POPULISM IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1892-1901

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POPULISM has received much notice as a political phenomenon. Most of the literature, however, is confined to a study of the movement as a Western and Southern force. Little has been written about the Northeast; none has focused on Pennsylvania. In part this situation reflects the relatively impotent and flaccid posture of the party in Pennsylvania as compared to that of Kansas or the Dakotas. Nevertheless there was a Populist or People's party in the state, and it was active in the efforts to realign and redefine the syndrome of political power in the 1890's.

Beyond accounting for the existence and activities of Populism in Pennsylvania, interesting analytic comparisons can be made vis-à-vis the movement in general. In some respects, Pennsylvania Populism was a microcosm of its national counterpart. However, careful analysis of its origins, programmatic posture, and regions of support tends to refute, at least in part, some of the traditional raisons d'être offered to explain Populism in America.

Basically historians have presented two theses relative to the rise and existence of Populism as a political movement. One emphasizes an agrarian theme; the other visualizes a broad-based class movement of rural and urban producers.

The agrarian thesis asserts that Populism grew out of the discontent generated by the end of the frontier with its cheap land and/or the rise of farming as a commercialized business. The former drove land prices up and added to the problem of agrarian indebtedness in a period of deflated currency. The latter implied all the incipient problems of selling perishable goods on a comparatively free and fluctuating world market. Railroads and currency were important elements in either process.

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If the agrarian thesis is accepted, Pennsylvania seemed ripe for Populism. Prices for wheat and corn were falling throughout the 1870's and 1880's.\(^2\) The slight increase in 1891 that raised wheat to almost $1.00 per bushel and corn to $.70 did not relieve the poor profits obtained.\(^3\) By 1895 prices were falling again. Wheat tumbled to $.70, and corn sold for $.50. Dairying was becoming barely profitable, and pork prices fell.\(^4\) Switching from cereal crops was not the boon some had expected.

This general price climate paralleled continued expansion of acreage in production. The acreage increase in the 1880's was in those areas where lumbering, coal, and oil had served as the backbone of the economy. As these interests stagnated, agriculture became the alternative.\(^5\) Continued movement into these less fertile areas drove land prices up, and farmers began to complain about competing with products from cheaper Western lands.\(^6\) Like the Dakota farmers, Pennsylvanians pushed into marginal land and borrowed to purchase it at inflated prices.

The farmers of the state also suffered from the marketing dilemma. Profits were harshly cut by railroad costs.\(^7\) The tariff, which her politicians vigorously supported, was killing foreign markets for farm products.\(^8\) Furthermore, Russia and South America were rapidly becoming wheat exporters; and completion of the Suez Canal promised to bring India into competition.\(^9\)

Norman Pollack has recently rejected the purely agrarian thesis by emphasizing the Populist attempt to create a viable political force that would couple agrarian discontent with the plight of the urban laboring masses. Although he is careful not to imply great success with the plan, he does accentuate the attempt as part of his theoretical foundations of the party.\(^10\) 

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\(^3\) Pennsylvania, Reports of the State Board of Agriculture, *Agriculture of Pennsylvania, 1891*, p. 308.

\(^4\) Ibid., 1895, pp. 426-427, 723.

\(^5\) Ibid., 1881, p. 23.

\(^6\) Ibid., 1891, p. 30.

\(^7\) *Agriculture of Pennsylvania*, 1890, pp. 260-261.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 262.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 281-282.

epitomized the effort when he wrote the party’s famous Omaha Platform. Declaring that the “union of labor forces of the United States shall be permanent and perpetual,” Mr. Donnelly underscored the identical interests of rural and “civic” (urban) labor and called on them to rally around the Populist banner.  

Whatever the validity of this thesis, Pennsylvania again offered a lucrative seedbed for efforts along these lines. The level of labor agitation can be gathered from the fact that there were fifty-three strikes in 1893. Most were caused by reductions of wages, and it has been estimated that $1,395,423.75 was lost in wages that year due to strikes. In 1894 a decline in the number of strikes was offset by an increase in the number of longer, more widespread, and more destructive strikes. The malaise facing farmers and urban laborers was pregnant with the conditions that ostensibly bred Populism.

