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## Article Title: Social Transformation and the Farmers' Alliance Experience: Populism in Saunders County, Nebraska

Full Citation: John A Sautter, "Social Transformation and the Farmers' Alliance Experience: Populism in Saunders County, Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 90 (2009): 6-21

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH2009FarmersAlliance.pdf>

Date: 1/15/2015

Article Summary: Drought and depression led to radical politics in 1890s Nebraska. Saunders County didn't fit the typical profile, but became a Populist stronghold thanks to its robust Farmers' Alliance culture.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: J M Swiggert, W O Rand, William Sanders, John Moyer, George Cornell, William H Dech, James Moss, Samuel Negley, Silas Holcomb, Charles Pirtle, James N Gaffin

Nebraska Place Names: Saunders County, Seward County

Farmers' Alliance Businesses: People's Cooperative Meat Market Association (Ithaca), Farmers' Meat Market (Ceresco), Alliance Livery and Feed Barn (Wahoo), Alliance State Business Agency, Weston Grain and Stock Company, Farmers' Stock and Elevator Company (Colon), Prague Farmers' Stock and Grain Company, Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company

Keywords: Farmers' Alliance, Populist Party, debt-to-property-value ratios, sub-alliances, J M Swiggert, Union Labor Party, *New Era*, women's rights, *Pritel Lidu*, co-ops, fusion, prohibition, Germans, Independent Party, Samuel Negley, Charles Pirtle, James N Gaffin, William H Dech

Photographs / Images: cover of Farmers' Alliance songbook; Farmers' Alliance convention badge; William Dech; masthead of the *New Era* (Wahoo); Frank Dolezal family; *Pritel Lidu*, a Czech-language Populist newspaper first published in Wahoo; advertisement for the Alliance Livery and Feed Barn of Wahoo; elevator at Weston; James N Gaffin; headlines proclaiming Independent Party victory in Saunders County (*New Era*, November 6, 1890); Charles Pirtle

# Social Transformation and THE FARMERS' ALLIANCE EXPERIENCE

## Populism in Saunders County, Nebraska

BY JOHN A. SAUTTER

Saunders County, Nebraska, was a leader in the Nebraska Farmers' Alliance movement and the later Nebraska Populist Party of the 1890s in terms of the number of members, county members holding state offices, and the movement's longevity. However, the county did not fit the typical profile of a strong Populist county: it was located in eastern Nebraska, it was not hard-hit by the economic depression of the early 1890s, and its predominant cash crops were corn and hogs, rather than wheat. In the absence of these other factors, the development of a strong Alliance movement culture made Saunders County a Populist stronghold.

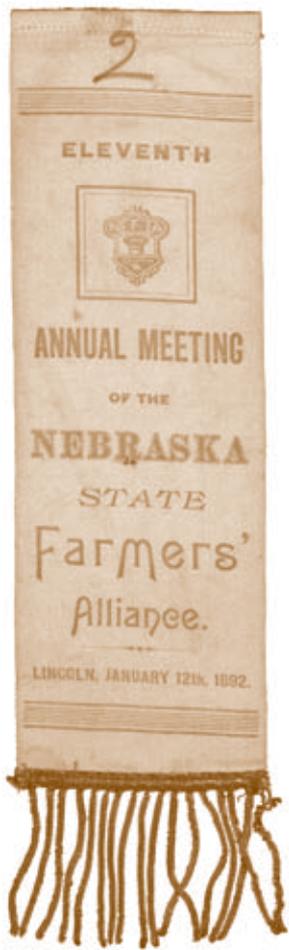
The Farmers' Alliance was arguably one of the most important agriculture and political groups of the late nineteenth century in Nebraska. The Alliance was instrumental in the formation of the Nebraska Populist Party and represented a concerted effort by farmers to develop viable alternatives to traditional social institutions. In most localities the degree to which the Alliance and the Populist Party were successful tended to rise and fall in relation to the severity of economic depression. Thus, in central and western Nebraska, where the depression of the 1890s was far more devastating, there was more political upheaval against the two traditional parties. In eastern Nebraska, on average, farmers were less affected by the economic downturn in agriculture and therefore tended to continue voting as Democrats or Republicans.

Located in eastern Nebraska, about fifteen miles north of Lincoln and twenty miles west of Omaha, Saunders County defies the conventional wisdom of the 1890s that the farther west one went the more radical were the politics. Except for Saunders County, all of the leading county Farmers' Alliance organizations (as



Below: Cover of Farmers' Alliance Songbook. After business matters were resolved, Alliance meetings could involve general discussions, speeches, music and literary performances. NSHS Museum Collections. 11055-584 SFN91459





**Farmers' Alliance convention badge. The Farmers' Alliance was arguably one of the most important agricultural and political groups of the late nineteenth century in Nebraska.**

NSHS Museum Collections.  
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measured by membership and number of sub-alliances) were located in central Nebraska. Though it did not suffer the severity of economic hardship experienced by central and western Nebraska counties, Saunders County developed one of the largest, most active, and politically successful Alliance organizations in the state, and represented, by far, the most important county Alliance in eastern Nebraska, producing some of the most important leaders of the Nebraska Populist movement.<sup>1</sup>

### Geography and Politics

It is not surprising that the Farmers' Alliance found its greatest recruiting successes in the drought-stricken central and western parts of Nebraska, which experienced rainfall far below normal during the spring and summer of 1890. Being farther west also meant higher transportation costs for farm produce. In contrast, eastern Nebraska farmers typically paid less to move their grain shorter distances on rail lines that usually carried higher volumes of traffic.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, wheat was the most important crop for central Nebraska farmers. In 1889 wheat was a financially unstable crop due to wide market fluctuations and high freight costs.<sup>3</sup> Most eastern Nebraska farmers raised corn and hogs, with their attitude being "if the price of corn is high, you sell it; if the price of corn is low, you feed it to the hogs and sell them."<sup>4</sup> Saunders County was situated in the heart of Nebraska's corn-hog economy. This agricultural environment differed significantly from other areas that established strong Alliance activity. Indeed, Stanley Parsons has shown there was a strong positive correlation between high levels of Alliance activity and areas where wheat was the dominant cash crop.<sup>5</sup>

The county also had one of the lowest debt-to-property-value ratios in the state, a calculation reflecting an area's economic hardship by comparing property values to interest rates. Mortgage loans for a relatively low percentage of the property value, even with a higher rate of interest, may not have been as burdensome as loans for a relatively high percentage of the property value, with a lower rate of interest. Saunders County's debt-to-property-value ratio in 1890 was under 8.5 percent, making it one of the lowest in Nebraska.<sup>6</sup>

### Formation of the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance

The first recruiting efforts for the Farmers' Alliance in Saunders County began in June 1889. Farmers initially attended Alliance meetings in hopes of acquiring financial benefits through the Alliance's State Business Agency, and to hear ideas

on cooperative ventures. The organization also offered Saunders County residents a social reform movement that included an educational program and an opportunity for women to participate. By December 1889 the Saunders County Alliance was the largest such group in eastern Nebraska, and one of the leading organizations in the state.<sup>7</sup>

The Farmers' Alliance recruiting effort in Saunders County was led by J. M. Swiggert of Buffalo County. Swiggert simultaneously founded the Saunders County Farmers' Union Mutual Insurance Company, which offered coverage against tornados, lightning, and hail. The new Alliance-sponsored mutual insurance company collected only enough money from its members to pay for actual losses and to defray necessary expenses. There was no assessor or corporate infrastructure to support, saving members money on their insurance. Swiggert's dual role as Alliance and mutual insurance organizer provided the ideal combination as he traveled across the county enlisting new Alliance members. During the summer of 1889, he organized three separate sub-alliances in eastern Saunders County.<sup>8</sup>

The Marble #611 sub-alliance, chartered by the state organization on June 11, 1889, was the first Alliance unit in the county. Located southeast of Mead, it started with twenty-six members. By September, secretary James O'Fallen reported that it had grown to more than eighty members, including sixty-five men and twenty-one women. Swiggert organized the Coughman #618 sub-alliance near Memphis on June 20, as well as the Pleasant Valley #693 sub-alliance on August 30, which met north of Ashland. As he recruited new members, he also promoted the Saunders County Farmers' Union Mutual Insurance Company. By fall 1889, the insurance company included members from Marble, Marietta, Pohocco, and Union Precincts.<sup>9</sup>

