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The Rise and Fall of the
Farmers' Alliance of Virginia

Honors Thesis

for

Dr. F.W. Gregory

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Nancy Byrd Manning

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The purpose of this paper is to trace the quick rise and equally sudden fall of the Virginia State Farmers' Alliance. Emphasis was given to the unique socio-economic conditions prevalent in Southern Virginia during the latter part of the nineteenth century which forced individual farmers into cooperation, and to the vacillating political situation which precipitated the death of the Virginia Farmers' Alliance. The structures and activities of the Alliance received particular attention because they were extremely important in attracting and maintaining membership.
In the latter part of the nineteenth century agrarian unrest swept the agricultural regions of the nation where ruralists, hard hit by distressed farm conditions caused by inflated currency, corporate exploitation, and over production, called for reform. As legislatures failed to act on their proposals, the farmers united by forming organizations such as the Farmers' Alliance. Reflecting national discontent, agitation in Virginia also resulted in the formation of a State Farmers' Alliance, but traced its origins to slightly different circumstances.

Four main conditions intermingled in Post-war Virginia; a growing cleavage developed between the prosperous, modern industrial areas in Northern and Western Virginia and the poverty stricken, tradition bound, agricultural areas in the South; a worsening economic situation sharply increased Virginia's special agricultural problems; and increasing anger alienated rural Virginia from the ruling classes; and finally a changing atmosphere in rural Virginia called for an outlet in action.

Cleavage or "New Sectionalism" was the most disturbing of these problems. Generally Northern and Western Virginia experienced a boom during the years 1870-1890, while Southern Virginia remained stagnant. Crop experimentation practiced by Northern and Western farmers caused an increased production of corn and wheat for these areas, while levels decreased for the state as a whole. Agricultural diversification such as dairying and cattle raising let mineral depleted fields lay fallow and replenish themselves for future usage. Here also, new industries such as coal mining provided work for unemployed Negroes and the possibility of supplemental income for farmers. Travelers in Virginia recognized that
the coal and iron deposits of Western Virginia attracted investors and railways to that area and predicted that Virginia might become "one of the great manufacturing centers of the country." While compared with the prosperity of the rest of the state, the poverty caused by worsening agricultural and economic conditions in Southern Virginia was magnified. The use of Virginia's fields as battle grounds during the Civil War devastated the once moderately productive farms. Although farm values did revive after 1870, they never reached the spectacular growth of the decade preceding the war. The decade of expansion 1850-1860, when farm values increased 50-100 per cent, was followed by ten years of decreased farm value during the Civil War. Farm values rose again between 1870-1880 by 25-50 per cent, and between 1880-1890 they rose by 10-25 per cent. Post-war increases, however, did not balance the decreases caused by the war. The possible total maximum per cent increase during the twenty year span was only 75 per cent as opposed to 100 per cent from 1850-1860.

The decreased value of farm land was realized in declining production levels; between 1859-1889 production of corn, wheat, and even the money crop tobacco dropped. It was not only difficult, but almost impossible to regain high production rates from the physically marred land because the soil was also minerally exhausted from long years of heavy usage. Farmers vainly tried to restore its former abundance by using artificial fertilizers. One contemporary noted that "There are few more depressing spectacles than a yellow tobacco lot totally robbed of its natural fertility, and yet, under the stimulus of artificial manure, kept going a little longer like a feeble
heart reinforced by doses of digitalis. Acting to compound farmers' problems, high production levels of tobacco in Kentucky drove prices down in Virginia three to six cents, or below growing costs. Even if the farmer could grow salable tobacco there was no guarantee that it would be marketable at a profit.

The depressed agricultural condition following the Civil War was not the only problem Virginia's farmers faced. Agriculturists realized that the unprofitable plantation system needed replacement by new economic methods which would provide spaces for disposed planters. Rurals dealt with this problem in two ways. First land owners could afford to farm only if they reduced the size of their holdings and worked their fields themselves or hired a few hands, thus avoiding dispersal of limited capital. As a result of this process the number of farms more than doubled from 1860-1890, while the average size of the farms fell from 324 acres in 1860 to 150 acres in 1880. Share cropping and cash tenant plans served as alternatives to small privately owned farms. By these methods former planters owning plenty of property, but little capital, leased their land to unpropertied farmers who either paid a rent or shared the profits from their crops with their landlord.

