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A neglected little rebellion: The Farmers' Holiday Association in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston Counties, Nebraska, 1932-1934

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**“A NEGLECTED LITTLE REBELLION:”
THE FARMERS’ HOLIDAY ASSOCIATION IN DIXON,
DAKOTA, AND THURSTON COUNTIES, NEBRASKA, 1932-1934**

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

Travis Sing

August 1998

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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

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Date July 28, 1998

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PREFACE

Not in my wildest dreams did I ever believe I would be writing a thesis on an agricultural topic, especially the Farmers' Holiday Association. (Agricultural history? How boring! Or so I thought.) My primary area of interest is the American West, especially American Indian history, and that is what eventually led me to learn of the Holiday in northeastern Nebraska. I first came across the Farmers' Holiday as an undergraduate at Creighton University taking a course on the FDR era. I thought a farm holiday was an interesting idea, but never gave it much more thought. Then I started graduate school at UNO, and during my first semester I took a seminar on the Northern Plains. Our term papers were to be a history of almost any county of our choosing in Nebraska, the Dakotas or Montana. The paper was to span a few years and be based mostly on information from local newspapers. My interest in Indian history took me to Thurston County, Nebraska, in order to study New Deal programs on the Omaha and Winnebago reservations. Little did I know what I was going to discover: a hotbed of agrarian discontent.

The more I studied, the more I realized only a few scholars had touched upon the topic, especially at the county level in Nebraska. I soon read John Shover's seminal work on the Farmers' Holiday Association--*Cornbelt Rebellion*, and my interest in the Holiday has yet to wane. The original intent was for the thesis to concentrate solely on Thurston County, but I expanded it to include two other Nebraska counties near Sioux City, Iowa, which was a location of much agrarian protest. Thus, Dixon and Dakota counties became thrown into the mix with Thurston County. It feels great to tread into uncharted historical waters, or perhaps "plowing up virgin prairie" would be more apt in this case.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the gracious help of numerous individuals, this project would have been more arduous than necessary. I extend my thanks to:

--Family and friends for moral support and encouragement.

--My aunt, Judy Sing, for helping edit/proof the manuscript.

--The Boswell families of Allen and Lincoln, Nebraska, who let me eat their food and sleep at their homes. Larry and Kathy Boswell also scared up a few people for me to talk to. Your hospitality is ever gracious and greatly appreciated.

--Marta Ferguson of Lincoln, who provided a place to crash and great conversation.

--Melanie Rumsey, who helped me at the Nebraska State Historical Society in my hour of desperation.

--All the people whom I interviewed or who wrote me their thoughts on the Farmers' Holiday and rural Nebraska during the "Dirty Thirties."

--The Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) Library/Archives. Without its vast holdings, this research would have been impossible.

--Dr. Tommy Thompson and Dr. Kent Kirwan for being on the committee.

--Dr. William C. Pratt, my faculty advisor, for his patience and guidance.

It was good fortune that I became the advisee of a scholar who possess such extensive knowledge concerning agrarian unrest.

--Finally, a bespectacled cartoon dog and his adopted human son taught me at a young age that history can be fun. (Bad puns included!)

"Sherman, set the Wayback Machine for 1932."

"Yes, Mr. Peabody."

Aims of the Farm Holiday Association

The Farmers Holiday Association was started in the early summer of 1932. Since then it has passed through two spectacular stages, both of which have focused national attention upon it.

The first of these was the effort to suspend marketing until markets would pay cost of production. Highways were picketed. This picketing succeeded in stopping deliveries of non-perishable products at many local markets, and at one terminal market, namely, Sioux City, Ia., but the association was not at that time strong enough to tie up the big terminal markets.

Due to the increased strength of the organization the second phase, that of preventing foreclosure sales and evictions, has not only brought very wide publicity to the pitiable plight of the farmer, but it has practically suspended foreclosure activities. **Wherever the Farmers Holiday Association is organized there are no foreclosure sales of farms or chattles [sic].**

While the Association membership has reached huge proportions, the marketing strike is at present suspended. Leaders of the organization say they are only waiting action by the special session of Congress to be called by President-elect Roosevelt.

These leaders say that if the new administration fails to enact laws which will stop foreclosures, refinance the farmer on long time, low interest and easy terms, and also guarantee a price for farm products, a profit over the cost of production, then the marketing strike will be renewed and every terminal market in the Mississippi Valley tied up.

The goal set by the Farm Holiday Association is **cost of production for farm commodities.**

--*Farm Holiday News*, 20 February 1933

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the night of August 22, 1932, a Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha livestock train was twice detained by an unknown number of farmers on its way from Norfolk, Nebraska, to Sioux City, Iowa. The train was scheduled to arrive in Sioux City at 10:40 P.M. after leaving Norfolk at 6 P.M., but did not reach its final destination until 4 A.M.¹ This episode became front-page news in many newspapers, including those in the metropolitan areas of Omaha and Sioux City, and was even mentioned in the *New York Times*.² The train was halted by a group of farmers, estimated at 100 to 150 in number, in Emerson, Nebraska, which straddles the county lines of Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties. Its progress was again impeded six miles to the northeast, at Nacora in Dakota County.³ The *Sioux City Journal* reported that upward of three hundred farmers, instead of 100 to 150, as reported in the *Pender Republic*, broke the seals of twenty-five livestock cars.⁴

According to railway agents, the seals were broken on the livestock cars and a few head of cattle were unloaded "as a demonstration," but were reloaded before the train pulled away from the station.⁵ As the locomotive left Emerson, the farmers hopped into their automobiles and raced to intercept the train again at Nacora, where they repeated their earlier exploits by setting the air brakes and uncoupling the cars.⁶ While at Nacora, the picketers dissuaded two men from loading their twenty-three cattle. The picketers threatened to scatter the

cattle by throwing lumps of coal at the livestock if the men attempted to herd them onto the train.⁷ Residents of Emerson claimed that the strikers were not from the immediate Emerson area, but from the towns of Hartington, in Cedar County; Concord, in Dixon County; Hubbard, in Dakota County; and Sioux City, Iowa.⁸

Because of Emerson's tri-county status, problems arose when local authorities were asked to intervene. A local sheriff was called, but being uncertain of his jurisdiction, he refused to interfere with the train because it was in the Thurston County section of town. As the train moved into Dakota County, Sheriff Sanford and Marshal Gallagher were notified, but found themselves sorely outnumbered by protestors when they reached the scene. They watched helplessly as the farmers uncoupled the train cars and set the brakes.⁹ Sanford reported that when he arrived at 2 A.M., the only livestock he noticed running loose were a single hog and a lone steer. Although he did not check all of the cars' seals, Sanford believed that no more than two or three seals were actually broken, rather than twenty-five, as earlier reported.¹⁰

The U.S. Attorney stated that the farmers who impeded the train could have been found in "violation of the interstate transportation act," since the train originated in Nebraska and was bound for Iowa.¹¹ Who were these farmers, who were willing to employ extralegal channels and risk violating federal law by halting an interstate livestock train? It was reported that they were members of a radical "farm holiday movement." The episode was only the beginning of

Nebraska Farmers' Holiday activity in the Sioux City vicinity.¹²

By the summer of 1932, the United States was staggering from the effects of the Great Depression, the Bonus Army had been rebuffed in Washington, D.C., and in urban areas the unemployed were living in Hoovervilles.

Agricultural prices had been sagging for over a decade. Farmers were at the mercy of a poor global economy, and, as they saw it, an American government that repeatedly failed to take the steps necessary to put agricultural prices back on par with what they had been before and during World War I, a time when American farmers enjoyed their greatest prosperity ever. Agrarian discontent was on the rise, and by the fall of 1932 it seemed that some farmers wanted nothing less than revolution. The Farmers' Holiday Association (FHA) appeared like a thunderstorm from a clear blue sky.

The Farmers' Holiday movement took root in several Midwestern states and eventually spread farther west and east, but a prime locus of activity was in the Missouri River valley between Omaha and Sioux City. What started as a milk producers' strike against the J. R. Roberts Dairy in Sioux City grew into a picketing movement which was meant to enforce the withholding of agricultural products from the market and cause prices to rise through the simple principle of supply and demand. Later, the primary focus of the Holiday would become stopping farm foreclosures, becoming politically active by pressing for legislation enacting mortgage moratoriums. From the beginning, the Farmers' Holiday movement was both criticized and lauded. Its methods, tactics, and economic

schemes stirred controversy, and although ultimately the Holiday failed, it brought the American farmer's plight to the forefront of the news.

The leading authority on the subject, John Shover, has called the Holiday a "neglected little rebellion," and indeed it is just that.¹³ Another scholar of agrarian revolts, Lowell K. Dyson, sees the Farmers' Holiday as "one of the truly revolutionary movements of the twentieth century."¹⁴ If it was so "revolutionary," why has there not been more study on the topic? Several theses and dissertations and a few published works, most notably Shover's *Cornbelt Rebellion*, give overviews of the movement. Some journal articles have focused on South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa counties, but there has been little published material on the Farmers' Holiday Association in Nebraska. John Shover's *Nebraska History* article on the Holiday was a fine look at the state as a whole, but it did not delve into the organization on a county-by-county basis.¹⁵ The Farmers' Holiday is mentioned in the 1939 Works Progress Administration (WPA) Writers' Project guide to the state of Nebraska, but at the time it was comparatively recent and still fresh in many minds. Today many Nebraskans have trouble recalling the movement or have never heard of it. Even the respected *History of Nebraska* by James C. Olson does not mention the Nebraska Holiday Association. Locally published histories from Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties usually overlook the Farmers' Holiday when examining the effects of the Great Depression. Consequently, a more in-depth look at the Holiday on the state and county level in Nebraska seems appropriate. These

three northeastern Nebraska counties were prime candidates for agrarian unrest due to their proximity to Sioux City because the region's links to Sioux City are both economically and geographically stronger than its ties to Omaha.

Numerous factors need to be analyzed in order to wholly understand the phenomenon of the Farmers' Holiday. Examining the three counties allows for comparison of similarities and differences among them, as well as between the region, state, and nation as regards the Farmers' Holiday movement. Among the items to be taken into consideration are climate, geography, crops grown, livestock reared, farm prices, and tenancy rates. After analyzing these factors, it behooves one to delve deeper into the movement and find out who joined the Holiday, what their economic status was, what their politics were, their length of tenure in the county, and age. Shover contends, from his research on the FHA in Iowa, that those who joined the movement were "from relatively prosperous areas where some immediate crisis, i.e. drought or foreclosure, threatened to deprive farmers of property or accustomed income."¹⁶ Does the same hold true for Nebraska? Further research on the topic and comparing the information found with Rodney Karr's treatment of the Farmers' Holiday in nearby Plymouth County, Iowa, will show parallels or offer reasons why the phenomenon was different in extreme northeastern Nebraska. Examination of the Holiday can serve as local and state history, and illustrate why the movement erupted and declined as quickly as it did.

One scholar of insurgent farm movements asserts that "[f]arm protest was

not simply struck from one mold but was shaped by local history and custom, and by local personalities.”¹⁷ In order to fully understand what happened during the Great Depression in northeastern Nebraska, an examination of the region’s topography, climate, and history is in order. Geology, topography, and climate have helped determine which kinds of agriculture flourished there. The area’s history is important in determining what came under cultivation, what groups of people resided there, what role partisan politics played, and which developments that took place earlier had an impact on the events of the 1930s.

Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties constitute the three most extreme northeastern counties of Nebraska. Compared to other Nebraska counties, they are relatively small. The Missouri River forms the border between these counties and the neighboring states of Iowa and South Dakota. Dixon County borders South Dakota, Dakota County borders both South Dakota and Iowa, and Thurston County borders only Iowa.

The topography of these three counties probably does not fit what one would consider “typical” Nebraska. These counties have more in common with the tallgrass prairie of Iowa than the shortgrass area of western Nebraska. From the alluvial plains of the Missouri River rise bluffs and loess hills deposited by the “Big Muddy” through the millennia. Near the river, trees are abundant and the hills are large. As one travels west, trees become less common and the hills become more gradual and rolling. There are distinct geographic regions in the three counties: the loess alluvial plains, the loess uplands, and the dissected till

plains.¹⁸ Aside from a strip of alluvial soils near the Missouri River, the typical soils of the region are the highly fertile Chernozem, ranging in color from dark brown to black.¹⁹ A 1930s Thurston County booster publication by the Walthill Real Estate Board states that the “soils of the county are deep and fertile . . . [and] very well adapted to the production of all crops common to the corn belt”²⁰ Due to the river, some of the hills in the region are composed of silt and sand, thus making them better suited as pasture land.²¹

Nebraska’s continental climate makes it a state of extremes. During the winter, temperatures can dip well below zero accompanied by howling winds and blizzards, and the summer can bring temperatures that exceed one hundred degrees. The annual mean temperature of the northeastern section of the state, until 1934, was 48.5 degrees Fahrenheit.²² The Thurston County booster publication reports that the average date of the last killing frost of the spring was April 27 and the first of the fall was October 1, making for an average growing season of 157 days.²³ Dixon and Dakota counties had similar growing seasons. Average annual rainfall for northeastern Nebraska from 1876 to 1933 was 27.2 inches, and average rainfall during the growing season for that period amounted to 18.06 inches. Yet for the years 1929 through 1933, average rainfall during the growing season was well below average, measuring a disappointing 14.7 inches.²⁴

It is easy to see why the farmers of northeastern Nebraska were not content with the state of farming during the drought and depression of the 1930s.

The land they tilled comprised highly fertile soil, and the region normally received copious rainfall. These counties are not on the Great Plains. West of the one hundredth meridian rainfall becomes increasingly scant, and that region is classified as semiarid. Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties are not located in the "Great American Desert," and due to excellent soil and normal rainfall the farmers of the area were used to reaping great benefits. These factors made northeastern Nebraska a highly productive and prosperous section of the state, and farmers' ire was increased due to crop failure and low prices.

This area was home to American Indians for thousands of years before the first whites arrived. When the first European explorers and fur trappers appeared in northeastern Nebraska, they found several Indian nations inhabiting the area. This region of Nebraska was home to the Omaha people at the time Lewis and Clark traversed the Missouri River in 1804. Although the Omaha were predominant in the region, other Siouan speakers lived in the area, which is indicated in a number of current place names. Dakota County was named for the Dakota Sioux, and Ponca, the county seat of Dixon County, was named in honor of those people. The Omaha were not a tribe native to the area, having migrated into Nebraska during the mid-1600s from the more wooded regions of the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys.²⁵ They were a sedentary horticultural tribe, not the typical nomadic buffalo hunters of the plains. In early 1854, the Omaha relinquished rights to all of their land in eastern Nebraska except for a 300,000 acre reserve. One term of the treaty was that if they did not find the

reservation satisfactory, they could move to another tract. The first reservation did prove inadequate, and they were relocated to a parcel of land measuring 540 square miles, bounded by the Missouri River on the east. This land was to become modern Thurston County.²⁶

The other tribe of Thurston County, the Winnebago, are also not Nebraska natives. Of Siouan stock as well, the Winnebago were originally from the Great Lakes area, but due to white encroachment, they were dispossessed numerous times and seemed to be continually shuffled from reservation to reservation. After the Sioux uprising of Minnesota in 1862, the Winnebago were forcibly moved to the Crow Creek Reservation in South Dakota, even though they played no part in the rebellion.²⁷ A small group of Winnebago traversed to the Omaha reserve seeking refuge, and soon more and more of them canoed down the Missouri to settle in Nebraska. On March 18, 1865, the Omaha agreed to sell the northern part of their reservation to serve as a home for the Winnebago.²⁸ Today, Thurston County is still composed almost entirely of the Omaha and Winnebago reservations.

The allotment of the reservations were piecemeal, and as Indian lands were allotted further, more and more whites flooded the region.²⁹ Dixon and Dakota counties were opened for settlement in 1854 when the Omaha signed their treaty with United States.³⁰ These three counties were not organized at the same time, despite their proximity. Thurston and Dakota counties were both hastily established in 1855 from unorganized territory.³¹ Dixon County was

organized a few years later, in 1858. The first whites were from the eastern United States, but in the early 1880s, European immigrants came to the region by railroad.³² Land on the Omaha and Winnebago reservations was further allotted in 1884, and the surplus land in the western portion of Thurston County was sold to whites.

In 1909 the Omaha became the first people subjected to fee patenting of their land. As part of fee patenting, the Indians were given a competency test in order to judge whether or not they were qualified to gain full title to their land.³³ It turned out to be another miscarriage of Indian affairs, and Indian Commissioner Cato Sells concluded that 80 percent of the Omaha granted fee patents lost their land.³⁴ The dispossession of Indian land did not end until the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act, also known as the Wheeler-Howard bill, in 1934.³⁵ Early on, the United States government encouraged the rental of Indian land to whites, after realizing that many Indians had no interest in being farmers.³⁶ The rental of reservation land to white farmers would become an important issue taken on by the Thurston County Holiday Association.

At the time Great Depression struck, the three counties had a population of only 31,553 people, who were highly rural and predominantly white. Because of South Sioux City, Dakota County was the only one of the trio that was not 100 percent rural. Seventy-two percent of Dakota County's rural population lived on farms, 60 percent of Dixon County, and 62 percent of Thurston County.³⁷ The small percentage of rural-nonfarm population in the region lived in towns under

twenty-five hundred people, and the only towns within the three counties that exceeded one thousand in population in 1932 were Pender and Walthill, both in Thurston County, and Wakefield, which straddles the Dixon and Wayne county lines.³⁸ Whites comprised an overwhelming percentage of the population, and Thurston County was the only one of the three counties with any substantial minority population, with American Indians comprising 18 percent.³⁹

Agriculture has long been an essential part of Nebraska history, both crops and livestock, and Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were no exception. Although corn was the primary crop, there was not a “cash crop” system as was the case with cotton in the South or wheat in the Dakotas and Montana. Nebraska farmers grew numerous other crops, such as barley, oats, rye, alfalfa, and wheat. Based on acreage, Thurston County’s primary crop was corn, with oats second in importance and alfalfa ranking third.⁴⁰ The same holds true for Dixon and Dakota counties as well, with most acreage dedicated to corn production.⁴¹

The Thurston County booster publication notes that winter and spring wheat were grown, but “wheat is not an important crop in the county.”⁴² By 1929 only 37,000 acres of wheat were grown in the thirteen northeastern counties of Nebraska.⁴³ Wheat was also not an important crop in either Dixon or Dakota counties. In 1930 Dakota County farmers grew 2,530 acres of wheat, while Dixon County contributed only 631 acres of wheat.⁴⁴ Nearly 80 percent of it were varieties of hard red winter wheat, almost 20 percent was hard red spring

wheat, and a negligible portion was durum.⁴⁵ Of the hard red spring wheats, Marquis was the most widely grown, with Nebraska acreage increasing in the previous five years before 1929.⁴⁶ The hard red winter wheats favored by northeastern Nebraska wheat growers were the Turkey and Kanred varieties, which showed marked acreage gains throughout the 1920s.⁴⁷

Corn was a dominant crop in the region, and most of it went to feed cattle and hogs. In 1929 corn acreage in Dakota County was 63,114, while Dixon and Thurston counties topped the 100,000-acre mark with 105,752 and 125,573 acres, respectively.⁴⁸ Corn had been a cash crop, but falling corn prices in the 1870s encouraged farmers to use it to fatten their livestock.⁴⁹ As the relationship between corn and hogs became cemented, hog numbers in northeastern Nebraska swelled. In 1930 Dakota County registered 42,265 hogs, Thurston County claimed 55,533, and Dixon County had 84,721.⁵⁰

As livestock feeding made the area prosperous, land values grew. Those who owned land in the three counties watched values increase through the 1910s, only to see them decline proportionally with commodity prices during the 1920s and 1930s. From 1900 to 1920, total farm value in the northeastern corner of Nebraska skyrocketed. In that period, Dakota County's total farm value rose from \$5.96 million to \$28.79 million, while Thurston County saw its gross farm value increase from \$6.82 million to \$43.19 million, and Dixon County's rose from \$10 million to \$60.79 million.⁵¹ The economic growth of the counties was substantial, and although these statistics span a twenty-year

period, most of the growth occurred during the second decade, when farm values more than doubled. Farmers in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties saw their good fortune wither at the end of World War I. As agricultural prices steadily declined with the Great Depression, farm values did likewise, making it difficult for those who wanted to leave the farm to sell it at any profit.

The golden age of American agriculture reigned from about 1910 until the end of World War I in 1919. The price of farm products increased due to wartime necessity, but European agriculture recovered faster than predicted, lessening the demand for American agricultural products abroad. By then American agriculture was also competing with products from other areas of the world such as Argentina, Canada, and Australia.⁵² Some scholars claim that the agricultural depression of the 1920s was "less an economic fact than a statistical artifact," but farm family income fell below the prewar level.⁵³ In 1925 the American farm dollar hovered around 92 percent of its prewar purchasing power, and farm income was 30 percent below urban America's income.⁵⁴ Nebraska corn prices per bushel fell at an amazing rate, declining from \$1.32 in 1919 to 38 cents the following year, and the price did not top the one-dollar mark again until 1936.⁵⁵ Wheat prices declined from \$2.07 per bushel in 1919 to \$1.59 in 1920. Some recovery was made and prices topped one dollar from 1924 through 1928, with the highest price being \$1.42 in 1925.⁵⁶ Hog markets witnessed the greatest dip between 1920 and 1921, when prices slipped from \$23 to \$14.80 per head. The low point of hog prices arrived in 1922 at \$11 and reached a high

of \$19.50 in 1927. Throughout the 1920s hog prices hovered around \$15.⁵⁷ These slumps may not have been completely ruinous, but considering the relative prosperity of farmers during the previous years, the effects were certainly felt.

Because of the price slump, farmers called for government assistance to protect their industry. In 1921 an informal group of senators and representatives from the Great Plains, Midwest, and South formed the Farm Bloc in order to pass legislation favorable toward agriculture. Several agricultural bills were passed, but unfortunately they had only a negligible effect on prices. Some of the most prominent efforts were the several McNary-Haugen bills from 1924 to 1928. This agricultural legislation was based on the philosophy of parity prices. Parity was set to be equivalent to the years 1910-14, and was defined as equitable value between what farmers received for their products and what they paid for the items they consumed. Devised by George Peek, the parity plan provided “producers of basic agricultural commodities with the same level of protection the tariff afforded manufacturers.”⁵⁸ The ideal of parity would figure largely into the New Deal agricultural programs of the 1930s, which were aimed at assuaging the crippling effects of the Great Depression.

The plan called for the government to buy the excess of domestic demand and sell it on the world market as well as maintain a tariff high enough to keep foreign competition to a minimum. Oregon senator Charles McNary and Iowa representative Gilbert Haugen sponsored the legislation to affect the six “basic

commodities” of cotton, corn, pork, wheat, rice, and tobacco. Opponents feared several aspects of the legislation: the system would create a huge bureaucracy, it would encourage increased production of commodities already in surplus, the equalization fee would not cover government losses, and international dumping would create trade retaliation. These fears led to the bill's defeat in 1924 and 1926 and to vetoes by Calvin Coolidge in 1927 and 1928.⁵⁹

Farm cooperatives were at full flourish in the 1920s, and the Hoover administration openly encouraged their continuation. As Secretary of Commerce from 1921 to 1928, Hoover became a strong believer in cooperatives, although he sometimes believed that within the context of agriculture, they were “ill-conceived and unsystematically executed.”⁶⁰ In 1929 the Agricultural Marketing Act was passed by Congress to further encourage marketing cooperatives. It created the Federal Farm Board, an agency with a \$500 million fund which allowed cooperatives to buy facilities and also to purchase commodities in order to stabilize prices.⁶¹ The legislation was not able to be tested to its full extent because of the impending Great Depression.

Hoover did, however, initiate the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) in early 1932, to keep banks, insurance companies, railroads, and other lenders solvent.⁶² By the fall of 1932, Nebraska farmers borrowed \$1,361,436 from institutions supported by the RFC in order to buy feed, fertilizer, seed, and gasoline, as well as to repair worn farm machinery.⁶³ They also applied for 6,761 crop production loans, averaging \$201.36 per farmer, an amount far

above the national average of \$126.47.⁶⁴ Nebraska farmers' high utilization of the RFC demonstrated two points. First, these loans proved that farm relief was needed in Nebraska, and second, they confirmed that Nebraska farmers were willing to take advantage of government programs designed for their aid.

With the stock market crash and onset of the Great Depression in 1929, farm prices fell at an astronomical rate. By the close of 1932, Nebraska farm prices had bottomed out and were the lowest in the state's history. Within this three-year span, many farmers were forced into utter ruin. From 1929 to 1932, total farm cash receipts for the state dropped by 65.9 percent.⁶⁵ The steady decline in farm income left it at less than 50 percent of its prewar level by 1933.⁶⁶ From 1929 to 1932 gross farm income in the United States declined nearly 57 percent, dropping to its lowest mark in the twenty-three years in which the USDA had been keeping statistics.⁶⁷ Wheat prices declined by 73 percent, hog prices fell by 72 percent per hundredweight and corn was dealt the hardest blow with a depreciation of 80.6 percent.⁶⁸ The decline in corn and hog prices was devastating to northeastern Nebraska, a region heavily dedicated to corn-hog production. From 1929 to 1931, wheat fell from \$1.03 to 36 cents per bushel, and in 1932 hog prices fell steeply from \$11.36 to \$6.14 per head.⁶⁹

Longtime Dixon County resident Mike Rewinkel remembers hog prices plummeting to \$2 per hundredweight. His mother paid for the family's subscription to the *Sioux City Tribune* with a chicken, and he cites that the problem with the depression was that while a chicken, regardless of weight, was

worth a dollar, pigs were fetching only \$2 per hundred.⁷⁰ Such ironic and seemingly inexplicable economic factors led to the farmers' shared bewilderment and anger during the depression and served as a spark that ignited the Farmers' Holiday movement.

