Scott decision," and characterized the court as "outraging law and justice in their efforts to serve their corporate masters, the railroad and the money power."<sup>32</sup> It further implied that the court's actions were a pretext to "war with the people." Finally, the sub-alliance argued that the Republicans and Democrats were in league to sabotage the Independent Party "by working hand in hand to defeat the will of the people."<sup>33</sup>

At its March 28 meeting, the Pohocco sub-alliance denounced the supreme court of Nebraska for having "unjustly and through usurpation of its power deprived the people of their choice for state offices."<sup>34</sup> The sub-alliance compared the supreme court justices to dictators for allowing Boyd "to hold the highest office through the most critical period of the legislative session, in which he may defeat all just legislation." Resolving that they

were thoroughly convinced that the supreme court "is a menace to the liberty and prosperity of the people", the Pohocco sub-alliance proclaimed "the sooner its members retire to private life the better." The sub-alliance continued by recognizing Powers and Dech as the rightful executives of the state and endorsed the actions taken by its "Alliance legislators."<sup>35</sup>

Saunders County representatives actively contributed to the reform movement during the 1891 Nebraska legislative session. At its February meeting, the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance unanimously passed a resolution stating that "we support and do endorse the action of our state representatives and senator, in the way they have worked for the interest of the people."<sup>36</sup> William Sanders was by far the least active of the three men, failing to propose a single measure during the entire Senate session.<sup>37</sup> Peter B. Olson introduced two different bills into the House of Representatives. His usury bill, which would have allowed anyone having paid usury the right to sue and recover excessive rates of interest within five years of signing the contract, was incorporated into a more extensive bill by the judiciary committee.<sup>38</sup> While the usury law was vetoed by Governor Boyd, Olson's bill to move Saunders County out of its federal congressional district with

Douglas and Lancaster Counties, and into a new district including Seward and Butler Counties, did pass into law. Olson acted as chairman of the House Immigration Committee, and was a member of the Constitutional Amendments Committee, as well as the Committee on Bridges and Roads.<sup>39</sup>

James N. Gaffin, by far the most successful of the three representatives, attained a considerable degree of influence in the legislature, ultimately leading him to become the Presiding Officer of the House (similar to Speaker of the House) in 1893 for the newly-named People's Party.<sup>40</sup> As chairman of the Committee on School Lands, Gaffin introduced legislation stipulating four months of compulsory attendance annually for school-age children, as well as a bill mandating that the negative effects of alcohol and tobacco be taught in school.<sup>41</sup> He also served on the more powerful committees in the House, including Ways and Means, Railroads and Finance. Though the bill failed, Gaffin introduced legislation outlawing the free pass system that railroads used to bribe political officials.<sup>42</sup> As a member of both the Alliance and Knights of Labor, he received many commendations from local organizations for his efforts in the legislature. The Center sub-alliance remarked in a letter to the Gage County Alliance that,

We as an Alliance feel truly proud of our noble president James N. Gaffin, who we sent out as a representative to do battle for the people. We have watched him closely, and not a cloud rests on his fair name. When he returns after a winter of arduous labor we can truly stamp on our banner, 'Well Done- Good and Faithful Servant.'<sup>43</sup>

A substantial number of legislative reforms, including legalization of mutual insurance, the secret ballot and an eight-hour work day, were made into law, but the more ambitious elements of the Independent platform failed. The success of the Alliance's political efforts hinged on the ability of Independent Party legislators to pass reform measures. When it became apparent that bills such as a maximum railroad freight rate, tax reform, lowering the legal rate of interest, and regulation of stockyards were not going to be made law, sub-alliances throughout Saunders County began publishing resolutions attacking those whom they felt were responsible.<sup>44</sup> Alliance members passionately believed in the reforms that the Independent movement was attempting to advance. Legislative failures struck at the heart of the movement and its chief backer, the Farmers' Alliance.

The Sand Creek sub-alliance, located in central Douglas precinct, attacked Governor Boyd for his veto of the Newberry Bill, which would have set maximum freight rates for Nebraska railroads. It stated that "the Newberry

bill was a matter of monopoly on one side and the people on the other."<sup>45</sup> Believing that democracy had failed, it declared "that the railroads have tightened their grip on Governor Boyd and shown their hand, Boyd acts only under the pretense of being a servant of the people, but really serves the railroads." Referring to two Independent legislators that voted against the reform measures of the Independent Party, the Sand Creek sub-alliance resolved,

That Boyd's name should be added to the list of other traitors, Collins and Taylor, and that it be in as much blacker letters as possible to designate his rottenness and that the finger of scorn may be pointed at the Omaha corporate tool, that he and the others be known as Nebraska's trio of traitors of 1891.<sup>46</sup>

The Marietta sub-alliance, on April 18, adopted similar language, by exclaiming that "Boyd's heinous act is in direct opposition to the will of the people. He is a usurper of power that properly belongs to the people and is unworthy of the office he holds."<sup>47</sup> The Ithaca sub-alliance summed up the episode by declaring that the legislative session proved that "under the existing state of affairs, capital takes the precedence over labor, when it should be the reverse case."<sup>48</sup> It concluded in a threatening tone, advising Boyd to "settle his business affairs, pack his traps and sever his connections with the state of Nebraska at the earliest possible moment as men of

his ilk are not needed and the people will not abide with them much longer."<sup>49</sup>

After the legislative session ended in April, the Knights of Labor of Wahoo and the Saunders County Alliance held a banquet at the Knights of Labor Hall in Wahoo, inviting all members of both organizations to come and congratulate Representatives Gaffin and Olson, as well as Senator Sanders. At the meeting a resolution was sponsored by both orders, declaring that "these men have fought a good fight and kept the faith."<sup>50</sup> William H. Dech and Charles H. Pirtle, who now served as the secretary of the Nebraska Senate, were also present, and they addressed the audience on future plans for the Independent Party in Saunders County.<sup>51</sup>

As time went on, the Independent Party relied less on the County Alliance organizational network of sub-alliances for political support. The winter and spring of 1891 marked the apex of the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance. Farmers involved in the reform movement were both Alliance and Independent Party members. However, following the spring of 1891, farmers sidestepped the older organization, choosing the new political party as a means to promote reform. The Alliances's main efforts encompassed supporting the measures of Independent legislators, as well

as advancing a program of aid and advocacy to victims of tough economic times. Though radicalizing for some members, the Alliance's political struggle transformed it into an organization bent on political agitation instead of mutual assistance and fraternity. This change was to have a dramatic effect on the future efforts of the Alliance to recruit and retain members, ultimately leading to its decline.