Although numerous rural Virginians jumped at the chance to plow their own fields, the small farming system failed to remedy the dissipated agricultural conditions in Southern Virginia. As the private land holders managed to avoid poverty their lessees grew poor because their land yielded inferior crops for which the highly competitive Northern markets refused to
pay an equitable price. The farmer, unable to earn a livelihood from his work was also unable to pay his rent or his bills, causing the entire locality to suffer from his misfortunes. This unending cycle, worsened by decreased farm values, low production rates and tenant farming, gave Southern Virginia a destitute appearance. Travelers to the area, surprised at the contrast between North and South, noted dilapidated mansions, insufficient material goods, and poorly cultivated lands as characteristic of the region.

Southern Virginians, daily encountering this pervasive poverty, developed a deep bitterness towards the wealthier ruling classes. They reacted in anger against big business, government, and the ruling political party whose corporate price fixing, monopolies, and favoritism left few rewards for the tiller. Dependent on railroads for transportation, on middlemen for selling or exporting, and on manufacturers and merchants for supplying their material needs, farmers faced a continually hostile situation. The farmer's first problems arose as he transported his freight. He found that railway policies operated contrary to his needs; lines did not extend to certain areas, rates were not posted in advance, and fares were raised or lowered indiscriminately. Railways charged farmers almost seven times as much to ship sheep ninety miles on the Atlantic and Danville as from Chicago to New York. Rurals from Caroline County stated that transportation, especially railroads, was one of their major problems. Farmers tried to force regulation of railroad practices by urging the state legislature to create a Railway Commission, but the state Senate defeated
the bill three times between 1885 and 1890. 17

After the transport of his produce the farmer expected his receiving middleman to transact a fair deal with the buyers or exporters. This was not the case for the middleman wanted a large profit. Thus brokers bought up agricultural produce at low harvest prices, selling it at a profit to his purchaser who in turn sold his finished product, under the protection of monoplies and tariffs, at an even higher price. When these commodities, bought by merchants at monopolistic prices from big business, reached the general store they were exorbitantly priced. The store keeper enabled the farmer to purchase his necessities by allowing him to obtain merchandise or credit, putting a lien on his property or future crops. But because his property and crops continually decreased in value, the farmer was unable to pay off his credits and remained permanently in debt. He acridly blamed his increasing misery on the railway kings, middlemen, corporate managers, and merchants, who grew rich out of his poverty. 18

As the farmer fell deeper and deeper into debt he began to favor free coinage of silver. Under the system of limited coinage the value of the dollar greatly inflated. While in the past one dollar bought one bushel of grain, now one dollar purchased two bushels. 19 Contemporary statisticians figured that in 1891 Virginia farmers lost approximately $2,000,000 per year in the sale of wheat because of the lower value of their crops contrasted with the higher value of money. 20 Based on these facts the farmer reasoned that if more currency were put into circulation he would receive better prices for his produce which would create more
profits and increase his purchasing power. He could thus pull himself out of debt. To encourage this end the farmers agitated for free coinage of silver but, as in the case of the Railway Commission, their pleas met with no success.

As the rurals launched their offensive attack on corporate business they concurrently reacted against state and federal governments whose protectionist policies added to the grief of the struggling worker. Farmers believed that the government permitted capitalists to establish monopolies and to fix prices, and allowed inflated currency because these lenient tactics benefited corporations who reciprocated with favoritism toward official agents and departments. Virginians were particularly angry with the state government which, in return for political support, allowed the Richmond based American Tobacco Company to force down the price of tobacco without similarly lowering the price of cigarettes.

The farmers might have accepted these injustices if the big businessman was taxed a commensurate amount with his privileges. This was not the case. The little man ended up paying almost four fifths of the state and local taxes because the government enforced a high levy on every day articles, while it protected the manufacturer against foreign competition through high tariffs, and allowed important companies to evade their taxes. Reports stated that farmers were taxed 30 per cent for their shoes, 35 per cent for their carriages, clothing, furniture, and saddles, 45 per cent for their iron implements, and 55 per cent for their dishes. Polarization created by the unequal relationship between steep taxes, high prices, and
discrimination on one side and protectionist tariffs, monopolies, and favoritism on the other, was an important factor in the growth of bitterness among farmers towards the wealthier classes.26

Betrayed by prejudiced government, farmers released their contempt by assaulting the ruling political party. The Democratic Machine of Virginia left itself wide open to attack because many of its leading chiefs held dual roles, one with the Democratic party and the other with a railroad. Two Democratic state chairmen, John S. Barbour and Basil B. Gordon also served as top officials for different railroads in private law suits and continued to support them in the General Assembly.27 These men successfully defeated the proposed Railroad Commission three times in the state Senate.