Transforming socio-economic discontent into political action is not an easy task, and constructing a third party faced serious obstacles in Pennsylvania. One of the more important of them was the fact that the Populist-inspired Farmers’ Alliances throughout the state were organized by the Southern Alliance. Hence the 16 county and 105 local groups that held alliance charters by 1889 were almost entirely committed to a doctrine of capturing existing parties. The third-party impetus that characterized the Northern Alliance and Industrial Union did not penetrate alliance activity in this state as it had in the West. The only evidence of independent party activity prior to 1892 was the appearance of three alliance candidates for the state legislature who ran and lost in Mercer County.

The seeds of the Pennsylvania People’s party were found in the remnants of the decadent Greenback-Labor movement. In its state convention held in Bellefonte on September 30, 1884, the name “People’s party” was occasionally used to refer to the declining

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13 The Omaha Platform of 1892 is cited in Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, pp. 439-444.
15 Ibid., XXII, 1894, p. 1-C.
16 Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, p. 127.
party. By 1886 most Greenbackers were shifting to the major parties or the Prohibitionists, but the party continued in Allegheny, Blair, Crawford, Indiana, and Northumberland Counties.17

In Indiana County the local Greenback press, the Indiana National, supported the revival of the party's principles under the People's party label.18 Indeed one of the county's Greenback politicians was destined to become a leading figure in the Populist movement. Robert A. Thompson, lumber mill owner and proprietor of the Indiana News, became the state chairman of the party for seven years.19 Many other Populist organizers had similar Greenback experience.

By the time the first state convention met in Franklin on June 23, 1892, the appearance of a national platform and slate of candidates for the Presidential race was a foregone conclusion. While the July 4, 1892, Omaha Platform is considered the first national platform of the Populist party, it was a virtual copy of the St. Louis resolutions of February, 1892. Furthermore, the declaration of intent to form a national party was pronounced in the Cincinnati Platform of May, 1891.20 Much of the impetus behind the Franklin meeting flowed from this national activity. In fact one of the key tasks accomplished by the convention was the selection of delegates and alternates to represent the state at the Omaha Convention.21

The small gathering at the convention also proceeded with a decision to run a full ticket in the 1892 election. Representatives from each Congressional district were ordered to assemble and nominate candidates for their districts. Meanwhile the convention selected George Dawson and S. P. Chase to run for the Congressmen-at-Large seats. Colonel H. B. McCombs was chosen to run for judge of the Supreme Court.22

The state platform endorsed the St. Louis demands of February, 1892, pleaded for referendum, demanded that employers pay an annual fee of not less than $100.00 per capita for each alien em-

19 Ibid., pp. 708-711.
20 All of the Populist national platforms are cited in Hicks, The Populist Revolt, pp. 427-444.
21 Oil City Derrick, June 23, 1892, p. 2.
22 Ibid.
ployed, and sought taxation on non-real property. It advocated uniform public school books to be furnished by the state. Direct election of the President, Vice-President, and all postmasters was urged. Women’s suffrage and the Australian ballot “pure and simple” were included. Use of Pinkerton detectives in labor disputes was to be suppressed. Sympathy was offered the Homestead strikers, and they were urged to rally to the Populist fold.

The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, which had combined with the Lehigh Railroad and the Susquehanna and Lehigh Valley Railroad, was to be disbanded for raising the price of coal to consumers and placing productive industries under still further English capital. Like the South Penn Rail combine that had been broken, the Reading Company was cited for being in violation of the state constitution. On the other end of the business theme, the party demanded free silver and denounced the scheme to call an international conference to fix a ratio between gold and silver. Dealing with “monarchial nations of the old world [was] un-American and a subterfuge to catch votes.”

The names of the national nominees, James Weaver for President and James G. Field for Vice-President, were printed on the Pennsylvania ballots. Two Populist candidates for congressmen-at-large, eight congressional district nominees, seven candidates for the state Senate, and thirty-seven for the lower house were also included.

The top elector for James Weaver polled 8,712 votes, while the rest of the slate of electors averaged around 8,200. Crawford, Indiana, and Potter counties gave him 7%, 6%, and 15.5% of their votes respectively. The nominees from the eight congressional districts ran far behind Weaver, although S. P. Chase polled

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28 The Baker Ballot Law of June 19, 1891, deviated from the pure Australian ballot by combining the party column with the traditional office column, thus encouraging straight ticket voting. This is detrimental to minor parties. It also required a percentage of votes to be cast for a party for its name to be printed on the official ballots. The party specified their complaint in this in the platform of 1894.