## Notes

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1. Wahoo Democrat (Wahoo, Nebraska), November 6, 1890, 1.
  2. New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), November 13, 1890, 6.
  3. John D. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party in Nebraska," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1929), 251; Robert W. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics: 1885-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 36-37
  4. New Era, November 27, 1890, 4.
  5. Farmers' Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), October 15, 1891, 1.
  6. New Era, November 20, 1890, 8.
  7. Ibid., November 27, 1890, 8.
  8. Ibid., June 11, 1891, 1.
  9. Ibid., January 15, 1891, 5; January 22, 1891, 6.
  10. Ibid., January 22, 1891, 6.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Ibid.
  13. Farmers' Alliance, November 22, 1890, 3.
  14. New Era, November 20, 1890, 8; Farmers' Alliance, November 22, 1890, 3.
  15. New Era, January 1, 1891, 5; January 22, 1891, 1.
  16. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 253; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and Transformation, 37.
  17. New Era, January 1, 1891, 5; January 22, 1891, 1.

18. Richard Oestreicher "Terence V. Powderly, the Knights of Labor, and Artisanal Republicanism," in Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, eds., Labor Leaders in America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 31-32; Robert E. Weir, Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 8-9.
19. Erling N. Sannes, "Knowledge Is Power: The Knights of Labor in South Dakota," South Dakota History, 22 (1992): 404-405.
20. New Era, November 6, 1890, 4.
21. Ibid., March 26, 1891, 5.
22. Ibid.
23. Oestreicher, Labor Leaders in America, 36; New Era, March 26, 1891, 5.
24. New Era, February 19, 1891, 5.
25. Ibid., February 26, 1891, 1.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., February 19, 1891, 1.
28. Ibid., April 2, 1891, 2.
29. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 275; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and Transformation, 37.
30. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 253.
31. Ibid., 256-259.
32. New Era, February 12, 1891, 6.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., April 2, 1891, 1.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., March 5, 1891, 4; March 12, 1891, 5.

37. Ibid., March 26, 1891, 1.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., March 26, 1891, 1,5.
40. Nebraska Blue Book 1998-99 (Lincoln: Office of the Clerk of the Legislature, 1999), 406.
41. New Era, March 5, 1891, 6; Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 273
42. New Era, March 5, 1891, 6; Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 273-274. For a discussion of the free pass bribery system and its effects on Nebraska politics from 1885-1900, see George W. Berge, The Free Pass Bribery System (Lincoln: Independent Publishing Company, 1905).
43. New Era, March 19, 1891, 5.
44. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 273; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 37-38.
45. New Era, April 23, 1891, 1.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., May 7, 1891, 7.
48. Ibid., April 23, 1891, 4.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., April 30, 1891, 1.
51. Ibid., March 26, 1891, 1; April 30, 1891, 4.

## CHAPTER SIX

FROM HAYSEED TO POPULIST:  
THE BIRTH OF THE PEOPLE'S PARTY  
AND THE DECLINE OF THE ALLIANCE

The Alliance is a fraternal and benevolent order, with principles of love and fraternity, wide as the world, universal as air. Let no man deceive himself by believing that this organization is but a passing episode in politics. Remember, its foundation is not primarily political, but social and economic. It is the embodiment of a revolution.<sup>1</sup>

County Lecturer Jerry Fischer  
July 1891.

The summer of 1891 marked a turning-point for the Farmers' Alliance in the state of Nebraska. Absorbed into the Independent movement, it began to lose its identity as a separate organization. Joining with other groups, including the Knights of Labor, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) and the American Order of Steam Engineers, the Alliance built a strong and diverse Independent Party in Saunders County.<sup>2</sup> The Alliance also founded a Citizens' Alliance in Wahoo, which acted as an urban sub-alliance for individuals who were not eligible to join either the Knights of Labor or the Farmers' Alliance.<sup>3</sup>

Knights of Labor member John J. Wilson began the first

chapter of the American Order of Steam Engineers in Nebraska during the spring of 1891, in Wahoo. In March, Wilson was narrowly defeated in the Wahoo city elections while running on the Independent ticket for city-engineer.<sup>4</sup> The Wahoo council of steam engineers also served as the state organizing committee for the order. It chartered two more chapters in Omaha by mid-April. Local membership numbered over fifty. Wilson explained that the goals of the order were "to educate, organize and care for the needs of the widows and orphans of engineers who have lost their life or limb in the performance of their duties."<sup>5</sup>

Officially, the Knights of Labor forbade lawyers, bankers and saloon keepers from being members of the order, while the Farmers' Alliance required that an individual have grown up on a farm in order to join.<sup>6</sup> As a result, both endorsed the establishment of a Citizens' Alliance for "those who are not eligible for the Knights of labor, nor being not farmers eligible for the Farmers' Alliance."<sup>7</sup>

Samuel H. Sornberger, a Wahoo lawyer and notable Independent Party orator who often gave speeches to sub-alliances in Saunders and neighboring counties, founded the sub-alliance. The Citizens' Alliance was represented at Farmers' Alliance county meetings and partook in all activities. It was "in short, a political club with an

iron constitution, whose membership consists of those ineligible for other labor organizations.”<sup>8</sup>

The W.C.T.U. also participated in the Independent movement. Though they played a less prominent role, several W.C.T.U. chapters raised funds for the Saunders County Independent Party. Since women could not vote, they were not invited to participate in Independent Party County Conventions. Therefore, their involvement in the Alliance, Knights or the W.C.T.U. constituted a way of participating in political matters. Some women belonged to all three organizations. W.O. Rand's wife Edith, served as secretary for the Center sub-alliance, was a member of the Wahoo Knights of Labor assembly, and was active in the W.C.T.U. chapter in Colon.<sup>9</sup> Another example was Mrs. J.M. Lee, whose husband served as president of the Center sub-alliance in the spring of 1891, and was a member of the Wahoo Knights of Labor. In June 1891, she was elected as Center sub-alliance lecturer, while also serving as Center precinct organizer for the W.C.T.U. Later, Mrs. Lee was elected as Saunders County president of the W.C.T.U.<sup>10</sup>

The Knights of Labor in Wahoo grew in membership during 1891. It elected a new master workman, Dr. Frank E. Way, a twenty-three-year-old physician who had recently graduated from the Boston University Medical School and had

moved to Wahoo earlier that spring.<sup>11</sup> In May 1891, the Knights of Labor reported a membership of 137 in the community. By March 1892, it had grown to over 200 members.<sup>12</sup> State Grand Master Workman William H. Dech had also organized a county-wide assembly, chartering new local assemblies in Valparaiso and Mead.<sup>13</sup> Alliance member Christopher E. Lillibridge of Weston was elected overseer of the Wahoo Knights in July 1891. In addition, by July 1892, W.O. Rand, former County Alliance secretary, and James Moss, former County Alliance organizer, were elected treasurer and worker foreman, respectively, of the Wahoo assembly.<sup>14</sup>

Alliance leaders unknowingly encouraged a decline in the membership of their organization by collaborating with these other groups. Its separate character was lost as members began to identify more with the new political movement than with the Farmers' Alliance. Officers of the Knights of Labor and the Alliance wielded a great deal of influence in the new Independent Party. These men used their clout as Alliance and Knights leaders to campaign for political office, thus turning Alliance meetings into political gatherings.