Farmers felt the already thick political situation solidify as the courthouse clique, or ring, gained importance. The county Democratic chairman held the pivotal position within this ring.28 He selected the electoral board which appointed judges and clerks of election. With his influence he made sure that his nominees for treasurer, sheriff, clerk of court, commissioner of revenue, supervisors, and even legislators got the job. Persons were chosen for these positions according to their promises to forward the goals of the Democratic party. Thus the farmers, who opposed habitual fraternization with privilege, were not often selected, leaving them under represented. The lack of spokesmen in legislative office meant the farmers' battle against their antagonists - big business, government, and political parties would continue until they could unite themselves and be heard.
Fortunately for the South-side ruralite the fourth general characteristic dominating the scene in post reconstruction Virginia was a growing feeling of unity and enthusiasm. \(^{29}\) A new social system based on self respect, initiative, and inquisitiveness replaced the traditional standards of deference, respect, and unquestioning faith. These new qualities surfaced as the numbers of small farmers increased. For those lucky enough to possess land, the pride of ownership instilled in them a new outlook on life. The economic dissipation and political license surrounding them sparked a feeling of irrepressible injustice. They felt they must lead their people back to wealth and happiness. Just as the proud land holders itched to lead, the numerous share croppers and tenants begged to follow. They yearned for the path to prosperity and contentment but their fights against business, government, and party ended in failure at every turn. When the chance came to join the Farmers' Alliance, which promised to relieve their grievances and also offered personal security as well as social diversion, the farmers signed up in droves. It was the "coming to consciousness of the long silent classes." \(^{30}\)

Many attempts were made at organization in Post-war Virginia before the Farmers' Alliance was founded. The first endeavor was the Virginia Agricultural Society founded, in 1866, which met with little success and soon passed away. The Patrons of Husbandry, known as the Grange, took its place and reached its height in 1876 with a total of 16,000 members. The Grange provided cooperative buying, propagandized against railroads, and published *The National Farm and Fireside*. Because of the limited effect of the Grange, leaders got together in Richmond during the spring of 1885
and formed the Farmers' Assembly which served as a link between farmers and government. As stated in its constitution: "The Assembly was to have the power and duty of considering, adopting, and recommending to the people of Virginia and the legislative and executive departments of the State government all such measures as they deem of interest or benefit to the agriculturists."  

Following the example of earlier organizations, the Farmers' Assembly soon proved ineffective and the farmers turned to the budding Farmers' Alliance as a last hope. The first Farmers' Alliances, formed during the 1870's in Lampasas and Parker Counties, Texas, stipulated that their chief goal was cooperation for protection of personal property. The two independent groups soon united to form the Grand State Alliance which immediately ran into trouble over political issues and the debate over federation with the North-West Alliance. Leaders of the Grand State Alliance finally agreed not to cooperate with the North-West Alliance because it was non-secret, loosely organized, and gave membership to Negroes and anyone raised on a farm including persons born on a farm and since moved away. At this time they changed their name to the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union of America and advertised as "a strictly white man's non-political secret business association." Meanwhile the Agricultural Wheel formed in 1882 at McBees Schoolhouse, Arkansas, had attracted 500,000 members by 1887. Feeling they would be more powerful as a bloc, the Agricultural Wheel and National Alliance united in September, 1889 to form the Farmers' and Laborers Union of America. By December 1889 the North-West
Alliance again attempted to join with the Southern Alliance but was unsuccessful because both bodies remained immovable over the issue of secrecy. During the negotiations the Southern Alliance changed its name for the last time to the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, setting as its main goals the relief of oppressed peoples and the proselytizing of the entire South.

Two years before the Alliance reached its permanent state, the first local Alliance appeared in Rockingham County, Virginia. In November of the same year Rockingham County held the first county Alliance meeting in the state. The first state-wide meeting, held at Luray in the summer of 1888, only attracted delegates from five counties; but thirty-five representatives, mostly from middle Virginia, attended the annual meeting at Lynchburg in 1889 and by 1890 ninety-six of the one hundred counties sent members. Membership totaled 33,406 persons distributed among 1,390 sub-Alliances by 1891. These impressive growth figures caused the House of Delegates to allow the Alliance the use of its chambers for their annual meeting until 1893 when the organization lost its impetus.