Farmers were not attracted only by the Alliance-sponsored mutual insurance association. In 1889 there was a statewide shortage of bale twine when a cartel of manufacturers, acting in concert, substantially raised the price of twine for Nebraska farmers. The Farmers' Alliance's cooperative purchase plan, through which they could buy twine at lower prices, lured farmers to the new organization. Swiggert described the organizing effort in Saunders County saying, "The twine question seems to be the all-absorbing topic, bringing in farmers who want to discuss what is to be done about the problem."<sup>10</sup>

On August 30, 1889, W. O. Rand organized the Marietta #692 sub-alliance north of Mead. Forty-five men and eleven women enlisted in the organization. Rand, a farmer who raised Duroc Jersey hogs,

lived north of Wahoo in Center Precinct. He was an important local Alliance figure, and was to become the future secretary of the Saunders County organization. While holding its meeting in a local school house, the sub-alliance voted to take the name of the surrounding Precinct. Samuel H. Moss, a German immigrant and a leader in the Saunders County Prohibition Party, was elected president.<sup>11</sup>

In establishing a sub-alliance, a recruiter would contact area farmers and extol the benefits of joining the Farmers' Alliance. If interested, the local residents would find a place to hold weekly meetings and elect officers. Officers of a typical sub-alliance included a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, lecturer, chaplain, and door-keeper. In addition to paying individual dues of ten cents every three months, members were responsible for sending delegates to the county conventions and were encouraged to participate in social activities.<sup>12</sup>

Meetings would often follow a ceremony unique to the particular sub-alliance. After business matters were resolved, there might be a general discussion on a subject of agricultural importance, including cooperative enterprises or politics. Accompanying these discussions were activities ranging from debates and speeches to music and literary performances. Each local sub-alliance elected a lecturer, who was responsible for organizing discussions and facilitating educational programs based on reading material endorsed by the state Farmers' Alliance. These activities provided intellectual stimulation, as well as practical discussions of farm problems. By expanding the social opportunities of the Alliance farmer, these meetings also helped break the monotony of daily life in sparsely populated rural areas.<sup>13</sup>

During September and October 1889, three more sub-alliances were organized in Saunders County. The Pea Ridge #706 sub-alliance was chartered on September 10, 1889. Thirteen men and one woman joined the group that elected William Sanders of Clear Creek Precinct as president. Sanders had homesteaded in Saunders County in 1863. Since then he had build up a 1,200 acre farm, one of the largest in the county. One month later, on October 11, the Richland #725 sub-alliance received its charter. It was located northeast of Ceresco, with twenty-seven men. Area farmer John Moyer, one of the organizers, was voted secretary. Moyer was born in 1853 in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, and moved to Saunders County in 1878. He erected the first grain silo and owned the first cream separator in the county on his 280-acre farm near Ceresco.

The Ithaca sub-alliance #724 also received its charter on October 11, 1889. Its initial membership was reported as fifty-seven men.<sup>14</sup>

In late October Saunders County Alliance members sponsored a Union Labor Party ticket for the county election in November. The Union Labor Party had been formed in Nebraska in 1886. Its platform called for government ownership of railroads and the telegraph, national banking reforms, prohibition, and woman suffrage. A convention was held in the Wahoo Courthouse on October 26, two weeks before the county election. The *Wahoo Democrat* disagreed with the Union Labor movement, saying,

The Democrats were opposed to this movement coming up at the eleventh hour, and for good reasons. It can be nothing but folly for the hand full of Union-Laborites, or anti-monopolists, or whatever they decide to call themselves... the impression has gone out that this was a Farmers' Alliance affair.<sup>15</sup>

George Cornell, a member of both the Farmers' Alliance and the Wahoo Knights of Labor assembly, acted as chairman for the meeting. Though he farmed in northern Stocking Precinct, Cornell also operated an auction business in Wahoo. At the meeting Alliance members nominated a slate, including W. O. Rand of Center Precinct for county judge, William Sanders of Clear Creek Precinct for county commissioner, Samuel H. Moss of Marietta Precinct for county sheriff, William M. Crow of Center Precinct for county treasurer, and Charles Pirtle of Wahoo for county clerk. Candidates issued a joint statement condemning both the Republican and Democratic parties and called upon "all of the farmers and others interested in the public welfare to lend us your aid before the election and at the polls." The Alliance-sponsored Union Labor Party did poorly in the election, with each candidate polling only about eighty votes.<sup>16</sup>

During December 1889, the Saunders County Alliance added six new sub-alliances, bringing its total to thirteen. W. O. Rand organized the Center #806 sub-alliance on December 2, 1889, with twenty-seven men, in Center Precinct. The Lothair #804 sub-alliance was also chartered on December 2. Meeting in northern Marietta precinct, the sub-alliance included sixteen men and two women. Other new sub-alliances included Wahoo #861, Union #866, Eureka #871, and Pohocco #883. By the end of December, the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance included 371 men and 41 women, with a total of thirteen sub-alliances. Aside from the Wahoo sub-alliances in Chapman Precinct, the organization was limited to the eastern half of Saunders County.<sup>17</sup>

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*John A. Sautter, Ph.D., J.D., is a Research Fellow at Vermont Law School and a native of Saunders County, Nebraska.*

On December 21, 1889, the Saunders County Alliance held its first county-wide convention at the Saunders County School House located three miles north of Ashland. Business included election of officers and discussion of shipping products through State Alliance Business Agent Allen Root of Omaha. Jay Burrows, president of the Northern Farmers' Alliance organization and the editor of the weekly newspaper called *The Alliance*, traveled from Lincoln to address the Saunders County convention. He praised the members present by saying,

They are making preparations to follow their products as far on their road to the consumer as it is possible to do with profit, and to go to the first hand for their goods. In short, they are doing just as all other classes are doing viz: organizing to promote their own interests.<sup>18</sup>

The Saunders County Alliance swelled to twenty-three sub-alliances in February 1890, chartering nine new local organizations that month. On February 15, the largest county-wide meeting to date was held in Ithaca with more than a thousand members present, including sixty-two official delegates representing nineteen sub-alliances. Following its usual routine of a business session at two o'clock, a public gathering commenced at seven. Local farmer William H. Dech addressed the meeting as the keynote speaker. He had been elected the Saunders County representative to the state legislature in 1873 as a Republican. Later, he was elected to state senate from District Five (Saunders and Sarpy County), a position he held until 1886. At that time, he left the Republican Party and helped found the Union Labor Party of Nebraska. Known as "Honest Bill" to his constituents, Dech was well known in the county for his service as state senator. A former Granger, and a master workman of the Wahoo Knights of Labor assembly, he served as a county delegate for the Ithaca sub-alliance.<sup>19</sup>

Dech provided leadership for the movement by writing editorials in Alliance newspapers and by speaking at Alliance gatherings. At the February 15 meeting, he argued that tax reform was needed to ease the plight of farmers. He also stated that political agitation was the only outlet available to financially burdened Alliancesmen. Two weeks earlier, he had written an editorial for *The Alliance*, stating his enthusiasm for the movement and encouraging readers to purchase only newspapers that printed information favoring the Farmers' Alliance. In another editorial he made a provocative statement:

There will never be a balance of wealth in society so long as the statesmanship presently in power continues to live off the working classes of the farmer and laborer.<sup>20</sup>

By April 1, established sub-alliances were being flooded with new members. The Marble sub-alliance membership increased to more than ninety, including twenty-three women. Nearly doubling, the Marietta sub-alliance increased to seventy-one men and twenty-two women members. The Rock Creek sub-alliance quadrupled its membership since its organization, including nine new women members. The Saunders County Farmers' Alliance was spreading like a wildfire.<sup>21</sup>

The county organization continued to grow during April, adding the Centennial #1426, Stocking #1455, and Sand Creek #1486 sub-alliances. At the next county convention, held in mid-April, twenty-eight sub-alliances were represented, with delegates arriving from nearly every precinct in the county. More than 1,500 members attended the gathering held at the courthouse in Wahoo. Commenting on the potential influence of the Saunders County movement in the up-coming election, County Secretary Rand noted that 4,379 votes had been cast in the 1888 state election. With county membership now exceeding 1,500, Rand felt that the Alliance had established a broad base of support and "should make some waves" in the coming election.<sup>22</sup>