Some Alliance leaders were conscious of the political transformation of the order and attempted to make other

members aware of the dangers. County Lecturer Jerry Fischer of Malmo spoke out against the political focus of a county meeting at Weston in May of 1891. He emphasized the differences between those who joined the Alliance on principle, and those that sought to serve their political self-interest.<sup>15</sup> Fischer remarked that,

I'm happy to be here today because the Alliance is bringing out that for which it was intended. I'm happy because I seek no office of any kind, but am working for the good of the cause and that alone. It is alright for these lawyers to get up here and make nice speeches and tell us what bad people they have been, but we must watch them. They may be after something. Better follow out the plan of the Methodists, that of taking in members on probation.<sup>16</sup>

Preceding Fischer at the podium were K.I. Perky and Samuel H. Sornborger, former Republicans and Wahoo lawyers who had recently joined the Independent movement.<sup>17</sup> The Center sub-alliance echoed Fischer's sentiments by passing a resolution in August condemning new members of the Independent movement who had not been associated with the cause in the fall of 1890. Concerned with "keeping traitors out of our camp," the sub-alliance resolved not to support any man for office who used the Alliance to secure a nomination.<sup>18</sup>

The Independent County Convention, held on August 8, 1891, nominated men who were either officers of the



Alliance or the Knights of Labor for each county office.<sup>19</sup> William H. Dech, State Grand Master Workman of the Nebraska Knights of Labor and Ithaca sub-alliance member, acted as temporary chairman of the meeting because the county chairman, Alliance member James Moss, sought the Independent nomination for county sheriff. Alliance members who were nominated for office included: Joseph Bartek of Chapman as county sheriff; W.O. Rand of Center as county clerk; Christopher Lillibridge of Chapman as county treasurer; Samuel P. Robinson of Marietta as county commissioner; William Rogers of Richland as county surveyor; S.E. Amerson of Oak Creek as superintendent of schools; and John Carey of Pohocco as clerk of the district court. The Knights of Labor members, who were nominated for county office, included Master Workman Dr. Frank E. Way as coroner, and former Master Workman William N. Silver as county judge.<sup>20</sup>

All candidates used their positions as Knights or Alliance members to campaign for office. During the summer of 1891, sub-alliances held picnics and meetings at which Independent candidates spoke.<sup>21</sup> The Farmers' Alliance became synonymous with the Independent Party. They were intertwined at every level, from the leadership who campaigned for political office, to the members who voted

for them. However, in the county election of 1891, the Farmers' Alliance took a more passive role than in the previous campaign. Though its members attended meetings to hear Independent candidates, there were no resolutions published by sub-alliances and there were far more political rallies outside of Alliance gatherings that members attended.

Alliance meetings were merely another political gathering for Independent Party office seekers. John Carrey, president of the Pohocco sub-alliance and candidate for clerk of the district court, held an Alliance picnic at his farm in Pohocco Precinct in mid-August. He invited Farmers' Alliance editor Jay Burrows and Wahoo Citizens' Alliance President Samuel H. Sornborger to join him in speaking on Independent principles before a crowd of over 600 people.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the Malmo sub-alliance held a picnic on September 3, inviting all Alliance members to attend. Every Saunders County candidate for the Independent ticket addressed the gathering. Offering "good food, good music and especially good speakers," the Malmo sub-alliance promised farmers and Independents that the picnic would be "good fun."<sup>23</sup>

Nebraska Independent Party Congressmen and Alliance members Omer Kem and William Mckeighan traveled to Saunders

County in the beginning of October to address Independent voters. Stopping in Ashland, Cedar Bluffs, Wahoo and Mead, they both spoke to Alliance and Knights of Labor gatherings, supporting candidates for the Independent ticket.<sup>24</sup> County candidates themselves scheduled stops nearly every other day from September to the end of October, in order to address sub-alliance meetings or Independent rallies held across the county.<sup>25</sup>

Immediately following the campaign, Samuel P. Robinson, president of the Marietta sub-alliance and candidate-elect for county commissioner, sponsored an oyster supper to thank those who voted for him at his farm. Over 150 Alliance members attended the gathering which was held in conjunction with a Marietta sub-alliance meeting. Noting that some sub-alliances had become inactive, the New Era praised the Marietta gathering by declaring that "the Alliance people in that area of the country should be congratulated. . . . If all Alliances would do like wise [sic], the organization would be much better off."<sup>26</sup> Yet even this gathering was only held to celebrate the political success of Independent Party candidate Samuel Robinson.

The sharp decrease in letters to the New Era suggested another sign of deterioration in Alliance activity. These

communiques were written by sub-alliance secretaries and informed readers of current events.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the few letters that were received did not discuss any Alliance activity outside of the Independent campaign. The correspondence, which formerly discussed Alliance gatherings and cooperative ventures, became filled with details about Independent caucuses and candidates' speeches.<sup>28</sup> The absence of Alliance activity prompted the New Era to print,

The long and most painful silence of many of our former correspondents has led to the inquiry, where have they all gone? The New Era greatly misses these spicy little communications from the different localities in the county and longs for a speedy return to the former custom. Send in the [Alliance] news and assist publishers in making this the best newspaper in the county.<sup>29</sup>

Independent Party candidates were highly successful in the Saunders County election of 1891, with victories in every office except county superintendent of schools. Independents waged an effective campaign just as they had done in 1890 by using sub-alliances as forums to address voters across the county. However, there were negative consequences for the Alliance in the campaign. Though members gathered for the Independent-sponsored events where candidates spoke, regular meetings were not as well attended, and sub-alliances began to lose members following

the election.

During 1891, while the Saunders County Independent Party was organizing and gathering strength, the Alliance lost one-third of its membership. In January 1891, the Saunders County Alliance included 1,603 members, with thirty-two sub-alliances. An average sub-alliance at this time consisted of just over fifty members. By January of 1892, following the county Independent campaign, the County Alliance dropped to 950 members and twenty-five sub-alliances. The average number of members per sub-alliance had fallen to near thirty-eight.<sup>30</sup>

Signs of Alliance decline continued to be displayed during the winter of 1891-1892. The Lothair sub-alliance reported that though it stopped meeting during the campaign because of a lack of interest among members, it had reorganized and had "taken a new lease on life and promises to try to exist in reality in the future."<sup>31</sup> The county Alliance meetings began to suffer as well. Using new language to advertise the December County Alliance meeting, the county committee exclaimed that "everyone should be there and every sub-alliance should send a delegation," implying that sub-alliances had not been attending.<sup>32</sup> The new advertising made no difference as the December meeting was so poorly attended that the Alliance had to postpone

officer elections until the next regularly scheduled one.<sup>33</sup>

In January 1892, the County Alliance sent delegates to the state convention in Lincoln. Among them were W.H. Dech, James Gaffin, and W.O. Rand. At the convention, James Gaffin was elected to the Farmers' Alliance State Executive Committee, prompting a resolution at the next county meeting declaring that the decision was met with "hearty approbation from the Saunders County Alliance."<sup>34</sup> The county organization continued to meet monthly until May, when it voted to postpone further meetings until after the 1892 presidential election.<sup>35</sup>