Leaders of the Alliance based the structure of the systematized whole on the principle of democratic representation. Five or more people could form a local or sub-Alliance "so long as the meeting hall is not within three miles by nearest travelled route to another sub-Alliance, except by consent of that near sub-Alliance." The local Alliance elected members from within its membership to attend the county meetings, county delegates elected representatives to the district meetings and the district chose persons to attend the state meetings.
Most members involved themselves mainly with the local Alliances causing them to become the most important unit in the whole. The large number of officers within the sub-Alliance provided many chances of leadership. These jobs included President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Chaplain, Doorkeeper, Steward, Lecturer and Assistant Lecturer. The Lecturer, probably the most influential man among the officers, was expected to cooperate with other state and county lecturers and to carry out the instructions of the National, State, and County Alliances. Most importantly he was "responsible for making meetings interesting."  

In order to insure solidarity, farmers tightly restricted eligibility. Both males and females (only wives of members) who had lived in Virginia for six months and had reached their sixteenth birthday were admitted if they earned their livings as farmers, country mechanics, school teachers, physicians, or ministers of the Gospel, and also possessed good moral character, were white, and believed in God. These regulations did not effect managers and employers of Alliance Cooperatives, civil officers otherwise eligible, or farmers who ran supply stores. Members of some local alliances, afraid of infiltration by the enemy, favored even tighter securities. The Old Hickory Alliance wrote to Mann Page, Brandon Alliance President, asking about the eligibility of a farmer who was also a merchant. Page replied that merchants are not eligible but exceptions could be made, the decision resting with the president of the State Alliance. Old Hickory, unwilling to admit the person in question proposed an amendment to the eligibility clause excluding "all those having interests besides farming which are at variance with the interests of farming, such as lawyers and farmer storekeepers."
Despite strict eligibility clauses membership rapidly increased. Leaders tended to report enrollment figures to suit their needs: Colonel Robert Beverley, state Alliance leader, declared membership was 80,000. This was almost certainly an exaggeration since the official report for the peak year, 1891, listed only 33,406 members. It cannot be doubted, however, that membership soared. In a letter to C.H. Pierson, Alliance leader in Caroline County, J.B. Grovath of Enfield, Virginia states that membership in his sub-Alliance rose from ten to forty-nine in the past year and about nineteen of those forty-nine joined in the last month. Another letter addressed to Pierson states that "just one year ago we started with less than ten members and now we have a goodly number with our order on the boom." The Alliance attracted two types of person. Leaders were usually land holders who were able to sustain the losses caused by agricultural depression, but spirited enough to resent its occurrence and intelligent enough to know its causes. Colonel Robert Beverley, very active in the various moves toward organization and in the Alliance itself, was typical of the new man who led the farmers into political activity. He gained authority because he was a popular Confederate veteran and prominence because he was a land owner in Essex and Fauquier Counties. Finally he was quite active in agricultural affairs. He served as president of the Virginia Agricultural Society which he founded in 1866; chaired the Farmers' Assembly; was a leader in the Farmers' Alliance, serving as a member of the interstate Farmers' Association and in 1888 as its vice president at large. His exemplary behavior caused a contemporary to call him the "connecting link between the ideal Virginia gentleman of past and present days."
Another important leader was C.H. Pierson. He was born in England, graduated from Cambridge, studied theology at Oxford, and was ordained an Anglican priest. Because of ill health he joined his brother, a dairy farmer in Virginia, where he failed as a farmer, but found his calling as a leader of the Alliance movement. A writer by nature, he edited *Necessity*, a popular Alliance reform newspaper, and maintained a prolific number of correspondences. At various times he served as Treasurer of the Fredericksburg District Exchange, Lecturer and President of Old Hickory Alliance, and delegate from Virginia to the National Alliance Conference on railroads.

In contrast to the leaders the average member was poorer, less knowledgeable, and more concerned with his individual contentment than the general well being of all farmers. While the letters to C.H. Pierson from other sub-Alliance leaders dealt primarily with national agricultural problems, or the role of the Alliance, the actual Alliance meetings as recorded in the minutes of the Old Hickory Alliance more often gave perfunctory notice to these things and emphasized the descriptions of recent or future parties, lists of the songs sung during the meeting, or solutions of their unique farm problems. Alliance promises to remedy national problems like the currency crisis probably lured the farmer; but the chance of fraternization, social life, and benefits was the real trap.

The need for brotherhood pervaded Virginia at this time and was manifested in the Alliance meetings which the members considered as a lodge or a secret society. This concept was so important that leaders wrote it into the Constitution of the Virginia State Farmers' Alliance, which
stated that before entering a meeting members must whisper the password to the doorkeeper; that at initiation a specially prescribed ritual must be followed; and finally anything happening at the meeting was secret and divulgence resulted in expulsion. The practice of calling each other brother or sister acted to cement the cohesive effect of these ceremonies.