Though the Farmers' Alliance was founded as a nonpartisan organization, political action by the order was an important issue by spring 1890. Recruiters organized new members by combining a message of political reform with collective financial strategies for farmers, such as mutual insurance and bulk purchasing. The Alliance's first political action, under the auspices of the Union Labor Party, had failed. In the fall of 1889, members were likely not yet interested in leaving their traditional political party for a new third party. Farmers flocked to the Alliance in hopes that it could press for reforms in state and national government economic policies through the Republican or Democratic parties. In only a year, from June 1889 to June 1890, the Alliance had spread across the county. This growth set the stage for the movement to enter politics on its own.<sup>23</sup>

### Education and Radicalization

In the new political movement, Saunders County Alliance members associated with those from other organizations, such as the Knights of Labor and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Paralleling the Alliance's entrance into politics were the efforts



**Known as "Honest Bill" to his constituents, William Dech of Ithaca was well known in Saunders County for his service as state senator.** NSHS RG2411, Scan # 0999

of Saunders County members who began a variety of cooperative businesses to protect their financial interests. Between December 1889 and May 1892, members created a strong movement culture based on an Alliance experience, which combined education, radical political ideology, cooperative ventures, and social gatherings. This experience, shared by Alliance members, altered their political views, essentially turning the county into a Populist Party stronghold for many years.

The Alliance movement fostered a producer ideology that pitted farmers and laborers against corporate and industrial interests. Through its educational programs, the Alliance altered the way that members viewed their relationship to each other and to the political process. Lectures, debates, discussions, and the distribution of reform minded books introduced members to the idea that farmers and laborers should unite to pursue their interests above all else. The political education that members received was directed at the goal of rural women and men finding their own voices on issues concerning political economy. Discussions initiated in the “sub-alliance-school” helped members explore the meaning of an alternative movement culture, empowering sub-alliances to engage economic questions that previously seemed out of reach.<sup>24</sup> As an editorial noted in the *New Era*, published in Wahoo,

The Alliance has become as it ought always be, the county neighborhood center of social entertainment and influence. It is the common ground upon which churchman and skeptic can meet in social accord, learn one another’s disposition and temper, become mutual teachers, and cultivate that charity which has its fruitage in place and social union. The Alliance makes room for everybody, it is the literary circle, debating club, the cultivator of good fellowship, the cementer of good will tempered with rivalry. God bless the Alliance, it is the neighborhood home.<sup>25</sup>

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

Until the establishment of the *New Era* on August 7, 1890, Saunders County Alliance members normally relied on the *Farmers’ Alliance* of Lincoln for their information. The *New Era* became the official organ of the Saunders County Farmers’ Alliance. Though more than ten newspapers were located in Saunders County at this time, the other papers typically

endorsed either Republican or Democratic principles and candidates, and served only the small number of readers residing in or around the smaller towns of the county. The Alliance-Independent *New Era*, however, committed itself to covering Farmers’ Alliance and Independent Party functions county-wide, claiming in 1892 it had the “largest and widest readership out of any newspaper in the county.”<sup>26</sup>

The *New Era* provided a means by which Alliance members could communicate on any subject that was deemed important. Weekly accounts about current activities were provided by sub-alliance secretaries. Resolutions were printed, meeting dates were given, and social gatherings were announced. In this manner the *New Era* not only informed members of Alliance activities, but also became an integral part of Alliance life itself. The paper’s editors, Peter Longfellow and John Miller, optimistically concluded that “the *New Era* is a presage of victory in Saunders County. We hail every additional champion of the peoples’ rights.”<sup>27</sup>

Speaking in Weston at a Saunders County Farmers’ Alliance monthly meeting in May 1891, State Lecturer Oliver Hull recommended that every sub-alliance in the county have a circulating library. He told the audience “there is no excuse for farmers not having more good literature.” With small contributions from all the lodge members, Hull suggested that a sub-alliance could secure the entire list of

Below: Masthead of *The New Era*, Wahoo’s Farmer’s Alliance newspaper.

# THE NEW ERA

THURSDAY JULY 9, 1891.

Official Organ of the Saunders County Alliance.





books and periodicals it needed. He concluded by urging, "Go at it farmers and get up a library of good literature of all kinds of books, especially upon economic questions. Do this! Educate yourselves, and the solution of the problem is attained."<sup>28</sup>

The Saunders County Alliance subsequently established a traveling library managed by the local organizer and county library agent T. C. Cook of Ashland. By the summer of 1891, it had purchased enough books to necessitate the printing of more than 2,000 catalogues listing all the books that were available to Alliance members in the county. Cook concluded, "the Alliance wants every farmer to have a library to read from in order to educate and build a strong union of farmers."<sup>29</sup>

During the winter of 1891-92, the county Alliance organized a massive education initiative to keep sub-alliances active. County Lecturer Jerry Fischer felt it most important that sub-alliances take up discussion of the money question and then move on to debate land as well as transportation issues. Showing his faith in educationally-based efforts as a means to invigorate members, Fischer remarked, "There is no better way of arousing the people than by the diffusion of facts on political conditions."<sup>30</sup> Local members echoed these sentiments in letters to the newspapers, supplying numerous examples of success with the educational efforts.<sup>31</sup> In October 1891 Jonas Yoder, librarian of the Richland sub-alliance, informed his constituents that there were now some 140 volumes in their library. He proudly stated, "this is a free institution, and is being taken advantage of by many that would not get to read and learn the true object and aims of the people's party."<sup>32</sup>

Sub-alliances constantly reported the acquisition of new books and the formation of new libraries. Books were either passed around, or, in some sub-alliances, kept in an Alliance library that often consisted of a locked cabinet located at the meeting hall or schoolhouse. Collections frequently included books such as W. H. Harvey's *Coin's Financial School*, and Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*.<sup>33</sup>

In August 1891 the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance passed an education resolution supporting the *New Era* and the state central committee in their efforts to inform the people of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The resolution insisted that "the principles taught by the Alliance have awakened in the people a new thought and have caused them to see their relation to their fellow man in an entirely new and different light."<sup>34</sup> Education provided the foremost tool in changing the social

dynamics of rural life by modifying the way that individuals perceived themselves in an economic and political context.

### **The Saunders County Alliance and Equality: Women and Immigrants**

Few other organizations of the late nineteenth century offered women the opportunity to serve as fellow participants with their male counterparts, or to discuss political and economic issues on an equal basis as did the Alliance. Within the Saunders County Alliance, women and men worked together. Both sexes voted, held office, and discussed important political and economic issues at meetings. Members frequently referred to each other as "brother" or "sister" in correspondence, as well as in discussions at meetings.<sup>35</sup> As a result, one might expect that women's rights would emerge as a political issue because of the shared experience of Alliance women and men. Yet, no resolutions or platforms published by the Saunders County organization mentioned woman suffrage.<sup>36</sup> The Alliance did offer new roles and organizational possibilities for women, but as historian Julie Roy Jeffery notes, "the issue of women's equality was probably undercut by the movement's strong emphasis on revitalizing the agricultural class."<sup>37</sup>

Nationally, one in four Alliance members was a woman; in Nebraska, however, the ratio was closer to one in five. In January 1891, according to a calculation by historian Jeffrey Ostler, women numbered 13,875 members out of a total Nebraska Alliance membership of 69,375.<sup>38</sup> Though many women participated only in auxiliary events, such as oyster dinners and ice-cream socials, some took advantage of opportunities to get involved in the organizational features of the Alliance. For example, Alliance member Isabel Jenks organized the Ashland #2215 sub-alliance in June 1891, with sixteen men and fifteen women.<sup>39</sup>

Though women were not charged quarterly dues, and married women were often omitted from records because couples counted as one member, women were not necessarily marginalized.<sup>40</sup> By being able to hold the same offices as men, women could be as involved in carrying out official responsibilities when called upon to do so. They assisted in drafting resolutions, spoke regularly at county or sub-alliance meetings, and drafted sub-alliance reports printed in the *New Era*. School teacher and Alliance member Minnie Eassom of the Pohocco sub-alliance co-authored the group's first resolution that condemned the two main political parties and called for railroad reform.<sup>41</sup> Women often provided

the entertainment at Alliance meetings by singing hymns, playing musical instruments, and conducting literary expositions. The Pohocco sub-alliance's women's quartet performed at several Alliance picnics and meetings.<sup>42</sup> One woman, who signed her name only as "Jane," wrote a weekly report for the Marble sub-alliance in the *New Era*. Jane's communications were often enthusiastic and colorful, describing Alliance members' activities. In one instance she chastised Marble sub-alliance members for not attending weekly meetings:

There is no use of this slip shod way of doing business. If we are going to do anything let us do it with a determination that will win. After all, if there is going to be a show in town or a horse buyer is to be there, then you will scamper off to town without fail, no matter how busy you are. But let us see if you will show up this Saturday for the Alliance meeting! That will tell the tale!<sup>43</sup>

Women clearly played an important role in the Saunders County Alliance. Their support of the movement was manifested in many different ways. Though they were not treated equally with men in all circumstances, the Alliance still afforded women opportunities that were not available prior to the existence of the organization. The earlier Granger movement was open to women's participation, but it did not admit them on an equal standing as did the Farmers' Alliance. Unlike the Alliance, the

Grange reserved certain offices and degrees for women. Though this curtailed the women's leadership roles, it did guarantee them an office, albeit not on the same level as men.<sup>44</sup>

In 1890, more than half of the Saunders County male population over twenty-one years of age had been born in another country, with 2,682 native born, and 2,966 foreign born. Consequently, the Farmers' Alliance often recruited its own members to translate at meetings and rallies. Eric Johnson of Swedeburg translated the Swedish language, while native Bohemians Frank Dolezal and John Hospodsky, both of Wahoo, interpreted for Czech speakers.<sup>45</sup>

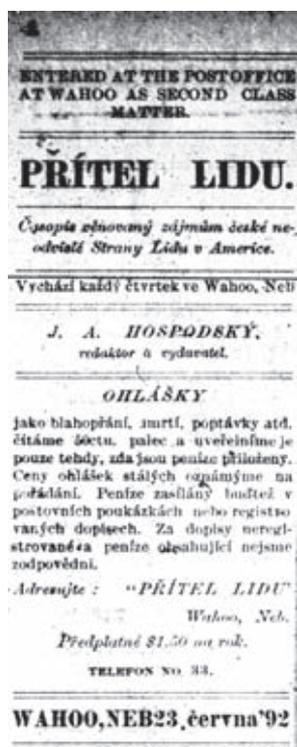
To this end, the county Alliance and the Knights of Labor in Wahoo sponsored the development of an Alliance-Independent newspaper to serve the large Czech constituency in western Saunders County. On March 29, 1891, both organizations co-sponsored a resolution pledging support for a Czech-language newspaper.<sup>46</sup> Later the two orders issued a statement describing their reasons for starting the new paper.

If we are now posted on our duties as citizens, is it right for us to remain indifferent to the welfare of our Bohemian-Americans, who have not an opportunity of acquiring knowledge of those principles which are essential in order that an honest and intelligent ballot may be cast in the interest of the commonwealth.<sup>47</sup>



**Frank Dolezal family. A native Bohemian, Dolezal interpreted for Czech speakers at Alliance meetings.** From *Past and Present of Saunders County, Nebraska*, vol. 2 (1915), NSHS 978.288/P41

***Přítel Lidu* (The People's Friend) was a Czech-language Populist newspaper first published in Wahoo. NSHS Filmstrips Roll 11, Item 27**



After organizing a joint stock company in April 1891, supporters purchased the necessary equipment from the Great Western Type Foundry in Omaha and hired E. J. Jonas of Atkinson, Nebraska, to be the superintendent. With general support from “the best Bohemian farmers and businessmen in Saunders County” and from the editors of the *New Era*, the newspaper was an assured success.<sup>48</sup> However, backers could not find an editor for the venture, so they turned to John Rosicky, owner and editor of the *Pokrok Zapadu* (Progress of the West) newspaper in Omaha during the summer of 1891 about starting a paper in Wahoo to serve Bohemian readers.<sup>49</sup>

The *Pokrok Zapadu*, founded in 1877, was the longest running Czech newspaper in the country. Rosicky assisted the new independent paper, the *Přítel Lidu* (The People's Friend), by convincing his protégé, John Hospodsky, to run the paper as its editor and publisher. The *Přítel Lidu* experienced initial success as the only Czech-language Alliance-Independent newspaper in Nebraska. Eventually, however, interest in the paper waned and Hospodsky decided to move the paper to Wilber, Nebraska, in 1893.<sup>50</sup>

### Alternative Institutions: Alliance Cooperatives in Saunders County

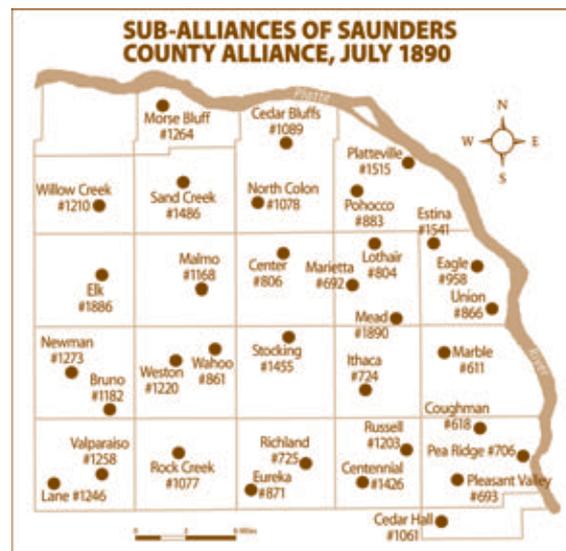
The Alliance experience also led farmers in Saunders County to establish many cooperative ventures. Consumer cooperatives, such as the Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco, the People's Cooperative Meat Market of Ithaca, and the Alliance Livery and Feed Barn in Wahoo, were efforts by sub-alliances to construct alternative institutions to serve members. Members associated in producer cooperatives by establishing elevators in Colon, Prague, and Weston to protect their financial interests.

Unlike other states that formed statewide cooperative enterprises, in Nebraska local farmers tended to form smaller, localized cooperatives, independent of the State Alliance, to market their grain and livestock. A rural-versus-urban split spurred the development of these enterprises as members felt that town-based merchants and professionals not only controlled local politics, but also dominated institutions of trade and finance to the detriment of farmers.<sup>51</sup> An examination of cooperative ventures in Saunders County illustrates how Alliance members created their own locally-operated enterprises to strengthen the county's agricultural class. There were two types of cooperative ventures used by Saunders County farmers. Consumer co-ops allowed members to buy products more cheaply

than at a privately-owned store. In contrast, producer co-ops were formed in order that farmers could sell their grain or livestock and receive the highest possible price.

A farmer-owned enterprise offered its members multiple benefits, in addition to the initial attraction of lower priced goods. Cooperative stores furnished farmers a method of breaking away from private financial institutions they felt had extorted them in the past. The Alliance cooperative movement represented an attempt by farmers to construct social and economic alternatives to serve the needs of agriculture that were outside the traditional local trade and finance operations they were rebelling against in the political realm.<sup>52</sup>

The Ithaca sub-alliance and two Ceresco area sub-alliances established cooperative stores. The People's Cooperative Meat Market Association of Ithaca was organized by Samuel Negley and William Dech, Jr., the latter the son of the local Alliance leader, W.H. Dech. Planning for the venture began in October 1890 at an Ithaca sub-alliance meeting. Dech, an Ithaca area Farmers' Allianceman, convinced other members of the need to construct



a facility where area farmers could sell beef, pork, fish, and poultry. After six months of discussion, the articles of incorporation were adopted in June 1891. A board of directors, consisting entirely of Alliance members, was elected to oversee the building of the store. The articles of incorporation approved issuing 100 shares of stock for ten dollars each, constituting a capital base of \$1,000. Using this start-up capital, the cooperative purchased a store on Main Street in Ithaca for forty-five dollars and began conducting business.<sup>53</sup>

By November 1891 financial shortages forced the board of directors to seek additional capital. Board member Albert D. Fellows extended the association a loan of \$123, which was paid off by March 1, 1892. Later that year the association, needing more money, took out a mortgage of \$250, a loan that would prove fatal. In March 1893 the People's Cooperative Meat Market Association disbanded and the property was sold at auction for \$280, just enough to pay off its loan and the interest still owed.<sup>54</sup>

The Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco was organized by the Richland and Eureka sub-alliances in January, 1891. Alliance members formed the market in the same fashion as had the Ithaca sub-alliance, establishing a joint stock company in which members bought shares. Alliance member John Beaman sold his farm and moved to Ceresco to manage the store, noting that "if the dressed beef combine wants to drive us out of business, all right, competition is the life of trade."<sup>55</sup> Ceresco businessmen organized a boycott of the store by townspeople, initially putting financial strain on the cooperative. Yet, by mid-summer the cooperative store boasted that business was so good that another Alliance member began a second shift to keep up with demand. According to the *New Era*, Jonas Yoder, the butcher of the Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco, made "the best bologna anywhere!" The cooperative continued in operation until April 1892, when the association asked all individuals owing money to settle accounts promptly since the Farmers' Meat Market of Ceresco was closing.<sup>56</sup> The two meat market cooperatives also dealt in consumer household goods, which sought to save farmers money on small-item purchases.