Political activity and enthusiasm for the reform movement increasingly drew members away from the Farmers' Alliance. By June, following the postponement of county meetings, the Saunders County organization fell to 733 members and included twenty sub-alliances. This massive decline became evident in the spring of 1892, when the Saunders County Alliance was virtually quiet. There were no resolutions passed, and talk of the Alliance generally reflected the deterioration of the organization. In late February, the Estina and Eagle sub-alliances consolidated their meetings together because each had too few members to meet separately. Subsequently, they held joint debates and musical programs.<sup>36</sup> In March, the Eureka sub-alliance

urged members and friends to attend a meeting, asking "the people of Eureka and vicinity to please remember that the Alliance is not dead yet."<sup>37</sup>

Saunders County Alliance President Gus S. Lambert and Knights of Labor Master Workman Dr. Frank E. Way issued a joint statement on March 17. The statement was in accordance with the State Independent Central Committee's declaration that March 26, 1892 be Ratification Day. At that time, all industrial organizations were supposed to meet locally to ratify the St. Louis Platform.<sup>38</sup> Held in late February 1892, the St. Louis Convention, was a gathering of twenty-one different national labor and reform organizations. It included both Northern and Southern Alliances, the Knights of Labor and the W.C.T.U. The convention adopted a platform that delineated the main political goals of American reform organizations, including such measures as free silver, a graduated income tax, and stricter land ownership and transportation regulations.<sup>39</sup> On March 26, Saunders County Alliance members met at the courthouse, joining Knights of Labor and Independent Party members to listen to speakers and to locally ratify the document.<sup>40</sup>

The St. Louis Platform rang the death bell for the Farmers' Alliance.<sup>41</sup> The platform signified the formation

of a national third party, the People's Party. Up to this time the Nebraska Independent Party was not affiliated with other states' reform parties. The People's Party, which was officially named at the Omaha Convention in July of 1892, solidified the national political reform movement. Its establishment increased the pattern of members shifting their focus from the Alliance to the more promising political reform movement.

Following the St. Louis Convention, independent clubs and literary societies began to organize in the wake of the declining Alliance. The South Pohocco Literary Society was formed in early March of 1892. At its first meeting the society focused on discussing the money question and the land-loan proposition, declaring that "we will debate and educate."<sup>42</sup> Throughout the spring, similar groups were organized across the county. In April, Ithaca organized an independent club, which met in the same school house as the Ithaca sub-alliance.<sup>43</sup> Center and Marietta Precincts reported the formation of independent clubs by May.<sup>44</sup> Wahoo's Independent Club formed in late April, and it took over the former Wahoo sub-alliance's library, advertising over 100 volumes of the latest reform literature to citizens interested in educating themselves on the principles of the People's Party.<sup>45</sup>



Unlike the Farmers' Alliance, independent clubs were not bound to a central authority. They supported the new People's Party by locally debating and discussing reform politics. Promoting the same political beliefs as the Alliance, these groups had a constituency that potentially included all People's Party members. Aiming to advance education of the public in political and economic matters, independent clubs continued Alliance educational activities. As the Alliance had done before, they welcomed women to meetings in order to discuss and debate issues. A less formal atmosphere and the promise of direct support of political reform were characteristics that attracted many former Alliance members to join the new organizations.<sup>46</sup> The widespread establishment of these clubs prompted the New Era to say,

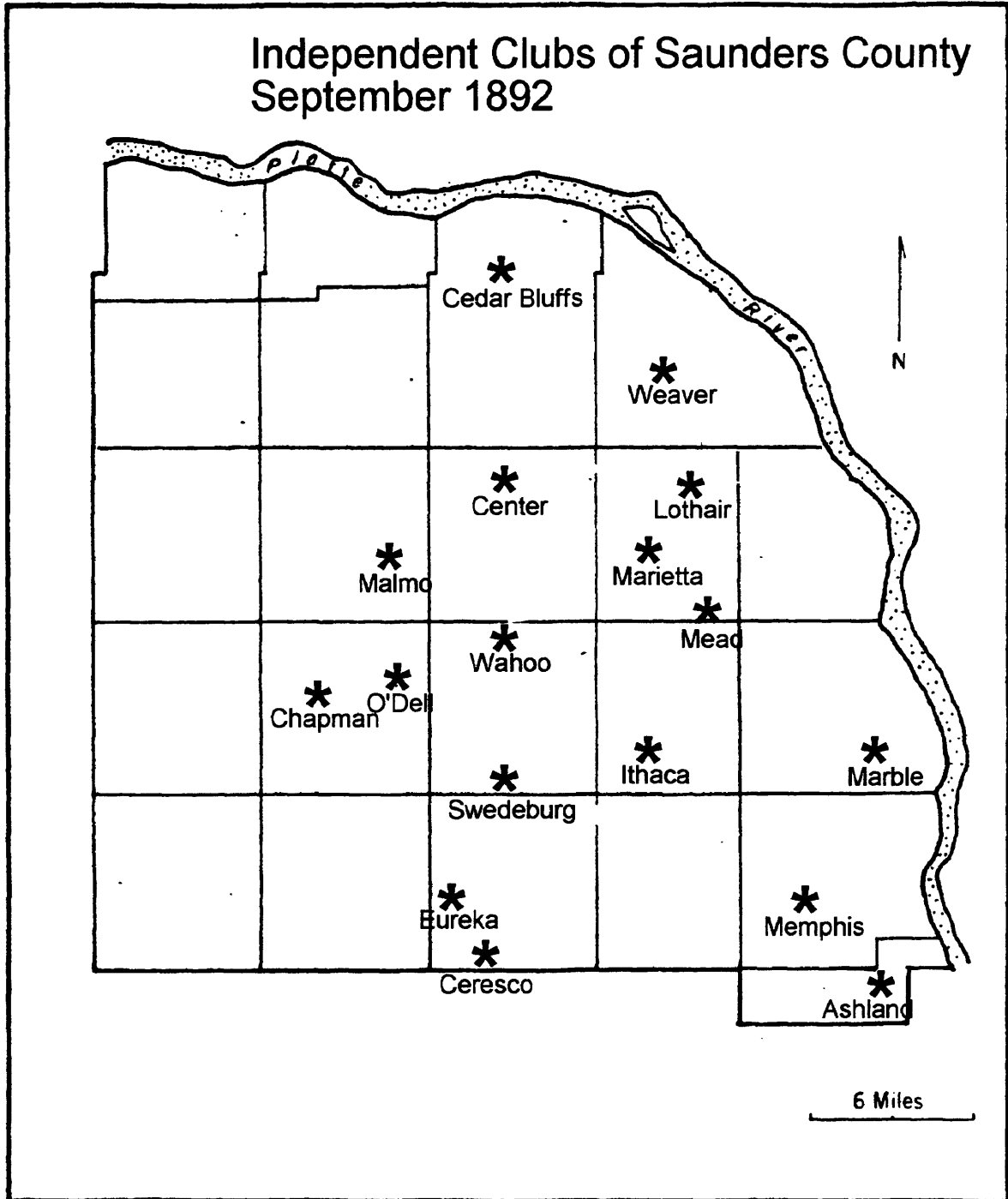
Independent clubs are being organized all over the county and a blaze of enthusiasm is being kindled that can never be extinguished by slurs or insult. The most encouraging reports are received every week at this office of the good work that is being done.<sup>47</sup>