The clannish society created by the Alliance served to unify the entire white population against the black menace. Because he possessed neither the knowledge nor the money to work a farm, the freed Negro who remained in Southern Virginia became a displaced person. Fearful of this large (657,502 in 1880 or about one half of the total white population) unemployed, potentially hostile mass, whites pulled closer together in traditionally segregated patterns. The resultant feeling of group harmony tended to be especially strong in the black belt and tidewater areas of Virginia where Negroes outnumbered whites in some counties almost two to one. The exclusive nature of the Alliance provided a triple appeal; dispossessed planters regained a sense of elitism, while lesser men gained a feeling of equality with their former social superiors, and all were above the Negro. The class consciousness created by rituals and group harmony added strength to the farmers burgeoning sense of power.

As the idea of a closed lodge pervaded the spirit of the Alliance, the prospect of social gatherings dominated the mood. The women of the Alliance constantly planned dances, suppers, rallies, and picnics. For Christmas 1890 "the Alliance [Old Hickory] met at Chestnut Valley House at four P.M. and having paid dues proceeded to take part in various games, provided nine pins, bean bags, and pistol shooting, etc. till supper, which
was served a little past seven P.M. After a hearty enjoyable supper the meeting was called to order...."61 For those times when there were no parties to plan one could always sing. Some of the songs included "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," "Marching Onward," "On to Washington," and "Gathering Masses."62 The songs tended to be political in nature and thus bolstered the feeling of unity when they were sung. C.H. Pierson felt that the songs were such an important part of the meetings that he recommended the formation of a choir to provide music for the meetings.63

Finally financial benefits attracted the farmers to the Alliance. In a day when public welfare, social security, and life insurance were nonexistent the prospects of economic aid were most welcome. The State Alliance, recognizing the special needs of farmers who lived year by year on a limited income, established a life insurance plan called Mutual Benevolent Brother. Any Alliance member less than sixty-five years of age could join for a small fee and yearly payments. When he died the Brotherhood made payments to his beneficiaries.64 Another assistance in providing for the welfare of members was the system called Captains of Tens. Under this program a person, called the captain, was responsible for the ten members in his squad. If someone fell sick or was injured he reported it at meetings and made sure other members visited and helped care for the person.65

Less formal but equally appealing was the outlet, provided by organization, for the natural sympathy and charity felt between friends. The Captains of Tens informed the Alliance about member's problems, but it was the Alliance that provided the material aid and comfort. During their
meetings members determined when they could visit a sick friend or who could babysit for an over worked family. When one brother lost his horse in an accident the Alliance voted to contribute money to help replace it.66 In another instance a Captain mentioned that a brother was "sick and in distress." Alliance members decided "that in consideration of Bro. Portor having only his work to rely on for a living, that collection be taken up for his benefit."67

Before joining the Alliance the farmer was enthused by the promise of social and personal benefits; but after affiliating with the Alliance he was drawn into its other activities. The occurrence of this conversion was one of the goals of the Alliance. Providing the key to this concept are the Alliance motto, "Knowledge is our armor, and without it we are powerless." and the requirement that all members subscribe and read at least one reform newspaper.68 Leaders felt that if the individual farmer understood the causes of his poverty and the number of persons involved, and if he realized that given unified action the problems could be solved, then the farmer would act to change his situation. Influential Alliance chiefs thus encouraged the proliferation of Alliance newspapers. Mann Page wished C.H. Pierson "success with your paper (Necessity). We want more Alliance papers to help educate our farmers as to their duties and responsibilities."69 The official newspaper of the Southern Alliance was the National Economist edited in Washington by C.W. Macune. Virginia's Alliance newspapers included the Alliance Farmer & Rural Messenger edited in Petersburg by Colonel Randolph Harrison, the Virginia People from Charlottesville, the Virginia Alliance News in Wytheville, and the Exchange Reporter.70
The Lecturer system furnished another important means of educating the people. In 1891 the National Legislative Council of the Alliance considered the Lecturer program useful enough to adopt a recommendation to assess a levy of five cents each quarter year to cover the Lecturer's expenses. The Lecturer's job was to speak at local Alliance meetings about various agricultural questions and present sound answers for their solution. He was also expected to describe successful affairs held by other Alliances and spark interest in the local Alliance to which he spoke. Directors hoped that the Lecturer would not only dispense helpful information, but also stir up a little insulating enthusiasm as well. Mann Page's secretary wrote to C.H. Pierson that "This system of Lecturing is the only one which I see that can be made effective against the tremendous money and boodle campaign that will be conducted by those who oppose us." 