During the depression, farmers were also faced with shrinking farm values. Average farm values from 1920 to 1925 dropped approximately \$12,000 for Dakota and Thurston counties, while those for Dixon County fell by almost \$16,000.⁷¹ For the period from 1925 to 1930, average farm values declined by a much smaller percentage, but the onset of the Great Depression wrecked farm values. Average farm value in the three counties plummeted at an average rate of 60 percent from April 1930 to January 1935.⁷² These numbers clearly illustrate how farm values were tied to production prices, and also demonstrate how farm values fell throughout the 1920s and even further after the onset of the Great Depression. The focus of the FHA was on prices of commodities, but the continually decreasing farm values may have been another important factor in the group's activity.

With agricultural prices low, many farmers had a difficult time paying their taxes. In October 1932, it was reported that the number of delinquent taxpayers in Dixon County increased approximately 53 percent over the previous year, meaning that in 1931 there were fifteen hundred delinquencies compared to approximately twenty-three hundred in 1932.⁷³ Similarly, Thurston County's delinquent tax sales hit a high-water mark totaling \$18,166.80, covering

delinquent taxes on 141 pieces of property.⁷⁴ Yet it should not be assumed that all the delinquent taxpayers were farmers. Some were probably small businesses in rural communities that were greatly affected by the depression, but considering the agricultural nature of the region, most of the delinquent taxpayers probably were farmers.

The inability of farmers to make mortgage payments reached crisis stage by 1932. In early 1933, A. E. Anderson, state agricultural statistician, reported that from 1910 to 1930, Nebraska mortgages rose 246.6 percent, adding that 1930 census figures indicated that 42 percent of the farms operated by owners were not mortgaged.⁷⁵ From the turn of the century through World War I, it was not uncommon for farmers to overextend their credit so they could buy more land and mechanize. During the span from 1919 to 1932, American farm income dropped 70 percent, and mortgage debt increased from around \$3 billion dollars in 1910 to \$8.5 billion around 1933.⁷⁶ The state average farm mortgage rate in 1930 was 57.8 percent. Dakota County was slightly under the state average at 57.5 percent, while Dixon and Thurston counties exceeded the average with 67.1 percent and 65.7 percent, respectively.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, those institutions that lent farmers money during the years of parity also had obligations to meet, and farm foreclosures became an everyday occurrence during the Great Depression. Consequently, when the situation reached its crucial stage in late 1932 and early 1933, the halting of farm foreclosures became an established goal of the Farmers' Holiday.

With agricultural prices and farm purchasing power slumping further, and a conservative government limiting itself in offering aid for agriculture, American farmers, a notoriously individualistic group, decided that they should concert their efforts and take prompt action. Out of the Iowa Farmers' Union came Milo Reno and many of the Farmers' Holiday Association's original adherents.

Chapter 1 Notes

1. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 August 1932, 1; 24 August 1932, 6. The Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha (CStPM&O) Railroad was a subsidiary of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad (C&NW).
2. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 August 1932, 1; *Omaha World-Herald*, 23 August 1932, 1; *New York Times*, 24 August 1932, 19.
3. *Pender Republic*, 26 August 1932, 1. Nacora was little more than a railroad switch.
4. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 August 1932, 1. Only railroad personnel were allowed to break the seals on the cars. The seals were often little more than pieces of paper that reported the last time the livestock had been let off the train, fed and watered. Conversation with Bruce Garver.
5. *Pender Republic*, 26 August 1932, 1.
6. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 August 1932, 1.
7. *Pender Republic*, 26 August 1932, 1.
8. *Ibid.*, 26 August 1932, 1.
9. *Ibid.* The *Pender Republic* does not specify which other county's sheriff was called to the scene before Sheriff Sanford.
10. *Sioux City Journal*, 24 August 1932, 6.
11. *Pender Republic*, 26 August 1932, 1.
12. For this study, the organization will be referred to as the Farmers' Holiday Association, although it is often written as "Farm Holiday Association" or "Farmers Holiday Association" (with no punctuation).
13. John L. Shover, "The Penny Auction Rebellion," *American West*, 4 (Fall 1965): 66; John L. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, August 1932," *Agricultural History*, 39 (October 1965): 196.
14. Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 71.
15. For more on the Holiday at the state and county levels, see Rodney D. Karr, "Farmer Rebels in Plymouth County, Iowa, 1932-1933," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (Winter 1985): 637-45; John E. Miller, "Restrained, Respectable Radicals: The

South Dakota Farm Holiday," *Agricultural History* 59 (July 1985): 429-47; Kim E. Nielsen, "Who Were These Farmer Radicals?: The Douglas County Farm Holiday Association," *Minnesota History* 51 (Fall 1989): 270-80; Larry Remele, "The North Dakota Farm Strike of 1932," *North Dakota History* 4 (Fall 1974): 4-19; and John L. Shover, "The Farm Holiday Movement in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 59 (Fall 1962): 53-78.

16. John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion: The Farmers' Holiday Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 7.

17. William C. Pratt, "Rethinking the Farm Revolt of the 1930s," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Summer 1988), 131.

18. Norman L. Slama, Dean W. DaMoude, Donald Kerl and John J. Foreman, *Soil Survey of Thurston County, Nebraska* (University of Nebraska, Conservation and Survey Division, 1972), 60.

19. James Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 3d ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 8.

20. Thurston County Real Estate Board, *Thurston County--Banner Corn County of the Cornhusker State* (n.d.), 11. Hereafter cited as *Banner Corn County*.

21. Slama and DaMoude, *Soil Survey of Thurston County*, 1.

22. *The Nebraska Blue Book, 1934* (Lincoln: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1934), 458.

23. *Banner Corn County*, 5.

24. *The Nebraska Blue Book, 1934*, 462.

25. Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 23.

26. *Ibid.*, 199.

27. WPA Federal Writers' Project, *Nebraska: A Guide to the Cornhusker State* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 38.

28. Norma Kidd Green, *Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph La Flesche* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Johnsen Publishing, 1969), 32.

29. The allotment system began with the Dawes Act of 1887, which gave each tribal member a set amount of land. The aims of the allotment system were to open more land for white farmers, break down the tribal way of life, and assimilate Indians into American society by forcing them to become

agriculturists.

30. *Northeast Nebraska Intensive Livestock Production in Dixon and Dakota Counties, Nebraska* (Nebraska State Historical Society State Historic Preservation Office, 1987), 22. Hereafter cited as *Intensive Livestock Production*.

31. *The Nebraska Blue Book, 1934*, 340, 357. Until 1889, Thurston County was known as Blackbird County, in honor of the legendary Omaha chief.

32. *Intensive Livestock Production*, 23.

33. Donald L. Parman, *Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 17.

34. *Ibid.*, 18.

35. *Ibid.*, 119.

36. *Ibid.*, 16.

37. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1930), 84, 88. Hereafter cited as *Fifteenth Census, Population*.

38. *The Nebraska Blue Book, 1932* (Lincoln: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1932), 342-43.

39. *Fifteenth Census, Population*, 88.

40. *Banner Corn County*, 7.

41. *Intensive Livestock Production*, 26-27. Although oats and alfalfa were important crops for fattening livestock, they had little market value compared to other products. Unlike for wheat and corn, there were no New Deal agricultural programs specifically designed to curb their production, so they will not be investigated further.

42. *Banner Corn County*, 7.

43. Allen J. Clark and K. S. Quisenberry, "Distribution of the Varieties and Classes of Wheat in the United States in 1929," Circular 283 (United States Department of Agriculture, November 1933), 33.

44. *Intensive Livestock Production*, 26-27.

45. Clark and Quisenberry, "Distribution of the Varieties and Classes of Wheat in the United States in 1929," 33.
46. *Ibid.*, 40.
47. *Ibid.*, 49-50.
48. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Agriculture*, vol. 2, pt.1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1930), 1234, 1239. Hereafter cited as *Fifteenth Census, Agriculture*.
49. *Intensive Livestock Production*, 23-24.
50. *Fifteenth Census, Agriculture*, 1225, 1231.
51. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Agriculture*, vol. 6, pt.3 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1920), 692, 698. Hereafter cited as *Fourteenth Census, Agriculture*.
52. David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 187.
53. *Ibid.*, 188.
54. *Nebraska Union Farmer* (Omaha, Nebraska), 12 April 1933, 5; Danbom, 189.
55. Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 413-14.
56. *Ibid.*, 417.
57. *Ibid.*, 421.
58. Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 190.
59. *Ibid.*, 190-91.
60. *Ibid.*, 192.
61. *Ibid.*, 192; Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 407.
62. Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 48.
63. *Nebraska Farmer* (Lincoln, Nebraska), 15 October 1932, 5.

64. *Ibid.*
65. Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 309.
66. *Nebraska Union Farmer* (Omaha, Nebraska), 12 April 1933, 5.
67. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1933, 8.
68. Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 310.
69. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, August, 1932," 196.
70. Mike Rewinkel, interview with author, Concord, NE, 6 March 1998.
71. *Fourteenth Census*, Agriculture, 692, 698; *Fifteenth Census*, Agriculture, 933-34, 939.
72. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1935), 328, 334.
73. *Nebraska Journal-Leader* (Ponca, Nebraska), 6 October 1932, 1.
74. *Pender Republic*, 9 December 1932, 2.
75. *Walthill Citizen*, 10 March 1933, 2. No mortgage figures were available for farms occupied by tenants.
76. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 12 April 1933, 5.
77. *Fifteenth Census*, Agriculture, 1274, 1278.

CHAPTER 2

TIME FOR REBELLION

The 1930s was an era of demagogues, and although Milo Reno's name is not as well-known as Father Coughlin's or Huey Long's, Reno had his own cranky tendencies.¹ In October 1932, Milo Reno held audience at the Pender city park, and northeastern Nebraska was introduced to his speaking style. A reporter from the *Pender Republic* agreed that he was an "entertaining speaker," but at times "drifted from the principles of the organization, as we understand it, and became radically partisan."² One year later, the *South Sioux City Eagle* warned farmers not to be "led astray by false gods of the Reno stripe" because he had "aspirations to be the dictator of the United States."³

Reno was the sparkplug of the Farmers' Holiday Association (FHA). From his former position as president of the Iowa Farmers' Union, he was catapulted into the presidency of the Holiday Association. Born in southeastern Iowa in 1866, Milo Reno was the second-youngest child of John and Elizabeth Reno's brood of thirteen.⁴ Educated in country schools, he later attended Oskaloosa College. Reno was an ordained minister, and sometimes traveled the rural circuit preaching in country churches. His divinity training figured into his speeches, which were replete "with homely farm analogies and liberal invocations of Biblical writ."⁵

In 1918 he joined the Iowa Farmers' Union and soon became its president. His domination of the Iowa Union continued until his passing in 1936,

although he resigned as president in 1930 to take charge of the Farmers' Union Insurance Company.⁶ Reno is credited with first suggesting the tactic of the withholding measure in a resolution submitted to the Corn Belt Committee on July 6, 1927: "If we cannot obtain justice by legislation, the time will have arrived when no other course remains than organized refusal to deliver the products of the farm at less than production costs."⁷ In 1931 Iowa farmers protested compulsory tuberculosis testing for their livestock and started what became known as the "Cow War."⁸ The Iowa Farmers' Union did not directly participate in that movement, but it was a proving ground for the farm revolt of the depression.

Of the utmost importance is the relationship between the Farmers' Union and the Farmers' Holiday Association. John Shover says that the Farmer's Holiday Association acted as "a strong-arm auxiliary of the Farmers' Union."⁹ The Farmers' Union was founded in northeastern Texas in 1902, and subsequently expanded northward. Nebraska's first local was established in Antelope County in 1911, and the state Farmers' Union was formed at Fremont two years later.¹⁰ The Dixon County Farmers' Union was established in 1915 at Allen under the auspices of the state organizer when twenty-nine union locals came together.¹¹

Farmers' Union membership in Nebraska rose quickly, and by 1919 it boasted more than thirty-seven thousand members. As agricultural prices declined in the 1920s and 1930s, membership declined because to the ailing

farmer, paying union dues was a low priority.¹² In 1925, 16 percent of Nebraska farmers belonged to the Farmers' Union. Dixon and Dakota counties exceeded the state average with 20 and 23 percent, respectively, while Thurston County membership was only 3 percent.¹³ For the remainder of the decade, these numbers held steady, and membership in Dixon and Dakota counties ranged from 23 to 18 percent and Thurston held at 2 percent.¹⁴ By 1932 approximately 11 percent of Dixon County farmers belonged to the Farmers' Union, while Dakota County boasted 12 percent, and Thurston County lagged far behind with a meager 1 percent.¹⁵ Only those who could afford to pay dues were recorded as members, and it is likely that Thurston County's high percentage of renters meant that many were excluded from the outset. In 1933 nine of Dixon county's seventeen locals were inactive and total county membership had slipped from 222 in 1931 to 163 for 1932, then finished 1933 with 174.¹⁶ By the end of 1933, Dakota County boasted 132 members, up from the previous year's 104, and Thurston County's small number remained static, leaving it at approximately 1 percent of all farmers in the county.¹⁷

A resolution calling for a farm strike was introduced at the 1931 National Farmers' Union convention. The measure was overwhelmingly defeated, out of fear that the strike would divide the already factionalized Union even further.¹⁸ A year later, however, Reno forged ahead and formed the Farmers' Holiday Association. On May 3, 1932, in Des Moines, Iowa, over two thousand men and women from Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma,

Minnesota, and Missouri convened to form the National Farmers' Holiday Association. The aim of the new organization was to apply political pressure for legislation to fix farm prices at the "cost of production" level. Independence Day 1932 was the date set for the first withholding action.¹⁹ A key element to the Farmers' Holiday program was "cost of production," but this idea did not originate with the Holiday. Instead it stemmed from the "radical" faction of the Farmers' Union, which gained power with the election of president John Simpson in 1930, who often proved to be an ally of Reno.

John Shover's view of the "cost of production" program is that it more resembled "a panacea than a concrete economic program," and was "a homespun answer to complex schemes for agricultural adjustment advanced by economists and conservative farm organizations."²⁰ In short, "cost of production" meant that the prices farmers received for their commodities would be enough to cover the cost of producing the items for consumption, plus a "reasonable profit." To be at "cost of production" levels in 1932, farm prices would have had to remain at 92 cents per bushel for corn, 11 cents per pound for hogs, and 62 cents per pound of butterfat; however, the asking price for these items in June 1932 was well below the prescribed "cost of production." Corn brought 10 cents per bushel, hogs were 3 cents per pound, and butterfat was 18 cents per pound.²¹

In contrast to Shover's assertion that "cost of production" was a panacea, Lowell Dyson contends that it was "far from . . . anti[-]intellectual" and has been

given "short shrift."²² According to Dyson, to make the plan successful, economists would be essential in tabulating factors such as "rates of interest on land and equipment, the depreciation of buildings and machinery, and the price of seed and fertilizer."²³ The "cost of production" program also required a yearly prediction of domestic needs for specific products, and while farmers were free to raise more than called for, they could not sell their products on the domestic market because of a federally licensed allotment plan.²⁴ Whether scholars view the "cost of production" scheme as a mere panacea or an economically feasible program can be debated, but either way, "cost of production" became a mantra for the Farmers' Holiday, much as "Free silver: 16 to 1" had been earlier for the Populists.

As the summer of 1932 dragged on with no recovery of farm prices in sight, dairy farmers in northwestern Iowa grew increasingly unhappy with the returns they were receiving for their cream at the J. R. Roberts Dairy in Sioux City. At this time, since it was receiving only one dollar per hundredweight for 3.5 percent butterfat milk, the Sioux City Milk Producers' Cooperative began asking \$2.17 per hundredweight. In protest the dairy farmers, under the leadership of I. W. Reck, declared a holiday on the sale of milk, beginning the morning of August 11, 1932.²⁵ Sioux City's milk strike was in effect, and the Farmers' Holiday soon instituted its withholding of other farm products from Sioux City's market.

The aim of the milk strike was not to deprive the city of milk, and to

demonstrate that fact, relief agencies, orphanages, and hospitals were supplied with free milk. J. R. Roberts Dairy was the intended target of the strike and the day after the strike began, J. R. Roberts, the owner, told the *Sioux City Journal* that “the [milk shortage] situation is not at all serious” and that the strike had been “fomented by a group of radicals and is not supported by the conservative farmers of the territory.”²⁶ Almost immediately after the strike started, sheriffs were called out to monitor the pickets, who were stopping milk trucks bound for the city. It was noted the next day that although milk trucks were not allowed to pass, trucks hauling cattle and hogs were not being molested by the pickets and that the livestock market receipts for Sioux City were normal.²⁷

On the second day of the action, Nebraska strikers complied with the orders, allowing no milk across the Missouri River.²⁸ By August 14, the highways leading into Sioux City were lined with fifteen hundred farmers who blocked almost all shipments of farm products, and the Sioux City Producers’ Cooperative claimed it had cut off 90 percent of Sioux City’s milk supply. After a week, hog receipts at Sioux City dropped to half of what they had been on the first day of the strike.²⁹ On August 19, the milk strike ended with a compromise of \$1.80 per hundredweight for 3.5 percent butterfat milk, settling the matter.³⁰

Although the milk strike was over, the FHA strike, which began its withholding action during the milk strike, remained intact. By then, the Holiday Association’s actions had traversed the banks of the “Big Muddy” into northeastern Nebraska. Farmers’ Holiday pickets in Nebraska were not

simultaneously organized with the county units. Dakota County farmers picketed after the formation of a county FHA. The same was true for Thurston County, but in Dixon County, farmers were recruited for picket duty before a county unit was formalized. The Nebraska Farmers' Holiday Association was not formed until mid-September, a few weeks after county organizations in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were established.

On August 17, when an estimated five thousand people gathered in Homer for the annual Dakota County Farmers' Union picnic, they also heard National Farmers' Union president John Simpson speak on the farm crisis and the merits of the Holiday movement. Simpson placed part of the blame for the farm problem on the supposed international banking conspiracy, and he "attacked the present money system, which he says is controlled by the large bankers who can manipulate the volume of currency to suit themselves . . . [and] advocated a money system controlled by the government, and demanded a cheaper dollar . . .

. . ."³¹ Demonstrating confidence in the strike, Simpson told the crowd that "if the farm holiday system is thoroughly carried out, the farmers will get better prices."³² The following day, Dakota County farmers convened in Dakota City to discuss organizing a county Holiday group. At the time, all Iowa and South Dakota highways leading into Sioux City were being picketed, with the exception of Highway 20 across the Combination Bridge from Nebraska.³³ Nearly two hundred farmers and businessmen attended the meeting, which led to the

formation of what was probably Nebraska's first county FHA. Dakota County officers were elected and lawyer-turned-farmer J. F. Kriege was chosen president. Even local potato growers were sympathetic to the FHA cause.³⁴

The following Monday, August 21, Thurston County farmers met at the Winnebago city park to decide whether to form a county Holiday Association. Addressing the throng was Plymouth County, Iowa, Farmers' Holiday president, C. J. Schultz, who spoke on the plight of farmers, explained the purpose of the organization, and answered questions from the curious audience. A vote was taken by those in attendance, and the outcome was a unanimous decision to form a county Holiday organization. Thurston County officers were elected, and Simon Madison of Winnebago became president. Eleven precinct committees were elected, with two men serving on each committee.³⁵ Plans were made for sending regular shifts of Thurston County farmers to Dakota County to bolster picketing efforts along Highways 20 and 77. Farmers were not the only ones willing to serve on the picket lines; some Winnebago merchants even spoke of closing their businesses for two days a week to help patrol the highways and picket the local train depot to prevent the shipment of agricultural products from the immediate area.³⁶

Original support for the FHA in Thurston County was fervent, and rallies were well attended. The day after the formation of a county organization, a meeting scheduled for Thurston County FHA leaders in Walthill turned into an "enthusiastic rally" of several hundred farmers who "jammed the Sun theater to

capacity and overflowed onto the sidewalks.”³⁷ A few days later, another gathering was held in the Pender city park, where C. J. Schultz addressed about four hundred interested farmers and businessmen.³⁸

The *Pender Republic* concluded that “sentiment seemed divided on the holiday movement.”³⁹ Thurston County extension agent E. T. Winter addressed the crowd at Pender, reporting on the leadership of the movement. He told those gathered that most leaders of the Holiday movement were sincerely interested in action on behalf of the farmers, while a few others were racketeers, and some fell into the gap between the two.⁴⁰ Winter and county president Madison both urged the pickets not to violate the law, use undue force, or disturb rail shipments. Because Madison was “rather vague” on the entire issue, the admonitions left some interpretation to the farmers.⁴¹

A week prior to organizing the Dixon County FHA, Evan Way, of Dakota County, called a meeting in Allen to recruit pickets. Before an official Holiday Association was formed, farmers were already involved with the strike. Local markets were affected by the strike measures in Dixon County, when some farmers at the village of Dixon convinced another farmer to return home with a shipment of hogs. Soon, several carloads of de facto organizers from Dakota County visited Waterbury, Allen, and Dixon.⁴² A Dixon County organizational meeting was called at the Allen city hall in the afternoon of Monday, August 29. Each of the county’s thirteen precincts was represented, and Gus Keil was elected president. After organization efforts, three hundred farmers met in Allen

to hear former Sioux City mayor Wallace Short speak about the Holiday movement, with a number of men from the Ponca area in attendance.⁴³

Way and Keil traveled to Norfolk in hope of organizing a Holiday unit in Madison County. Sixty-five men from the Dixon and Dakota organizations traveled to Norfolk, and a crowd estimated at three hundred to four hundred turned out to listen to Way at Central Park. Farmers from neighboring Pierce, Stanton, and Antelope counties also were present, but organizational efforts were hampered by the farmers' reluctance to endorse the movement "for fear that some violence might develop."⁴⁴ Way admitted that pickets were in flagrant violation of the law, but he countered by telling the audience that "the law wasn't made for the common man, the law was made for the capitalists."⁴⁵ A gentleman in the audience questioned Way about the detention of a man collecting cream cans on rural mail routes. Way answered by saying:

Well, how many of those post-office inspectors are there? Do you think they are going to try to come out and put us all in jail? I'll tell you, men, this thing has already gone beyond the control of the stategovernment [*sic*] and it will get beyond the control of the federal [*sic*] government if we show them that we mean business.⁴⁶

The organizational results in Madison County were disappointing. When the call for volunteers to be county officers went out, no one spoke up, and so two men from the audience were "drafted." Those in attendance were also invited to come to the bandstand and sign up, but none did, so it was decided to pass around sheets of paper with pencils for signups. Afterward, the farmers

expressed their disappointment with the meeting, but by its end, about 4:30 P.M., the crowd had dwindled to under one hundred men, with most of them being visitors from Dixon and Dakota counties.⁴⁷ Subsequently, the farmers of Madison County and surrounding counties would eventually join the Madison County Plan Farmers' Holiday Association, a group autonomous from the Reno-led national organization.