29 Details of the effects of this combination, which united all of the great coal carriers, are given in Howard M. Jenkins, ed., Pennsylvania Colonial and Federal (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1905), III, 196-197.


7,466 in the congressional-at-large contest. The pattern was similar for the state Senate and House races.

In most instances the Populists ran behind the Prohibitionists, but their total number of candidates and their fair showing in some counties was significant for a party less than four months old. The party girded itself for the next big race—the gubernatorial election of 1894.

The next state convention met in Williamsport on June 14, 1893. A vociferous speech by J. H. Atwood of Indiana County received most of the press notice. He set the tone of the proceedings by claiming:

Instead of government of the people, operated by the people, we have a king, and we call him President. We have a house of lords, and we call it the senate.

Then the convention settled down to readjust the party in line with the exigencies of purely state elections scheduled for 1893 and 1894.

The alien labor tax, women suffrage, denunciation of Pinkertons and the Reading Railroad, and free silver were dropped entirely. More emphasis was placed on issues pressing Pennsylvania homesteads and coal miners. To relieve the former, they advocated a graduated income and an inheritance tax for raising state revenues. The foreclosures of homesteads were to be limited to that which was not already paid. For the latter, the platform endorsed making all mine bosses state officers under civil service. They also favored state ownership and operation of coal mines.

J. H. Stevenson of Allegheny County was nominated for judge of the Superior Court and F. M. Windsor of McKean County for state treasurer. Neither did very well on November 7, 1893, but Crawford and Indiana counties again gave the Populists over 5% of their votes, and Potter County produced 11.5%. Erie joined the list of promising Populist counties.

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25 George Dawson polled only 4,313. Ibid., 1894, p. 551.
26 The Sun (Williamsport), June 14, 1893), p. 1.
29 Computed from data in Cochran, ed., Small's Legislative Handbook, 1894, pp. 552-678. The figure 5 per cent is utilized because it is generally
In preparation for the gubernatorial race in 1894 the party held another convention in Harrisburg on May 1, 1894. Confusion marked its opening. A search by a newspaper reporter the night before failed to find one delegate. The next day Judge Simonton reneged on the promised use of the courthouse and party leaders had to search for new quarters. Association Hall was obtained, and the Bolton House was to be party headquarters. To further emphasize the flimsy nature of the Harrisburg episode, the party had to pass the hat to collect money to pay the rent of the hall.

The convention finally met on the day Coxey’s Army was routed, and it immediately sent a telegram expressing sympathy and support. Democratic Congressman J. C. Sibley, a Populist idol, sent a wire via a friend to the convention assuring them that Coxey’s men “shall not suffer for bread as long as he has anything.” This only heightened the efforts by some to nominate him for governor.

Over 9/10 of the delegates wanted Sibley. S. D. Karns, an old man and one-time oil millionaire who lost it all by speculation, said he had a letter of acceptance from Sibley. A reading of the letter revealed that Sibley only desired “to serve the people as a private citizen.” After this confusion, it took two ballots to nominate Jerome T. Ailman, leader of the Pennsylvania Grange, for governor. Jerome Akin became the nominee for lieutenant governor. Nominations were made for secretary of internal affairs and congressmen-at-large.

The platform featured the Biblical quotation “Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself” and proceeded to back it with a carbon copy of the Williamsport Platform of 1893. The party was ready for the assault on the statehouse.

It was evident that the Populists were concentrating on the governorship on November 6, 1894. Besides the candidates fielded by the convention, they ran in only three congressional districts, significant and often spells victory in a system of proportional representation.

Populists later advocated this system over the single-member district, plurality system which is statistically loaded against minor parties.

The Patriot (Harrisburg), May 1, 1894, p. 1.
Ibid., May 2, 1894, p. 3.
Cited ibid.
Ibid., pp. 2-3.
Ibid., pp. 674-675.
none of which included any of their more potent counties. They ran in only ten contests for the state Senate but managed to run ninety-three for the lower house. The latter were concentrated in about half the counties; fourteen of them were in Allegheny County.

Crawford, Indiana, Potter, and Washington counties produced over 10% of their votes for each of the Populist candidates for the state legislature who ran there. One of the lower house nominees in Allegheny County compiled a surprising vote to run second to a Democrat.