Discussions held during the local meetings were the most important teaching tool for the individual members because they aimed directly at remedying daily farm problems. The Old Hickory Alliance discussed such topics as "How to Make a Living on Poor Land," crop diversification, and cooperation. In order to provide higher quality debates they decided to plan a yearly program beginning in 1891. The first six months called for discussions entitled "Progress: the Necessity of Brains on the Farm," "Trucking," "Green Manures," "Poultry," and "Fruit Culture." 

After the farmers obtained their education through newspapers, lectures, and discussions they were ready to enter into other aspects of Alliance affairs. There were two main non-educational functions of the State Alliance - cooperatives, and political involvement. Cooperatives
proved to be the less successful of these activities. The most important cooperative was the Business Exchange which bought and sold at the lowest possible price, eliminating the middlemen and enabling it to provide the required farm implements at a minimum cost to the farmers. The charter of the State Business Exchange, formed in 1890, stated that "The purpose of this company is to buy and sell, wholesale and retail for cash, farmers' supplies and products, and to do a general commission business." Because an efficient cooperative system demands unified support the State Exchange centralized the concerns of the many local Alliances which guaranteed stricter control and thus improved chances of survival. To discover the needs of local Exchanges the main office sent price lists and catalogs to the local store manager who returned his itemized request list to the central bureau. Items frequently needed included fertilizer, salt, feed, nails, stock such as cattle and hogs, burlap sacks, oil, and groceries. The twenty local and five district Exchange agents, appointed and controlled by the State Exchange, distributed the goods purchased by the central office for the small Exchanges.

Although the tight rule established by centralization prevented problems of over and under supply of goods it did not avoid a lack of funds. As chartered, individual sub-Alliances held controlling interests in the corporate exchange system. Founders estimated that they needed an average of forty dollars per sub-Alliance in order to keep the cooperative running; however, farmers felt they could not afford this sum even when divided among fifteen or twenty members and failed to support the exchange. A friend
wrote to C.H. Pierson that "it is so hard to get them to pull together, they want all the help that can be had, but want somebody else's money to provide the way, and then they are so impatient and expect so much they think you can do $10,000 worth of business with $1,000 capital . . ."81

As early as July 20, 1891 the State Exchange seemed "in a critical position through lack of funds to carry it on."82 By August 19, 1893 the Old Hickory Alliance, convinced of the cooperative's failure refused to donate additional funds.83

A marked shortage of trade characterized Alliance Exchanges as much as want of capital. Local Exchanges lost business because they did not possess enough profit to take the risk that local stores took when they reduced their prices to maintain their clientele.84 They grew even less popular since all business was on a cash purchase basis.85 Rurals sealed the fate of cooperative businesses as they boycotted the struggling Exchanges and frequented the temporarily low priced neighborhood stores; they failed to realize that as soon as the exchanges closed, prices would again rise. The political situation further intensified reduced trade because "our Democratic brothers seemed to think that if they did not vote with us, they would not deal with us . . ."86 Short funds and minimal trade swamped the Alliance Exchange system, as stores grudgingly shut their doors to all customers.87

Various Alliances participated in several other types of cooperatives including the wholesale purchase of seeds and fertilizers by a county or district which avoided middlemen; a cooperative factory at Iron Gate, Alleghany for the manufacture of agricultural implements; tobacco and peanut warehouses which evaded the storage commission; and Alliance
salt company; and finally a fertilizer factory in King William County which temporarily succeeded in driving prices of commercial brands down nearly 25 per cent. 88

All these many types of cooperatives failed because they lacked proper management and adequate support. Alliance leaders were over-confident in thinking that the farmers who were barely able to secure enough profit to buy necessities could raise enough capital to provide a solid base for corporate enterprise. With a singular lack of good business sense, the leaders established cooperatives on minimal funds assuming they would profit. The farmers, however, transacted their business with traditional persons in traditional ways dooming these cooperatives to failure from the beginning.