Some Alliances attempted to balance independent clubs with their own meetings. In June, the Pohocco sub-alliance decided to hold its meetings on the first and third Saturdays of every month in order that the Pohocco Independent Club could hold its meetings on the alternate weekends.<sup>48</sup> The new group would later take the name Weaver

Independent Club, in honor of Iowa's James B. Weaver, the People's Party candidate for United States President in 1892. One Pohocco member described his new club as including speakers, book debates and literary circles as its core activities.<sup>49</sup> Reflecting its decrease in membership, the Pohocco sub-alliance reported that instead of electing officers to two month terms, it would elect officers to six month terms, or as needed.<sup>50</sup>

In support of the National People's Party Convention, which convened between July 1 to July 4 in Omaha, the Ithaca Independent Club held a political rally that included speakers, the town's brass band and an enormous bonfire.<sup>51</sup> They invited all members of the "old parties to come out and smell the powder, the People's Party proposes to fight this campaign with."<sup>52</sup> The Populist gathering in Omaha prevented the Saunders County Alliance from holding a Fourth of July parade and rally as it had done for the previous two years because all of its officers and delegates were at the convention.<sup>53</sup>

The 1892 People's Party campaign depleted the remaining energy of the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance. Many former Alliance County Officers or sub-alliance presidents, including W.O. Rand, John Carey, James Gaffin, and Samuel P. Robinson, now held new roles in the county or



**Figure 11** Independent Clubs of Saunders County:  
September 1892.

Collected from reports in the New Era, February 1892  
through September 1892.

state People's Party. Thus, the same men that had founded the order in Saunders County less than three years before, were no longer directing their attention to the Alliance. After the 1892 campaign, only eleven sub-alliances in the county reported back to the Alliance State Committee. Furthermore, the total county membership had fallen to 305 members, nearly forty percent of whom were women. Of the remaining sub-alliances in December of 1892, the average membership consisted of only seventeen men and eleven women.<sup>54</sup> The new independent clubs, which held weekly gatherings to discuss politics, though not the same, paralleled the Alliance's educational endeavors. Formed during the spring and summer of 1892, the new groups partially filled the void of the declining Alliance.

Cooperative initiatives begun by sub-alliances throughout the previous two years either operated independently of the order or were by this time out of business. Other than the State Alliance Business Agency, ventures such as cooperative elevators, co-op stores, and mutual insurance were not integrated into the Alliance administrative structure.<sup>55</sup> Luna Kellie, the Nebraska Farmers' Alliance State Secretary, believed that cooperatives were one factor in the decline of the organization, as the local cooperative's business meetings

took the place of weekly sub-alliance gatherings. She noted that some Alliancemen used the business meeting in this way to avoid paying quarterly membership dues.<sup>56</sup> In many respects, the Farmers' Alliance had been made obsolete by the very political, economic and educational programs it sought to promote.

A steep decline in membership occurred across the state during the fall of 1892 and it worried Nebraska Alliance leaders. Throughout the campaign, Alliance State Secretary J.M. Thompson pleaded with sub-alliances to send in their dues and to conduct meetings in accordance with Alliance protocol. Thompson issued weekly-advertisements asking sub-alliances to contact the state organization.<sup>57</sup> The fantastic growth that the Nebraska State Farmers' Alliance had experienced in 1890 and 1891 did not continue into 1892, during which time only fifty new sub-alliances were chartered in the entire state.<sup>58</sup> Saunders County only added one new sub-alliance in February 1892. It was the Chester #2273 sub-alliance, which was chartered with seven new members in Chester Precinct.<sup>59</sup>

In December of 1892, in an attempt to revitalize the organization, the Nebraska State Alliance decided to affiliate with the Southern Alliance. Moving did more to weaken the remnants of the Northern Alliance than it did to

strengthen the position of the Nebraska Alliance, which was the main force in the northern organization.<sup>60</sup> The moribundity of the Nebraska order was revealed when only 360 sub-alliances reported to its state committee in 1893. That year only seven sub-alliances in Saunders County reported to the state organization. The county's total membership stood at 178, with 96 men and 82 women. These dire circumstances prompted the State Secretary Luna E. Kellie to remark in her 1893 State Secretary's Report, that "a critical year is the one just closed. The aggressive growing force of a new society. . . . has lost its power. Other movements that seem to give promise of results have sought in a measure to take the place of the Alliance."<sup>61</sup> Another development that contributed to the decline was the depression of 1893, as farmers were not willing to pay dues. In 1891, the Nebraska State Alliance received over \$14,000, but only took in \$202 by 1895.<sup>62</sup>

W.F. Wright, state organizer visited Saunders County in May of 1894 in order to recruit new or former members.<sup>63</sup> Wright remarked in a letter to Luna E. Kellie after his visit, that "they seem to be thoroughly whipped and unwilling to organize" in Saunders County.<sup>64</sup> The County Alliance was attempting to hold a meeting to re-organize, but it had deteriorated into only four functioning sub-

alliances, with fifty-five total members, and could not muster enough interest among farmers.<sup>65</sup> In mid-June of 1894 the four remaining sub-alliances consolidated into one "grand lodge."<sup>66</sup> It seems that only the Center sub-alliance was still holding regular meetings, and it absorbed the members from former sub-alliances at Ithaca, Pohocco and Marietta.<sup>67</sup>

In 1896, William Jennings Bryan visited Wahoo to begin his presidential campaign as nominee of both the People's and Democratic Parties. At this time only the Center sub-alliance was still active in Saunders County, with a mere nine members.<sup>68</sup> The Nebraska Alliance held its final state convention in 1897. In July of the same year the New Era re-organized under a new owner, removing from its masthead, "Official Organ of the Saunders County Alliance," thus denoting the final dissolution of the order in Saunders County.<sup>69</sup>

## Notes

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1. New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), July 30, 1891, 5.
  2. Ibid., March 26, 1891, 5; April 23, 1891, 4.
  3. Ibid., January 1, 1891, 5; June 4, 1891, 4. For a discussion of how the Citizens' Alliance collaborated with the Farmers' Alliance, see Robert C. McMath, American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 143-145.
  4. New Era, March 26, 1891, 5.
  5. Ibid., April 23, 1891, 4.
  6. Erling N. Sannes, "Knowledge Is Power: The Knights of Labor in South Dakota," South Dakota History 22 (Summer 1992): 404.
  7. New Era, January 1, 1891, 5.
  8. Ibid., June 4, 1891, 4.
  9. Ibid., November 13, 1890, 5; May 7, 1891, 4; July 16, 1891, 7.
  10. Ibid., June 25, 1891, 4; June 25, 1891, 8; July 30, 1891, 4; August 4, 1892, 3.
  11. Ibid., July 16, 1891, 7; Biographical Sketches of leading Citizens of Saunders and Sarpy Counties (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, Richmond Press, 1900), 127.
  12. New Era, May 7, 1891, 4; March 24, 1892, 5.
  13. Ibid., May 7, 1891, 4; June 25, 1891, 4.
  14. Ibid., July 16, 1891, 7; July 14, 1892, 4.
  15. Ibid., June 4, 1891, 1, 8.
  16. Ibid., June 4, 1891, 8.