As soon as a Dakota County FHA was formed, no time was wasted picketing the highways into Sioux City. It was reported that in Dakota County the picketing was "100 per cent effective" and "[n]ot a single truck load . . . [has] been permitted to pass . . . into Sioux City."⁴⁸ The focus of picketing was at the Combination Bridge over the Missouri River along Highway 20, which was constructed in 1895, and was the only span across the Missouri River from Blair, Nebraska, to Yankton, South Dakota. With the aid of Nebraska farmers, the strike was having its desired effect, and on August 22, Sioux City had no deliveries of butter, eggs, or poultry and almost no livestock deliveries. Over the previous weekend, no hogs or sheep had been delivered and only eight head of cattle were presented to the stockyards.⁴⁹ The pickets on Highways 20 and 77 were reported to be "carrying on their duties in an orderly manner" and were highly effective at constricting the supply of agricultural products to Sioux City.⁵⁰

Two weeks later, the Dakota County strike still remained unbroken, and there was little conflict, but three noteworthy incidents did take place. Six truckloads of hogs, four of which were from Cedar County and two from Dixon

County, were turned back on Highway 20 one-half mile west of South Sioux City, following "much argument," and after South Sioux City's assistant police chief had been called to the scene.⁵¹ To the south, at Dakota City, a Wayne County farmer tried to pass through the picket line with a load of hogs. During an argument between the man and Holiday strikers, the hogs were "liberated" from the truck. After gathering his livestock, the farmer returned home.⁵² Two Winside truckers, transporting hogs, were stopped at Dakota City where pickets removed the end gates of the trucks and turned the animals loose on the highway. No violence resulted from the incident, and the truckers remained in Dakota City waiting until they could proceed with the shipment.⁵³

On the last day of August, a convoy of about thirty-five trucks, coming from the west on Highway 20, attempted to run the Dakota County blockade.⁵⁴ Four hundred farmers, including some from South Dakota and Iowa, quickly convened at the scene to turn back the convoy, but not without a scuffle.⁵⁵ The driver of the lead truck lost most of his clothes as pickets tried to extract him from his vehicle, but he gained some revenge by punching a picket in the nose. Another driver suffered a broken toe when hit by a picket. While returning west, the truckers stopped in Jackson to eat lunch but were ordered to get out of Dakota County as fast as they could. A rumor circulated that one picket had been shot and killed in a skirmish on Highway 77 leading into Sioux City, but it was most likely an inaccurate account.⁵⁶

Although Sioux City was the major market targeted by Holiday Association

efforts, other communities of rural northeastern Nebraska were not neglected. Despite the concentration of pickets near South Sioux City, the FHA actually had people stationed on the highways every few miles.⁵⁷ On August 25, the *Allen News* reported that the “blockade is nearly perfect in this community, allowing no trucks or cars loaded with produce to reach the market.”⁵⁸ At Concord, picketing farmers refused to allow two train cars loaded with livestock to pull away from town.⁵⁹ The Wakefield area in southern Dixon County was one of the last to be affected by train depot strike activity. Although the trains were not disturbed, the pickets refused to allow a carload each of hogs and poultry to be shipped, and few livestock had been transported from the area in preceding days.⁶⁰ Despite “slight disturbances” at Emerson, Dixon, and Martinsburg, Dixon County sheriff Sam Curry reported that the situation was under control and the need for additional deputies was unlikely.⁶¹

Dixon County’s Mike Rewinkel recalls, from his childhood, hearing of a farmer transporting his cream to Sioux City who was stopped on “the bottom” (the flood plain of the Missouri) near Sioux City. When asked to turn back, the farmer got “feisty,” so Holiday members removed a can of cream from the vehicle and dumped it on him, soaking him from head to toe. Rewinkel also remembers a gathering of neighbors at his parents’ house, discussing the Holiday. Among his recollections was the story of a truck driver with a load of hogs bound for Sioux City, who supposedly had men armed with shotguns riding inside each fender well, in anticipation of difficulty passing through the picket lines.⁶²

According to the *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, Dixon County farmers were “lukewarm” on the Holiday idea and beyond Allen, Waterbury, and Dixon, there was little strike activity.⁶³ The Wakefield area was relatively quiet, and on the south side of the community, which lies in Wayne County, law officials cleared the pickets along the highways entering town from the south.⁶⁴ Pickets responded by simply crossing the county line into Dixon County.⁶⁵ In early September, the *Wakefield Republican* reported that there was no current strike activity and that shipments of livestock had been unusually heavy with the Wakefield stockyards “taxed to capacity.”⁶⁶

The Holiday pickets in Thurston County began on August 24 with the announcement that all stockyards and railroad stations in the county were to be picketed.⁶⁷ The previous day, a crowd at Winnebago forbade county commissioner Ralph J. Norris from shipping livestock to Sioux City by train. Local banker Ray Grosvenor was selected by the pickets to be their spokesman, and although Norris agreed not to ship his cattle, suspicious Holiday members surrounded his farm for the night in case he might try to sneak his products to market under the cover of darkness.⁶⁸ Those looking to buy cream from Pender were warned that no more would be shipped from that point to larger markets, and the railroad property was picketed to enforce the order.⁶⁹

Despite a warning from the Holiday, some citizens of Thurston County were undeterred. Ross Byerly of Macy ordered two or three milk cans from the nearest train depot, probably Walthill, and was cautioned against attempting to

ship his milk by rail because of the pickets. The next morning he arrived at the train depot with full cans and a loaded firearm lying in the seat next to him. Byerly stepped from his vehicle, brandished the gun, and ordered the pickets to stay where they were. No pickets dared interfere with Byerly's shipment, and before he returned home with his billing, the marshal had seized the weapon which had already served its intended purpose.⁷⁰

By early September, Thurston County picketing had peaked and slowly dissolved, and it was reported that all roads were clear. The *Walthill Times* had earlier prophesied that "[t]he number of volunteers probably reflects the temperature of enthusiasm which may cool somewhat after the novelty wears away."⁷¹ A week later, the same newspaper commented: "The fever has died somewhat as excitement passed with novelty."⁷² On the same day, a meeting was called in Walthill and was attended by the county Holiday Association members and a few businessmen. It was called in order to lift the selling ban on butter, cream, and eggs, so that Thurston County farmers could have enough money to procure the necessities of life. The ban was lifted by a narrow margin, but not before a long discussion which "waxed hot between holiday association members and sympathizers and the antis."⁷³ Although the majority decided to lift the ban, some individuals railed against the verdict. The following day, a "king bee" of those urging continuance of the withholding measures held a steady crowd of people in front of a Walthill store by "fulminating defiance in an effort to incite [r]evolt against the decision of the pickets."⁷⁴ Some of the observers were

of the opinion that his rhetoric brimmed with “bolshevic [*sic*] tactics with plain anglo-saxon emphasis.”⁷⁵

Despite Reno’s announcement that the strike would end on September 1, on the last night of August nearly four hundred farmers guarded Highway 20, with their numbers bolstered by about 140 men trucked in from Union County, South Dakota.⁷⁶ Picketing ceased on the night of September 2, in accord with a proclamation issued by Reno. Yet Dakota County pickets on Highways 20 and 77 refused to relinquish their posts, informing county FHA president J. F. Kriege that they felt victory was imminent and they did not wish to abandon the movement.⁷⁷ Reno’s statement to the press asserted: “The first objective of the farmers strike--calling attention to the general public of the plight of American agriculture[--]has been attained.”⁷⁸ By mid-September, Sioux City was not being picketed from the Nebraska side, while Iowa farmers remained vigilant.⁷⁹

Some Farmers’ Holiday members believed that they were revolutionaries, often comparing themselves to the Founding Fathers of the United States. The farmers viewed themselves as patriots full of righteous indignation against their oppressors. Josephine Herbst, in a *Scribner’s* magazine article, reported that many on the picket lines considered themselves modern-day Paul Reveres, with their picketing awakening the countryside to the plight of American farmers, much as Revere’s famous ride warned the colonists of the approaching Redcoats. Despite the comparisons to Revere, activists frequently invoked the Boston Tea Party as the pivotal event. Herbst quoted an anonymous picket who

claimed: "We aren't so different from the Boston Tea Party, boys. Those fellows weren't keeping the law. If they had kept the law we would be tied to the skirts of Mother England now."⁸⁰ When the Nebraska Farmers' Holiday Association was established in September 1932, Dakota County's J. F. Kriege was quoted as saying that the FHA effort was "similar to the Boston Tea Party which started the Revolutionary War," and through picketing, farmers were standing up for their rights like the American colonists did.⁸¹ Even the *Nebraska Farmer* believed that the situation was

comparable to that preceding the Revolutionary War when tax-oppressed citizens protested through the Boston Tea Party, followed by the embattled farmers of Concord and Lexington successfully revolting from the tyranny of King George and English rule. In the opinion of some of the speakers, farmers of the middle west should now declare their independence from oppression and tyranny at home which is grinding agriculture into the dust through ruinously low prices for farm products.⁸²

The strike was designed for immediacy, and it dramatized the plight of farmers, but there were several factors that served to hobble the action. First, there was a lack of organized leadership and discipline; second, shutting off only Sioux City, though feasible, could not affect long-term agricultural prices, and third, farmers could not afford to withhold their cream and eggs for a long period of time. Yet the unwillingness of militant farmers to obey the wishes of Holiday leaders was readily demonstrated when Reno tried to call off the strike. And on an even more local level, that disobedience was evident when the pickets of Dakota County told their county president that they did not want to abandon their

lines. Even after a truce was called in the milk strike, some pickets still refused to let trucks loaded with cream pass, causing only added confusion and hostilities to an already tense situation.

The geographic focus of the movement was another hindrance. Midwestern markets picketed were Sioux City, Omaha, and Des Moines. Although picket lines were an inconvenience for nonstriking farmers, they could still ship their products to other markets. Yet surprisingly enough, the nadir of 1932 farm prices came while the strike was in progress.⁸³ At the end of 1932, Sioux City receipts were down 30 percent compared to 1931, and along with natural phenomena such as drought and grasshoppers, the *Nebraska Union Farmer* credited the Farmers' Holiday Association with part of the decrease.⁸⁴

The diminished flow of products into a few Midwestern markets was not enough to drive up national prices for agricultural products. Because the strike's geographical focus was so narrow, the law of supply and demand had negligible effects. The only markets affected were the few that were picketed. Many farmers also depended on their cream and egg checks to buy items that they could not produce, such as flour, sugar, and coffee. Because of the strike, hard-pressed farmers could not market the products from which they derived regular income, thus making the withholding action counterproductive.

Apart from dumping cream and refusing to let livestock be marketed, several lifetime residents of the area recalled that Farmers' Holiday members also offered to kill livestock in order to keep it off the market. Edwin Farenholz,

of the Allen area, included the killing of swine in a list of Farmers' Holiday activities.⁸⁵ Another Dixon County resident, Ella Isom, remembers a man from Concord approaching her husband, Claren, and his brother and offering them money to kill their new litter of hogs. The Isoms refused to destroy their livestock. They took the pigs to Pender, where they did not even receive a bid. This was partly because the hogs were not ready for market and the situation was so desperate that farmers did not have feed. Unable to feed the hogs themselves, and considering the possibility that the hogs could become diseased while in the sale barn, the Isoms hired a truck to take them to Sioux City. In an episode that was all too common during the era, the price received for the hogs was insufficient to cover transportation costs. The Isoms lost money on the venture, owing the truck driver six dollars.⁸⁶

The county Farmers' Holiday groups were now fully formed and active in picketing and seeking "cost of production" for their farm products. Their next step was to gain cohesion and formulate a plan. A state organization was needed. On September 15, 1932, the Nebraska State Farmers' Holiday Association was formed in Fremont. Initially, thirteen counties sent delegates, with the northeastern portion best represented. Four other counties, including Thurston, were represented before adjournment.⁸⁷ The envoy from Dakota County was Joe Sivill, while Dixon County sent its county Farmers' Union president, Francis Kimball. Other prominent figures from the area were Methodist minister Reverend Earl N. Littrell from Allen and South Sioux City's J.

F. Kriege, who was one of the meeting's featured speakers.

Among the first business was election of officers. Harry C. Parmenter of Yutan, who was serving as Nebraska Farmers' Union vice-president, became the Nebraska FHA's president, with A. O. Rosenberg of Newman Grove as vice president, and Clair Johnson of Fremont as secretary and treasurer.⁸⁸ The directors of organization were Emory Sampson of Valley, John O. Schmidt of Wahoo and Joe Sivill of South Sioux City. J. F. Kriege, Dakota County's FHA president, was elected to the Farmers' Holiday board of national directors.⁸⁹

Most of the counties supported the Reno-led Holiday program, but a handful of dissenting counties urged the Madison County Plan, which, after some debate, was finally adopted by the convention. The Madison County Plan consisted of resolutions calling for "cost of production;" a mortgage moratorium; cancellation of government feed and seed loans; tax exemption for poor, heavily mortgaged farmers; a moratorium on rents; no evictions; increased prices to farmers from profits of the middlemen and the money interests; and a call for a national emergency farm relief conference in Washington when Congress convened on December 1.⁹⁰

In the *Fremont Evening Tribune*, George Kerl claimed Dixon County was 32 percent organized, Evan Way stated that Dakota County was 90 percent organized, and another Dakota County resident reported that 90 percent of Thurston County had joined the Association.⁹¹ Reno spoke in the Fremont city park before a crowd estimated at one thousand to fifteen hundred people. It was

noted that Reno preferred the term “strike” and “evaded the word ‘picketing’ during his address,” with one exception, when he said the pickets were the “shock troops of the holiday movement.”⁹² Tom S. Allen of Lincoln, serving as an observer for governor Charles Bryan, attended the convention. Allen bore the brunt of Kriege’s wrath when he said that Bryan “thinks we [farmers] are too ignorant for consideration, but he’s going to get his eyes opened.”⁹³

On the following Sunday, a meeting of the Holiday’s national directors was called in Sioux City. It went on record as opposing any more picketing of the highways by declaring that the pickets had served their purpose, which was to draw attention to the critical farm situation. The national directors urged farmers to act as observers on the highways in order to identify which farmers in their county were not complying with the Holiday, so that they might be persuaded to withhold their products from the market. An additional set of resolutions was passed by the directors, one of which was the withholding of grain and livestock beginning Wednesday, September 21.⁹⁴

Yet even with as much support as the FHA had, it also had its share of detractors on the national, state, and county levels. The fairly conservative, general farm newspaper, the *Nebraska Farmer*, addressed the strike on its editorial page in the fall of 1932. Editor and former Nebraska governor, Samuel R. McKelvie, agreed that the cause of the Holiday was just, but felt that its reach was beyond its grasp. To him, the most important “phase is the cause and the principles involved,” rather than picketing and withholding.⁹⁵ Several weeks

later, he criticized the Holiday for not mandating a “planting and production holiday” to accompany its withholding action.⁹⁶ With the New Deal agricultural programs to come in 1933, Nebraska farmers would be offered something much akin to a production holiday.

The *Sioux City Journal* ran an editorial that announced it was in full sympathy with the strike because of unfair farm prices, and stated that the strike was one in which the farmer should be able to act like industry--meaning farmers, not consumers, needed to have the authority to decide the level at which prices would be set.⁹⁷ When asked by the Associated Press (AP) to outline the reasons behind the strike, Sioux City mayor W. D. Hayes simply stated that “farmers can no longer support themselves and their families on an American standard of living, much less pay taxes and interest, to say nothing of debts.”⁹⁸

When the strike surged in 1932, local newspapers not only covered the pertinent events, but offered editorials that ranged from support to ambivalence. As soon as a Dakota County Holiday Association was formed, the *South Sioux City Eagle* portrayed the farmer as the “forgotten man” providing the “basic industry of our nation.” Each farmer was “fighting with a determination, his back to the wall,” and when the day came that the return on farm products was greater than the “cost of production”, the public would witness “prosperity return to this nation.”⁹⁹ Other newspapers took a supportive tone and believed strongly that the cause was just, but that the methods employed by the farmers to reach their

goals were suspect. At the onset of picketing in Dixon County, the *Allen News* stated:

It is true. The farmer is fighting for what is rightfully his. He carries a burden upon his shoulders, a burden that can be lifted only by a price that is deservant of his produce. But will all this uprising and radical movements grant them the things they wish? We do not know, and time alone can tell, but we hope that th[e] farmer will get what he is after, a price worthy of his products and untiring efforts.¹⁰⁰

Thurston County's *Walthill Times* found that although the picketing gave opportunities to "adventurers, irresponsibles, and thrill-seekers," its success depended "upon the prudence with which the campaign is conducted . . . Violence and intimidation encourages antagonism and should be strictly avoided."¹⁰¹ The newspaper believed: "The sane and level-headed way in which the farmers of this community are participating in this effort is to be commended."¹⁰²

The opinions of farmers, and not newspapermen, could be found in the pages of the *Nebraska Union Farmer*. Considering the relationship of the Farmer's Holiday and the Nebraska Farmers' Union, this source gives a glimpse of what Union members thought of the Holiday, and most of the responses were decidedly negative. In the September 14, 1932 edition, several letters by Farmers' Union members criticized the strike. Walter Burgess of Columbus relayed an incident in which his car was attacked by protestors who threw tree limbs through the windshield, broke out a headlight, and punctured the radiator

several times. Burgess believed Nebraska farmers “had more sense than to promote such doings,” and he predicted that with Farmers’ Union members participating in the Holiday Association, the already fragile relations between the two groups would rip apart the Union.¹⁰³

A farmer from Schuyler wondered why any “clear-thinking farmer figures such efforts will do him any good,” and implored farmers to “stand together” in peaceful methods in order to maintain the respect of the nation.¹⁰⁴ S. J. Woodruff of Douglas County, a frequent contributor to the “Open Forum” page of the *Union Farmer*, believed that “mob psychology” was a motivating factor in the strike, and lambasted the “atrocities” of trucks “wrecked, stock turned loose, milk spilled, and lives endangered.” He earnestly reminded fellow farmers that it did “not pay to cut off your nose to spite your face”¹⁰⁵

On the following page in the same edition, L. S. Herron’s anti-Holiday editorial asserted that the strike was injurious to the farmers’ cause. The immediate economic aims of picketing were unlikely because the action could not cover enough territory. He deplored the violence and extralegal methods employed by the strikers and said that for farmers to “assume authority over traffic on the public highways is both presumptuous and illegal.” Herron concluded by asserting that a farm strike was “bound to prove futile in producing any lasting effects” on farm products and viewed picketing as a setback to the cause.¹⁰⁶ Later that month, the Farmers’ Union of Johnson County, in southeastern Nebraska, passed a resolution condemning the Holiday

Association's tactics, but agreed with the idea of "cost of production".¹⁰⁷

One of few who viewed the Union and Holiday relationship as beneficial was a farm wife, Mrs. John F. Meyer of Howells, in Colfax County. She stated that "after close observation from every angle, it seems to me the Farmers' Holiday Association . . . is the best ally the Farmers Union has ever had."¹⁰⁸ For a person to be for one and against the other was impossible, she declared, because of the concerted objectives of the two organizations. She urged Farmers' Union members not to be misled by misrepresentations and gross exaggerations about the Holiday that were appearing in newspapers. Her view was that of a minority.

Many local people recalled that Holiday participants had been perceived as "agitators" and "trouble makers." One Dixon County resident agrees with the aims of the program, but feels they were "a little bit radical."¹⁰⁹ A farm wife claims that the Farmers' Holiday members "didn't believe in the hereafter."¹¹⁰ A Thurston County resident believes that the Holiday movement did seem too radical for many, but he admits that the way it derived its power was from being radical. The activists "had to show force, yet when they were showing force they were sort of cutting their own throat by taking groceries off of the table."¹¹¹

One person outside the Farmers' Holiday in Thurston County who kept a keen eye on the group's activity was County Extension Agent Winter, who had held the office since 1924. He had a highly negative perception of the Holiday Association, using an ominous tone in his 1933 yearly report:

Meetings were held daily in all parts of the county. Many of these meetings were addressed by fiery orators who advocated the repudiation of all debts, the abolition of all public officials who attempted to block their plans and the utter destruction of all who dared to differ with them. It was a critical situation.¹¹²

From 1932 to 1933, Winter's tone shifted from mentioning the group only as a "radical farm agitator," to addressing them as the Farmers' Holiday Association, an organization which seemed to him to be hellbent on revolution and the annihilation of any not aligned with them. Part of Winter's opinion no doubt revolved around the role the FHA played in denying appropriations to his office.

The men who joined the ranks of the FHA in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were not "radicals" or downtrodden farmers. Many of them had been long involved with community politics and were considered upstanding citizens. One Dixon County resident recalls: "There were a lot of good people out on the roads stopping trucks and freight . . . and stopping farmers from taking their cream and eggs to town."¹¹³

It is hard to determine who joined the Holiday because it was not a dues-paying organization. Oftentimes, names listed in local newspapers are the only clue. John Shover and Rodney Karr constructed samples from newspaper lists of men who had been arrested.¹¹⁴ The list for this study is comprised of those who served as county officers and county precinct leaders. Once membership is established, the difficulty lies in then uncovering personal information on the men concerning their status as farmers, i.e. landowner, tenant, or farm laborer. According to Shover, "[t]hose who picketed may have represented a different

population from those who were leaders or even members of the Holiday Association”¹¹⁵

Perhaps the most prominent leader of northeastern Nebraska's FHA was John Fred Kriege of South Sioux City. J. F. Kriege was born in 1889 near Remsen, Iowa, in Plymouth County. He graduated from a rural school at the age of twelve, and continued to work on the family farm. When he was seventeen, the family moved to LeMars. An English teacher at LeMars High School lived next door to the Krieges, and she told him that she could aid him in completing high school in three years. He reluctantly attended and graduated at age twenty. His athletic talents were enough to earn him a football scholarship to the University of South Dakota, in Vermillion, and three years later, in 1914, he graduated with a law degree. After practicing law in Sioux City for approximately one year, he moved to central Washington to farm land his father owned near Wenatchee, as the current renters were not meeting their obligations. Kriege remained in Washington for five years raising wheat. He sold the farm in 1918 and that fall prepared himself to go overseas and serve in World War I, but the armistice came before he could leave.¹¹⁶

Kriege married a Sioux City woman, Anne Braunger in 1920, and his father bestowed on him a Dakota County farm which was already heavily mortgaged.¹¹⁷ Living on the farm a short time to improve it, and then returning to law was what he had in mind, but the Great Depression dashed his plans. Despite the worrisome situation, the Krieges remained on the farm because as

his daughter, Constance, recalls: "If you were on the farm you were eating, and lawyers weren't all eating at that time."¹¹⁸ The 180-acre farm bordering the Missouri River, one and a half miles southeast of South Sioux City, produced barley, corn, hogs, sheep, milk cows, and alfalfa. Kriege was an active member of the Dakota County Farmers' Union and unsuccessfully ran for Nebraska state representative in 1932.¹¹⁹ He was defeated in the primary, and finished with the least votes of the four Democrats on the ballot.¹²⁰

Kriege was a renaissance man. His attention was often diverted from farm work. He had a blacksmith shop in which he tinkered constantly, making various tools. Kriege held a patent on a corn picker and also invented a device to keep potato sacks open. The patent on the corn picker was received in 1932, but he never claimed many royalties from the device because of the proliferation of mechanical corn pickers soon afterward. It was said that he was "always drawing . . . and writing letters . . . [he] would have been better off probably if he would have stayed with the law. Because he wanted to talk and he wanted to read . . . he didn't just want to go up and down the rows."¹²¹

Kriege was an avid letter writer. He wrote to President Roosevelt and Father Coughlin, from whom he often received replies.¹²² Kriege was a supporter of Roosevelt in 1932. He composed a manuscript detailing an elaborate monetary system and sent it to the president-elect.¹²³ At some point, Kriege became disillusioned with the Roosevelt administration and "resigned from the Democratic party." He then became a Coughlinite, a follower of the

politics of the Michigan "Radio Priest."¹²⁴

Kriege's wife had reservations about her husband's activities and cared little for his organizing efforts. She believed that "he should be home tending to business, taking care of his own farm and not running the car to death and wasting gas."¹²⁵ Anne Braunger Kriege was from a wealthy Sioux City family and attended boarding school, so farm life was somewhat foreign to her. At the time, of his activism, the Krieges had three daughters and the women did not milk cows, so his organizing efforts were hampered by his wife's demand that he be home at milking time every evening. Mrs. Kriege worried less about his being injured while organizing or picketing than his performing the required chores.¹²⁶

In addition to serving as an organizer, Kriege would often go into restaurants and ask if they could spare food for the pickets. He would usually take them coffee and doughnuts. The relationship between Kriege and Reno was not close. Kriege's daughter, Constance Fouts, remembers from childhood that Reno's name was mentioned on numerous occasions, but she does not remember his ever being a guest in their home.¹²⁷

Thurston County FHA secretary George J. Lemmon had a distinguished career as a lawyer in the county. He was a Spanish-American War veteran who worked at a grain elevator, co-managed a grocery store, and farmed near the town of Thurston. Lemmon, a Democrat, served as an assistant in the county assessor's office, and as acting county judge under judge Frank Flynn, before being elected county judge himself in 1932, which office he held until 1948. He

finished his public career by serving as county attorney from 1950 to 1952.¹²⁸

Other Thurston County men who joined the Holiday Association were prominent citizens. J. W. Reilly, a farmer from the Rosalie area, served in the Nebraska Legislature as a Republican during the 1935 session, representing the 23d Congressional District.¹²⁹ Cecil R. Boughn, who farmed near Pender, served on the Walthill Board of Health when the town was incorporated, and acted as the town's postmaster for a period.¹³⁰ He served as Thurston County attorney from 1926 to 1930, and was district judge from 1924 to 1928.

Republican Charles W. Rutledge, of Bryan Township, was Thurston County sheriff from 1919 to 1922.¹³¹ William Wingett, of the Walthill area, represented the 23d Congressional District as a Republican in the Nebraska Legislature for the 1923 and 1925 sessions. Wingett was active in the community and county. His biography in the 1924 *Nebraska Blue Book* noted that Wingett "[h]as been officer of school board, president cooperative store, president Farmers' Co-operative elevator, president Thurston county Farm Bureau. Member of United Brethren Church, Farmers' union, Farm Bureau and Odd Fellows."¹³²

In Dixon County, Logan precinct representatives Walter Grosc and Oscar Brown were said to be "outstanding people in the community."¹³³ Dixon County's major contribution to the Farmers' Holiday was a Methodist minister, Reverend Littrell, who served as the state FHA organizing secretary at Fremont.¹³⁴ Earl Nelson Littrell was born in Butler County, Nebraska, on October 19, 1887. He attended college at Nebraska Wesleyan in Lincoln, where he majored in religion

and psychology, and minored in sociology. Littrell came to Allen in 1929 from a post at Creighton, Nebraska, in Knox County. In 1934 he was reassigned to the Methodist Church in South Sioux City, where he remained active in the Holiday. In a movement composed of farmers, why would a man of the cloth be aligned with a radical farm movement? According to his son, Littrell “felt the plight of the farmers . . . and did what he believed was best in supporting their cause.”¹³⁵

During the FHA’s heyday, Earl’s son Donald Littrell was a nineteen-year-old student at Morningside College in Sioux City. He took a place on the picket lines and “that meant being involved in burning rail bridges, filling grease boxes with gravel, stopping cars and pickups[, and] emptying milk and cream in the roads.”¹³⁶ He also chauffeured Milo Reno over the back roads of Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties to FHA meetings at country schoolhouses.