The contest for governor was futile. Ailman received about 2% of the vote in the state and even ran behind the Prohibitionist by 3,000 votes. He did beat the Socialist-Labor and the Independent Republican candidates. Crawford County gave him 11.5%; Erie, 6.5%; Indiana, 7.5%; and Potter, 12%. More significantly, several new counties were added to the list of potential power centers; Jefferson, Susquehanna, Tioga, Warren, and McKean Counties broke the 5% figure. Mercer and Venango came within a few votes of doing so. The promise of power had spread somewhat.

With the major state-oriented elections over, 150 delegates met in Williamsport on July 4, 1895, to begin refurbishing the party for the next Presidential race. The party was in a state of flux, both nationally and within the state. On the national scene, the silver issue had captured the fancy of many leaders and the party strained to retain its character. Pennsylvania Populists had never been enamored with the silver plank, having dropped all reference to it in their state platforms since 1892. Yet the Williamsport convention of 1895 had to regroup and readjust to focus on the coming national election and the possible Populist swing to silver.

Internally the Pennsylvania party did attempt to strengthen their organization. The Sledge Hammer of Meadville was authorized as the official organ of the party. However, money and dissension plagued them. Receipts for 1895 were $44.60, and expenses amounted to $114.16. The re-election of R. A. Thompson as state chairman exposed the dissension. He was attacked by T. P. Rynder of Erie. One of the sensations of the convention

Ibid., pp. 555-559.

Computed from data ibid., pp. 563-585.

Computed from data ibid., pp. 427-428.

Hicks, The Populist Revolt, pp. 344-345.

The Sun (Williamsport), July 5, 1895, p. 1.
was Rynder’s speech denouncing Thompson as a traitor and accusing him of selling out his paper (the *Indiana News*) to the Democrats.48

This atmosphere of financial and internal problems, plus the unsettled condition of the party’s national image, led to the adoption of a short platform. Several nationally oriented items were put in it. Initiative and referendum were endorsed, equal rights for women reappeared, the Supreme Court was denounced for its decision on the income tax; and the party resolved that the arrest and conviction of Eugene V. Debs amounted to “revolutionary action” by the United States Court. Silver was not mentioned specifically, but a tax of 10% was demanded upon all future contracts made payable in gold.49

A candidate for state treasurer and three for judges of the Superior Court were nominated. All did very poorly on November 5, 1895, polling about 1% of the state vote.50 Following the election, Pennsylvania Populists fixed their attention on the events surrounding the Presidential nominating conventions.

The silver wing of the Democratic party nominated William Jennings Bryan. The Populists, meeting in St. Louis, had to respond. The ensuing debate exposed the struggle between the “fusionists” and the “middle-of-the-roaders” that had been developing internally since 1894.51 Their painful response of endorsing Bryan while nominating their own candidate for Vice-President exposed a similar split in the Pennsylvania party.

Both the fusionists and the middle-of-the-roaders were faced with some hard decisions in the light of existing Pennsylvania politics. There were conditions to suggest that reform could have appeal. The coal and iron areas in the western part of the state were plagued by strikes and turmoil, and agriculture was suffering. It was a problem of how to present reform to the people—fuse with Bryan or offer straight Populism.

Fusionists could point to the dangers of deviating from the party’s national strategy and to the fact that industry in the state was not staunchly committed to gold. Their opponents countered with the observation that the tariff issue overwhelmed whatever

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48 Ibid.
50 Ibid., pp. 462-463, 471.
feelings industry might have on the currency question. Anti-fusionists also noted that the Pennsylvania Democrats were committed to Clevelandism and gold. In fact, only Joseph Sibley of Crawford County could be labeled a significant silver Democrat, and only three Pennsylvania votes went for Bryan at the Democratic convention. Fusion, therefore, meant assuming an issue of little import in the state, plus an alliance with a very meager block in the state Democratic organization.47

Apparently the fusionists did not perceive the situation this way, because some of their key adherents began to maneuver for their goal. Prior to the state Populist convention a Democratic rally was held in Meadville. Over 2,000 people attended to hear Sibley espouse Bryan and silver. On the platform with him was Curtis S. Clarke, editor of the Populist Sledge Hammer.48 In addition, early arriving delegates to the state convention in Pittsburgh were openly discussing the adoption of the California plan of fusion whereby a common electoral ticket, based on the proportion of Bryan votes obtained by each party, would be used.49

When the convention opened at Curry University Hall on August 6, the party leaders planned to forestall the divisive question of fusion by quietly assigning it to a committee of five for study after the party platform had been debated and adopted. On the surface this strategy did produce a temporary aura of calm. Opening debate concerning the platform was tranquil and focused upon the best way to verify the prudence of the Populist silver plank. There was some discussion whether to emphasize the slight prosperity that previous silver purchase had perhaps brought, or to stress the depression and the repeal of the Sherman Act. The latter prevailed.50 Then the tempest over fusion broke the synthetic calm.