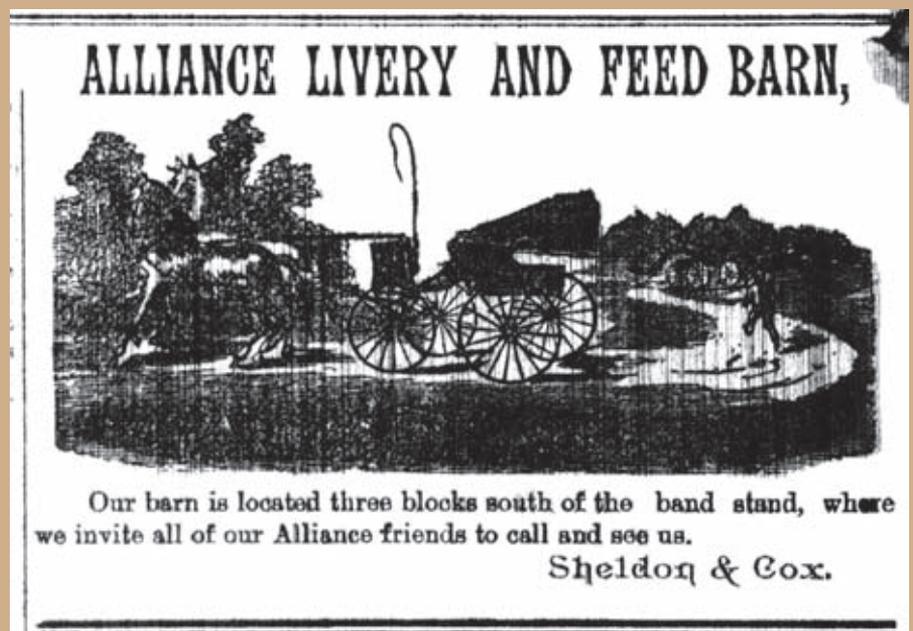
In addition, the county Alliance arranged business partnerships in an effort to minimize costs. The Stocking sub-alliance began the Alliance Livery and Feed Barn in Wahoo, providing a place for Alliance members to leave their horses and wagons when they visited the town.<sup>57</sup> These operations, while small in scale, demonstrated the amount of time and energy that sub-alliances were willing to devote to develop alternative enterprises to serve members. M. F. Elliot, who owned a fruit tree nursery, operated as the Saunders County Alliance nursery agent. He extended credit, as well as discounts, to members who bought trees from him. The county organization endorsed Elliot by printing in the *New Era* that "all Alliance men would do well to give him a call and purchase from a home nursery rather than from an Eastern man."<sup>58</sup> County Alliance members also bought basic food items, seed, and bale twine in bulk through the Alliance State Business

Agency. County Purchasing Agent William T. Crow received monthly shipments of Alliance flour, sometimes amounting to as much as three railroad cars.<sup>59</sup>

Though bulk purchasing did save farmers money, it sometimes failed to work properly because of members who took advantage of the trusting nature of the system. The Lane sub-alliance, located southwest of Valparaiso, reported that member A. Delamand had failed to pay for his share of the last shipment. The sub-alliance did not have enough money to cover the expense and could not order further products until Delamand's debt was paid. However, most joint stock companies prevented members from taking advantage of cooperative stores by forcing partial payments up front.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to bulk purchasing and consumer co-ops, Alliance members incorporated joint-stock producer co-ops, usually on a much larger scale, in order to ship grain and livestock. Using a system similar to the Rochdale plan to operate the cooperative association, Alliance members followed the same design that the earlier Grange had used to launch cooperative enterprises. The Rochdale cooperative system is named for the town of Rochdale, England, where textile workers first employed the system in the operation of a textile mill in the 1840s. Its principal features were the organization of a joint-stock company, with shares held by individuals in limited amounts. Each shareholder of one or multiple shares of stock counted as a member of the association, and had an equal voice in its management regardless of the amount of stock held. Sales normally were for cash only. Profits were distributed

**The Alliance Livery and Feed Barn of Wahoo was one of the cooperatives established by the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance. *The New Era*, Dec. 4, 1890**



**ALLIANCE LIVERY AND FEED BARN,**

Our barn is located three blocks south of the band stand, where we invite all of our Alliance friends to call and see us.

**Sheldon & Cox.**



**Elevator at Weston, date unknown, typical of the small town elevators established as cooperative ventures by the Saunders County Farmers' Alliance.**  
 Courtesy of the Saunders County Historical Society #981.14.2

to purchasers in proportion to the amount of money they spent at the cooperative. These producer co-ops provided a new alternative to the privately-owned local elevators.<sup>61</sup>

The Weston Grain and Stock Company represented how Alliance members used democratic decision-making to manage their co-op. Initially selling 320 shares at twenty-five dollars each, the co-op began with \$8,000 in startup capital.<sup>62</sup> Its articles of incorporation put a limit of six shares per person. Each member could cast only one vote in business meetings, regardless of the number of shares he or she owned. This feature prevented a minority of members from holding sway over a majority.<sup>63</sup>

Organized by area Farmers' Alliance members Hans F. Blunk, Joseph Bartek, and Samuel Rockafellow, the Weston co-op opened for business on September 15, 1890. When it began, two other

privately-owned grain elevators were already operating in Weston. Advertisements stated that the cooperative was supported by the county Alliance, and that it provided everything a farmer needed, from buying lumber to selling hogs.<sup>64</sup>

By December, the farmers' cooperative was prospering, and was described as "doing a rushing business!"<sup>65</sup> At this time the co-op had not yet built an elevator. Nevertheless farmers sold their grain at the Weston Grain and Stock Company. By storing the grain in large cribs, the cooperative waited until the elevator could be constructed in the spring for grain loading. The *New Era* stated, "they [Weston Stock and Grain Company] have been buying an immense amount of corn, which they can shell and ship any time prices suit them."<sup>66</sup> This remark underscored the important benefits that ventures such as the Weston co-op could provide farmers. Essential-

ly, it gave them more control over the shipping and pricing of their grain. During the fall, grain prices were generally lower than at other times in the year, as most farmers attempted to sell their grain once it was harvested. By holding the grain off the market until prices went up in the spring, member farmers of the cooperative could realize a higher profit.<sup>67</sup>

Alliance members organized similar grain and stock co-ops in Prague and Colon. In both cases, the boards of directors, as with the Weston Grain and Stock Company, were made up of Farmers' Alliance members. The Farmers' Stock and Elevator Company of Colon incorporated on December 16, 1889, the same month that the Center sub-alliance, which met in Colon, was chartered.<sup>68</sup> This cooperative's officers and board of directors were the same individuals who held many of the offices in the Center sub-alliance.<sup>69</sup> The Prague Farmers Stock and Grain Company, founded by Farmers' Alliance members, incorporated on August 1, 1893. After 1888, when the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad built a new connecting line, the town of Prague was established and became a hub for a four-precinct area. The cooperative was formed to provide everything that local farmers needed, with the general nature of the business being the "buying and selling of grain and all kinds of products of the farm, live stock, also wire, coal, stone, fencing, salt, lime, lumber, and all kinds of agricultural implements and machinery."<sup>70</sup>