For this study, a list of Holiday leaders and influentials in the counties was taken mostly from newspaper accounts. Of the fifty-seven county officers and precinct representatives, information from various sources was found on thirty-seven, or approximately 65 percent.¹³⁷ The men identified as county leaders of the Farmers’ Holiday serve as the sample from which the following collective biography was fashioned. Most were native-born Americans, and many were born in the Midwest. Of those born in the Midwest, Nebraska and Iowa claimed fifteen and ten, a full two-thirds of the men. Four were born in Illinois, two in Wisconsin, and one each was born in Missouri and South Dakota. Of the four born outside of the United States, one each was from Germany, Denmark,

Ireland, and Canada. Ethnically all probably were of northern European descent. The ethnicity of nineteen of the thirty-six could be definitely established. German and Irish blood predominate. Nine were Irish, five German, two Danish, one Danish-Norwegian, one French, and one French-Canadian.

Their religious affiliations can only be surmised, but inferences can be made by looking at the religious bodies in each county. Dakota County was home to a large Irish population, and the county was 56.7 percent Catholic. Lutherans, who were mostly Danes, constituted 26.9 percent, while other Protestant made up less than 10 percent.¹³⁸ In Dixon County, with heavy Swedish influence, Lutheranism predominated, with 44.7 percent. The “all others” category was the second largest in the county. It included the Society of Friends (Quakers), who settled in the central part of the county near Allen in the 1860s.¹³⁹ Catholics comprised only 16.6 percent, while Methodists and Presbyterians combined for 18.5 percent.¹⁴⁰ Religious affiliations in Thurston County were more evenly distributed than in Dixon and Dakota counties. The county’s largest religious groups were Catholic (26.5 percent) and Presbyterian (20 percent). Lutherans comprised 17.2 percent, Methodists 12 percent, and smaller denominations 14.7 percent.¹⁴¹

Previous studies of the Holiday Association attempted to determine the ages of the rebels. Two studies found the average age to be approximately forty-three. Rodney Karr’s study of Plymouth County, Iowa, finds the average

farm protestor age to be thirty-four.¹⁴² Here in the three northeastern Nebraska counties, the average age for the FHA sample was forty-nine. Dixon had the lowest age at forty-six, while Dakota had the highest with fifty-four. Thurston County's average was forty-eight. Most were, of course, farmers, but a few, like J. F. Kriege and George Lemmon, were trained in other fields. Dakota County vice-president George Ashford held a pharmacy degree from the University of Iowa, and served as president of the Security State Bank.¹⁴³ The 1920 Census listed Cecil Boughn as a "bank cashier assistant" and Herman Witt as a "mail carrier." The only persons listed as "farm laborer" were Roy Graham and William Brady, of Dakota County, who were both in their early thirties in 1932. Granted, in a dozen more years, men who were not farmers may have left other occupations to become farmers.

Length of tenure in the county of residence is another factor that needs to be determined. All thirty-seven of the identified men had lived in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties at least since 1920, and a few were born to pioneer parents near where they farmed as adults. Of the three, Thurston County accounted for lowest number of Holiday figures that could be located, only fourteen of twenty-five. This could be attributed to Thurston County's high tenancy rate. As more Indian land was lost through allotment and forced patents, new acreage opened for white farmers, so some of the men were new arrivals to the area.

Tenancy is another factor that needs to be addressed when determining

the composition of the Farmers' Holiday. Activists Shover surveyed believed that it was a mix of "'about half and half' tenants and owners."¹⁴⁴ Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties all had tenancy rates over 50 percent in 1930.¹⁴⁵ Both Dixon and Dakota counties' tenancy rates increased only 1 percent from 1930 to 1935, while Thurston County's percentage of tenants climbed from 57 to 62.¹⁴⁶ There is little hard evidence that tenants played an important role in the Holiday Association here, but Thurston County's support of the Holiday seemed considerably stronger than that of Dixon and Dakota counties. Perhaps a higher tenancy rate did play a role. Thurston County home demonstration agent Helen Suchy claimed that "many of the white renters are transients and do not stay longer than one or two years on a farm."¹⁴⁷ She later expressed that every March "there is a general shake-up," with many tenants moving to other farms within the county, rather than away from Thurston County.¹⁴⁸ Ivan Schmedding's father, who farmed in Thurston County near Winnebago, participated in the Farmers' Holiday. He remembers a Sunday night in which a carload of other farmers came to take his father to picket the Combination Bridge in Sioux City. At the time, they were tenant farmers, but in 1934 the elder Schmedding purchased the farm on which Ivan now lives. Ivan thinks that most of the men in Thurston County who picketed with his father were renters.¹⁴⁹

The 1933 tenancy figures for Thurston County ranged from the reservation superintendent's eight hundred, to the county extension agent's estimate of nine hundred.¹⁵⁰ In 1930 the census placed the number of rented

farms at 704 compared to 1,234 total farms in the county.¹⁵¹ The number of Thurston County tenants increased from 556 in 1920 to 704 by 1930.¹⁵² County Extension Agent Winter used the word “perpetual” to describe the lease problem there.¹⁵³ He cited a high tenancy rate and poor economic conditions for putting tenants “in a state of mind to be easily reached by the radical farm agitator” in 1932.¹⁵⁴ Although he did not mention the Farmers’ Holiday Association by name, he was, of course, referring to it.

As the Great Depression squeezed both the patience and economic resources of American farmers, the FHA took root in the Midwest. County units were formed, and to accompany the withholding measure, picket lines were established to enforce it. A state organization was formed at Fremont in September 1932, and a list of demands was drafted. FHA participants in the three northeastern Nebraska counties were typically Midwestern-born, middle-aged men. Some of them were involved with county politics, and held offices such as county judge, county sheriff, and state legislator on both the Republican and Democratic tickets. Their organization did not solely concentrate on picketing, and undertook other activities away from the picket lines.

Chapter 2 Notes

1. For more on Long and Coughlin, and the relationship between Long, Coughlin, and Reno, see Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 233-37.
2. *Pender Republic*, 14 October 1932, 1.
3. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 16 November 1933, 1.
4. Roland A. White, *Milo Reno, Farmers Union Pioneer: The Story of a Man and a Movement* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 17. Agrarian politics were not foreign to the Reno family. Milo's parents were Greenback supporters and when voting age, Reno cast his ballots for the Union Labor and Populist parties.
5. John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion: The Farmers' Holiday Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 25.
6. *Ibid.*, 25.
7. *Ibid.*, 27.
8. For more on the Iowa "Cow War," see *Ibid.*, 28-33.
9. John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 35.
10. Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 226.
11. *Dixon County[,] Nebraska* (Dixon County Historical Society, 1982), 11.
12. Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 226.
13. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 23 December 1925, 5.
14. For the purposes of determining Farmers' Union membership percentages, the numbers have been taken from several issues of the *Nebraska Union Farmer*. The years tabulated include 1925, 1926, 1928, 1929, and 1930.
15. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 11 January 1933, 2. By 1945 numbers had slightly bounced back. Farmers' Union membership was 15 percent in Dixon County, 22 percent in Dakota County, and 2 percent in Thurston County. See *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 23 January 1946, 3. While Farmers' Union membership was calculated each year, the publication used census figures for the total number of farms, so those numbers remained static throughout each decade.

16. *Ibid.*, 13 September 1933, 5; 10 January 1934, 2.
17. *Ibid.*, 10 January 1934, 2.
18. John L. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, 1932," *Agricultural History* 39 (October 1965): 197.
19. *Sioux City Journal*, 4 May 1932, 4.
20. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, 1932," 198; John L. Shover, "Populism in the Nineteen-Thirties: The Battle for the AAA," *Agricultural History* 39 (January 1965): 18.
21. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, 1932," 198.
22. Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 72.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Sioux City Journal*, 11 August 1932, 1.
26. *Ibid.*, 12 August 1932, 4.
27. *Ibid.*, 13 August 1932, 8.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, 1932," 199.
30. *Sioux City Journal*, 20 August 1932, 1.
31. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 14 September 1932, 7. For more about the farm movement and the alleged international banking conspiracy, see Chapter 5.
32. *Sioux City Journal*, 17 August 1932, 6.
33. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 18 August 1932, 1.
34. *Ibid.*, 25 August 1932, 1.
35. *Winnebago Chieftain*, 26 August 1932, 1.
36. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 August 1932, 5.

37. *Pender Republic*, 26 August 1932, 1.
38. *Ibid.*, 2 September 1932, 1.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Walthill Times*, 25 August 1932, 1.
41. *Ibid.*, 6.
42. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 25 August 1932, 1.
43. *Ibid.*, 8 September 1932, 1.
44. *Norfolk Daily News*, 27 August 1932, 1.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, 6.
48. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 25 August 1932, 1.
49. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 August 1932, 5.
50. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 25 August 1932, 1.
51. *Ibid.*, 1 September 1932, 1; *Sioux City Journal*, 29 August 1932, 1.
52. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 1 September 1932, 1.
53. *Norfolk Daily News*, 29 August 1932, 1.
54. *Ibid.*, 8 September 1932, 1.
55. *Ibid.*, 1 September 1932; *Allen News*, 1 September 1932, 1. The *Norfolk Daily News* covered the incident on the front page of the September 1, 1932, edition. It reported the convoy was thirty-seven trucks strong, and a trucker from Plainview estimated the number of farmers on the picket lines to be from six hundred to seven hundred.
56. *Allen News*, 1 September 1932, 1. A short paragraph appeared in the *Allen News*: "According to word received here, one picket was shot and killed when he attempted to halt a Sioux City bound truck on Highway 77." This seems to be an unfounded rumor. If true, it would have generated more press attention. The

only confirmed picket fatality in the area was the accidental death of Frank Fletcher of Homer in 1933. See Chapter 4.

57. Ella Isom, interview with author, Allen, NE, 5 March 1998.

58. *Allen News*, 25 August 1932, 1.

59. *Sioux City Journal*, 24 August 1932, 6.

60. *Wakefield Republican*, 25 August 1932, 1.

61. *Sioux City Journal*, 27 August 1932, 1-B.

62. Mike Rewinkel, interview with author, Concord, NE, 6 March 1998.

63. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 1 September 1932, 1.

64. *Wakefield Republican*, 1 September 1932, 1.

65. *Norfolk Daily News*, 29 August 1932, 1.

66. *Wakefield Republican*, 1 September 1932, 1.

67. *Sioux City Journal*, 24 August 1932, 1.

68. *Ibid.*, 6.

69. *Ibid.*, 25 August 1932, 2.

70. *Walthill Times*, 1 September 1932, 1.

71. *Ibid.*, 25 August 1932, 6.

72. *Ibid.*, 1 September 1932, 6.

73. *Pender Republic*, 2 September 1932, 1.

74. *Walthill Times*, 1 September 1932, 1.

75. *Ibid.*, 1 September 1932, 1.

76. *Sioux City Journal*, 1 September 1932, 1.

77. *Ibid.*, 3 September 1932, 1.

78. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 8 September 1932, 1.

79. *Sioux City Journal*, 12 September 1932, 1.
80. Josephine Herbst, "Feet in the Grass Roots," *Scribner's* 93 (January 1933): 48.
81. *Fremont Evening Tribune*, 15 September 1932, 1.
82. *Nebraska Farmer*, 1 October 1932, 8.
83. Shover, "The Farmers' Holiday Association Strike, August 1932," 202.
84. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 25 January 1933, 2.
85. Edwin Farenholz, letter to author, 14 March 1998.
86. Ella Isom, interview with author, Allen, NE, 5 March 1998.
87. *Fremont Evening Tribune*, 16 September 1932, 1.
88. Parmenter was on the 1922 Nebraska gubernatorial ticket as a third party candidate. He was defeated by Charles Bryan. For more on Parmenter's gubernatorial bid, see James A. Stone, "Agrarian Ideology and the Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics with Special Reference to Northeast Nebraska, 1920-1933" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1960), 261.
89. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 22 September 1932, 1. Apart from the FHA's resolutions, it also agreed that dues be fixed at fifty cents per member.
90. *Fremont Evening Tribune*, 15 September 1932, 1, 9.
91. *Ibid.*, 1.
92. *Ibid.*, 16 September 1932, 1.
93. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 22 September 1932, 1.
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Nebraska Farmer*, 3 September 1932, 6. Samuel R. McKelvie, a Republican, served as Nebraska's governor from 1919 to 1923.
96. *Ibid.*, 1 October 1932, 4.
97. *Sioux City Journal*, 19 August 1932, 1.
98. *Ibid.*, 22 August 1932, 2.

99. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 25 August 1932, 1.
100. *Allen News*, 18 August 1932, 1.
101. *Walthill Times*, 1 September 1932, 1, 6.
102. *Ibid.*, 1.
103. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 14 September 1932, 3.
104. *Ibid.*
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ibid.*, 4.
107. *Ibid.*, 28 September 1932, 3.
108. *Ibid.*, 12 April 1933, 6.
109. Ella Isom, interview with author, Allen, NE, 5 March 1998.
110. Lois Asbury, interview with author, Wakefield, NE, 6 March 1998.
111. Ivan Schmedding, interview with author, Winnebago, NE, 6 March 1998.
112. Everett T. Winter, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1933," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 12 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Winter, County Agent's Report, 1933.
113. Mike Rewinkel, interview with author, Concord, NE, 6 March 1998.
114. See Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*; Rodney D. Karr, "The Farmers' Holiday Movement, Plymouth County, Iowa: 1932-1933" (Master's thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1980).
115. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 9.
116. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998. Constance is the daughter of J. F. Kriege.
117. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998; George Molstad, *Dakota County, Nebraska* (Dakota County Historical Society, 1982), 205.

118. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998.
119. *Ibid.*; Molstad, *Dakota County, Nebraska*, 205-06.
120. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 21 April 1932, 1.
121. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998.
122. *Ibid.*
123. John L. Shover, "The Farm Holiday Movement in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 43 (1962): 74.
124. *Ibid.*, 76.
125. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998.
126. *Ibid.*
127. *Ibid.*
128. *Pender, Nebraska: The First Hundred Years, 1885-1985* (Pender Centennial Book Committee, 1984), 221-22, 305.
129. *Nebraska Blue Book 1934* (Lincoln: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1934), 9; *Nebraska Blue Book 1936* (Lincoln: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1934), 259.
130. *Walthill: Golden Jubilee, 1906-1956* (Editing Committee of the Golden Jubilee of Walthill, Nebraska, 1956), 6, 36.
131. *Pender, Nebraska: The First Hundred Years, 1885-1985*, 221-22.
132. *The Nebraska Blue Book, 1924* (Lincoln: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1924), 206.
133. Mike Rewinkel, interview with author, Concord, NE, 6 March 1998.
134. Littrell was not the only Nebraska minister involved with the Farmers' Holiday. In his 1939 study, Edward Andrew Brandhorst found that many ministers opposed the Holiday, but one from Tilden (Madison County) and one from Dannebrog (Howard County) supported the movement. Reverend Moeller, of Dannebrog, once told a Holiday group at Columbus that he had been a

member since the day he was born--in 1885. Edward Andrew Brandhorst, "A Sociological Study of a Farm Movement" (Master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1939), 73-74.

135. Donald E. Littrell, letter to author, 7 April 1998.

136. *Ibid.*

137. Most of the information in this section was compiled from the 1920 enumerated census and various local county histories.

138. Stone, "Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics," 34, 43.

139. *Ibid.*, 34, 43; *A Century of Memories: The Allen Centennial History Book, 1891-1991* (1991), 38.

140. Stone, "Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics," 43.

141. *Ibid.*, 43.

142. Karr, "The Farmers' Holiday Movement, Plymouth County, Iowa: 1932-1933," 108. Karr suggests that the young age of FHA members in Plymouth County indicated that they were farmers who stood to lose the land they would inherit. Karr cites Frank Dileva's study which found the average age to be 42.5, and John Shover's questionnaire responses which averaged 43.5.

143. Molstad, *Dakota County, Nebraska*, 98.

144. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 9.

145. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Agriculture*, vol. 2, pt.1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1930), 1287. Hereafter cited as *Fifteenth Census, Agriculture*.

146. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1935), 328, 334.

147. Helen Suchy, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1933," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 6 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives).

148. Helen Suchy, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1935," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 13 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives).

149. Ivan Schmedding, interview with author, Winnebago, NE, 6 March 1998.
150. *Walthill Citizen*, 1 December 1933, 1; Winter, County Agent's Report, 1933, 10.
151. *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Agriculture, 1287.
152. Herman M. Staley, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1934," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 3 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives).
153. Winter, County Agent's Report, 1933, 13.
154. *Ibid.*, 10.

CHAPTER 3

AWAY FROM THE PICKET LINES

As the general elections of 1932 approached, condemnation of the Herbert Hoover administration mounted. An early November editorial in the *South Sioux City Eagle* blared "What Four Years Of Hoover Cost Dakota County Farmers." Relying on Nebraska Department of Agriculture figures, it reported that in four years Dakota County farmers had lost \$14,628,000, with a grain loss exceeding that of livestock by \$1 million.¹ A similar article appeared in the *Walthill Citizen*, claiming that Hoover cost Thurston County \$24 million during his tenure, including corn, wheat, oats, and all livestock.²

Traditionally Republican Nebraska broke with its past during the 1932 general election by voting Democratic across the slate. During the 1928 general election, the Cornhusker State voted 63 percent Republican, but in 1932 the Democrats received that same percentage.³ Elections in 1924 and 1928 demonstrate previous voting patterns in the three counties.

In 1924 Dixon County voted overwhelmingly for Calvin Coolidge, and Independent Robert LaFollette received far fewer votes than Democrat John W. Davis. George Norris garnered more than twice the votes of his competitor for a U.S. Senate seat.⁴ In 1928 Dixon County cast 2,966 votes for Hoover, while Al Smith tallied only 1,601.⁵ The Thurston County election results in 1924 varied from Dixon County. Democratic presidential candidate John Davis beat Coolidge, but by only thirty-four votes, and LaFollette received 26 percent of the

county's vote.⁶

In 1928 Thurston County leaned even farther toward the Democratic camp by giving Al Smith 54 percent of the presidential vote and Charles Bryan 58 percent in the gubernatorial race. It also clearly favored Edgar Howard over James Nichols by 2,013 to 1,064 for Congress.⁷ Some of Thurston County's Democratic strength came from the Indian population. In 1932 Thurston County voted Democratic across the board, and Edgar Howard, who had strong interests in agriculture and Indians, not surprisingly received 80 percent of the votes.⁸

Dakota County gave Coolidge a plurality of 432 over LaFollette; Davis followed him by 4 votes. Other counties in which LaFollette finished second, such as Pierce, Knox, and Stanton, were areas of neo-Populist strength. Dakota County was not a center of neo-Populism, so the vote may have been something of an aberration.⁹ George Norris won by a sizeable margin, and Edgar Howard prevailed by over two hundred votes.¹⁰ In 1928 Dakota County voters favored Smith by a small margin over Hoover, and continued the Democratic pattern by giving their votes to Bryan for governor.¹¹

When the 1932 election results were tallied, Dakota County showed a Democratic sweep, with Roosevelt over Hoover 3,044 to 863, Bryan in a tight race over Dwight Griswold, and Edgar Howard over H. Halderson, August Hohnke, and M. F. Hall.¹² Dixon County was fairly Democratic by 1932 and the election brought little change to local government. Of eighteen county voting

precincts, all but two were carried by Roosevelt. Some precincts which “had never in their history gone democratic” fell in line with the Roosevelt revolution.¹³

Dakota and Thurston counties did not have a long history of agrarian activism, though Dixon County had some Populist support in the 1890s. Most of Nebraska’s Populist strength appeared west of the 98th meridian on the semiarid Great Plains. In his work on Populism, Jeffrey Ostler grades the level of Populist support in the Cornhusker state. Dakota and Thurston counties ranked below 10 percent, and Dixon County fell into the 20 to 29.9 percent range.¹⁴ Although Edgar Howard carried these counties until 1934, they were not a region of great neo-Populist strength. The counties of northeastern Nebraska considered to be neo-Populist territory were the ones later influenced by the Madison County Plan Farmers’ Holiday: Madison, Stanton, Pierce, Knox, Antelope, and Boone.¹⁵ These neo-Populist counties were also an area which earlier had witnessed Nonpartisan League (NPL) activity.¹⁶

Throughout its lifespan, the Farmers’ Holiday Association (FHA) was constantly accused of being a Communist organization. American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) president Edward A. O’Neal believed that the FHA was “sponsored by a limited group of misguided farmers . . . associated [with] radical agitators.”¹⁷ He further stated that when protests were accompanied by violence, public sympathy for agriculture declined. Milo Reno countered O’Neal’s accusations by describing them as absurd remarks in a “red baiting enterprise,” which was to be expected from someone who had “never

undertaken a militant movement."¹⁸ During the unruly picketing of the second FHA strike in November 1933, the *South Sioux City Eagle* stated that some of the strike leaders "smell a whole lot like communists," and the Sioux City Milk Producers' Association head asserted that he did not believe farmers would "commit vandalism unless there were communists in their midsts [sic]."¹⁹

Although the Nebraska Holiday organizers accepted the Madison County Plan at Fremont in September 1932, according to Shover's estimation, the plan was not as radical as some believed and in fact it was "more reminiscent of Ignatius Donnelly than of Karl Marx."²⁰ In mid-September 1934, the second annual Nebraska Farmers' Holiday state convention was held in Walthill. The Nebraska organization passed a resolution condemning Communism and made it a major plank of the convention. It read:

We join with organized labor and other groups of society seeking to correct the faults and maintain the originality of our representative form of government and denounce communism as a foreign invasion of American principles which is seeking to overthrow our government. We demand that this invasion be met with adequate means of control.²¹

There was schism between the Madison County Plan Farmers' Holiday, under the leadership of Andrew Dahlsten, and the Reno Plan of the FHA, headed by Harry C. Parmenter, and the 1934 declaration demonstrated that the Holiday movement in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties was attached to the Reno camp.

Another group made inroads into tumultuous Holiday areas. The Modern

Seventy-Sixers, led by Lester P. Barlow, "sought to revitalize the free enterprise system by breaking, by force if necessary, the stranglehold of corporate capitalism."²² It was a small group, but key FHA leaders from northwestern Iowa supported Barlow. One of the major proponents of the Modern Seventy-Sixers in Nebraska was J. F. Kriege, president of the Dakota County Holiday Association. In November 1932, the Dakota County Farmers' Holiday sponsored a meeting at the South Sioux City high school gymnasium for the express purpose of forming a group of "Modern 76ers," which was characterized as a "nonpartisan organization of farmers, businessmen and professionals."²³ While there was no follow-up article detailing the results of the meeting, it is probable that some Nebraska FHA members joined.

At Norfolk during the waning days of 1932, seventy-five Farmers' Holiday members gathered to discuss resolutions they wanted the Nebraska legislature to adopt when it convened in a few weeks. The resolutions requested the repeal of the deficiency judgement law, suspension of forced collection of debts, reduction of interest on delinquent taxes, passage of the Frazier bill, repeal of the law providing for appointing the receivers of foreclosures, dropping the interest rate to 6 percent, reduction in salaries of all public officials by 50 percent, remonetization of silver and unrestricted issuance of currency, state issuance of scrip for payment of debts, national legislation affording "cost of production," and tax exemption of gasoline for agricultural purposes.²⁴

Delegates from the fifteen counties represented announced that they would

support-state FHA president Parmenter in his bid for the governorship in 1934.²⁵

Long-time animosity between the Farmers' Union and the American Farm Bureau Federation (Farm Bureau) became obvious when several Nebraska counties voted to deny appropriations to county agents. The Farmers' Union was an outspoken critic of the Farm Bureau from its inception, because the Farmers' Union considered it to be allied with the federal government, big business interests, and the state agricultural colleges. It was also the Farmers' Union's belief that the county agent system gave the Farm Bureau a distinct advantage in recruiting new members.²⁶ Part of the Farmers' Union rhetoric against the Farm Bureau revolved around the idea that it was spawned by the Chicago Board of Trade.²⁷

The Farm Bureau was a more conservative organization than the Farmers' Union, and it attempted to unite farmers in a superorganization built upon the foundation of the county agent system.²⁸ In November 1919, the American Farm Bureau Federation was formed at a Chicago meeting. From there the organizing of state farm bureaus began. County farm bureaus relied on federal and county funds as well as membership dues, while the national and state bureaus were financed strictly by the membership.²⁹ The AFBF became a hybrid organization that stood somewhere between a private organization and a government agency.³⁰ The county farm bureaus, AFBF, agricultural colleges, extension service, and U.S. Department of Agriculture became intertwined in a complex web. In these three northeastern Nebraska counties, the

interrelationships were blurred, and people often referred to the county extension office as the “farm bureau,” which was loosely related to the private organization known as the Farm Bureau.³¹

As the Great Depression squeezed county resources due to the lack of tax collections, voters were willing to slash what they viewed as unnecessary spending. With general elections approaching in the fall of 1932, the issue of continuing funding county agents became heated. What started as general criticism of continuing county funds to the extension service became a focus of the Farmers’ Holiday in Dakota and Thurston counties. It was a non issue in Dixon County, since it did not have an extension agent.

Dakota County’s debate over the farm bureau was sparked when a letter to the editor of the *South Sioux City Eagle*, signed by “An Overtaxed Farmer,” who admitted that he did see “some benefit” in farm bureau programs, but what, he begged, was the purpose of growing more grain when there was already a surplus? He summarized the frustration of many farmers when he noted that the bureau was a “direct expense of around six or eight thousand dollars a year in teaching us farmers to grow two blades of grain to grow where one grew before, as it were, and after we have grown it, what do we get for our product?”³² The letter’s author urged the people to do away with the office because of economic necessity, and he made it known that there was no personal animosity toward county extension agent Robin A. Spence.