Fusionist T. P. Rynder, who had blasted Thompson for having Democratic overtones in 1895, tried to get a committee to act with the Democrats to put up one state platform. This move failed, and the party nominated two Congressmen-at-large. A delegate rose to protest. He suggested nominating one, letting the Demo-

47 An excellent account of the political conditions in the state at the time is given in S. K. Stevens, "The Election of 1896 in Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania History, IV (April, 1937), pp. 65-87.
49 Ibid., August 5, 1896, p. 3.
50 Ibid., August 6, 1896, p. 1.
crats nominate another. George Dawson said, "No" and gave a "quiet roast to Democracy and advocated a middle-of-the-road policy." The battle ended with a committee's being empowered to name Populist electors, work out a deal with the Democrats if possible, and even to remove one Congressman-at-large nominee if fusion succeeded.

The platform produced in the aftermath gave witness to the split in the convention. It re-affirmed the Omaha Platform of 1892 and endorsed "essentially" the platform produced at St. Louis in 1896. It accepted Bryan and their own Populist Vice-Presidential candidate (Tom Watson) as standardbearers. Finally, to satisfy anti-fusionists, it demanded an impossible price from Pennsylvania Democrats if they desired Populist support. They had to rid themselves of the "gold-bugs."

The power configuration in the Democratic party prevented a unified or purposeful response to these Populist demands. The party had held a convention at Allentown in April and endorsed a strict anti-silver platform. After Bryan captured the national party, the Pennsylvania Democrats held another convention at Harrisburg in September. Silver, Bryan, and fusion with Populists were meekly accepted; but a large splinter group broke with the party and formed the Jeffersonian party. They re-affirmed the Allentown planks. When election day came, Bryan was the nominee for the Democratic, People's, and National Silver parties.

It is hard to calculate the Populist contribution to the 433,228 votes cast for Bryan in the state. Officially it was 6,103. The fact that this was less than that obtained by the Jeffersonian Democrats is not significant, since many Populists probably voted Democratic or even National Silver. Nevertheless the official list of Pennsylvania electors for Bryan was identical for both Democrats and Populists.

The inability of either party to vigorously accept or reject fusion was evident on the rest of the ballot. Of the seven district candidates for Congress, only one was fused. He lost miserably. None of the candidates for the state Senate or House were fused. They

51 Ibid., p. 6.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
55 Both Democratic platforms are cited ibid., pp. 423-428.
56 Ibid., pp. 460-461.
ran poorly. Yet the anti-fusionists could point to the fact that one of their Populist congressman-at-large candidates ran second and far ahead of the Democratic nominee. The results encouraged neither side.

No state convention was held in 1897. The party did run in some local contests; and they held the offices of prothonotary, clerk of the court, district attorney, warden, two auditors, and coroner in Crawford County. In Potter County they held one auditorship. All of these victories were the product of fusion.

A state convention met on April 27, 1898, in Williamsport, a week after war was declared on Spain. There were no regular delegates, merely interested individuals or those who were representing people they wanted endorsed for the ticket. The other parties sent agents to "raid" the party. Republicans Bill Andrews and "Boss" Matthew S. Quay were represented. Dr. Silas Swallow, a Prohibitionist, had agents there too. "Middle-of-the-road" Wharton Barker of Philadelphia attended, threatening to leave the party unless true Populists were nominated.

Fusionists eventually carried the convention. Silver was endorsed, and the St. Louis Platform was finally adopted without reservation. Nominations reflected complex fusion. Swallow became the gubernatorial nominee; but he was also the standard-bearer for the Prohibitionist, Liberty, and Honest Government parties. The Populist lieutenant governor candidate was fused with the Liberty ticket. So were the nominees for judge of the Superior Court. One Congressman-at-large fused with the Democrats, and the other ran alone as a Populist. The secretary of internal affairs candidate ran likewise.