17. Ibid.
18. Farmers' Alliance (Lincoln, Nebraska), August 6, 1891, 3.
19. New Era, August 13, 1891, 1.
20. Ibid.; Sannes, "Knowledge Is Power," 405. Gerald N. Grob argues that the Knights and Alliance shared similar interests because they were forged by the same reform tradition. See Gerald N. Grob, Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900 (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 93-96.
21. New Era, June 4, 1891, 7; July 16, 1891, 10.
22. Ibid., August 13, 1891, 6.
23. Ibid., August 20, 1891, 7.
24. Ibid., October 15, 1891, 10.
25. Ibid., October 22, 1891, 4.
26. Ibid., December 17, 1891, 5.
27. Ibid., November 12, 1891, 12.
28. Ibid., August 27, 1891, 8-10; September 10, 1891, 1,9; October 15, 1891, 10; November 12, 1891, 12.
29. Ibid., November 12, 1891, 12.
30. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, Roll 4, Frames 566-578, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
31. New Era, November 19, 1891, 5.
32. Ibid., December 24, 1891, 4.
33. Ibid., December 31, 1891, 5.
34. Ibid., January 14, 1892, 4.
35. Ibid., June 23, 1892, 1; November 24, 1892, 4.
36. Ibid., March 3, 1892, 3.

37. Ibid., March 17, 1892, 6.
38. Ibid., March 17, 1892, 1.
39. John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 227-228.
40. New Era, March 17, 1892, 3.
41. For a discussion of the St. Louis Platform and the decline of the Southern Alliance, see Robert C. McMath, Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 138-139.
42. New Era, February 18, 1892, 4.
43. Ibid., May 5, 1892, 1.
44. Ibid., May 19, 1892, 5; June 23, 1892, 1.
45. Ibid., May 19, 1892, 5.
46. Ibid., May 5, 1892, 1; May 19, 1892, 5; June 30, 1892, 4, 7.
47. Ibid., June 30, 1892, 4.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., June 23, 1892, 6.
50. Ibid., June 23, 1892, 1.
51. Ibid., June 30, 1892, 4.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., July 7, 1892, 1.
54. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frames 566-578.
55. Cooperative elevators, cooperative stores and the Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company, though they were organized by Farmers' Alliance members, were incorporated outside of the Alliance structure and were independent of the order. See chapter four above.

56. Jane Taylor Nelson, ed., A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 142.
57. New Era, September 8, 1892, 6; September 15, 1892, 6; September 22, 1892, 6.
58. John D. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party of Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 423.
59. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 4, Frame 577.
60. Ibid.
61. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 424.
62. Ibid., 425.
63. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 1, Frame 688.
64. Ibid., Roll 1, Frame 723.
65. Ibid., Roll 1, Frame 701; Ibid., Roll 4, Frames 566-571.
66. New Era, June 21, 1894, 1.
67. Ibid.; Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 1, Frames 669, 708.
68. Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, Roll 3, Frames 2799, 2800; Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and People, Vol.I (Chicago: Lewiston Publishing Company, 1931), 764-765.
69. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 425; New Era, July 27, 1897, 4.

## CONCLUSION

AGRARIAN REBELLION:  
THE ALLIANCE MOVEMENT CULTURE

Now brethren, let us send men to our county, state, and national offices, men who will uphold our principles, who will make laws to protect every man alike. Some old party stragglers and puppets who are nothing less than political sapheads, call us fools and fanatics, but you know history tells us that fanatics and fools make the wise swallow more than they have ever wished for. We have erected an Independent bath room [sic] and we will wash all old party stragglers, making them clean and white in the blood of this- Our Political Rebellion.<sup>1</sup>

A Young Saunders County Independent  
New Era editorial, June 1891.

The Saunders County Farmers' Alliance was important, both in its own right, and in its role in the Populist political movement. It developed a strong and distinct movement culture that was based on various Alliance social and economic activities. Political success for the movement stemmed from an *Alliance experience*, which farmers encountered during their active membership in the organization.

Above all else, the *Alliance experience* was social. The organization sponsored picnics, oyster dinners and an annual Fourth of July parade for farm families. Sub-alliance meetings combined music, literary programs and

debates that enhanced social interaction among farmers who lived in sparsely populated areas. The Alliance also opened its meetings to women's participation. Women could hold office and discuss issues on the same standing as men, unlike agrarian organizations that preceded the order. Furthermore, by using interpreters and establishing sub-alliances in all areas with strong ethnic identities, the organization created a culturally and religiously diverse movement that promoted the interests of farmers above all else.

In this regard, the movement fostered a producerism ideology that pitted farmers and laborers against corporate and industrial interests. Through its educational programs, the Alliance altered the way that members viewed their relationship to each other and to the political process. Lectures, debates, discussions and the distribution of reform-minded books introduced members to the idea that farmers and laborers should unite to pursue their political and financial interests over other matters. Saunders County members took action against problems affecting farmers by sending food, seed corn and money to suffering farmers in western Nebraska. The Ithaca sub-alliance published a resolution calling for government help for drought victims in 1891. The Richland group adopted a

resolution in support of a saddle and harness maker's labor union that was on strike in Omaha.

Saunders County farmers worked within ventures outside of the Alliance that promoted the interests of the movement. The New Era and the Bohemian Pritel Lidu were newspapers that were supportive of county and sub-alliance activities.<sup>2</sup> Members reported meetings, discussed issues, and developed a sense of community via these enterprises. Through the local Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company, established by Alliance recruiter J.M. Swiggert, farmers protected each other's property. The association saved them money and kept financial resources in the county. These establishments indirectly enhanced the Alliance experience in Saunders County by complementing the educational and social activities of the Alliance itself.

It was in Alliance meetings that farmers in Saunders County planned and established cooperatives. All cooperative ventures which were begun during this time were organized after a sub-alliance had been established in the area. Consumer cooperatives, such as the Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco, the People's Cooperative Meat Market of Ithaca, and the Alliance Livery and Feed Barn in Wahoo, were efforts by sub-alliances to construct alternative institutions outside of privately-owned enterprises.