One week later, a front-page editorial in the *South Sioux City Eagle*

proclaimed that all county expenditures needed to be cut. It also reiterated the points raised by "Overtaxed Farmer" concerning both the chance to cut county expenditures with "one stroke of the pen" and Agent Spence personally.³³ The editor considered the farm bureau office unnecessary and urged amending the law. He stated that the county "MAY not MUST, have this office, or leave it to a vote in the county."³⁴ In the June 2 issue of the *South Sioux City Eagle*, an even longer editorial focused solely on the issue of the farm bureau. The newspaper's figures estimated that the office cost Dakota County taxpayers over \$8,000 annually, and that Dakota County farmers had the power to continue or dispense with the bureau. County citizens were informed that to continue funding the office, 275 farmers had to sign a petition of support. If the minimum number of signatures was secured, the county commissioners were obligated to provide funds for the office.³⁵ Out of nearly 850 farmers in Dakota County, 626 eligible signers placed their names on the petition to continue appropriations, far exceeding the number required.³⁶

Extension Agent Spence concluded that the legally required number of farmers in the county had signed the petition in favor of retaining the county farm bureau, thus continuing the county's \$3,500 appropriation.³⁷ With such overwhelming support derived from petitions, the matter of farm bureau appropriations was not placed on the Dakota County ballot in 1932.

For those still fretting about county taxes supporting the farm bureau, Extension Agent Spence in early 1933 sent the *South Sioux City Eagle* the facts

of the matter. Spence vehemently defended his office, as if his own appropriation was appearing on the ballot, and he let the readers know that the office's new 1933 budget of \$2,890 was 20 percent lower than the previous year's budget. He stated that only about 3 percent of USDA appropriations went to pay county agents' salaries, that the federal extension cost only one-fourth of a cent of every federal tax dollar, and that the cost of the office had been "greatly exaggerated" in the local press.³⁸

In Thurston County, the issue grew to larger proportions, and the Farmers' Holiday Association helped deny the extension agent continued financial support. The Thurston County Farm Bureau, originally known as the Thurston County Farm Management Association, was organized in May 1913, with early financial support coming from local businessmen and farmers.³⁹ As with other independent county farm bureaus, it grew increasingly closer to the Nebraska Extension Service and the Farm Bureau. As in Dakota County, Thurston County taxpayers clamored to cut county expenditures, and with the farm revolt at its zenith, the farmers' ire turned toward the extension service. Further perpetuating the link between the extension agent and the Thurston County Farm Bureau was the fact that both were housed in the same Walthill office.⁴⁰

From the parlance used in the local press, it seemed that the farm bureau would simply be abolished from Thurston County, but actually the referendum was whether or not to continue providing county funds for the office. The farm

bureau issue had been placed on the Thurston County ballot during two previous elections, and in both instances the allotment of appropriations was upheld.⁴¹ This time was different, and the bureau met staunch opposition. Although the issue did not reach a climax until the fall, a taxpayers' league was formed in the spring with the express purpose of "knocking out the appropriation for the Farm Bureau."⁴² Extension Agent Winter noted in his annual report that the Farmers' Holiday "took up the fight against the Farm Bureau."⁴³ Between the two groups, public opinion shifted decidedly against the bureau.

In September 1932, the *Pender Republic* announced that the farm bureau question was to appear on the ballot in the November general election. As in Dakota County, petitions had to be circulated in order to put the issue to a taxpayer vote. Those opposing appropriations offered a petition that contained 711 signatures, while the pro-bureau petition had 638 signers. The minimum number of names required was 275; however, a number of the signatures on both petitions were duplicates, while other names belonged to unqualified voters.⁴⁴ Having two separate petitions in circulation created legal problems.

The petition filing deadline was September 1, and there were 163 alleged withdrawals of signatures by the month's end. After the petition was filed and closed, the legality of withdrawing the names on the anti-bureau petition was called into question. There was also a possibility that the issue would go to court. The *Walthill Times* noted the irony of entering litigation when the court costs, from taxpayers' pockets, would probably outweigh the cost of retaining the

farm bureau's appropriation. Such folly was attributed to a "mania for upheaval and discord."⁴⁵ This is perhaps a veiled reference to the activity of the Farmers' Holiday, which had recently ceased picketing.

A month prior to the election, the county commissioners voted two to one to place the issue on the ballot. As soon as the commissioners' decision was made public, the officers and directors of the farm bureau assembled to consider their options. After consulting with their attorneys, the farm bureau decided to go to court and appeal the decision of the commissioners. Such an appeal would not prevent the issue from being placed on the ballot, but if the court overturned the commissioners' decision, the election results would be considered void.⁴⁶

As election day grew nearer, local newspapers featured columns dedicated to the pros and cons of continuing farm bureau funds. D. A. McQuistan, Thurston County Farm Bureau secretary-treasurer, wrote the editor of the *Walthill Citizen* in support of the farm bureau. McQuistan acknowledged that farmers were for cutting taxes, but he believed that county support should be continued because the extension service's 4-H programs instilled leadership skills and character development in farm children. In an attempt to prove that the bureau benefitted farmers as well as their children, McQuistan cited the farm bureau's active pursuit of fair rent settlements between Indian landowners and white lessees, a interminable problem in Thurston County.⁴⁷

Those opposed to continuing the utilization of county funds for the

extension service were represented by Thurston County attorney Robert F. Fuhrman. Evidently Fuhrman had long crusaded to do away with farm bureau appropriations. He was once heard "uttering unsparing denunciation" in his "animosity against the farm bureau which he made an abortive effort to wipe out by similar method several years ago."⁴⁸ Fuhrman distilled the argument down to the factors of economic necessity and the bureau's support from its own fundraising programs. He argued that the bureau could continue without county money because it had alternative sources of funding, such as from the state and the USDA.⁴⁹

County Extension Agent Winter also offered his opinion concerning the farm bureau in the local press. He exclaimed that if cutting out the bureau's appropriation would cure the ills of the depression, he would gladly volunteer to be the "goat." Winter closed his argument by countering the assertion of Fuhrman and those who cried that the bureau was an excessive burden to county taxpayers by pointing out that the bureau received less than 1 percent of the county's tax money and the amount consisted of less than 3 percent of the county's general fund.⁵⁰

On election day, November 8, eleven of Thurston County's twelve precincts voted to discontinue funding the farm bureau. The only precinct in favor of continuing funding was the Omaha-Walthill precinct, where the farm bureau was located, by the slim margin of only three votes. The total vote amounted to 2,256 against further appropriations and 951 in favor.⁵¹ At the

same time, other Nebraska counties, Burt, Fillmore, Holt, Madison, Red Willow, Sarpy, Stanton, and Washington, also voted to do away with farm bureau appropriations.⁵²

In the following weeks, the farm bureau, fighting to keep its \$3,500, filed a petition in district court, claiming that placing the question on the ballot was illegal.⁵³ It offered no explanation as to why the vote was illegal. In March 1933, the farm bureau case was dismissed from district court by motion of the plaintiff.

The *Walthill Citizen* reported that

[t]his case was to test the right of the county board of commissioners to put the Farm Bureau question on the ballot, and was delayed last fall until after election. The question was put up to the voters and they voted to cut off the Farm Bureau county appropriation [*sic*], so the members of that organization decided to abide by the will of the people regardless of the right of the board in putting the question on the ballot.⁵⁴

Without the appropriations, the effects were felt, and county Farm Bureau membership declined over the next few years. Holiday Association opposition to the farm bureau was so strong that when Herman M. Staley took over as county extension agent in early 1934, paid Thurston County Farm Bureau memberships had dropped below ten.⁵⁵

At one of the largest meetings of the Thurston County FHA, in October 1933, it cited its many accomplishments, but was most proud of feeling that it was solely responsible for defeating farm bureau appropriations. Ambery Bates of Winnebago crowed that the "Holiday association had accomplished more in its little over a year's life than the farm bureau had accomplished in all the time it

has been in existence.”⁵⁶ Apart from crusading to deny county funds, the Thurston County FHA also had an indirect effect on the county extension service’s strength, which came in the form of farm women. Home demonstration agent Helen Suchy reported that because of the Farmers’ Holiday’s opposition to extension work, many women who had been valuable to home economics extension work were forced to drop out of the organization at their husbands’ behest.⁵⁷

As another way of cutting budgets, many counties urged officials to take salary cuts. The Thurston County FHA proposed that the salaries of county clerk, district court clerk, and county treasurer be reduced by \$1,200 per annum, and suggested that other officials accept cuts as well. A meeting of county officials resulted in their disregarding the FHA’s proposal. The farmers proclaimed that those officials who refused to accept reductions would not be reelected. Farmers also threatened not to pay taxes unless salaries were cut.⁵⁸

Another measure taken by the FHA was the halting of foreclosures. Although the plan was never condoned by the national organization, FHA members would gather where there were foreclosures. Stopping foreclosures became one of the platforms of the Madison County Plan adopted by the Nebraska Farmers’ Holiday Association at Fremont in September 1932. The FHA thwarted banks and insurance companies by bidding in increments of pennies and nickels at foreclosures. These were coined as “penny auctions” or “Sears and Roebuck” sales.⁵⁹

After the 1932 picketing, the FHA changed its emphasis to halting farm mortgage foreclosures. The rash of foreclosure stoppages occurred mostly in the latter part of 1932 and early 1933, after the withholding of products and picketing ended. Nebraska FHA assistant secretary F. C. Crocker issued a press dispatch on December 15, 1932, which declared that the Farmers' Holiday would place new emphasis on curbing farm foreclosures.⁶⁰ Harry Lux, of the Madison County FHA, reported that the Nebraska Farmers' Holiday Association's primary focus was the stopping of foreclosures and evictions, and that seven foreclosure sales had been thwarted in northeastern Nebraska during the fall of 1932.⁶¹ In October 1932, farmers from Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties gathered in Allen to hear Harry Parmenter discuss the farm situation. The group formulated a telegram that was to be sent to President Hoover. It encouraged compliance with the recent governors' conference recommendation to halt farm foreclosures.⁶² After the Roosevelt administration was sworn in, a committee representing the National Farmers' Holiday Association and the National Farmers' Union, accompanied by Senator Lynn Frazier of North Dakota, called upon Henry Morgenthau, head of the Farm Credit Administration (FCA), requesting that a moratorium be declared on foreclosures and evictions until farm prices rose to "cost of production" levels.⁶³

The halting of foreclosures was an extralegal activity. Coercion and intimidation were employed as methods of keeping non-Holiday people from bidding. According to Dixon County resident Mike Rewinkel, the Farmers'

Holiday members “let their whiskers grow.” This was a method of recognition that would be helpful at auctions where farmers from several counties gathered. Even if they did not know each other, they could tell who belonged to the Farmers’ Holiday by their beards. Once a sale was about to commence, Holiday members would split up and work their way through the crowd. Bumping people on the shoulders to get their attention, they would tell prospective bidders: “You’re not bidding today, we’re bidding today. You got that? Make sure you got that. You’re not bidding today, we’re bidding today.”⁶⁴

Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties seem to have had no penny auctions. There is, however, a sketchy tale of an auction in the northern portion of Dixon County. Before the sale, farmers were seen carrying a noose, supposedly intended for an unpopular lawyer connected with the event. Evidently the lawyer heard of the plan and never arrived at the sale.⁶⁵

On December 22, 1932, Farmers’ Holiday members led a protest of Dakota County taxpayers at the county courthouse in Dakota City. The protest concerned a sheriff’s sale involving the Metropolitan Insurance Company and Michael Hurley, in which \$9,000 was bid for the farm. The FHA formulated a petition to district judge Mark Ryan stating its opposition to evictions, foreclosures, and chattel auctions “for the present period of financial depression.”⁶⁶

At the opening session of the Eighth District Court in Ponca on January 23, 1933, six hundred farmers presented a formal request for mortgage relief.

The courtroom and corridors of the Dixon County courthouse were overflowing. Due to the sizeable crowd, Judge Ryan, of Pender, moved the session to the city park to announce his ruling.⁶⁷ The farmers had planned to ask for a ninety-day delay on foreclosures, but Ryan reportedly ordered a one-year moratorium on all foreclosures in the Eighth Judicial District, composed of Dixon, Dakota, Thurston, and Cedar counties.⁶⁸ All those who were foreclosed on were given another year beyond Nebraska's statute, which allowed a year to fourteen months to redeem their property. The judge's decision also allowed them to stay on the land provided they paid regular rent to the owner or mortgager.⁶⁹

After the favorable ruling, an impromptu Holiday Association meeting took place, and several leaders addressed the throng.⁷⁰ Resolutions were adopted by the FHA during the meeting; one demanded a salary reduction for county officials, and another called on county newspapers to refrain from publishing upcoming foreclosures in the legal notices.⁷¹

Apparently, reports in the *Pender Republic* and *Allen News* erred in their coverage of the court's decision, and to rectify the error, the *Cedar County News*, of Hartington, published a special announcement by Judge Ryan. He clarified that mortgage foreclosures in the Eighth Judicial District were to proceed normally, and because the state legislature had established mortgage foreclosure laws, the district court possessed no authority to overturn such measures. The change the court made granted a year to redeem the property after confirmation, rather than the mandated forty days. Ryan also stated that

the decision was not a capitulation to the demand of the farmers gathered at Ponca, but rather, it was formulated of his own volition two weeks prior to the opening of court.⁷² Perhaps the court's opinion had indeed been arrived at in previous weeks, but the strength the Farmers' Holiday Association exerted in the preceding fall cannot be discounted as a factor in his ruling.

Despite Judge Ryan's decision, it already was too late for some farmers. In February 1933, after Judge Ryan had adjourned the spring session of district court, the farm of Thomas J. Cullerton, cashier of the Jackson State Bank, went on the auction block. Cullerton's forty acres east of Ponca, near the Dixon-Dakota county line, was bid on for \$2,000, with the money going to the Nebraska Securities Corporation. A fact duly noted in the local press was that the Farmers' Holiday was not on hand to halt the sale, and the *South Sioux City Eagle* reported that the "sale went off quietly and there were no protests or spectators present."⁷³ The article closed by mourning Cullerton's move far from Nebraska and from farming by establishing residence in Chicago.

Another method to aid in stopping foreclosures was employed. The establishment of boards of conciliation was a recommendation endorsed by Governor Bryan. Dixon County organized its conciliation board in February 1933.⁷⁴ The conciliation boards put in place by Bryan were little more than empty political gestures. Having no real power, the boards could only make suggestions in hope that the parties would settle the matter on their own. Members of the state board included the state tax commissioner; Nebraska farm

organization leaders from the Farmer's Union, Farm Bureau, Grange, and Farmers' Holiday; the president of the Mortgage Bankers' Association; and the president of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce.⁷⁵ The first meeting of the state Conciliation Committee saw Parmenter withdraw his support on the grounds that he did not believe the group seriously wanted a moratorium in Nebraska.⁷⁶ No sooner had the Dixon County conciliation board been established than the FHA read a resolution to the Nebraska legislature condemning such boards.⁷⁷ In September 1933, the Dakota County FHA circulated a petition requiring a county bankruptcy conciliator with the authority to adjudicate a farmer's debts or grant an extension of payment.⁷⁸

Possibly the greatest single demonstration of Farmers' Holiday Association solidarity and strength in the Cornhusker State came on February 16, 1933, when an estimated four thousand farmers marched on the new capitol building.⁷⁹ The event's official name was the Nebraska Farmers' Relief Conference.⁸⁰ Surprisingly, the newspapers of Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties provided no coverage of the event, yet it is likely there were several carloads of farmers from those counties who trekked to the capital city.

Two weeks before the demonstration, headquarters had been established at a hotel room in Lincoln, and a special session of the state legislature agreed to admit the marchers into the chambers. Amid allegations of Communist infiltration, the farmers marched in orderly columns from the state fairgrounds to the capitol. Teeming over the capitol steps and crowding the legislative

chambers, farmers now had the chance to air their grievances. A list of demands read before the joint session included slashing state salaries in half, disbanding the state militia, and inflating the state's currency.⁸¹ The mortgage moratorium bill, already submitted to Governor Bryan as emergency legislation, was the most important, and feasible, of the demands. The protestors demanded the immediate passage of H. R. 10, which would eliminate deficiency judgements. After the demonstrators left Lincoln, Bryan introduced a new moratorium bill which was quickly ushered through the legislature, but a few weeks later it was declared unconstitutional.⁸² Gaining a moratorium on deficiency judgements was a moral victory for the Farmers' Holiday, but such legislation did little to alleviate other problems, and most important, it did not institute "cost of production" measures.

A few days following the march on Lincoln, Communist Party figure "Mother" Ella Reeve Bloor spoke to about three hundred farmers at the Racely-Rumsey Hall in Walthill. The *Pender Republic's* account of "Mother" Bloor's speech to the FHA was supplied by a schoolboy from Winnebago. "Mother" Bloor, the youngster reported, contradicted those who claimed the Holiday was growing weaker.⁸³ The *Walthill Citizen* reported that the meeting "demonstrated the split of the farmers and plainly sh[o]wed that they are ready to unite and take definite steps to help put the industry again upon a profitable basis."⁸⁴

Aside from stopping foreclosures, the Thurston County FHA had the added problem of delinquent rent payments by white renters to Indian landlords,

and the organization took an active role in alleviating the situation. It was a rare instance in which the FHA and the Farm Bureau had the same goal--to settle the matter. Due to a fairly dry year in 1931, the county extension agent claimed that both "crop and price failure" placed Thurston County tenants in a "sorry condition," leaving them unable to pay their rents. The Farm Bureau and Bureau of Indian Affairs made arrangements for an extension of payments.⁸⁵

In October 1932, a meeting to find a solution for the equitable payment of rents on Indian land was held at the Winnebago Agency. Present were C. H. Berry of Washington, D.C., Reservation Superintendent H. M. Tidwell, E. R. Hall, John Reeves, and A. L. Hess of the agency, along with County Extension Agent Winter. A consensus was reached that owner and lessee share the burden equally and settle the matter of delinquent rents through payment of installments over a number of years. Agent Winter suggested that the rents be collected in corn rather than money.⁸⁶ Winter pursued the grain settlement further by filing a brief with the Secretary of Interior in the fall of 1932. The report detailed the deplorable conditions of renters in Thurston County and requested that rents be arranged on a bushel basis, made retroactive to include 1932.⁸⁷

On February 1, 1933, officers of the Farm Bureau, FHA, and businessmen's organizations of Walthill and Winnebago convened at the Walthill Business Club to discuss the county lease problem.⁸⁸ The county commissioners believed that Indian owners and white renters could reach an equitable adjustment on a sharecrop basis.⁸⁹ From this meeting, a committee of

Thurston County men were chosen to go to Washington, D.C., to deliver the proposal to the Secretary of the Interior. The group consisted of E. T. Winter; E. W. Rossiter of Walthill, representing the banks of the county; J. W. Reilly of Rosalie, serving as the FHA delegate; and Paul Ashford of Winnebago, representing Thurston County businessmen.⁹⁰

The Thurston County delegates rendezvoused with Superintendent Tidwell, who was already in the nation's capital, and then met with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Secretary of the Interior, and several other Interior department officials.⁹¹ Winter resubmitted the report he had sent to the Interior Department earlier, which included the cancellation of back taxes and a grain settlement on rents instead of cash. The pleas of the Thurston County delegation stretched out the meeting for an extended period. Because of other scheduled engagements, several Interior officials were pressed for time. For the sake of brevity, it was agreed that the matter was well understood by all parties, and instructions were drawn up by the Interior Department. The following morning, the Thurston County delegation received a memorandum signed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and First Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Joseph M. Dixon.⁹² Upon returning to Thurston County, Reservation Superintendent Tidwell announced that all Omaha and Winnebago lands were to be leased on a cash or bushel-per-acre basis.⁹³ Following "Mother" Bloor's Walthill speech in February 1933, Winter and Reilly discussed their trip to Washington, during which a rental agreement was reached.⁹⁴ The *Walthill*

Times said of Reilly: "He has a faculty of presenting a matter in a way that is vivid, forceful, sound and sincere in the impression made. His testimony bolstered up effectively the representations of the other members of the delegation."⁹⁵ To further reduce the rent crisis, in late 1934 the Thurston County FHA passed a resolution declaring that rental preference of the county's farmland should be given to county residents.⁹⁶

Winter was astounded by the fact that the same men who had driven around the county circulating remonstrance petitions against the farm bureau the previous fall were now canvassing the county soliciting funds to pay for the committee's trip to Washington. He asserted that if the trip to Washington had occurred before the preceding fall's elections, the outcome of the vote on farm bureau appropriations would have been vastly different. Winter wholeheartedly believed that the new lease agreements did much to improve public sentiment about the farm bureau. The modification of approximately five hundred rent agreements took place in the county farm bureau office in Walthill, and in other parts of the county, bankers, notaries, and attorneys filed the new contracts.⁹⁷ (The Dakota County FHA adopted a motion that no attorney should be present when FHA committees arranged rent settlements between landowners and renters.)⁹⁸

At a Thurston County Farm Bureau meeting in October 1933, all were shocked when Winter announced his resignation to accept a position with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) as assistant agent for the district.

His new occupation allowed him to “combat the malicious falsehoods” circulated about the farm bureau in Thurston County.⁹⁹

Demonstrating its solidarity with the Farmers’ Holiday in other states, the Dakota County FHA, spearheaded by J. F. Kriege, passed a resolution condemning Iowa governor Clyde Herring’s declaration of martial law in April 1933. The Dakota County FHA used harsh language, proclaiming that “acts of violence against farm debtors under such military rule were acts of rank hypocrisy,” and that acts of “intimidation and terrorism” were to be held in contempt because they were “inhuman and undemocratic.”¹⁰⁰ Dakota County FHA president Kriege’s origin was Plymouth County, Iowa, and his home county being a hotbed of Holiday activity could explain why he was so vehement when the county came under martial law.

In an era before mass media, good roads, and extensive automobile travel, an organization such as the Farmers’ Holiday also served as a social outlet. While the men were on the picket lines and at penny auctions, they most certainly would have used lulls in the action to catch up with each other, share information, and joke. Apart from the impromptu socializing, the Farmers’ Holiday also sponsored events such as dances, picnics, and husking bees.

There is little information about dances and husking bees, but they did occur, even if infrequently. A Thurston County Farmers’ Holiday dance was held on October 29, 1932, and the men were instructed to wear overalls and the women house dresses. Anyone appearing at the dance otherwise was subject

to a fine.¹⁰¹ There was no explanation of why anyone not in the proper attire would be fined. Unfortunately the same newspaper that announced the event did not report on the dance in the following weeks. In November 1933, the Thurston County FHA held a husking bee at the farm of John Pallas, northeast of Thurston village. Pallas was injured in the picket line accident north of Dakota City in which Frank Fletcher was killed a few weeks earlier. Forty-six teams and seventy-two men husked sixty-five acres from morning until 3 P.M., and the wives were reported to have kept the hungry men furnished with hot meals.¹⁰²

Farmers' Holiday picnics for the northeastern portion of Nebraska were held in Walthill late in the summers of 1933 and 1934. Annual Farmers' Union picnics in the area were always well attended, and Dakota County's "Old Settlers' Picnic" was a tradition. Not only did a picnic sponsored by the FHA bring crowds to hear those lauding the merits of the Holiday, it also provided recreation and entertainment for rural Americans facing the dire days of the Great Depression.

Several thousand people were expected to attend the first Farmers' Holiday Tri-County picnic on August 22, 1933.¹⁰³ The *Walthill Citizen* anticipated fifteen hundred people and extended an invitation to all in the area. The Holiday Association and the town of Walthill wanted to "make the day one long to be remembered."¹⁰⁴ The picnic opened with a baseball game which pitted the Burt County FHA group against the Thurston County FHA club, and after lunch the Walthill band offered a concert, followed by addresses by Parmenter, Thurston

County president Simon Madison, J. W. Reilly, and others. After the speakers came footraces for children, and following supper was another band concert as well as a kittenball game, boxing matches, and the grand finale was a dance at the Legion Hall.¹⁰⁵

A light rain forced the featured speakers to stand at the microphone inside a small booth, with scarcely any headroom. Thurston County Attorney Fuhrman and former Sioux City mayor Wallace Short did not arrive to speak, but Reilly and Reverend Littrell addressed the crowd before Parmenter took his place behind the microphone. Reilly appealed for unity and loyalty among the Holiday movement, and he was said to be an "impassioned, forceful speaker . . . [that] never betrays into extravagant, flamboyant utterance of radicalism. He keeps his brain above his tongue."¹⁰⁶ With such speaking skills and affiliation with the FHA, it is not surprising that he was chosen to represent the district in the Nebraska legislature in 1934.

The picnic's sporting events began with a Model T race and a motorcycle race before footraces for children and adults began. Watching the footrace participants slip and slide on the muddy track was enjoyed immensely by the crowd. Other "athletic" events included a slipper-kicking contest, which "stimulated considerable hilarity," a husband-calling contest, which was rated "highly amusing," a tug-of-war, and a kittenball game between Burt County and Dakota County women.¹⁰⁷ A conservative estimate placed three thousand people at the event, despite threatening weather. The Farmers' Holiday

Association of Thurston County pronounced the picnic "one of, if not the best general picnic ever held in the county."¹⁰⁸

Again in 1934, Thurston County's FHA sponsored a picnic which coincided with the state Farmers' Holiday Association convention in Walthill. The program was similar to the previous year's picnic, with speakers, sporting events, music, and a dance. Speakers at the picnic were Parmenter and state Holiday secretary F. C. Crocker. Heavy rains the previous night and a chilly breeze kept many away, but it was still considered a success even if attendance "fell considerably short of last years."¹⁰⁹

Beyond the picket lines, Farmers' Holiday members forced political issues by voting for Roosevelt and marching on the state capitol asking for a much-needed moratorium. Concentration was placed on assuaging other situations detrimental to farming, instead of solely on agricultural prices. Much time and effort was devoted to opposing the county farm bureau, stopping foreclosures, and aiding the settlement of delinquent rents. The FHA also served a social function by sponsoring county picnics and husking bees for fellow farmers who could not harvest their corn. Yet as New Deal agricultural programs came to American farms and attempted to rectify a dreadful situation, the Farmers' Holiday Association watched its base erode.