Mutual insurance constituted another means by which Saunders County Farmers' Alliance members were able to collaborate in creating alternative economic institutions to reduce costs. In addition to the company that J. M. Swiggert began in 1889 when he organized sub-alliances in eastern Saunders County, James Moss and Samuel Negley started a second mutual insurance association on June 18, 1890. Swiggert's organization operated independently of the one begun by Moss and Negley, though both were developed by Alliance initiatives. The two organizations merged in 1891 to form a larger, county-wide mutual insurance association, taking the name Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company.<sup>71</sup> By May 1892 the Saunders County Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company had grown to 267 members, had been legally incorporated, and had established an office with two full-time insurance assessors. The association charged members a one-time, five-year membership fee. If a member were to experience a loss, all members would be assessed to cover the insurance due to the property owner. As the association's secretary Samuel Negley stated, "Money is kept in the county instead of being

sent back east to a larger insurance company." The board of directors, including such notables as W. O. Rand, George Cornell, and William H. Dech, consisted entirely of Farmers' Alliance members.<sup>72</sup>

Cooperatives, including mutual insurance, were a very important part of Alliance work, especially in the sub-alliances that created their own. In fact, many co-ops outlived the Farmers' Alliance. The Weston Grain and Stock Company, as well as the Prague Farmers Stock and Grain Company, lasted well into the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup>

Individuals active in Saunders County cooperatives included James Gaffin in Colon, Joseph Bartek in Weston, William Dech Jr. in Ithaca, Jonas Yoder in Ceresco, and Samuel Negley of Ithaca, all of whom played key roles in the Alliance, in the new Independent Party, and in the later Populist Party. Gaffin was elected to the Nebraska House of Representatives in 1890; Bartek was elected county sheriff the same year; Yoder was the Richland sub-alliance librarian; and Negley served as secretary of the Independent County Central Committee in 1890. There was a connection between organizing cooperative ventures and participation in what became the Populist Party movement. In all instances of cooperative activity, sub-alliances were chartered prior to the formation of cooperatives. It was in Alliance meetings that plans were made to take cooperative action in business. In Saunders County, the Alliance experience prompted members to forge new business relationships to promote their collective economic interests.

### Populism in Saunders County

Saunders County was a People's Party stronghold in eastern Nebraska throughout the Populist era. In the 1892 election, the county polled 1,791 votes for the Populist gubernatorial candidate, Charles C. Van Wyck. The victorious Republican candidate, Lorenzo Crouse, garnered 1,252 votes, and Democrat J. Sterling Morton received 830 votes. People's Party candidates continued to dominate the county elections of 1893, electing the entire Populist ticket, except for county sheriff. In 1894 the Nebraska Democratic and People's Parties nominated a fusion state ticket with Populist Silas Holcomb as candidate for governor. Under fusion, Saunders County polled 2,592 votes for Holcomb, while the Republican candidate, Thomas J. Majors, captured only 1,703 votes in the county.<sup>74</sup>

In 1894 there was a split in the Saunders County People's Party, with those against fusion running a second Populist ticket for county offices. The anti-Fusionists felt joining with Democrats was selling



James N. Gaffin of Colon, served in Nebraska House of Representatives 1891-97. He was one of several leaders who played key roles in the Alliance, in the new Independent Party, and in the later Populist Party. NSHS RG2411

**SAUNDERS COUNTY DOES HER DUTY.**

The Independent Ticket "Runs Like Hells and Gets There Like Hell."

THE BANKERS AND OLD PARTY MEMBERS HAVE GOT THE "GIRD."  
The Farmers' Speech and the Old Parties Take a Duck Bath.



Majority for the Independent Party in the County

**The New Era (Wahoo) "crowed" about the Independent Party victory in Saunders County in 1890 in its Nov. 6 issue.**

out the cause and a rejection of Populist principles. The 1894 election returns show that Saunders County narrowly elected Fusion candidates in all county races, with the Fusionists barely beating out the Populist Party ticket.<sup>75</sup> Though fusion helped the Nebraska People's Party elect Holcomb governor again in 1896, many members of the Saunders County People's Party still rejected fusion as a political strategy. Former Alliance leader James Gaffin, was a major opponent of fusion on both the county and state level.<sup>76</sup>

During the 1896 gubernatorial election Saunders County polled 2,769 votes for the Populist candidate Holcomb, while Republican candidate John MacColl garnered 1,850. Saunders County would remain a People's Party stronghold through the turn of the century by consistently electing Populist candidates to county offices. The county also continued to poll more votes for Populist or Fusionist candidates than for Republicans on the state level through 1900.<sup>77</sup>

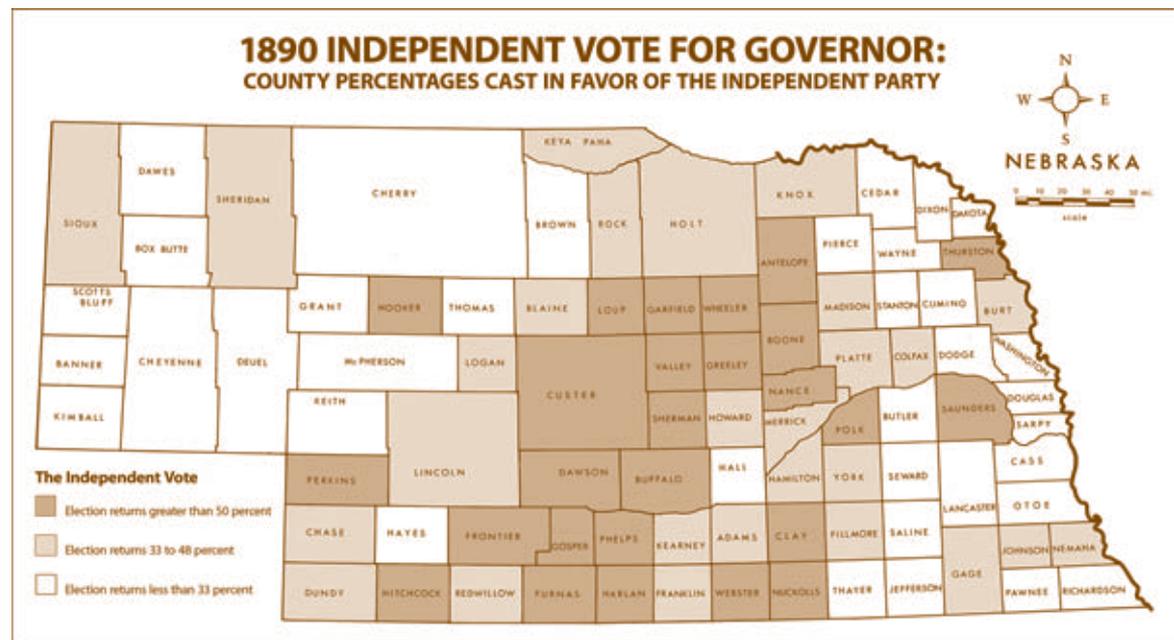
The vitality of the Populist political culture during and after 1892 was a direct result of an intense Alliance experience from 1889 to 1892. The high degree of separation of the Alliance-Independent movement from the traditional political and economic institutions, such as the two old parties and private businesses, magnified the Saunders County Alliance experience. It transformed the county into a Populist stronghold even though economic conditions there were not conducive to the formation of a strong People's Party movement.<sup>78</sup>

Seward County, Nebraska, located directly to the southwest of Saunders County, was very similar

to Saunders in its economic, political, and ethnic makeup. It was a Republican county prior to 1890, had a strongly developed corn-hog economy, and just under half of the males over 21 were foreign born. Seward County, however, did not develop into a strong Populist county. David Trask studied the Seward County People's Party during 1890-1892 in his article, "Formation and Failure: The Populist Party in Seward County." Using census data and biographical information, he employed statistical analysis to consider why the new party did not take hold there.<sup>79</sup>

One of the most important factors Trask did not consider was that Seward County did not have a strong Alliance movement. It formed a county-wide organization only in early 1890, which at its height contained fewer than twenty sub-alliances.<sup>80</sup> Only one cooperative store was begun by Alliance members. Furthermore, once the Independent Party (the predecessor of the Populist Party) formed in May 1890, its first act was to offer fusion with the Seward County Democrats, which the latter rejected. The high degree of separation from the old economic and political institutions did not occur in Seward County, because there was no strong Alliance movement culture, as was the case in Saunders County.<sup>81</sup>

Trask concluded that the prohibition issue was a major factor in the Populists' defeat in Seward County. It kept the county's native Germans, who composed more than 22 percent of the population, loyal to the Democratic Party in seven out of nine precincts heavily populated by Germans.<sup>82</sup> In Saunders County, of thirteen precincts heavily populated



by Bohemians or Germans in 1890, eight voted Independent, with five voting Democratic. Cedar and Union Precincts, areas with multiple sub-alliances, voted Democrat by only twelve and eight votes over the Independent Party, respectively. The remaining three precincts that voted heavily Democratic were all located in the northwestern part of the county, and contained only three sub-alliances combined. One of the three, Bohemia Precinct, located in the county's far northwest corner, was the only precinct prior to the election that did not have any Alliance activity. The Independent Party polled only two votes there.<sup>83</sup> These voting patterns show that where the Alliance movement culture took root, Populism tended to follow.