On November 8, 1898, the results of fusion practically eliminated the People's party from Pennsylvania. Dr. Swallow received 125,746 votes as a Prohibitionist, 632 on the Liberty ticket, 4,495 Honest Government, and only 2,058 Populist votes. Fusion on the Prohibition ticket made the biggest drain on the Populists. Even old Populist bailiwicks like Crawford County did not register Populist votes for Swallow, although they did for the lieutenant governor, who was not on the Prohibitionist ticket. The Congress-

56 Ibid., pp. 627-665.
57 Ibid., 1898, pp. 897, 905.
58 The Sun (Williamsport), April 27, 1898, p. 1.
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a man-at-large candidate who had fused with the Democrats ran far ahead of his middle-of-the-road companion. Yet one non-fusionist for state assembly came very close to winning in Crawford County.60 These contradictions and inconsistencies merely underscored what was happening in Pennsylvania politics generally and within the Populist movement specifically.

By the following year, scattered remnants of the party met in Philadelphia. The platform evaded controversial issues for more esoteric and negative items such as condemning the state legislature for placing state funds in favored banks, failing to pass a new ballot law, and reducing school appropriations. More to the point, they resolved:

That to those former members of the People's party of this state who have withdrawn from the regular State Organization, and who have voluntarily absented themselves from this convention, we extend an invitation to join with us during the ensuing campaign, and to reunite with us in all our future deliberations.61

The 1899 election for state treasurer, judge of the Supreme Court, and judge of the Superior Court saw the Populist vote reduced to essentially two counties—Crawford and Erie. Even in these, the vote was small.62

Prior to the Presidential campaign of 1900, two national Populist conventions were held. The middle-of-the-roaders met in Cincinnati and nominated Wharton Barker of Philadelphia for President and Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota for Vice-President. They adopted a long platform pledging to remain a third party and re-emphasizing the old Populist tenets of initiative and referendum, public ownership of railroads and telegraphs, graduated income tax, and direct election of senators. They shifted away from silver to a pure paper money thesis.63

Meanwhile the fusionists met at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to nominate Bryan. Pennsylvania was represented by W. M. Diesher of Reading, E. T. Mason of Meadville, and J. H. Stevenson of Pittsburgh. This faction reiterated Populism with the silver plank,

60 Ibid., pp. 628-796.
61 Ibid., 1900, p. 5.
62 Ibid., pp. 636-641.
63 Ibid., 1901, p. 559.
plus Bryan's call for independence for the Philippines, an end to militarism, and sympathy for the Boers. They spoke against the importation of Japanese, denounced disfranchisement of Negroes, and sought home rule for the territories.64

The middle-of-the-roaders in Pennsylvania followed the Cincinnati idea of utilizing initiative and referendum for the internal operation of the party. There were to be no more state conventions, and nominations were made for auditor general and Congressmen-at-large by these methods.65

Bryan's name appeared at the head of four parties on Pennsylvania ballots: the Fusion People's, American Anti-Imperialist League, Lincoln Silver Republicans, and the Democrats. Barker and Donnelly were listed separately. The Socialist-Labor, National Democratic (gold), National, United Christian, Social Democrat, and the Union Reform parties all had candidates. In all the confusion of shifting political balances in the country since 1896, parties had acquired a magnificent capacity for fission.

Barker and Donnelly drew 638 out of over one million votes in Pennsylvania. This level of performance was generally the same throughout the ticket.66 One lone granite and marble cutter, running on a People's-Prohibition ticket in Crawford County, actually won a seat in the lower house of the state legislature.67

In 1901 several men endorsed themselves as Populists and ran for state treasurer and the Supreme Court. The vote was trifling. A Populist candidate for judge of the Court of Common Pleas got one vote in Clarion County.68 By the time the gubernatorial race arrived in 1902, there was no record of a People's party in the state.

In many respects Populism in Pennsylvania ran parallel to its national counterpart. It was concentrated in rural areas, rose to a peak of dissension over silver and Bryan, and faded as prosperity and fusion brought an end to what had become part of the most powerful third party in America. There were even hints of the nativism that Richard Hofstadter noted in the national move-

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64 Ibid., pp. 554-558.
65 Ibid., p. 586.
66 Ibid., p. 623.
67 Ibid., p. 773. A biographical sketch of this man is provided ibid., 1902, p. 1156.
68 Ibid., pp. 623-625, 785.
The demand for a tax on alien labor and the anti-British feelings relative to the financiers of the Reading Company that were part of the Franklin Platform are indications of this. The state organization also shared the national interest in initiative, referendum, direct election of senators, and the Australian ballot.