Chapter 3 Notes

1. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 3 November 1932, 2.
2. *Walthill Citizen*, 3 November 1932, 1.
3. Edgar Eugene Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1934), 49.
4. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 13 November 1924, 6.
5. *Ibid.*, 8 November 1928, 1.
6. *Pender Republic*, 7 November 1924, 8.
7. *Ibid.*, 9 November 1928, 4; for more on the political career of Edgar Howard, see William E. Christensen, "The Legislative Career of Edgar Howard" (Master's thesis, University of Nebraska, 1955), and "Splendid Old Roman: The Political and Journalistic Career of Edgar Howard" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1966).
8. *Pender Republic*, 11 November 1932, 1.
9. James A. Stone, "Agrarian Ideology and the Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics with Special Reference to Northeast Nebraska, 1920-1933" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1960), 281.
10. *North Nebraska Eagle*, 6 November 1924, 1.
11. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 8 November 1928, 1.
12. *Ibid.*, 17 November 1932, 1.
13. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 10 November 1932, 1.
14. Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 24-25.
15. Stone, "Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics," 281.
16. *Ibid.*, 394. Madison County Holiday leader Anton O. Rosenberg was a Nonpartisan League (NPL) leader in northeastern Nebraska.
17. *Sioux City Journal*, 31 August 1932, 1.

18. *Ibid.*
19. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 16 November 1933, 1.
20. John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion: The Farmers' Holiday Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 70-71, 75.
21. *Pender Republic*, 21 September 1934, 1.
22. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 59. For more on Barlow and the Modern Seventy-Sixers, see *ibid.*, 60-65.
23. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 27 October 1932, 1.
24. The Frazier bill, sponsored by senator Lynn Frazier of North Dakota, called for a refinancing of farm mortgages by the federal government at 1.5 percent yearly payment on principal and a 1.5 percent yearly interest, see Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 35.
25. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 5 January 1933, 1.
26. Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 284.
27. Ivan Schmedding, interview with author, Winnebago, NE, 6 March 1998.
28. Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 255-56.
29. *Ibid.*, 283.
30. *Ibid.*
31. For this study, the AFBF will be capitalized as "Farm Bureau," while the county farm bureaus, vying for county appropriations, will not be capitalized.
32. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 12 May 1932, 5.
33. *Ibid.*, 19 May 1932, 1.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1932, 1.
36. Robin A. Spence, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Dakota County, State of Nebraska, 1932," Office of the Extension Agent, South Sioux City, Nebraska, 3 (Microfilm Collection, University of

Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Spence, County Agent's Report, 1932.

37. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 June 1932, 1.

38. *Ibid.*, 9 February 1933, 4.

39. *Walthill: Golden Jubilee, 1906-1956* (Editing Committee of the Golden Jubilee of Walthill, Nebraska, 1956), 83-84.

40. Ivan Schmedding, interview with author, Winnebago, NE, 6 March 1998.

41. *Pender Republic*, 23 September 1932, 1.

42. Everett T. Winter, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1932," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 5 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Winter, County Agent's Report, 1932. The January 6, 1933, edition of the *Pender Republic* dedicated only one sentence to the uniting of the Thurston County Farmers' Holiday Association and Taxpayers League; no names were given.

43. Winter, County Agent's Report, 1932, 5.

44. *Pender Republic*, 23 September 1932, 1.

45. *Walthill Times*, 29 September 1932, 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 6 October 1932, 1.

47. *Walthill Citizen*, 27 October 1932, 1.

48. *Walthill Times*, 29 September 1932, 1.

49. *Walthill Citizen*, 3 November 1932, 1; *Pender Republic*, 4 November 1932, 1.

50. *Pender Republic*, 2 November 1932, 1.

51. *Ibid.*, 11 November 1932, 1.

52. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 23 November 1932, 8.

53. *Pender Republic*, 25 November 1932, 1.

54. *Walthill Citizen*, 10 March 1933, 1.

55. Herman M. Staley, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1934," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 4 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives).

56. *Pender Republic*, 3 November 1933, 1.

57. Helen Suchy, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1933," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 7 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). There were no reports of farm women directly involved with the FHA in the three counties.

58. *Pender Republic*, 13 January 1933, 1.

59. John L. Shover, "The Penny-Auction Rebellion," *The American West* 2 (Fall 1965): 65. Although Shover makes a distinction between the two terms, most Farmers' Holiday scholars use them interchangeably.

60. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 28 December 1932, 1.

61. *Pender Republic*, 23 December 1932, 1.

62. *Allen News*, 6 October 1932, 1.

63. *Pender Republic*, 13 October 1933, 1; *Walthill Citizen*, 20 October 1933, 1.

64. Mike Rewinkel, interview with author, Concord, NE, 6 March 1998.

65. Lynn Holm, *Seedlings in a Shoebox: A History of Wakefield* (1981), 55.

66. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 22 December 1932, 1.

67. *Pender Republic*, 27 January 1933, 1.

68. *Ibid.*, 27 January 1933, 1; *Allen News*, 26 January 1933, 1.

69. *Allen News*, 26 January 1933, 1.

70. *Pender Republic*, 27 January 1933, 1.

71. *Norfolk Daily News*, 24 January 1933, 1.

72. *Cedar County News*, 26 January 1933, 1.

73. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 23 February 1933, 1.

74. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 16 February 1933, 1.
75. Edward Andrew Brandhorst, "A Sociological Study of a Farm Movement" (Master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1939), 63.
76. Stone, "Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics," 413.
77. *Ibid.*, 418.
78. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 14 September 1933, 1.
79. *Nebraska Farmer*, 4 March 1933, 7.
80. *Farmers' National Weekly*, 3 March 1933, 2.
81. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 84-85.
82. Stone, "Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics," 416, 420.
83. *Pender Republic*, 24 February 1933, 1. The report was supplied by Johnny Madison of Winnebago, probably the son of Thurston County FHA president Simon Madison.
84. *Walthill Citizen*, 24 February 1933, 1.
85. Everett T. Winter, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1933," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 10 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Winter, County Agent's Report, 1933.
86. *Walthill Citizen*, 20 October 1932, 1.
87. Winter, County Agent's Report, 1932, 23-27.
88. *Walthill Citizen*, 3 February 1933, 1.
89. *Pender Republic*, 3 February 1933, 1.
90. Winter, County Agent's Report, 1933, 12.
91. *Ibid.*
92. *Walthill Times*, 23 February 1933, 1.
93. *Pender Republic*, 17 February 1933, 1.

94. *Ibid.*, 24 February 1933, 1.
95. *Walthill Times*, 23 February 1933, 1.
96. *Pender Republic*, 9 November 1934, 1.
97. Winter, County Agent's Report, 1933, 12-13.
98. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 2 February 1933, 2.
99. *Walthill Citizen*, 20 October 1933, 1.
100. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 18 May 1933, 1.
101. *Walthill Citizen*, 13 October 1932, 1.
102. *Ibid.*, 24 November 1933, 1. The death of Frank Fletcher is examined in the following chapter.
103. *Pender Republic*, 11 August 1933, 1.
104. *Walthill Citizen*, 18 August 1933, 1.
105. *Ibid.* Kittenball is softball. Ivan Schmedding, interview with author, Winnebago, NE, 6 March 1998.
106. *Walthill Times*, 24 August 1933, 1.
107. *Ibid.*, 24 August 1933, 6.
108. *Ibid.*
109. *Ibid.*, 20 September 1934, 1.

CHAPTER 4

THE NEW DEAL ARRIVES

The Roosevelt administration began in March 1933, and those in the ranks of the Farmers' Holiday Association (FHA) were waiting impatiently for farm relief. A preview of Roosevelt's agricultural policy had come during the "Topeka Speech" on September 15, 1932. Roosevelt outlined six points of a voluntary plan for agricultural recovery. Among other things, it called for tariff benefits, no dumping of American surplus on foreign markets, and the use of existing government agencies to carry out the program.¹ The subsequent New Deal agricultural programs were "shaped by economic and fiscal constraints" and reflected the sense of extreme crisis that American farmers faced."²

Roosevelt chose Iowan Henry A. Wallace, son of former Secretary of Agriculture Henry H. Wallace and editor of *Wallace's Farmer*, as Secretary of Agriculture. Shortly after being named to the post, Wallace announced his seven-point plan for agricultural relief. It consisted of controlled inflation of currency; domestic allotment legislation; revision of agricultural tariffs; compulsory use of ethanol made from domestic grains; debt adjustment in case controlled inflation was ineffective; liberality with foreign creditors and resumption of European loans; lowering of taxes; and reduction of the rates of railroads, electricity, telephone, and other utilities.³ The primary aim of New Deal agricultural programs was to restore farm purchasing power and thus bring back prewar parity prices, and to place production controls on cotton, wheat,

dairy, and tobacco. Parity years were established as 1910-14, and the program was to be paid for by a processing tax levied on all products handled by the plan. During the parity years, the goods farmers produced were equal in price to the goods they consumed. From this, an economic scale to measure farm purchasing power was established, with the time of parity equaling 100 index points.⁴

A Farm Relief Bill was drafted and presented to Congress on March 16, 1933, and almost a week later, a radio address by the disgruntled John Simpson accused the bill of being an “economic legislative folly.”⁵ Simpson’s argument centered on the fact that the bill was adjusted to parity prices and not “cost of production.” Simpson had developed his own plan for “cost of production” prices, called the “Domestic Allotment” plan, not to be confused with the New Deal domestic allotment plan.⁶ He said the administration’s bill would “stink to high heaven,” and “[c]ompared with the inevitable results of this bill, the Farm Board and its policies will be popular.”⁷ But John Shover asserts that, compared to inflation and “cost of production,” “domestic allotment and controlled inflation were temperate and cautious reforms.”⁸ In retrospect, the New Deal farm programs do seem cautious, but at the time they were innovative.

On May 12, 1933, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was approved by the president. It established an organization to execute the program, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). Compliance was purely voluntary. Although several options were weighed by Congress, including “cost of

production,” the agreed-upon solution was a Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan. Voluntary contracts would make it possible for the AAA to control production in an attempt to raise and stabilize farm prices. A similar idea was first proposed in 1926 by Dr. W. J. Spillman of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and was impressive enough that Professor John D. Black of Harvard University, chief economist for the Federal Farm Board, became a proponent.⁹ Soon after the enactment of the AAA, confidence in the plan boosted farm purchasing power from 50 index points in March to 71 by July.¹⁰

The administration of AAA programs was to be carried out by the county extension service, which was already in place in most rural counties throughout the nation. The extension service’s affiliation with the USDA made it a natural choice. Use of the county agent system minimized further bureaucratization in the proliferating “alphabet soup” agencies of the New Deal. In Nebraska, however, the idea of utilizing county agents to carry out federal work met with varying reactions. Samuel McKelvie of the *Nebraska Farmer* sang the praises of the county extension service, noting that the cost of carrying out government programs would be much greater if not for the “extension departments in the state colleges of agriculture and the county agents.”¹¹

Conversely, the *Nebraska Union Farmer* opposed the extension system’s role in the AAA, believing another (unnecessary?) link between the federal government and the county agents would be forged through the alliance. The *Nebraska Union Farmer* regretted the utilization of county agents for farm relief

because the plan would “necessitate a county agent . . . and perhaps several assistants” in every Nebraska county.¹² Such a response from the Farmers’ Union is no surprise considering the county extension service’s relationship with state agricultural colleges and the Farm Bureau. Although no Farmers’ Holiday Association leaders attacked this kind of use of the extension service, the FHA most likely found it a slap in the face.

During the New Deal’s infancy, farmers in northeastern Nebraska proved eager to procure help from the government. They received relief from the wheat program, the emergency hog-buying, and eventually the corn-hog program, as well as various farm loans offered through other New Deal agencies such as the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

Although wheat was not an important crop to Dixon, Dakota, or Thurston counties, it was the first program in which farmers in the area could participate. Due to wheat’s status as a lesser crop in the region, many wheat growers would gain little because they either raised only five or six acres per year or had grown wheat in only one or two of the base years.¹³ Nonetheless, farmers who raised wheat in this corner of the state were interested in the program, which aimed to curtail wheat production by 20 percent. There were only fifty-two wheat farmers in Thurston County with an average output of about 26,000 bushels per year.¹⁴ The smallest of the three counties, Dakota, boasted 89 wheat producers, while there were only 20 in Dixon County. Because of the modest number of wheat growers in Dixon County, its reduction program was combined with Dakota

County's.¹⁵

A meeting in Walthill was called on August 14, 1933, to discuss an AAA wheat plan for Thurston County. Wheat farmers there were eligible for \$4,200 in relief, which was the county's maximum allotment.¹⁶ The *Walthill Citizen* reported in late November that sixty wheat contracts from the county had been mailed to Washington, and payments were expected to arrive in ten days.¹⁷ In Thurston County, 763 of 1,303 acres of wheat were under contracts by 24 farmers, while the remaining acreage belonged to 66 farmers who were growing a nominal amount of wheat.¹⁸ Ultimately that year, Nebraska wheat adjustment would bring \$5 million to the state.¹⁹

More than thirty thousand wheat applications had been filed in Lincoln by October 1933, and the Dixon and Dakota County Wheat Control Association registered fifty-three of them, while Thurston County claimed twenty-six.²⁰ By late 1933, Nebraska farmers were reaping the benefits of signing on with the AAA wheat reduction program. It had brought \$1,994.60 to Dakota County growers at the close of the year, while Dixon County wheat farmers received \$636.60.²¹ By February 1934, the three counties had received wheat allotment checks totaling \$1,634.80 for Dakota County, \$934 for Thurston County, and \$416.60 for Dixon County.²² Virtually all of those wishing to sign up had done so at first eligibility, as total new wheat contracts for the Dixon and Dakota Wheat Control Association grew by only three in 1934.²³

Many more area farmers took out corn loans, offered under the auspices

of the Commodity Credit Corporation, established in October 1933. The loan period began in November 1933 and was halted at midnight on April 30, 1934.²⁴ In response to the Farmers' Holiday Association strike in 1933, according to Van L. Perkins, the gross rate was raised from ten cents per bushel to forty-five cents per bushel.²⁵ The Holiday Association may have not had as many adherents as in 1932, but if it was able to exert enough pressure on the government so that farmers gained higher rates for corn loans, it still retained some political clout.

Many Nebraska farmers took advantage of the higher price of corn loans. The Cornhusker State constituted nearly 20 percent of the \$121.3 million of ear corn "put under seal" nationally from November 1933 to April 1934.²⁶ Dixon County had many more participants in the corn loan program than did the other two counties. Applications there were made daily and by mid-December 1933, seventy-five loans had been signed on quantities ranging from six hundred to four thousand bushels.²⁷ Two months later, corn loan applications snowballed in Dixon County. By then 313 farmers had applied for corn loans averaging \$506.43 per farm with a pledge of 1,125 bushels. Estimating fifteen hundred farmers in Dixon County at the time, only 21 percent had taken advantage of the loans, but that was almost 10 percent above the state average.²⁸

Furthering the availability of loans was the Farm Credit Act (FCA), which spurred the formation of a seven-county credit association in areas which were bastions of Farmers' Holiday strength. On February 27, 1934, a credit association was established that tied the farmers of the Iowa counties of

Crawford, Monona, Woodbury, and Plymouth to the farmers of Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties, in the Sioux City Production Credit Association. It was a means of financing short-term agricultural loans made possible through the Farm Credit Act of 1933.²⁹

The Emergency Farm Loan Act, enacted on May 12, 1933, brought \$14,453,000 for 6,746 loans in the region. Peter Kautz, secretary-treasurer of the Homer National Farm Loan Association, was quoted as saying: "In practically every case, these loans are second mortgages following federal land bank first loans."³⁰ It was reported that the land bank records showed 2,696 cases where farmers sought help from the FCA, and of those, 2,272 had been approved, with 22 pending and 402 denied.³¹

A major concern of farmers in northeastern Nebraska, and in the Corn Belt in general, was what to do with the hogs that were bringing nominal market prices. The hog crisis was growing more serious by the day. One reason hog prices had plummeted was overproduction due to depressed corn prices. The grain was inexpensive, abundant, and readily available to those wishing to feed it to livestock. In an effort to mitigate the situation, the *Nebraska Farmer* suggested that farmers breed only their best hogs while selling the rest.³² This tip was given before New Deal agricultural programs were available to alleviate the hog surplus. How many actually heeded the advice is impossible to tell.

In order to deal with the crisis, the government initiated an emergency hog-buying program, scheduled to operate from August 15, 1933, through

October 1, 1933. Within that period, the government sought to buy four million pigs ranging from 25 to 100 pounds at a graduated rate of \$6 to \$9 per hundredweight, plus a \$4 bonus on all farrow hogs and a processing tax on any exceeding 235 pounds.³³ The emergency hog-buying program was well received by farmers in northeastern Nebraska, but before a corn-hog reduction plan could be put in motion, farmers turned to other agencies for economic relief.

At the same time the emergency hog-buying program was in operation, an effective corn-hog program was formulated through the recommendations of the National Corn-Hog Producers' Committee and the USDA. On July 10, 1933, the Nebraska Farmers' Union passed a resolution in favor of sending delegates to the upcoming Corn-Hog meeting in Des Moines on July 18. The resolution was a reaction to the knowledge that hog prices had fallen far behind cattle and mutton prices.³⁴ A graduated price that discriminated against heavy hogs, including a processing tax of \$2 per hundredweight on all live hogs beginning November 1, 1933 was recommended by the Corn-Hog Committee.³⁵ The implemented corn-hog plan was based on the principles that corn acreage be reduced by 20 percent and hog numbers be decreased by 25 percent.³⁶

All farmers who decreased their corn acreage by 20 percent or more were to be paid a benefit of \$1 per hundredweight on hogs weighing below two hundred pounds between November 1, 1933, and June 1, 1934.³⁷ The processing tax was \$2 per hundredweight.³⁸ Hog benefits were to be paid in small amounts throughout the marketing year. It was further recommended that

funds for the corn benefit payments be derived from the processing tax, and if necessary, from any other funds which were available to the Secretary of Agriculture.³⁹ Beginning on November 5, for a two-year period, the processing tax on hogs would gradually increase from an initial rate of 50 cents to \$2 per hundredweight on February 1, 1934.⁴⁰

The program had the potential to exert a marked effect on Nebraska agriculture. At the time, the state ranked second in the nation in the number of hogs marketed, third in hog value, and second in corn acreage. If a farmer specialized in either corn or hogs, he was eligible to participate in the program for the commodity he produced; however, there were exceptions to this arrangement. A farmer specializing in hogs was not obligated to reduce his corn acreage if it had been less than ten acres during the base period of 1931 through 1933, and corn growers were not required to reduce the number of hogs, provided the average was less than three sows during the base period of 1932 and 1933.⁴¹

Those who signed up for the program were required to form a production control committee which would administer the plan throughout the county, with the cost of administration to be deducted from the corn-hog benefit payments on a pro-rata basis.⁴² The *Nebraska Farmer* predicted that the corn-hog program would bring \$40 million to Nebraska.⁴³ Farmers in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were eager to obtain information on the corn-hog reduction programs, but before informational and organizational meetings could be formed, a second

farm strike was called.

In 1933 Milo Reno, anticipating that the extent of New Deal farm relief would fall short of his expectations, called for a meeting of the FHA in Des Moines on March 12. For the purpose of organizing another withholding action, a dispatch by Reno stated that American farmers would not "go through another year such as 1932 without a real showdown. The time has come for determined action on the part of the farmers."⁴⁴ But in order to give the AAA programs a chance to aid agriculture, a strike was indefinitely postponed. By the fall of 1933, however, Reno concluded that New Deal agricultural policies were inadequate, and he called another strike. At one o'clock in the afternoon of November 2, 1933, an official notice was issued by the Farmers' Holiday Association that cream and poultry should not to be shipped because highways were being picketed.⁴⁵ The Dixon County FHA met in Ponca, and county president Gus Keil told the 150 attending that the new strike's objective was to force the adoption of NRA-like codes for agriculture, which would fix agricultural prices above "cost of production."⁴⁶

In August 1933, area businesses began complying with the Blue Eagle of the National Recovery Administration (NRA).⁴⁷ The NRA had barely been established when it began to attract criticism from farmers. In September 1933, a meeting of over one hundred Holiday members convened in Homer and sent a petition to Roosevelt, referring to the NRA the "New Racketeering Association" and asserting that farm relief measures had not gone far enough to restore farm

prosperity.⁴⁸ Considerable antipathy toward the NRA was created because rural Nebraskans were paying higher prices for products consumed, while farm prices continued to fall.⁴⁹ According to the *Nebraska Farmer*, “discontent flared up . . . in the form of a marketing strike by the Holiday Association,” and Governor Bryan and other Midwestern governors declared that the NRA had failed to help agriculture. It was agreed that the “seat of trouble . . . is the failure of the administration to advance farm prices proportionate to those of other commodities or faster, leaving the farmer at a greater disadvantage than ever in purchasing power.”⁵⁰

In 1933 the picketing was more controversial, eventful, and tragic than in 1932. Northeastern Nebraska pickets focused on South Sioux City, and farmers lined Highways 20 and 77 as well as Ninth Street.⁵¹ The only Dakota County road not picketed was the “river road,” which paralleled Highway 77 one-half mile to the east between South Sioux City and Dakota City, and that created an opportunity for farmers to sneak products over the river and into Iowa.⁵² Once again, South Sioux City was the focus of picketing, but pickets were numerous enough this time that they effectively halted the shipment of all farm products from Ponca. Several trucks were turned back at Ponca on the first day of the strike and no further attempts to run the blockade were reported within the next week.⁵³ During the picketing of 1933, the Dixon County Farmers’ Holiday initiated a council of defense, with the express purpose of issuing permits to farmers that would allow them to pass through picket lines to market. The permit

was to let those “who are forced, by circumstances, to sell some of their products,” but no definite criteria were set forth in the local newspaper.⁵⁴

The Nebraska ranks reportedly had learned a valuable lesson from the 1932 strike, and they attempted to employ a new method of picketing. This time they stationed a small group of sentinels along roadsides, and sent others to serve as “watchers,” who would phone ahead to warn of approaching trucks. The arrangement allowed all the farmers in the vicinity to rush to the picket line and stop vehicles.⁵⁵ Early in the strike, acts of violence were recorded. One occurred when an angry picket hurled a club through the windshield of a car.⁵⁶ Even respected citizens were not immune from being stopped and subsequently acted upon violently.

Dr. Lewis Goodsell, veterinarian from Homer, and his son, Tony, “mixed it” with the pickets on the evening of November 7 on their way from Homer to South Sioux City. A log was thrown across the road to make them stop. One of the automobile’s headlights was knocked out, and when Tony left the car to move the log from the roadway, several farmers closed in and began calling the Goodsells obscene names. At this point, Dr. Goodsell “landed his right [fist] on the picket’s chin.”⁵⁷ The pickets then assailed the pair with clubs. After being beaten, the Goodsells were finally allowed to pass. Dr. Goodsell was well known in the area and personally knew virtually every Dakota County farmer. He related his story to the *South Sioux City Eagle*, reporting that he recognized only three Dakota County men in the crowd.⁵⁸ That day’s *Sioux City Journal*

published photos of Dakota County Holiday members with ropes and logs. One picketer held aloft a baseball bat for the camera, although the caption read that no disorder took place on the Nebraska side of the bridge during the strike.⁵⁹

Tragedy struck on the evening of November 5, when twenty-two-year-old Frank Fletcher, of Homer, was killed while on picket duty on Highway 77. The incident began when pickets stopped a truck belonging to the Fremont Union Transfer Company, and several men walked to the rear of the truck to inspect it for livestock. A speeding automobile, transporting Henry Martens and Harry Jackson, both of Emerson, crashed into the rear of the truck, pinning the men against it.⁶⁰ Pickets said they had attempted to stop Jackson's vehicle before the accident, but the driver failed to heed their signaling. It was reported that Fletcher was "hurled to the top of the automobile by the impact" and killed almost instantly.⁶¹ For three years, Fletcher had been a hired hand on a farm southwest of Homer.⁶²

Five other men were injured in the incident, four of them residents of Thurston County. Three of the men's injuries were serious enough to warrant admission to St. Vincent's Hospital in Sioux City. Fifty-eight-year-old William Wingett, of Winnebago, suffered serious injuries. His back was fractured, and one knee and several ribs were broken, and in addition he suffered numerous cuts and bruises. John Pallas, forty-two, of Thurston village, suffered a broken leg, a possible skull fracture, and several cuts. Twenty-two-year-old Jerry Fillipi, of Walthill, sustained a broken leg with accompanying cuts and bruises.⁶³

William Critz, forty-three-year-old farmer from Homer, was slightly injured, as was Anton Masonka, of Macy.⁶⁴

When the car crashed into the truck, Martens and Jackson immediately jumped from the vehicle and ran into a cornfield, where they were found by South Sioux City chief of police George Sheets and Dakota County special deputy Richard Hart. When discovered, Martens and Jackson were both bleeding and were taken to a South Sioux City hospital.⁶⁵ After being released from Purcell Hospital, they were taken into custody by sheriff George Sanford, then transported to a Sioux City jail to prevent FHA vigilante justice upon the duo.⁶⁶ Martens and Jackson were acquitted by the coroner's jury in Dakota City that investigated Fletcher's death. After the jury's decision, the *South Sioux City Eagle* published a photograph of the ragged pair, showing Martens's head replete with bandages.⁶⁷

Pickets at South Sioux City affected farmers shipping products to Sioux City from farther west in Nebraska. The *Walthill Citizen* reprinted an article regarding the pickets around Sioux City from the *Pierce Call*. It was the *Call's* opinion that "the entire movement is a joke from the farmers' point of view."⁶⁸ A Pierce farmer had been stopped by pickets on his way to Sioux City, and on the way home he stopped to question the pickets, discovering that they were not local men. At a meeting of the Thurston County FHA, the newspaper article was brought to the group's attention. The *Citizen* reported:

The members of the organization brand this story as a lie, and defy

the Pierce county man to verify the statements contained in the item. The farmers do not regard such stories as helpful to their cause and are caustic in their denunciation of the author of such a falsehood.⁶⁹

When the farm strike broke out anew in November 1933, the *South Sioux City Eagle* had taken a decidedly negative turn of opinion from 1932, by calling into question the character of those picketing. It asked readers:

To be honest with yourself, how many men on the picket lines in Dakota county can you name who have added one iota to the advancement or upbuilding of Dakota county or the community in which they reside? How many offices of trust have they been called upon to fill by their neighbors or the community? How much support do they give to educational and religious advancement? Are they active members of any church or fraternal order, which stand for true Americanism, and teach morality, temperance, law observance, brotherly love, home lovers, etc? Are they men who are the sinew and bone of the country? Are they men who you would go to [to] secure advice on any proposition?⁷⁰

The article concluded that many citizens were cognizant of farm conditions and were sympathetic, but pointed out that farmers needed to recognize that they were not the only ones suffering from the effects of the depression. After Fletcher's death and the injuries to the other men, public sentiment in Dakota County had turned against the Holiday.