Prohibition was an important issue in 1890 when it appeared before Nebraska voters on the election ballot. Democratic gubernatorial candidate James Boyd, an Irish-Catholic immigrant, made an anti-prohibition stand his main campaign issue. The Independent Party kept prohibition out of the political platform in order to avoid alienating anti-prohibition immigrant voter groups.<sup>84</sup> As Robert Cherny determined in *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics: 1885-1915*, "prosperous Democrats" in Nebraska during the 1890 election were most likely to have stayed loyal to their party because of the prohibition issue, as they did in Seward County.<sup>85</sup>

In Saunders County, a comparatively economically prosperous county in 1890, a majority of Germans and Bohemians voted Independent because of their involvement in the Farmers' Alliance. In other words, unlike in other areas of Nebraska, "prosperous Democrats" in Saunders County did not stay loyal to their party during the 1890 election. The five precincts with a large Swedish population, which had voted staunchly Republican prior to 1890, were the strongest Independent precincts in the 1890 election.<sup>86</sup> Prohibition was not a major factor for the predominantly Baptist and Lutheran Swedes.<sup>87</sup> Each of the Swedish precincts experienced high levels of Alliance activity. The encounter with the Alliance experience altered all three groups' political dispositions. In rural areas where the Alliance movement culture was weak, Independents did not win many votes.

The Saunders County Alliance leadership included some of the most active Alliance-Independent men in the state. Leaders such as William H. Dech, who campaigned for lieutenant governor in 1890, Charles Pirtle, secretary of the State Independent Party Organizing Committee, and James Gaffin, a leading representative in the State Legislature in

1891 were among the best and brightest of the reform movement.

Once the Alliance movement enjoyed electoral success in 1890, the county leaders were some of the first members to leave the organization for the new Populist movement. They took positions in the new Independent Party (which in 1892 would become the Populist Party) or began filling elected office. Rand was elected county clerk in 1891, Pirtle became the secretary of the Nebraska State Senate that same year, Dech became the grand master workman of the Nebraska Knights of Labor, and Gaffin was elected to the State House of Representatives. He became presiding officer of the legislature in 1893 and a People's Party candidate for lieutenant governor in 1894.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, during 1891, those who occupied positions on the Independent County Central Committee were, in most cases officers of sub-alliances. Jonas Bender of Union Precinct, Anton Pospisel of Elk Precinct, Peter B. Olson of Mariposa Precinct, W.A. Tracy of Ithaca, and James Jamison of Oak Creek Precinct were all presidents or secretaries of their respective sub-alliances.<sup>89</sup> The original leadership group that organized the county Alliance left the organization for the new Independent/Populist Party movement. Rank and file members followed them, as they had during the organization's formation. Members brought the Alliance movement culture into the Independent and People's Parties, thus creating a Populist political culture in Saunders County.

The Farmers' Alliance was successful in Saunders County because it fostered a movement culture that altered the political ideology and social relationships of its members. This culture was not motivated only by severe economic distress, although financial considerations were a factor in its formation. Rather, at its base, the Alliance movement culture in Saunders County was both a social and political experience, which combined education, radical political ideology, cooperative ventures, and social gatherings, as well as equal treatment for women inside the organization. This shared experience by Alliance members altered their political disposition, even after the organization was gone. Ultimately, the Alliance transformed the county into a Populist stronghold in an area of the state where, generally, Populism was not prevalent. 📍



**Charles Pirtle, one of the best and brightest of the reform movement, was secretary of the State Independent Party Organizing Committee.**  
NSHS RG2411

## NOTES



<sup>1</sup> John D. Barnhart, "The History of the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party of Nebraska" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), 200, 247; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Hallie Farmer, "The Railroads and Frontier Populism," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 13 (December 1926): 390-91.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley B. Parsons, Jr., "Who Were the Populists?" *Nebraska History* 44 (June 1963): 98-99.

<sup>4</sup> Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1993), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald C. Briel, "Preface to Populism: A Social Analysis of Minor Parties in Nebraska Politics, 1876-1890" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1981), 74-75; Parsons, "Who Were the Populists?" 98-99. A study of corn-hog cycles by agricultural historian Fred Shannon demonstrates that in each year but three from 1865 to 1897, farmers who fed corn to their hogs made more money than farmers who sold their grain directly on the market. Consequently, counties such as Saunders that engaged in hog raising were generally more prosperous than those that grew wheat or marketed their corn directly. Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860-1897* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 168.

<sup>6</sup> Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 200.

<sup>8</sup> *The Alliance* (Lincoln, Nebraska), June 12 and 19, 1889, July 3, 1889; *New Era* (Wahoo, Nebraska), May 21 1891.

<sup>9</sup> Roll 4, Frame 565, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers, 1887-1901, microfilm, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. The number following the sub-alliance name reflects the number of sub-alliances organized before it, minus one hundred. The state organization numbered sub-alliances beginning with one hundred. Thus Marble #611 was the five hundred-eleventh sub-alliance organized in Nebraska. For an analysis of Nebraska Farmers' Alliance membership journals, see Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 181-84. For Marble #611 see *The Alliance*, June 19, 1889, Sept. 14, 1889, and Roll 4, Frame 565, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.

<sup>10</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 95; *The Alliance*, July 3, 1889.

<sup>11</sup> *The Alliance*, Oct. 12, 1889, Dec. 28, 1889; *Wahoo Democrat* (Wahoo, Nebraska), Oct. 26, 1889; Roll 4, Frame 565, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.

<sup>12</sup> It is not explicitly stated how much the dues were for members. This number was calculated by taking the amount of money a sub-alliance submitted to the state organization, quarterly per member for the Center sub-alliance in Saunders County, Nebraska. "Quarterly Report and Correspondence of Center #806 sub-alliance (Colon) to Luna E. Kellie, Secretary State Farmers' Alliance, December 30, 1894," Roll 3, Frame 2656, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.

<sup>13</sup> For a description of a typical sub-alliance meeting, see Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance," 132-33. For a description of the importance of the position of Alliance Lecturer, see John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Roll 4, Frame 566, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers; *New Era*, Oct. 9, 1890, 1; *Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record* (Chicago: George Richmond Press, 1900), 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Wahoo Democrat*, Oct. 31, 1889. Antelope, Custer, Hamilton, and Sherman Counties also ran their own Alliance ticket in the fall county elections of 1889. See Annabel L. Beal, "The Populist party in Custer County, Nebraska: Its Role in Local, State, and National Politics, 1889-1906" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation,

University of Nebraska, 1965), 37; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: the Land and the People*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), 636; Robert W. Cherny, *Populism Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics from 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> *Wahoo Democrat*, Oct. 31, 1889, Nov. 14, 1889.

<sup>17</sup> Roll 4, Frames 565-67, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.

<sup>18</sup> *Farmers' Alliance* (Lincoln, Nebraska), Dec. 28, 1889.

<sup>19</sup> Roll 4, Frames 565-68, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers; *Farmers' Alliance*, Feb. 22, 1890; *New Era*, June 25, 1891; Sheldon, Nebraska, 636; *Saunders and Sarpy County Biographical Record*, 93. Master Workman in the Wahoo Knights of Labor was a position similar to being president of the organization.

<sup>20</sup> *Farmers' Alliance*, Aug. 9, 1890, Jan. 25, 1890, Mar. 15, 1890.