The second area of Alliance activity encompasses the realm of political involvement. To obtain their goals, the Farmers' Alliance acted within the existing political parties by supporting candidates who pledged to uphold the organization's reforms in the areas of big business, especially transportation, and currency. In the division of big business farmers demanded the revision of tariff laws which would place a heavy tax on luxury goods; the destruction of trusts and favors; and the equal distribution of taxes in the form of graduated income taxes. 89 Reform of big business did not come easy because it presented a dual problem; the men who ran the corporations also ran the government, therefore political changes must occur before corporate improvements could take effect. To insure political change the Alliance wrote into its platform a plank against "support for office the representatives or paid attorneys of railroads, transportation companies and other corporations." 89 They also demanded "pledges from all candidates to office
that they will not accept free passes upon railroads or other transportation lines..." 90 Individual Alliances assigned squads to captains who visited their team members and urged them to "attend the primaries of their respective parties, and elect delegates pledged to support our interests." 91 In 1891 the voter crusade successfully elected ten Democratic Congressmen pledged to support the Alliance reforms. 92

Although the money situation received as much lip service as corporate problems it gained no relief. Alliance platforms called for the free coinage of silver; the repeal of national banking laws; "the substitution of legal-tender Treasury notes in lieu of national banking notes" and the sub-treasury plan which called for the establishment of depositories in "several states which shall loan money direct to the people at a low rate of interest, not to exceed two per cent per annum, on non-perishable farm products, and also upon real estate, with proper limitations upon the quantity of land and money." 93 Because the theories involved with these issues were so abstract farmers found it difficult to support the proposed reforms with energy. Instead they attempted discussions about the feasibility of the sub-treasury plan, or the advantages in the free coinage of silver and drew few conclusions except growing perplexity. 94 They left proselytizing to other men who understood the situation better.

Radical Alliance leaders grew tired of fighting for their reforms within a system which refused to expand to meet their needs. They felt double crossed by party candidates who announced their political support of Alliance reforms and then vetoed acts suppressing the railways or passed legislation specifically aiding monopolies. 95 They also resented the political controls written into their platform prohibiting them from acting
for reform outside of the political structures, as well as the ineffectual usage made of their county and state dues. Leaders, convinced that the Alliance could not meet their needs, defected from the organization and established the Populist Party of Virginia on June 23, 1892. Shortly after individual leaders pledged to support the Populist party "in a non partisan spirit, not for the sake of party; but for the sole purpose of securing the enactment of our demands into law." Alliance leaders asked their members to support the Populist party but the average rural, strongly bound to the two party system, refused to ally with the political rebels. He felt that "though I believe he [Mann Page, Populist candidate for governor] stands on sound Democratic principles which will relieve the masses of great injustice, still I cannot make up my mind to go against the Democratic party."

The Democratic party, sensing a change in the air, prepared for a show down with the budding Populist party. As early as 1889 the Democratic party realized that in order to gain complete support from their farmer constituents they must adopt a platform which would appease some of their demands. The State Democratic Convention thus called for recoinage and free coinage of silver, and revision of land taxes. During the 1889-1890 session of the General Assembly these Democrats supported improved fertilizer, fruit tree inspection, and three bills which incorporated Alliance cooperatives. They also favored the Yarrell Railroad Bill which was vetoed and the repeal of the state charter from the American Tobacco Company.
The election year, 1891, caused Democrats to concentrate on winning the election. Party hacks talked Alliance leaders into accepting Democratic nominees who supported railway regulations but refused to promise to vote for anti-railway legislation. Winning an overwhelming majority in both the House and Senate, Democrats pledged to give their continuing aid to the farmers' cause. The passage of a railroad bill which provided for one commissioner paid by the railroads was not exactly what the farmers had hoped for, but it was a start towards better representation.

Factors other than the adoption of many Alliance programs aided in pulling the farmers back to the Democratic party. The strong atmosphere of tradition which surrounded the party and many of its leaders caught the farmer unaware and quietly guided him back into the fold. The Democratic Party emphasized its role in securing the state in post-Reconstruction days from the Republicans and the Negroes and stated that "'every vote caste in the South for the third party will be a Republican vote by proxy, tending to encourage the Negro to another effort for supremacy.'" Democrat strategists also carefully equalled the Populist party with outsiders and the Democrat party with the South. They labeled the Populist presidential candidate, James G. Weaver, "'a foul-tongued political acrobat, this excuse for a man, the South-hater and South-slanderer.'" This type of propaganda consciously cultivated the reflex reactions of poor white farmers who still keenly feared the black menace and resented the Northern carpetbagger.
Several Democrat leaders represented an even more enticing tradition in their person than the Democratic party did in its longevity. A "cult of the Confederacy" swept through Virginia at this time causing many Democrat leaders to exploit the nostalgic sentiments held by their constituents for war heroes. John W. Daniel, wounded in battle and called the "Lame Lion of Lynchburg" gained notoriety through his moving eulogies for celebrated war heroes such as Robert E. Lee. Moved by his touching oratory Virginians linked "themselves to Lee and his revered commonwealth through Daniel." He pressed his advantage by publicly empathizing with the trials of the farmer. In a speech before Congress he stated that he felt "profound sympathy with every class of our fellow citizens who have been smitten with the afflicting hand of an evil financial dispensation." The traditional appeal of the Democratic party solidified by a popular platform, strengthened the farmers' position within the party and reinforced them against the Populist lure. The farmers remained loyal to their Alliances and its political philosophies until their leaders defected to the Populist party promising to bring the rural with them. The agriculturists, influenced by Democratic propaganda and legislation, refused to be dragged along in this arbitrary manner and supported the Democrats against their former Alliance chiefs. As 80 per cent of the Alliances dispersed, farmers aided in the election of Democrat officials: in 1892 Cleveland received 56 per cent of the Virginia votes, an increase of 7 per cent from 1888, and in 1893 O'Ferrall received the largest majority ever given
to a gubernatorial candidate. Future elections would prove that the Democrats had effectively secured rural support for their party against the Populist threat.