The renewed outbreak of picketing decreased Sioux City hog receipts by 10 percent, but few pickets lined the roads in the late autumn chill. Part of the reason the strike had so few adherents was that its timing could not have been worse. November is the height of the corn harvest in Nebraska, and the farmers who did muster the energy to strike lacked both the time and motivation to stand

along roadsides. Acts of violence and sabotage increased, and “covert acts of sabotage [were] carried out under the cover of cold darkness,” including the burning of a railroad bridge in Dakota County.⁷¹ Shover notes: “The last active support Milo Reno received was from the insubordinate element within the Holiday movement that he had never been able to control.”⁷²

A familiar ally of the Farmers' Holiday from the previous fall, the Sioux City Milk Producers' Association, complained that the strike was costing its members \$2,000 per day, and it voted, by a substantial margin, not to support current Holiday activity. Mayor Hayes of Sioux City, who in 1932 perceived the FHA as spreading like a prairie fire out of control, bemoaned the fact that his city was the only market being picketed, and urged Governor Herring to summon the militia.⁷³

Farmers' Holiday picketing ended when the strike was called off during the Farmer's Union Convention on November 21 and 22 in Omaha. The already widening rift in the Farmers' Union, caused by differing opinions over the FHA, grew even wider. Lorena Hickok, of the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA), came to Omaha for the convention. She reported on the event to her superior, FERA director Harry L. Hopkins, and also to her personal confidant, Eleanor Roosevelt. Hickok spoke with Nebraska Farmers' Union president H. G. Keeney, and she learned that a great number of Farmers' Union members were not in accord with the Reno plan, and many favored price-fixing and inflation.⁷⁴

Hickok was scathingly critical of Reno and Simpson, with Reno being the target of her harshest criticism. She referred to him as a “racketeer,” as well as a

“cheap little organizer.”⁷⁵ Hickok did not stop there, however. She went on to infer that he was a drunkard, writing to Hopkins that Reno could probably come up with “some new ideas--if he stays sober. The last time they had a confab here, he passed out in the meeting, and they had to carry him out.”⁷⁶ Keeney promised Hickok that he would introduce her to Reno. After hearing Reno speak for a few minutes, she walked out of the convention without having met him. Hickok reported to Mrs. Roosevelt that if she had met Reno, “I’d feel tempted to slap him in the face.”⁷⁷

Hickok believed that the smartest tactic for the Holiday Association would be to call off the strike because it was accomplishing little and “[n]obody seems to believe in it much.”⁷⁸ Reno claimed that “not even God Almighty” could call off the strike until farmers received justice.⁷⁹ Despite such rhetoric, Reno soon ended the strike. Hickok believed the strike was fatally weakened by the arrival of “wheat allotments checks, the corn-hog program, corn loans, and so on [which] are creating fairly good feeling toward Washington.”⁸⁰ Although Farmers’ Holiday and Farmers’ Union leaders, and even Governor Bryan, fired verbal volleys at the federal government, Hickok reported that anti-Wallace sentiment was higher in the Dakotas than in Nebraska. She attributed this to the presence of two major Democratic papers in Nebraska, the *Lincoln Star* and the *Omaha World-Herald*.⁸¹

By December 1933, Greth Dunn had been named Dixon County corn-hog agent. An agent had to be named because no extension work had been carried

out in the county since 1918.⁸² Dunn's first step was to organize a county committee, which in turn chose three men to serve on precinct committees and help the county committee set up meetings at schoolhouses and other sites for reduction plan sign-up.⁸³ Enthusiasm for the new program was evident at a general information session in January 1934. Seven hundred farmers packed the Ponca high school gymnasium eager for details concerning the corn-hog reduction programs, and one hundred others were turned away because the building had reached maximum capacity. Following the informational meeting, the program's county officers were elected. One man from each of the five districts into which the county was divided was chosen to serve on the committee.⁸⁴ The extent of participation in the corn and hog reduction plan in Dixon County in 1934 is revealed in the fact that the county reached its outlined AAA goals, and benefit payments were projected at an incredible \$476,070.09.⁸⁵

In early 1934, corn-hog information was being disseminated throughout Dakota County, and Agent Spence expected upward of three hundred participants. All of those wishing to be committeemen were told that they must be able to present the facts at community meetings and assist Spence in establishing policies and setting up sessions to sign contracts. Three men in each precinct were to serve as the local corn-hog committee.⁸⁶

A temporary corn-hog committee for Dakota County was established by the end of January, and a permanent corn-hog control association was formed in March 1934.⁸⁷ At the time, 89 percent of Dakota County corn acreage was

included in the corn-hog program.⁸⁸ In Dakota County, 653 farmers signed corn-hog contracts, a 90 percent participation rate, and benefits were projected to be \$294,918.⁸⁹ As a result, Dakota County corn was reduced by 24 percent and hog numbers fell by 10,644.⁹⁰ Yet in 1935, only 45 percent of Dakota County farmers voted to continue the program. They believed that New Deal programs were helping get them through the immediate economic pinch, and they wished to continue the program for the next year, but voted decidedly against a long-term corn-hog program.⁹¹

Anticipation of the program in Thurston County ran just as high as in Dixon and Dakota counties. Contracts were available to Thurston County corn-hog farmers during the first week of December 1933, and farmers from all parts of the county repeatedly called the extension agent's office expressing interest.⁹² The first county wide corn-hog meeting was held in Walthill in January 1934, and in the following weeks, meetings were held in other precincts for the express purpose of explaining the program. Yet extension agent Herman Staley reported considerable opposition to the corn-hog program from the Farmers' Holiday Association in Winnebago, Omaha, and Dawes precincts.⁹³

After three weeks, 320 preliminary contracts had been signed in Thurston County.⁹⁴ Permanent county directors were elected in March 1934.⁹⁵ Both corn and hog reduction participation for Thurston County in 1934 hovered around 25 percent, and although final compliance with the hog program was not fully tabulated, Staley projected the reduction to be approximately 40 percent. Of the

1,054 contracts, there were 61 cases of noncompliance, almost half of which occurred because of a common misunderstanding within the contract.⁹⁶ In October 1934, the Thurston County Corn-Hog Production Control Association monitored the corn-hog referendum for the following year. Despite a small margin, the decision favored continuing the program, although an estimated 43 percent of Thurston County farmers abstained from voting.⁹⁷ It was assumed that most would participate in 1935 as well, and County Extension Agent Staley sensed that delays would not be as serious as in 1934 because the "Farm Holiday situation was quiet"⁹⁸

Of the state's 87,896 preliminary corn-hog contracts, Dakota County accounted for 664, Dixon County 1,171, and Thurston County 1,031.⁹⁹ Dakota County was supposedly the first county in Nebraska to send its corn-hog contracts to Washington and the second county to distribute checks amounting to \$10,120.60 to 52 farmers, a sum representing one-half their total corn payments and 40 percent of their hog payments.¹⁰⁰ Another source states that Thurston was the first county to send its contracts, fourteen of them, to the nation's capital. By June 14, Dixon and Dakota counties reported that contracts had been cut to fit their quotas.¹⁰¹ In August, corn-hog checks in Dakota County totaled \$40,000, which was the first installment for two hundred contracts. Total payments to Dakota County farmers were expected to be \$300,000, with an average payment of over \$400.¹⁰²

The temptation of a government check lured Holiday participants. Local

newspapers printed the names of all men serving on county corn-hog committees, and later listed all farmers who signed corn-hog contracts. In Dixon County, no FHA members served on the county corn-hog committee, but several precinct leaders signed reduction contracts. They were Ross Polly, C. W. Dave, Oscar Brown, Walter Grosc, John Ellis, and J. C. Boeshart.¹⁰³ Thurston County Holiday treasurer W. E. Allbaugh served as a director on the permanent county corn-hog committee, while A. F. Maslonka and J. M. Hightree were elected to oversee contracts in Anderson precinct.¹⁰⁴ FHA leaders who signed corn-hog contracts were Chris Herringfield, William James, W. E. Allbaugh, John Girardot, C. W. Rutledge, Fritz Krause, and F. L. Beaudette.¹⁰⁵

Acceptance of the corn-hog program by Holiday leaders in Dakota County is more evident than in the other two counties. M. R. Boler, the St. John's precinct Holiday representative, and Theodore Rohde, Holiday leader from Emerson precinct, both served on the temporary corn-hog committee.¹⁰⁶ Rohde later served on the county's corn-hog board of directors and as precinct chairman. Other Dakota County Holiday members on the permanent corn-hog committee were Dan Rush of Jackson precinct and Henry Wilke of Emerson precinct.¹⁰⁷ Wilke and Rohde had both been Emerson precinct leaders in the Farmers' Holiday. Other Dakota County FHA leaders joining the program were Elmer Blessing, Roy Graham, Mike Logue, John Harty Jr., Edward Polly, Chris Miller, and Sam Knox.¹⁰⁸

Despite Holiday members signing reduction contracts, one of Thurston

County's Flourney precinct leaders, William Gesch, refused to participate. The *Farm Holiday News* reported: "Gesch says he is no corn-hog program farmer and no lover of Wallace and he was therefore free to list corn on 45 acres of his 80 acres of oats and this corn is now coming along nicely."¹⁰⁹ Gesch was one of the few who maintained his militancy after the introduction of the reduction program. Another Thurston County Holiday leader signed a reduction contract, but chose not to comply, according to County Agent Staley, simply because he was a FHA leader, and reported that he did so because "non-compliance [sic] was an attack on the Farm Holiday."¹¹⁰

With plow-ups and emergency hog and cattle slaughtering being part of New Deal agricultural programs, criticism was levied against these actions, which some viewed as immoral. Detractors viewed them as direct defiance of Christian principles. Referring to emergency livestock buying and plow-ups, John Simpson declared during a radio address in late 1933: "As a believing Christian, I am fearful that the Lord of Hosts will not smile on this program of destruction."¹¹¹ In mid-1934, during one of the most severe droughts in American history, *Nebraska Farmer* editor Samuel McKelvie dedicated the front page to a column titled "God, or Nature." Wallace's referral to those who blamed the AAA programs for stirring the wrath of God as "grotesque" was addressed by McKelvie. He stated: "In ye olden days it would have been criminal to destroy food or the fibre for clothing . . . [and the] people of our father's time would have expected the wrath of God to be visited upon them forthwith had they done such

a thing.” The editorial closed with McKelvie telling the readership:

Call it what you will--God or Nature--mere man has not found a way to make it rain, or stop the winds, or abate the sunshine, or control the farrowings of a sow, or immediately replace cotton once it has been plowed under, or do any one of the things that would be necessary in a government-controlled farm economy. That is where the planners fall short in their reckoning. And they do not help their cause by ridiculing those whose impulses react to these fundamental facts.¹¹²

The conflict in these circumstances was that often the same farmers who saw AAA programs as un-Christian and wasteful had no qualms with overproducing corn, which was so worthless it was burned for winter fuel, or willingly dumping milk along a roadside. Doubtless, some farmers genuinely felt that New Deal programs defied Christian precepts, but at the same time many adhered to farm relief because it placed much-needed cash in their pockets.

After the strike of 1933, chinks in the Farmers' Holiday's armor were revealed to be gaping holes. The lack of leadership and a sound plan of action continued to plague the organization on all levels. The implementation of New Deal programs and subsequent infusions of cash extinguished the burning rage of American farmers. Even if many farmers did not wholly agree with the policies of Roosevelt and Wallace, they were at least willing to give the administration time to prove itself. A problem as large and pressing as agricultural prices could not be resolved overnight. *Time* magazine credited the demise of the Holiday movement to AAA checks “descending on the land in a gentle, pervasive rain, damping the prairie fire of the farmers' anger.”¹¹³ This statement rang true for

northeastern Nebraska. Thurston County's home demonstration agent Helen

Suchy proclaimed:

The Farmers' Holiday Association had a strong following in the county. In general the attitude of a great many of the farmers was anything but friendly to the Farm Bureau and Extension Service. . . . However, with the introduction of the New Deal in Agriculture a change in the farmer's attitude toward Extension work is gradually taking place.¹¹⁴

The crippled Holiday movement hobbled along after the introduction of New Deal agricultural programs. In 1934 the Nebraska Farmers' Holiday Convention was held at Walthill in conjunction with the Thurston County FHA annual picnic. Stewart Amusement Hall was the site of the convention. The morning session consisted of the perfunctory acts of calling the meeting to order and approving minutes, followed by a round table discussion of resolutions until the noon recess. After the break, resolutions were approved for passage. The eleven demands approved were typical Holiday Association fare, asking for an extension on mortgage moratoriums, a cut in the salaries of public officials, gasoline tax exemption for agriculture, "cost of production" prices, and the remonetization of silver. New demands were for the passage of the original Frazier-Lemke bill, the immediate payment of soldier compensation, and a relatively lengthy denouncement of Communism. Thurston County's J. W. Reilly, who was absent during the election of state officers, was voted vice-president. Reilly, when informed of the election results, protested fiercely but acquiesced after numerous and repeated pleas to accept the office. Harry C. Parmenter

retained his position as president and F. C. Crocker was elected secretary. Dues were set at \$2.00 per annum, with \$1.50 going to the national organization, which included a subscription to *Farm Holiday News*, and the remaining 50 cents to be split between the state and county organizations.¹¹⁵

The Thurston County group seemed to linger longer than its counterparts in Dixon and Dakota counties. Yet the Thurston County Holiday did little apart from passing resolutions. Possibly inspired by the recent meeting in Walthill, it passed two resolutions in early 1935. In January it approved a resolution supporting an alcohol-gasoline blend for fuel.¹¹⁶ Then in February, it outspokenly criticized a proposed child labor amendment to the Nebraska constitution. Over one hundred members met in Walthill to draft the resolution and send copies to Senator Neumann and Representative Reilly. The resolution, printed in its entirety in the *Pender Republic*, stressed the “reasonable engagement of our growing youth in some useful occupation” which cultivated their minds and bodies as well as kept them from idleness, an “easy doorstep to immorality, vicious conduct, and even crime”¹¹⁷ Beyond this there is little mention of the Holiday in the county.

After Roosevelt’s programs were implemented, the mid-term elections suggested some discontent with New Deal policies. The 1934 election results for Dakota County were not as overwhelmingly Democratic as in 1932. The *South Sioux City Eagle* let readers know that other traditionally Republican areas of the country went Democratic and endorsed the New Deal, but in Dakota

County “‘intelligent’ voters . . . seem perfectly satisfied with the Old Deal.”¹¹⁸

Dixon County was a political grab bag in the 1934 election, not voting strictly along party lines.¹¹⁹ Thurston County voted Democratic almost across the board. Democrats carried major offices, with the exceptions being Republican J. W. Reilly’s victory in the 23d District’s legislative race and Karl Stefan’s edge over Edgar Howard in the Congressional race.¹²⁰ The Stefan-Howard contest was the most significant of 1934. Howard, from Columbus, had represented Nebraska’s Third District since 1922 as a neo-Populist Democrat. He was chairman of the House Indian Affairs Committee and sponsored the significant Wheeler-Howard bill, also known as the Indian Reorganization Act, which deeply affected Thurston County. Yet Stefan, of Norfolk, defeated Howard in all three counties. Stefan won in Dakota County by 158 votes, Thurston County by 321 votes, and Dixon County by an incredible 1,088 votes.¹²¹

Two years later, in 1936, Roosevelt carried all three counties. His win over Kansas governor Alf Landon was substantial in Dakota and Thurston counties, but the race was closer in Dixon County, with an 11 percent margin over Landon.¹²² William Lemke, running for president on Father Coughlin’s Union Party ticket, received 5 percent of the presidential vote in Thurston County and 6 percent in Dakota County. These two counties voted equally Republican and Democrat in the 1936 general elections, while Thurston County went almost completely Democratic, with the exception of Stefan’s victory. All three counties voted convincingly for George Norris as Senator, who ran as an Independent.¹²³

After the 1940 general elections, the *South Sioux City Eagle* proclaimed: "Nebraska Goes Republican By Huge Majority." Dakota County was not a Republican sweep. It gave a small plurality to Roosevelt, and Democratic Senatorial candidate Roy Cochran won the county, while Republicans Dwight Griswold and Karl Stefan carried the county in the gubernatorial and congressional races, respectively.¹²⁴ In 1940 Dixon County reversed its Democratic trend in the presidential race by giving 3,014 votes to Wendell Willkie and only 1,897 to FDR, but the county was the only one of the three to support Willkie. Stefan and Griswold were also favored by Dixon County voters that year.¹²⁵ Thurston County continued its Democratic stance, although the Roosevelt-Willkie vote was close. Farm bureau funding again appeared on Thurston County ballots in 1940, and those in favor carried the motion by 1,714 to 1,075.¹²⁶

As Nebraska slowly returned to its traditional political fold, the Farmers' Holiday Association, an organization which stirred agrarian emotions both pro and con, faded into memory. New Deal programs slaked the thirst for income. Farmers in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties joined the AAA programs and made use of government loans. Although the FHA did manage to wage another strike in 1933, it was highly ineffective and quickly disintegrated into chaos. The strike's failure was the proverbial straw that broke the organization's back. As the impotent group marched on into 1934, it was certain the organization's heyday in northeastern Nebraska had passed.

Chapter 4 Notes

1. Francis W. Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil, 1930-1936* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 85.
2. David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 207.
3. *Nebraska Farmer*, 18 March 1933, 5.
4. Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 190.
5. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 12 April 1933, 7.
6. James C. Milligan and L. David Norris, "Organizing Wide-awake Farmers: John A. Simpson and the Oklahoma Farmers' Union," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 74 (Winter 1996-97): 373-74. Part of Simpson's rage could have stemmed from the fact that in conversation with Roosevelt, FDR paid lip service to "cost of production," but being a consummate politician, he never really endorsed such a program. Rumors also abounded that Simpson would be named Secretary of Agriculture, and he expected to occupy the office, which went instead to Henry A. Wallace. Because he did not receive the appointment and Roosevelt did not advance his plan, Simpson became "livid." *Ibid.*, 379.
7. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 12 April 1933, 7.
8. John L. Shover, "Populism in the Nineteen-Thirties: The Battle for the AAA," *Agricultural History* 39 (January 1965): 24.
9. *Nebraska Farmer*, 29 October 1932, 7.
10. Van L. Perkins, "The AAA and the Politics of Agriculture: Agricultural Policy Formulation in the Fall of 1933," *Agricultural History* 39 (October 1965): 221.
11. *Nebraska Farmer*, 30 September 1933, 4.
12. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 12 April 1933, 11.
13. Robin A. Spence, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Dakota County, State of Nebraska, 1933," Office of the Extension Agent, South Sioux City, Nebraska, 36 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Spence, County Agent's Report, 1933.
14. *Pender Republic*, 21 July 1933, 1.

15. Spence, County Agent's Report, 1933, 36.
16. *Pender Republic*, 11 August 1933, 12.
17. *Walthill Citizen*, 24 November 1933, 1.
18. Herman M. Staley, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1934," Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 38 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Staley, County Agent's Report, 1934.
19. *Nebraska Farmer*, 3 February 1934, 27.
20. *Pender Republic*, 6 October 1933, 1.
21. Spence, County Agent's Report, 1933, 63.
22. *Walthill Times*, 22 February 1934, 1.
23. Robin A. Spence, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Dakota County, State of Nebraska, 1934," Office of the Extension Agent, South Sioux City, Nebraska, 60 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Spence, County Agent's Report, 1934.
24. *Nebraska Farmer*, 12 May 1934, 34.
25. Perkins, "The AAA and the Politics of Agriculture," 228.
26. *Nebraska Farmer*, 12 May 1934, 34.
27. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 14 December 1933, 1.
28. *Ibid.*, 1 February 1934, 1.
29. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 8 March 1934, 3.
30. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1934, 1.
31. *Ibid.*, 20 December 1934, 1.
32. *Nebraska Farmer*, 12 November 1932, 5.
33. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 23 August 1933, 5.
34. *Ibid.*, 26 July 1933, 5.

35. *Nebraska Farmer*, 14 October 1933, 18.
36. *Ibid.*, 25 November 1933, 8.
37. *Ibid.*, 14 October 1933, 18.
38. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 11 October 1933, 5.
39. *Nebraska Farmer*, 14 October 1933, 18.
40. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 25 October 1933, 5.
41. *Nebraska Farmer*, 25 November 1933, 8.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 3 February 1934, 27.
44. *Pender Republic*, 3 March 1933, 1.
45. *Ibid.*, 3 November 1933, 1.
46. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 9 November 1933, 1.
47. *Pender Republic*, 11 August 1933, 1; *Allen News* 3 August 1933, 1. The Blue Eagle was a symbol of the NRA, and businesses abiding by NRA standards usually displayed the emblem in their establishments' windows. As a reaction to talk of NRA-like codes for agriculture, one farmer designed a logo with a Green Eagle clutching a pitchfork. See Lowell Keith Dyson, "The Farm Holiday Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1968), 237.
48. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 14 September 1933, 1.
49. Perkins, "The AAA and the Politics of Agriculture," 222.
50. *Nebraska Farmer*, 28 October 1933, 4.
51. *Sioux City Journal*, 4 November 1933, 1.
52. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 16 November 1933, 1.
53. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 9 November 1933, 1.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Sioux City Journal*, 4 November 1933, 6.

56. *Ibid.*, 4 November 1933, 1.
57. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 November 1933, 1.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Sioux City Journal*, 7 November 1933, 7.
60. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 November 1933, 1. The *Walthill Citizen* (November 10, 1933) and the *Farm Holiday News* (May 15, 1934) list the name as "Martens," but several other sources spell it differently. The *Pender Republic* (November 10, 1934) lists it as "Mertens"; the *South Sioux City Eagle* spells it "Merten."
61. *Pender Republic*, 10 November 1933, 1; *Walthill Citizen*, 10 November 1933, 1.
62. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 November 1933, 1. Fletcher was born in Sioux City and lived near Nacora until age six, when the family moved to the Homer area. He suffered serious head injuries after being hurled two hundred yards by a "cyclone" in late 1928. The funeral took place at the Homer Methodist church.
63. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 November 1933, 1. Pallas's hospital stay lasted two months and the Thurston County Holiday Association held a large husking bee for him. His story took a twist when he sued First American Insurance Company of Lincoln, Nebraska, in Dakota County court. The insurance company refused to pay because he was supposedly in violation of the law by picketing. See the *Farm Holiday News*, 15 May 1934, 1.
64. *Pender Republic*, 10 November 1933, 1; *Walthill Citizen*, 10 November 1933, 1.
65. *Pender Republic*, 10 November 1933, 1.
66. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 November 1933, 1.
67. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1933, 1.
68. *Walthill Citizen*, 24 November 1933, 1.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 9 September 1933, 1.
71. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 163. The railroad bridge burning is probably the one referred to by Reverend Donald Littrell in his April 1998 correspondence

with the author.

72. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 163.

73. *Ibid.*, 162-64.

74. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, eds., *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 102.

75. *Ibid.*, 97, 104.

76. *Ibid.*, 98.

77. *Ibid.*, 104.

78. *Ibid.*, 97.

79. *Nebraska Farmer*, 9 December 1933, 6.

80. Lowitt and Beasley, *One Third of a Nation*, 98.

81. *Ibid.*, 100.

82. *Dixon County[,] Nebraska* (Dixon County Historical Society, 1982), 12.

83. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 28 December 1933, 1.

84. *Ibid.*, 11 January 1934, 1.

85. Greth Dunn, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Dixon County, State of Nebraska, 1934," Office of the Extension Agent, Ponca, Nebraska, 34 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives). Hereafter cited as Dunn, County Agent's Report, 1934.

86. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 4 January 1934, 1.

87. *Ibid.*, 25 January 1934, 1; 22 March 1934, 1.

88. *Ibid.*, 22 March 1934, 1.

89. Spence, County Agent's Report, 1934, 2.

90. *Ibid.*, 60.

91. *Ibid.*, 57.

92. *Walthill Citizen*, 24 November 1933, 1.
93. Staley, County Agent's Report, 1934, 41.
94. *Walthill Times*, 22 February 1934, 1.
95. Staley, County Agent's Report, 1934, 41-42.
96. *Ibid.*, 43.
97. *Ibid.*, 44.
98. *Ibid.*, 49.
99. *Ibid.*, 28 April 1934, 28.
100. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 19 July 1934, 1.
101. *Nebraska Farmer*, 23 June 1934, 22.
102. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 2 August 1934, 1.
103. *Allen News*, 12 April 1934, 3; *Dixon Journal*, 12 April 1934, 4; *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 22 March 1934, 1; 12 April 1934, 3-4; *Wakefield Republican*, 12 April 1934, 2. Not all precincts for each county were located, so there could possibly be more FHA members who were not listed.
104. Staley, County Agent's Report, 1934, 42; *Pender Republic*, 23 March 1934, 1. Although Staley's report lists Allbaugh as a county corn-hog director, the *Pender Republic* does not. It is uncertain if A. F. Maslonka and J. M. Hightree were Holiday members, but other evidence suggests that they were. A. F. Maslonka is likely to be "Anton Masonka," of Macy (Anderson precinct), who was injured while picketing in 1933. See note 66 in this chapter. J. M. Hightree is most likely "Mel Hightree," an Anderson precinct FHA committeeman.
105. *Pender Republic*, 20 April 1934, 5-6; *Walthill Citizen*, 20 April 1934, 4. "Chris Herringfield" is probably Chris Herringfeldt, a Perry precinct FHA committee member.
106. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 25 January 1934, 1.
107. *Ibid.*, 22 March 1934, 1
108. *Ibid.*, 12 April 1934, supplement.
109. *Farm Holiday News*, 15 June 1934, 3.

110. Staley, County Agent's Report, 1934, 49.
111. *Nebraska Union Farmer*, 8 November 1933, 6.
112. *Nebraska Farmer*, 18 August 1934, 1.
113. As quoted in Perkins, "The AAA and the Politics of Agriculture," 228.
114. Helen Suchy, "Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Thurston County, State of Nebraska, 1935." Office of the Extension Agent, Walthill, Nebraska, 1 (Microfilm Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Archives).
115. *Walthill Times*, 20 September 1934, 1.
116. *Pender Republic*, 1 February 1935, 1.
117. *Ibid.*, 15 February 1935, 1.
118. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 8 November 1934, 1.
119. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 8 November 1934, 1.
120. *Pender Republic*, 9 November 1934, 10.
121. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 8 November 1934, 1; *Pender Republic*, 9 November 1934, 10; *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 8 November 1934, 1.
122. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 5 November 1936, 1.
123. *Pender Republic*, 6 November 1936, 6; *South Sioux City Eagle*, 5 November 1936, 1.
124. *South Sioux City Eagle*, 7 November 1940, 1.
125. *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 7 November 1940, 1.
126. *Pender Times*, 8 November 1940, 1.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Farmers' Holiday came from the same wellspring as other agrarian organizations such as the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange), the Farmers Alliance, the People's Party (Populists), and the Nonpartisan League (NPL). Farmers are at the mercy of conditions they cannot control, such as the weather or the economy. In desperate times, farmers would attempt to exert political pressure, whether calling for government-regulated railroad rates, state hail insurance, or guaranteed "cost of production" prices.

Now that the actions of the Farmers' Holiday have been examined, its attitude toward economic crisis needs to be analyzed within the context of the Jeffersonian agrarian myth. In *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter puts forth the thesis that agrarianism has two sides, a "soft" side and a "hard" side, which gave the American farmer a "dual character."¹ One method of gaining greater understanding of agrarian revolt, according to Hofstadter, is to determine which part of the dual personality is most evident. His contention is that Populist rhetoric was derived from the soft side, while most farm organizations since the fall of the Populists have represented the hard side of agrarianism, focusing on "agricultural improvement, business methods, and pressure politics."²

The soft side of agriculture sprang from the Jeffersonian agrarian myth of the yeoman farmer as the moral and economic backbone of the republic. The hard side of agriculture recognized the harsh economic realities of farming,

which admitted that farmers, like any other businessmen, were taking risks and were at the mercy of fluctuating economic cycles. Hofstadter asserts that unlike business, “the bathos of the agrarian rhetoric pointed in a different direction: broad political goals, ideological mass politics, third parties, the conquest of the ‘money power,’ [and] the united action of all labor, rural and urban.”³ When times were consistently hard for farmers, they reverted to the agrarian myth and assumed the role of the “injured little yeoman” being exploited by international bankers, railroad companies, middlemen, and politicians.⁴ Although Hofstadter focuses on the Populists, the same can be said of the Farmers’ Holiday, in which

the farmer is not a speculating businessman, victimized by the risk economy of which he is a part, but rather a wounded yeoman, preyed upon by those who are alien to the life of folkish virtue. A villain was needed, marked with the unmistakable stigmata of the villains of melodrama, and the more remote he was from the familiar scene, the more plausibly his villainies could be exaggerated.⁵

One familiar farm nemesis was the supposed international banking conspiracy, which Farmers’ Holiday members often cited as a presence harmful to agriculture. In the well-known photograph of the farmers’ march on the state capitol in Lincoln in 1933, there are numerous banners demanding fair wages and an end to evictions. One of the placards to the rear of the group has a rattlesnake on it. The slogan beneath the snake’s image is obscured by the huddled men, but the top can clearly be seen: THE JEW SYSTEM OF BANKING[–]YEARS OF APPARENT PROSPERITY.⁶ Without being so overtly anti-Semitic, Dakota County’s J. F. Kriege wrote to Roosevelt, blaming the farm

crisis on “ruthless, unscrupulous, unchristian middlemen” and “present-day money lenders.”⁷ To counter the “money system” and relieve the farm crisis, currency inflation was promoted by the FHA, and it was loosely tied into broad political goals. At the governors’ conference held at Sioux City in September 1932, Milo Reno, representing the FHA, put forth a four-point program, with one point calling for “a special session of Congress to enact the Frazier inflationary farm credit bill.”⁸ The action mirrored the Populist request for free coinage of silver, which is one indication of being on the soft side of agrarianism.

The Farmers’ Holiday ultimately failed, but the organization’s accomplishments should not be overlooked. In general, it attempted to organize farmers for the purpose of doing something about the deepening economic hardship. By 1932 American farmers had suffered lower returns on their products, decreased purchasing power, increased delinquent taxes, and farm foreclosures. The Holiday aimed to alleviate these maladies by pushing for legislation ensuring “cost of production” prices, by withholding products from market, by picketing major agricultural markets, and by thwarting foreclosures with penny auctions and moratoriums.

On a more local level, the FHAs of Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were extremely active during the height of the crisis, from summer 1932 to spring 1933. Their *modus operandi* varied from the parent organization, which can be said of nearly every county Holiday group, but because of their own history and geography, they varied from each other as well. Dakota County was the prime

area of picketing due to the convergence of several major highways at South Sioux City. Dixon County's organization offered cash to farmers willing to kill their hogs to keep them off the market. Due to the presence of the Omaha and Winnebago Indian reservations, the Thurston County FHA wrestled legal problems with which the Dakota and Dixon County Farmers' Holiday Associations did not have to contend.

The three northeastern Nebraska counties possessed many similarities which affected their Holiday efforts. Geographically, they are near Sioux City, the locus of much Holiday activity. All three have similar climate and topography which affect the kinds of agricultural products raised, those being hay, oats, alfalfa, and wheat, with corn and hogs predominating. They comprised three of four counties in the Eighth Judicial District, an important factor when considering how mortgages were handled. There was also no reported FHA interference with foreclosure sales in any of the three counties.

Another similarity among them may have been that none were centers of agrarian insurgency earlier. Kim Nielsen's research in Douglas County, Minnesota, found that although the Holiday Association had no real ties to the Farmers' Union, it was linked to the Farmer-Labor Association and had a history of NPL activity.⁹ Populism had not been particularly strong in the northeastern corner of Nebraska, and Dixon County was the only of the three to have had any substantial Populist sympathy. Dixon and Dakota counties did have a fair amount of Farmers' Union support, but that was not the case in Thurston

County.

Thurston County deviates from the other two counties because of its history. The Thurston County Farmers' Holiday Association was more active in settling delinquent rents than Dixon and Dakota County FHAs, even though tenancy rates for all three counties were similar. Thurston County's rent problem centered on leased land of the Indian reservations. Because hundreds of white tenants owed rent to Indian landlords, the landowners were hurt economically. In conjunction with the Reservation Superintendent and Farm Bureau, the Thurston County FHA sent a delegate to meet with Interior Department officials in Washington, D.C., seeking a rent settlement equitable for both landlords and lessees.

The Thurston County Holiday also had a hand in voting down farm bureau county appropriations. In Dakota County, the issue also stirred passions, but a sufficient number of farmers signed a petition to continue county funding. The situation was fraught with legal complications in Thurston County, but the issue did appear on the ballot, much to the farm bureau's chagrin. Although the Holiday erroneously took all of the credit for the vote's outcome, the denial of funds to the farm bureau did have a decidedly negative effect on extension service activities.

The participants in the Farmers' Holiday in extreme northeastern Nebraska were not ordinarily prone to radicalism, although they were often labeled as "radicals." The leadership of the Holiday Association was farm-

based, although there were a few exceptions. Many members were respected citizens, including a Methodist minister. Most precinct leaders and county officers in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were found to be middle-aged men who had resided in the county for at least over a decade, and some of them, like J. F. Kriege, carried heavy mortgages.¹⁰ Politically, no one party dominated the FHA's strength in the region. Those who served as Holiday Association officers, and often ran for public office as well, were found to be a mix of both Democrats and Republicans. The farmers' desperation often manifested itself in the form of violence, an unfortunate side effect of picketing. These counties were no exception, but unlike Shover's and Karr's findings in Iowa, members of the Holiday in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties were not arrested for incidents linked to their activism. Violence and intimidation utilized by the FHA was reported in the local press and did much to mar public opinion of the organization.

The demise of the Farmer's Holiday Association is not as simple as it appears on the surface. Of course, the availability of New Deal agricultural programs cannot be underestimated, but there was no single contributing factor. A myriad of problems plagued the organization from its inception. Saying the Holiday Association "failed" is harsh because while it did indirectly accomplish desired goals, it fell short in other areas. Specific aspects of the FHA agenda such as the "cost of production" plan, and other Holiday planks, such as inflation, were not implemented through legislation. In Nebraska farmers gained

a moratorium on deficiency judgements. Although specific Holiday aims were not part of New Deal agricultural programs, the attention generated by the group was a factor in federal agricultural relief. The withholding measures of the farm strike, pioneered by the Farmers' Holiday, inspired the National Farmers' Organization (NFO) to employ the same tactics in the early 1960s.¹¹

The seeds of destruction were in the Holiday from its beginning. Ivan Schmedding believes that New Deal agricultural programs were, in part, a direct result of the Farmers' Holiday.¹² Constance Kriege Fouts also cites factors such as farmers' livelihoods depending on cream and egg checks, which only complicated the situation of withholding enough products to actually cause a price rise. She believes that AAA programs certainly aided farmers, but it took World War II to pull American farmers out of the depression.¹³ Catherine McNicol Stock contends that the proposed method of dealing with the farm crisis was "a mixture of old and new," and "when radical farmers signed on for the . . . [AAA] in 1933, they were not surrendering to modernism but forging a compromise between themselves and their reformers."¹⁴ Many of those who led the Holiday as county officers and precinct leaders in Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties signed corn-hog reduction contracts, despite their organization's demand for "cost of production" prices.

The Holiday was ineffective at organizing farmers, but in its defense, it did attempt to bring cohesion to the most notoriously independent group of people in the nation. J. F. Kriege's daughter attributes the Farmers' Holiday demise to the

fact that “you just can’t organize farmers. They’re too independent.”¹⁵ Kansas farmer Erich Freuhauf sums up the problem of organizing farmers by stating:

Couldn’t they organize farmers for some action beneficial to all? Not a chance. The examples set by labor organizations, to unionize the farmers were not feasible because the farmer is the most individualistic person. He was used to tackling the normal problems on the farm himself, was suspicious of outsiders and their motives Only a fraction of the farm operators belonged to a farm organization. It was said that it is easier to keep a handful of fleas in a hat than a bunch of farmers in an organization. The major farm organizations had their own pet programs and solutions, but did never wholeheartedly pull in one direction. Nor do all farmers within an organization have the same interests.¹⁶

Mike Rewinkel remembers his mother stating that if not for Roosevelt’s election in 1932, “there would have been a revolution in this country.”¹⁷ Perhaps the Farmers’ Holiday Association may not have led it, but the dramatic actions taken by the organization brought the nadir of American agriculture to the forefront of the national conscience. The Farmers’ Holiday Association is an important link in the chain of agrarian revolt. Perhaps by looking at Dixon, Dakota, and Thurston counties in depth, the Farmers’ Holiday will be better understood, and no longer remain relegated to the status of “a neglected little rebellion.”

Chapter 5 Notes

1. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 47.
2. *Ibid.*, 47.
3. *Ibid.*, 46-47.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 73.
6. For more on anti-Semitism, see William C. Pratt, "Rethinking the Farm Revolt of the 1930s," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Summer 1988): 137-38.
7. John L. Shover, "The Farm Holiday Movement in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 43 (1962): 53-78, 74.
8. John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion: The Farmers' Holiday Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 51-52.
9. Kim Nielsen, "Who Were These Farmer Radicals: The Douglas County Farm Holiday Association," *Minnesota History* 51 (Fall 1989): 270-80.
10. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998.
11. A. William Hoglund, "A Comment on the Farm Strikes of 1932 and 1962," *Agricultural History* 39 (October 1965): 213-216.
12. Ivan Schmedding, interview with author, Winnebago, NE, 6 March 1998.
13. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998.
14. Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 129.
15. Constance Kriege Fouts, interview with author, Lincoln, NE, 28 March 1998.
16. Erich Freuhauf, "Fifty Years on a One-Family Farm in Central Kansas," *Kansas History* 2 (Winter 1979): 254.
17. Mike Rewinkel, interview with author, Concord, NE, 6 March 1998.

APPENDIX 1

TOTAL FARM VALUE: LAND AND BUILDINGS

	<u>Dakota</u>	<u>Dixon</u>	<u>Thurston</u>
1900*	5,960,727	9,491,715	6,828,263
1910*	13,326,444	24,855,173	14,704,907
1920*	28,792,999	60,791,924	43,195,843
1910	11,680,605	21,656,050	12,644,944
1920	25,481,870	53,646,135	39,415,563
1925	19,254,780	31,532,777	23,648,315
1930(Apr. 1)	16,840,093	27,844,107	22,877,148
1935(Jan. 1)	9,590,360	18,289,905	14,423,055

(Figures for 1910-1925 from 1925 Ag. Census)

(Figures for 1900*-1920* from 1920 Census)

(Figures for 1930(Apr. 1)-1935(Jan. 1) from 1935 Ag. Census)

AVERAGE FARM VALUE: LAND AND BUILDINGS

	<u>Dakota</u>	<u>Dixon</u>	<u>Thurston</u>
1920	34,435	37,228	35,670
1925	22,868	21,568	23,743
1930(Apr. 1)	19,953	18,199	18,539
1935(Jan. 1)	11,336	11,978	11,189
Decrease %	32.9%	32.1%	31.3%

(Figures for 1920 from 1920 Census)

(Figures for 1925 from 1925 Ag. Census)

(Figures for 1930(Apr. 1)-1935(Jan. 1) from 1935 Ag. Census)

FARM OWNERSHIP and TENANCY (Percentage)
(O=owner; T=tenant)

	<u>Dakota</u>	<u>Dixon</u>	<u>Thurston</u>
1920 O	52.8	57.2	48.8
T	45.8	41.8	50.3
1925 T	50.5	46.1	63.1
1930 T	50.9	52.9	57.1
# Farms(4-1-30)	844	1,530	1,234
# Tenants(4-1-30)	430	809	704
1930%	51%	53%	57%
# Farms(1-1-35)	846	1,527	1,289
# Tenants(1-1-35)	440	820	802
1935%	52%	54%	62%

(Figures for 1920 from 1920 Census)

(Figures for 1925-30 from 1930 Census)

(Figures of # farms/tenants from 1935 Ag. Census)

APPENDIX 2

FARMERS' HOLIDAY ORGANIZATION OFFICERS
 (Correct spellings appear in brackets)

NEBRASKA (*Fremont Evening Tribune*, 16 September 1932)

President	Harry Parmenter	Yutan
Organizational Secretary	Rev. E.N. Litterell [Littrell]	Allen
Vice-president	O.F. [A.O.] Rosenberg	Newman Grove
Secretary-Treasurer	Clair Johnson	Fremont
Executive Committee	Parmenter	
	Rosenberg	
	E. Sampson	Valley
	John C. Schmidt	Wahoo
	Joseph Sevil [Sivill]	S. Sioux City

THURSTON CO. (*Winnebago Chieftain and Pender Republic, 26 August 1932*)

President	Simon Madsen [Madison]	Winnebago
Vice-president	William Wingett	Walthill
Secretary	George Lemmon	Thurston
Treasurer	W.E. Albaugh [Allbaugh]	Thurston

Precinct Committee:

Mel Hightree	Anderson
Dan Flynn	Anderson (Macy)
John Giradot [Girardot]	Pender
C.R. Boughn	Pender (Pender)
Paul Krieder	Flournoy
Wm. Gesch	Flournoy (Thurston)
Frank Belt	Merry
John Mayberry	Merry (Walthill)
Wm. James	Perry
Chris Herringfeldt	Perry (Emerson)
Herman Essman	Thayer (Pender)
Chas. Rutledge	Bryan
Herman Witte	Bryan (Pender)
Fred A. Rhode	Dawes
J.W. Riley [Reilly]	Dawes (Rosalie)
H.L. Brewer	Omaha
Edly Keeling	Omaha (Walthill)
Fritz Krause	Winnebago
Marshall Ross	Winnebago (Winnebago)
F.L. Beaudette	Blackbird
Geo. Ashman [Ashmore]	Blackbird (Macy)

DIXON COUNTY (*Allen News*, 1 September 1932)

President

Gus Keil

Precinct Committee:

George Hanson	Newcastle
John Ellis	Springbank
J.C. Boeshart	Clark
William Twamley	Galena
Clyde Goodell	Otter Creek
Ross Polly	Ponca
Walter Grosse [Grosch]	Wakefield
(To be appointed)	Emerson
Burt Grovenor [Grosvenor]	Daily
A.M. Coyner	Hooker
Oscar Brown	Logan
C.W. Dave	Silver Creek
J.T. Saunders(not present)	Concord

DAKOTA COUNTY (*South Sioux City Eagle*, 25 August 1932)

President	J.F. Kriege
Vice-president	George Ashford
Secretary	W.H. Berger
Treasurer	Edward Polly

Precinct Committee:

Sam Nixon	Covington
Joe Sevil [Sivill]	Covington
Elmer Blessing	Dakota
Roy Graham	Dakota
William Brady	Omadi
Chris Miller	Omadi
Sam Knox	Pigeon Creek
E.J. Way	Pigeon Creek
John Hardy, Jr. [Harty]	Hubbard
Frank Lussier	Hubbard
M.R. Boler	St. John's
To be determined	St. John's
Henry Wilke	Emerson
Ted Rhode [Rohde]	Emerson
Mike Logue	Summit
Dan Rush	Summit

APPENDIX 3

FARMERS' HOLIDAY BIOGRAPHY

37 of 57 leaders were located=65 percent

(Names left uncorrected)

(All information from 1920 Census, except (*) from County Histories)

THURSTON COUNTY

	<u>(1920)Age</u>	<u>Place of birth</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Simon Madsen	34	Iowa	Dane/Nor.	Farmer
Wm. Wingett	44	Missouri		General farm
Geo. Lemmon	41*	Nebraska*		Atty./farmer*
Wilbur E. Albaugh	35	Wisconsin		Farmer
C.R. Boughn	41	Illinois		Bank asst.
Frank Belt	34	Iowa		Home farm
John Mayberry	44*	Nebraska*	Irish*	
Wm. James	36	Iowa		Farmer
Herman Essman	25*	Nebraska*		Farmer*
Herman Witt	30	Nebraska	German	Mail Carrier
J.W. Reilly	44	Iowa	Irish	Farming
Friz Krause	21	Nebraska	German	Farmer
F.L. Beaudette	27	Iowa		Farming
Geo. Ashmore	55	Iowa	Irish	General farm

DIXON COUNTY

	<u>(1920)Age</u>	<u>Place of birth</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Gus Keil	34*	Wisconsin*		Dairy/farm*
George Hanson	39	Nebraska	Danish	General farm
John Ellis	31	Nebraska		General farm
J.C. Boeshart	31*	Iowa*	French*	Farmer*
William Twamley	35	Nebraska		General farm
Clyde Godell	30	Nebraska		General farm
Burt Grovenor	36(38*)	Nebraska		General farm
C.W. Dave	36	Illinois		General farm

DAKOTA COUNTY

	<u>(1920)Age</u>	<u>Place of birth</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
J.F. Kriege	31*	Iowa*	German*	Farmer/atty.*
George Ashford	45*	Nebraska*	Irish*	Banker/ pharmacist*
Edward Polly	45	Iowa		General farm
Sam Nixon	51	South Dakota	Irish	Farmer
Elmer Blessing	45	Nebraska	German	General farm
Roy Graham	21	Nebraska		Farm laborer
William Brady	24	Illinois		Farm laborer
Chris Miller	29	Denmark	Danish	Farmer
Sam Knox	44	Nebraska	Irish	Farm operator
E.J. Way	49*	Iowa*		Farmer*
John Hardy	57	Canada	Irish	General farm
Frank Lussier	41	Nebraska	Fr.-Canad.	General farm
Ted Rhode	26*	Germany*	German*	Farmer*
Mike Logue	54	Ireland	Irish	Farm operator
Daniel Rush	61	Illinois	Irish	Farm operator
(Dan H. Rush	20* --not in age average)			

PLACE OF BIRTH, ETHNICITY, OCCUPATION, and AGE

<u>PLACE OF BIRTH</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>ETHNICITY</u>	<u>#</u>
Nebraska	15	Irish	9
Iowa	10	German	5
Illinois	4	Danish	2
Wisconsin	2	Scand.(Dane-Nor.)	1
South Dakota	1	French	1
Denmark	1	Fr.-Canadian	1
Canada(Irish)	1		19 of 37
Germany	1		
Ireland	1		
	37 of 37		

<u>#</u>	<u>OCCUPATION (1920 CENSUS)</u>
24	farmer
2	farm laborer
1	bank cashier
1	mail carrier
28 of 37	

	<u>AVERAGE AGE PER COUNTY(1932)</u>
Dakota	53.5
Dixon	46
Thurston	48.5

FHA CORN-HOG PARTICIPANTS (18 of 32 precincts)

DIXON COUNTY

COMMITTEE: No Dixon County FHA members on the on Corn-Hog Committee
SIGNERS (6 of 13 precincts):

Ponca Precinct-Frank Ross Polly
Silvercreek Precinct-Coen W. Dare (C.W. Dave)
Logan Precinct-G.O. (Gustavus Oscar) Brown
Wakefield Precinct-Walter H. Grosc
Springbank Precinct-John W. Ellis
Clark Precinct-John Charles Boeshart

(*Dixon Journal*, 12 April 1934, Clark and Concord Precincts; *Nebraska Journal-Leader*, 12 April 1934, Galena, Ponca, Silvercreek Precincts; *Wakefield Republican*, 12 April 1934, Logan and Wakefield Precincts; *Allen News*, 12 April 1934, Springbank Precinct)

DAKOTA COUNTY

COMMITTEE: M.R. Boler (St. John's Precinct-temporary)
Ted Rohde (Emerson Precinct--precinct chairman and board of directors)
Dan Rush (Jackson Precinct)
Henry Wilke (Emerson Precinct)
SIGNERS (6 of 8 precincts):

Dakota Precinct-Elmer Blessing and Roy Graham
Summit Precinct-Mike Logue and Dan Rush
Emerson Precinct-Theodore (Ted) Rohde and Henry Wilke
Hubbard Precinct-John Harty, Jr. and Edward Polly
Omadi Precinct-Chris Miller
Pigeon Creek Precinct-Sam Knox

(*South Sioux City Eagle*, 12 April 1934, all precincts)

THURSTON COUNTY

COMMITTEE: W.E. Allbaugh (Flournoy Precinct-chairman and county director)
A.F. Maslonka [Masonka?] (Anderson Precinct)
J.M. [Mel?] Hightree (Anderson Precinct)

SIGNERS (6 of 11 precincts):

Perry Precinct-Chris Herringfield (Herringeldt) and William T. James
Flournoy Precinct-W.E. Allbaugh
Pender Precinct-John Girardot
Bryan Precinct-C.W. Rutledge
Winnebago Precinct-Fritz Krause
Blackbird Precinct-F.L. Beaudette

(*Pender Republic*, 20 April 1934, Perry, Flournoy, Pender, Thayer, Bryan Precincts; *Walthill Citizen*, 20 April 1934, Winnebago and Blackbird Precincts)

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