Members associated in producer cooperatives by establishing elevators in Colon, Prague, and Weston, as well as a cooperative creamery in Wahoo, in order to protect their financial interests. Once established, cooperatives became another facet of the *Alliance experience*.

The vitality of the Populist political culture during and after 1892 was a direct result of an intense *Alliance experience* from 1889-1892. A high degree of separation of the Alliance-Independent movement from the traditional political and economic institutions, such as the two traditional parties and private businesses, strengthened the Saunders County movement culture. It transformed the county into a Populist stronghold even though the economic conditions of eastern Nebraska were unlike those of other Populist centers.<sup>3</sup>

Saunders County was a bastion of support for the People's Party in eastern Nebraska throughout the Populist era.<sup>4</sup> In the 1892 election, the county polled 1,791 votes for the Populist gubernatorial candidate Charles C. Van Wyck. The victorious Republican candidate Lorenzo Crouse garnered 1,252 votes, and Democratic candidate J. Sterling Morton drew 830 votes.<sup>5</sup> People's Party candidates continued to dominate the county elections of 1893 by electing the entire Populist ticket, except for county

sheriff.<sup>6</sup> In 1894, the Nebraska Democratic and People's Parties nominated a fusion state ticket, with the Populist Silas Holcomb as candidate for governor. Under fusion, Saunders gave 2,592 votes to Holcomb, while the successful Republican candidate, Thomas Majors, captured 1,703 votes.<sup>7</sup>

In 1894 there was a split occurred in the Saunders County People's Party, with those against fusion running a second Populist ticket for county offices. Still, returns for the 1894 election show that Saunders narrowly elected Fusion candidates in all county races.<sup>8</sup> Though fusion with Democrats helped the Nebraska People's Party elect Holcomb as governor in 1896, many members of the Saunders County People's Party rejected fusion as a political strategy. Those against it felt that combining with Democrats was selling out the cause and a rejection of Populist principles. Former Alliance leader James Gaffin was a major opponent of fusion with Democrats on the county and state level.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1896 gubernatorial election, Saunders County polled 2,769 votes for Holcomb, while the Republican candidate John MacColl drew 1,850.<sup>10</sup> Saunders County would remain a People's Party stronghold through the turn of the century by consistently electing Populist candidates to county offices. The county also continued to poll more



votes for Populist or Fusionist candidates than for Republicans on the state level through 1900.<sup>11</sup>

Seward County, Nebraska, which is located to the southwest of Saunders County, was very similar to Saunders in a number of respects. It was a Republican county prior to 1890, had a strongly developed corn-hog economy, and just under half of the males over 21 were foreign born, yet, it did not develop into a strong Populist county.<sup>12</sup> Historian David Trask conducted a study of the Seward County People's Party during 1890-1892, in his article, "Formation and Failure: The Populist Party in Seward County." Using census data and biographical information, Trask mainly employs statistical analysis to consider why the new party did not take hold.<sup>13</sup>

Seward County did not have a strong Alliance movement. It only formed a county-wide organization in early 1890 and at its height contained less than twenty sub-alliances.<sup>14</sup> There was only one cooperative store begun by Alliance members. Furthermore, once the Independent Party formed in May 1890, its first act was to offer fusion with the Seward County Democratic Party, which the Democrats rejected.<sup>15</sup> The high degree of separation from the old economic and political institutions did not occur here as it had in Saunders County because there was not a strong Alliance

movement culture.

Trask concluded that the prohibition issue was one major factor in the Populists' defeat in Seward County. It kept the county's native Germans, who composed over 22 percent of the population, loyal to the Democratic Party in seven out of nine precincts that were heavily populated by Germans.<sup>16</sup> In Saunders County, out of thirteen precincts heavily populated by Bohemians or Germans (both groups had a strong inclination against prohibition) in 1890, eight voted Independent, with the five remaining voting Democrat. Cedar and Union Precincts, areas with several sub-alliances each, voted Democrat by only twelve and eight votes over the Independent Party, respectively. The remaining three precincts that voted heavily Democratic were all located in the northwest area of the county, and contained only three sub-alliances. One of the three, Bohemia Precinct, located in the extreme northwest corner, was the only precinct prior to the election that did not have any Alliance activity or sub-alliance. There, the Independent Party only polled two votes.<sup>17</sup>

Prohibition was an important issue in 1890 since it appeared before Nebraska voters on the election ballot. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate James Boyd, an Irish Catholic immigrant, made an anti-prohibition stand his main

campaign issue.<sup>18</sup> The Independent Party kept prohibition out of the political platform in order to avoid alienating anti-prohibition immigrant voter groups.<sup>19</sup> Historian Robert Cherny, in Populism, Progressivism and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics: 1885-1915, determined that "prosperous Democrats" in Nebraska during the 1890 election were most likely to have stayed loyal to their party because of the prohibition issue, as they did in Seward County.<sup>20</sup>

In Saunders County, a relatively economically prosperous county in 1890, a plurality of Germans and Bohemians voted Independent because of their involvement in the Farmers' Alliance. But the five precincts with a large Swedish population, which had voted staunchly Republican prior to 1890, were among the strongest Independent precincts in the 1890 election.<sup>21</sup> Prohibition was not a major factor for the predominantly Baptist and Lutheran Swedes.<sup>22</sup> Each of the Swedish precincts experienced high levels of Alliance activity. The encounter with the Alliance experience altered all three groups' political dispositions. In rural areas that the Alliance movement culture was not strong, Independents did not win many votes.

In her Farmers in Rebellion, historian Donna Barnes

uses protest movement theory to describe the formation of the Texas Farmers' Alliance. Barnes's use of the mobilization strain theory of protest movements to illustrate the emergence of the Texas Alliance is useful in understanding the social and organizational features of Saunders County's movement culture. The mobilization perspective on protest movements views civil discontent as an ever-present force in society as a result of conflicting interests among different classes.<sup>23</sup>

Such discontent is only activated when members of a particular class become aware of their objective interests in society, and as Karl Marx stated, transforms from "a class in itself" to "a class for itself."<sup>24</sup> However, in order for this galvanization of class interest to occur, external support and organization must precede the formation of a protest movement. As John McCarthy and Mayor Zald explain in their study on resource mobilization and social protest,

There is always enough discontent in any society to supply grassroots support for a movement if the movement is effectively organized and has at its disposal the power resources of some established elite group.<sup>25</sup>

This model stresses that effective mobilization of the agricultural class in Saunders County would depend on how well the Farmers' Alliance coordinated its activities and

utilized the "power resources" of an "elite group."