<sup>21</sup> Roll 4, Frames 565-71, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.

<sup>22</sup> *Farmers' Alliance*, Apr. 26, 1890.

<sup>23</sup> *The Alliance*, June 19, 1889; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism and Transformation*, 36-37; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 83-84; Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of political education in the Farmers' Alliance, see Theodore Mitchell, *Political Education in the Southern Farmers' Alliance, 1887-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). Mitchell uses Paulo Freire's idea of the 'banking concept of education' as a means to explain empowerment of class-based education. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 1970), chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> *New Era*, Jan. 8, 1891.

<sup>26</sup> *Farmers' Alliance*, Aug. 16, 1890; *Index to the Newspapers of Saunders County* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1991), 48-59; *New Era*, Jan. 14, 1892.

<sup>27</sup> *New Era*, Jan. 14, 1892.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, June 4, 1891.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, July 9, 1891.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1891.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 9, 1890; Oct. 23 and 30, 1890, Mar. 26, 1891, Aug. 13, 1891.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1891.

<sup>33</sup> For a description of sub-alliance activities in Rock Creek Precinct, which was located in northern Lancaster County, see Mary L. Jeffery, "Young Radicals of the Nineties," *Nebraska History* 38 (Spring 1957): 36. The Morse Bluff sub-alliance reported an eighty-five-volume "circulating" library "without walls," available to the membership. See *New Era*, May 28, 1891.

<sup>34</sup> *New Era*, Aug. 6, 1891.

<sup>35</sup> *The Alliance*, June 12, 1889, 4; *New Era*, Oct. 23, 1890.

<sup>36</sup> *Farmers' Alliance*, Mar. 1, 1890, May 24, 1890, June 28, 1890, July 5, 1890, Nov. 22, 1890; *New Era*, Jan. 22, 1891, Feb. 12, 1891, Aug. 13, 1891. The Declaration of Principals and Popular Call for a People's Independent Party, which was adopted as the platform at the Independent Party State Convention July 29, 1890, did not contain a woman suffrage plank. *Farmers' Alliance*, May 24, 1890. Historian John D. Hicks noted that woman suffrage "was a delicate question, for it was closely identified with the politically hazardous matter of temperance legislation." Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 406.

<sup>37</sup> Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance: A Reconsideration of the Role and Status of Women in the Late Nineteenth Century South," *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 74.

<sup>38</sup> Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 184.

- <sup>39</sup> *New Era*, Aug. 20, 1891; Roll 4, Frame 574, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.
- <sup>40</sup> Mary Jo Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reforms: Women in the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1986), 48-49.
- <sup>41</sup> *Farmers' Alliance*, Dec. 28, 1889, June 14, 1890; *New Era*, Feb. 26, 1891, Mar. 26, 1891.
- <sup>42</sup> *New Era*, Feb. 26, 1891, Mar. 5, 1891, July 16, 1891.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, June 14, 1891.
- <sup>44</sup> Solon J. Buck, *The Granger Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 41-43; Donald B. Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991), 23-25.
- <sup>45</sup> *1890 Census of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), vol. 1, pt. 1, 773; *New Era*, May 21, 1891, Mar. 3, 1891, Sept. 8, 1892.
- <sup>46</sup> *New Era*, Apr. 2, 1891.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, June 18, 1891.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, June 4, 1891.
- <sup>50</sup> Rose Rosicky, *A History of Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska* (Omaha: Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, 1929), 388.
- <sup>51</sup> Stanley B. Parsons, Jr., *The Populist Context: Rural Versus Urban Power on a Great Plains Frontier* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 5-7; McMath, *American Populism*, 104-6.
- <sup>52</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 106.
- <sup>53</sup> *New Era*, Oct. 23, 1890, Nov. 27, 1890, June 25, 1891; Record of Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebr.
- <sup>54</sup> Record of Deeds.
- <sup>55</sup> *New Era*, Jan. 29, 1891.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, June 4 and 25, 1891, April 7, 1892.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1890.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 4, 1890.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 26, 1891, July 30, 1891.
- <sup>60</sup> Roll 1, Frame 631, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers; Joseph G. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise* (Chicago: Interstate Printers and Publishers Inc., 1969), 65.
- <sup>61</sup> Knapp, *American Cooperative Enterprise*, 65-66; Buck, *The Granger Movement*, 259.
- <sup>62</sup> *New Era*, Oct. 30, 1890.
- <sup>63</sup> Buck, *The Granger Movement*, 259.
- <sup>64</sup> *New Era*, Oct. 30, 1890, Dec. 18, 1890.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1890.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 13, 1890, Dec. 25, 1890.
- <sup>67</sup> Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 193.
- <sup>68</sup> Record of Articles of Association, Office of the County Clerk, Saunders County Courthouse, Wahoo, Nebr.; *New Era*, Apr. 23, 1891, July 30, 1891; Roll 4, Frame 566, Nebraska Farmers' Alliance Papers.
- <sup>69</sup> Record of Articles of Association. The Farmers' Stock and Elevator Company of Colon's board of directors consisted of: president- James Gaffin, secretary- Jacob Keifer, treasurer- W. O. Rand, as well as, J. M. Lee, W. T. Crow, and Frank Barry, who were members at large. Though it is not known if the secretary, Jacob Keifer, was an Alliance member, the rest of the board members belonged to the Center sub-alliance. See *New Era*, July 30, 1891.
- <sup>70</sup> Record of Articles of Association.
- <sup>71</sup> *New Era*, May 26, 1892.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 6, 1892, May 26, 1892, for Negley quote, and May 31, 1891.
- <sup>73</sup> Jim and Arnold Fencil, *The Prague Centennial: Celebrating a Century of Czech Heritage* (Waterloo: Publication Printing of Nebraska, 1987), 27-28; Virginia Pokorny, *Weston Centennial Celebration: 1876-1976* (Weston: Weston Centennial Committee, Nebraska, 1976), 33.
- <sup>74</sup> Roll 8, Frames 87-88, 93, 95-96, Saunders County election records, microfilm, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
- <sup>75</sup> *Wahoo Democrat*, Nov. 15, 1894.
- <sup>76</sup> *New Era*, June 25, 1896, 1; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and Transformation*, 87.
- <sup>77</sup> Roll 8, Frames 102, 104-16, Saunders County election records.
- <sup>78</sup> Michael Schwartz examines the interaction between social structure and protest movement organization to explain the development of the Southern Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party. He contends that any social structure includes in itself a power strong enough to change it. This potential to alter the social structure resides in any aggrieved group that has the political force to disrupt the normal functioning of the current political system. The group becomes an agent of change only if it can "form and maintain an organization independent of the original structure. That organization must have a membership extensive enough and disciplined enough to call into question the combined functioning of the system." Michael Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 173.
- <sup>79</sup> David Stephens Trask, "Formation and Failure: The Populist Party in Seward County" *Nebraska History* 51 (Spring 1970): 281, 282-83, 290. The only other county-level study of the Alliance or Populism in Nebraska is Beal, "The Populist Party in Custer County, Nebraska." Beal's history of the Custer County movement is a narrative social history that uses local newspapers as primary sources.
- <sup>80</sup> Barnhart, "History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party in Nebraska," 200, 202.
- <sup>81</sup> Trask, "Formation and Failure," 283-86.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.
- <sup>83</sup> Roll 8, Frames 73-75, Saunders County election records; *New Era*, Nov. 6, 1890; Roll 49, 1885 Nebraska State Census, microfilm, Nebraska State Historical Society.
- <sup>84</sup> James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 229.
- <sup>85</sup> Roll 8, Frames 73-75, Saunders County election records; *New Era*, Nov. 6, 1890. Cherny demonstrates that in 1890, prosperous Democrats were the most likely to stay with the Democratic Party. He also contends that throughout the 1890s and early 1900s those counties with high numbers of rural Bohemians and Germans were most likely to have voted for Fusion candidates. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism and Transformation*, 58, 89-93.
- <sup>86</sup> Roll 8, Frames 73-75, Saunders County election records; *New Era*, Nov. 6, 1890; Roll 49, 1885 Nebraska State Census.
- <sup>87</sup> Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism and Transformation*, 21.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 80, 87.
- <sup>89</sup> *New Era*, July 30, 1891.