There were, however, trenchant differences between the Pennsylvania movement and that operating nationally. First, the Farmers’ Alliances played a much less conspicuous role in organizing the party in this state. Professional third-party politicians of Greenback extraction, who by no means were absent from the national level, were far more important.

Second, the tenor of Pennsylvania Populism represented the right-wing in the party’s programmatic spectrum. Silver never received the enthusiastic endorsement evident at the national level. Even while embracing Bryan in 1896, Pennsylvania Populists could only “essentially” agree to the silver-tinged St. Louis Platform. Government ownership did not receive much attention beyond a brief demand for government-owned coal mines and general endorsement of the ideas appearing in national platforms. Moreover, none of the state platforms, or even the press notices of official conventions, mention the famous sub-treasury plan.

In fairness, these programmatic differences reflected a state orientation in the Pennsylvania party and a national orientation in the national party. Currency reform and the sub-treasury plan touched upon powers lodged only in Washington. Government ownership, while possible at a state level, was primarily aimed at complex interstate railroad and telegraph systems. Yet, even during Presidential races, these issues were not vigorously promoted by Pennsylvania Populists. Furthermore, the Reading Company complaint illustrated little interest in government regulation on a continuing basis. It merely visualized the utilization of government to break up the combine.

Third, the leadership of the state organization reinforced this more cautious, more conservative brand of Populism. R. A. Thompson was a newspaperman and lumber mill owner. T. P. Rynder was a journalist, and Ailman led the conservative Penn-

Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, p. 77.

Details of this famous Populist idea appear in Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, pp. 186-204.
sylvania Grange. These men were far different from the aggressive and colorful "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, Ignatius Donnelly, "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, or Tom Watson who led the national party. There was no equivalent to Mary Lease of Kansas, who urged farmers to "raise less corn and more hell."71

Finally, the two theses presented by historians to explain the rise and existence of Populism in America have only partial applicability to the movement in Pennsylvania. One of them is especially inadequate. A Populist party premised on a coalition of discontented agrarians and urban laboring masses did not become a reality in Pennsylvania. The concerted appeals to coal miners never materialized, let alone efforts to capture the more urbanized laboring masses in Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties. Failure along these lines in a state that contained large numbers of both sides of the proposed coalition underscores the limited utility of this thesis.

The agrarian thesis, however, has more utility. Populism in Pennsylvania was an agrarian phenomenon; but it shared only part of the intricate web of inequities, real or imagined, that served as impetus for the movement in other parts of the United States. At least those aspects of the thesis relative to the discontent generated by indebtedness and marginal farm land can be applied to the movement in this state. Support for the party was concentrated in the fringes of the state, both geographically and economically. Crawford, Indiana, and Potter counties were situated in a region caught in the midst of a shift from a dead lumbering economy to a highly questionable agricultural base. Farm land had been purchased on borrowed capital, but the poor quality of the soil made farming tenuous. By 1894 large areas slipped into disuse. Foreclosures were rampant, production slipped, and the population began to decline.72

Conversely those aspects of the thesis that attribute agrarian discontent to marketing dilemmas and railroad rates are of little value when applied to Pennsylvania. Unlike many Populist bailiwicks in the West, the areas of Populist support in this state did

71 Ibid., p. 160.
not contain extensive commercial farming interests. In part this explains the programmatic posture of Pennsylvania Populism relative to government ownership of railroads and silver.

In retrospect, the Pennsylvania People’s party was part of the abortive attempt to realign and re-define the political forces in America during the 1890’s. For that it deserves notice. In addition, it captured a significant block of votes in an extensive, if not populous, portion of the state. It provided a voice to dissenting and protesting elements which probably would have remained unheard in the chambers of “Boss” Quay, or the ruling hierarchy of the Democratic party.

Conversely it should be noted that the most commercialized and market-conscious farm areas in the state (i.e., York, Berks, Lancaster, and Bucks counties) did not respond to Populism. These were the areas of least farm tenancy and greatest prosperity. Almost all the farms were family-owned ancestral homesteads. In short, whatever plummeting prices, rising land costs, or railroad rates did to profits, the capacity to survive was greatest in the key commercial farming counties in the state. Fletcher, Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, pp. 28-39. 369.