The County Alliance leadership included some of the most active men in the Alliance-Independent movement in the state. These leaders were men such as William H. Dech, who campaigned for lieutenant governor in 1890, Charles Pirtle, who was the secretary of the State Independent Organizing Committee, and James Gaffin, who was a leading representative in the State House in 1891. Furthermore, the County Alliance leadership, including County President Samuel H. Moss, County Secretary W.O. Rand, and County Organizer James Moss, were all active Alliance members prior to the formation of the Independent Party. Samuel Moss was the Prohibition and Union Labor Party candidate for county sheriff in 1889. Rand was the Union Labor Party candidate for county judge. James Moss was the Saunders County chairman for the Democratic Party in 1889. These men, among others in Saunders County, were part of the county and state political elite during the formation of the Alliance. They were some of the best and brightest of the reform movement.

Once the Alliance enjoyed electoral success, the original county leadership assumed new responsibilities. They took positions in the new Independent Party or began filling elected office. Rand was elected county clerk in

1891; Pirtle became the secretary of the State Senate that same year; and Gaffin was elected to the State House of Representatives. He became Presiding Officer of the State House in 1893, and a People's Party candidate for lieutenant governor in 1894.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, during 1891, those who occupied positions on the Independent County Central Committee were in most cases officers of sub-alliances. Individuals such as Jonas Bender of Union Precinct, Anton Pospisel of Elk Precinct, Peter B. Olson of Mariposa Precinct, W.A. Tracy of Ithaca and James Jamison of Oak Creek Precinct were all presidents or secretaries of their respective sub-alliances.<sup>27</sup> The original leadership group that organized the County Alliance assumed new responsibilities in the Independent movement. Rank and file members followed them, as they had during the organization's formation. Members brought the Alliance movement culture into the Independent and People's Parties, thus creating a Populist political culture in the county.

Despite Lawrence Goodwyn's claims of a "shadow populism" in Nebraska, the state did play a major role in the Populist movement. It elected several U.S. congressmen, a U.S. senator and two governors during the 1890s. Fusion in the 1894 election would eventually prove fatal, as the People's Party was eclipsed over time by the

Democrats. Contrary to Goodwyn's assertions of a "shadow movement" of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party, Saunders County demonstrates that a movement culture did exist in Nebraska, but it was more than a cooperative experience.<sup>28</sup> It was an *Alliance experience*. The year 1890 may have been the most politically successful for the Saunders County movement, but Populists continued to enjoy electoral success for a decade. On the other hand, the Alliance went into decline after that election and never regained its strength. In many respects, the Saunders movement acquired a sense of classical tragedy. Having slain its father, the Saunders County Alliance, the local People's Party would assure its own destruction through fusion with the Democratic Party.<sup>29</sup>

## Notes

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1. New Era (Wahoo, Nebraska), June 11, 1891, 4.
  2. Eric Johnson bought the New Era in 1897 and operated it until 1906. He had been a Saunders County Allianceman and served as Chief Clerk of the Nebraska State House of Representatives. New Era, July 27, 1897, 4; May 13, 1906, 1; Nebraska Blue Book, 1998-1999, (Lincoln: Office of the Clerk of the Legislature, 2000), 407.
  3. Michael Schwartz examines how protest movements interact with the social structure to explain the development of the Southern Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party. He contends that any social structure includes in itself a power strong enough to change it. This potential to alter the social structure resides in any aggrieved group that has the political force to disrupt the normal functioning of the current political system. The group only becomes an agent of change if it can "form and maintain an organization independent of the original structure. That organization must have a membership extensive enough and disciplined enough to call into question the combined functioning of the system." Michael Schwartz, Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890 (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 173.
  4. Norman Pollack, who cites the New Era several times in his work, considers Saunders County one of the seven most Populist counties in Nebraska during the 1890s. Pollack is the only scholar who has recognized the significance of the movement in Saunders County and placed it among the leading centers of People's Party activity in the state. Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 148.
  5. Saunders County Office of the County Clerk Election Records, Roll 8, Frames 87-88. Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
  6. Ibid., Roll 8, Frame 93.



7. Ibid., Roll 8, Frames 95-96. Fusion was forced upon the People's Party in Nebraska in 1894. It was the Democrats of Nebraska that nominated People's Party candidate Silas Holcomb for governor on their state ticket. Democrats took this move in order to defeat Republican candidate Thomas J. Majors, who was a member of the American Protective Association (a nativist and anti-immigrant organization) and strongly opposed silver. It was furthermore hoped by Democrats that fusion would deliver Populist votes for William Jennings Bryan's senatorial campaign in 1895. See Robert W. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism, and The Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 44-45.
8. Wahoo Democrat (Wahoo, Nebraska), November 15, 1894, 2.
9. James Gaffin had an active role in the Nebraska People's Party during the 1890s. In 1898, he became Chairman of the State Committee. This was viewed as a major victory for those "middle of the roaders" in the People's Party, which meant these individuals stuck to the central themes that the party was founded on. New Era, June 25, 1896, 1; Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 87.
10. Saunders County Office of the County Clerk Election Records, Roll 8, Frame 102.
11. Ibid., Roll 8, Frames 104-116.
12. David Stephens Trask, "Formation and Failure: The Populist Party in Seward County," Nebraska History 51 (Spring 1970): 282-283, 290. The only other county-level study of the Alliance or Populism in Nebraska is Annabel L. Beal, "The Populist Party in Custer County, Nebraska: Its Role in Local, State, and National Politics, 1889-1906" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1965). Beal's history of the Custer County movement is a narrative social history based largely on local newspapers as sources.
13. Trask, "Formation and Failure," 281.
14. John D. Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party in Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 200, 202.

15. Trask, "Formation and Failure," 283-286.
16. Ibid., 298.
17. Saunders County Office of the County Clerk Election Records, Roll 8, Frames 73-75; New Era, November 6, 1890, 3; 1885 Nebraska State Census, microfilm, Roll 49. Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
18. James C. Olson, and Ronald C. Naugle, History of Nebraska, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 229.
19. Ibid.
20. Saunders County Office of the County Clerk Election Records, Roll 8, Frames 73-75; New Era, November 6, 1890, 3. Cherny demonstrates that in 1890, prosperous Democrats were the most likely to stay with the Democratic Party. He also contends that throughout the 1890's and early 1900's those counties with high amounts of rural Bohemians and Germans were most likely to have voted for Fusion candidates. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 58, 89-93.
21. Saunders County Office of the County Clerk Election Records, Roll 8, Frames 73-75; New Era, November 6, 1890, 3; 1885 Nebraska State Census, microfilm, Roll 49.
22. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 21.
23. Donna A. Barnes, Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers Alliance and People's Party in Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 12-18.
24. Karl Marx, "The Coming Upheaval," The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), 218.
25. John McCarthy and Mayor Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," American Journal of Sociology, 82 (1977): 1214.
26. Cherny, Populism, Progressivism and Transformation, 80, 87.
27. New Era, July 30, 1891, 4.

28. Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 91-92.

29. This analogy is taken from Paul W. Glad, McKinley, Bryan and the People (New York: J.B. Lipponcott and Co., 1964), 35.

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