By 1893 the majority of Farmers' Alliance organizations in Virginia had given up their charters and their brotherhoods in favor of the more stable Democratic party. For six years the farmers had assumed the role of unsure aggressors. The structures of their organization followed traditional guidelines as did their activities. They tried to fight the system within that system and ended in failure. When their leaders decided to transcend the accepted pattern, the farmers refused to reject the security of establishment and rejoined their former enemies. This rejection and acceptance was made easier because the farmers had unknowingly become a power in their own right. Thus the establishment offered to secure for the farmer the personal satisfaction and financial benefits which he had sought elsewhere. Although the Farmers' Alliance of Virginia failed as a permanent body, it was successful in the long run since the farmers had become an important faction in the Democratic party.
FOOTNOTES


8. Sheldon, Populism, p. 5


11. Ibid.


14. Moger, Virginia Bourbonism, p. 87; Sheldon, Populism p. 17.


21. Minute Book, March 5, 1890.


26. Sheldon, Populism, p. 163-165, appendix I.


28. Ibid., p. 97.

29. Ibid., p. 79. This section is difficult to document other than a sentence here and there by various authors. Its basis for inclusion comes more from a feeling I have gathered about the period after reading scores of letters and the Minute Book from the Pierson Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.


31. omitted

32. Sheldon, Populism, p. 22-26

33. cited by Moger, Virginia Bourbonism, p. 88.


35. Ibid., p. 266.


37. Moger, Virginia Bourbonism, p. 90.


40. "Virginia State Farmers' Alliance Constitution", articles XII and XIV.

41. Ibid., article X.

42. Mann Page, Brandon, to C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, January 16, 1891, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

43. Minute Book, August 3, 1891.

44. Sheldon, Populism, p. 31.


46. Illegible, to Friends of Old Hickory, Caroline, January 12, 1891, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

47. Moger, Virginia Bourbonism, p. 90-91; Sheldon, Populism, p. 33-35.


49. Ibid.


52. A.P. Rowe Jr., Fredericksburg to C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, October 28, 1890, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
53. R.H. Hudson, King George Court House, to C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, November 10, 1890, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia; Minute Book, inserted sheet listing officers; C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, to editor of Free Lance, October 20, 1891, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.


56. "Virginia State Farmers' Alliance Constitution." article XV.

57. Letters to fellow Alliance members are addressed to Brother ______, and signed Fraternally Yours ______. Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.


61. Minute Book, December 29, 1890.

62. Ibid., May 21, 1890; February 23, 1891; August 13, 1892; August 20, 1892; September 17, 1892.

63. Ibid., inserted piece of paper.

64. "Virginia State Farmers' Alliance Constitution." article XIX.

65. Minute Book, June 11, 1892.

66. Ibid., October 19, 1891.

67. Ibid., February 23, 1891.

68. "Virginia State Farmers' Alliance Constitution," article XV; Minute Book, April 16, 1890.

69. Page to Pierson
70. Moger, *Virginia Bourbonism*, p. 93; Sheldon, *Populism*, p. 44; Pierson to editor of *Free Lance*.


72. *Minute Book*, April 2, 1890.


74. *Minute Book*, May 7, 21, July 2, 1890.


76. "Charter, Constitution, and By-Laws of the Alliance Cooperative Company of Richmond," (1890), Sheldon Collection, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

77. Illegible Flessy, to C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, June 8, 1891, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

78. Bills of sale, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.


80. Chrisman

81. Scrap of letter - no name or address, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

82. *Minute Book*


84. P.C. Waring, Loretto, to C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, November 24, 1890, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

85. W.S. Powell, to C.H. Pierson, Fredericksburg, June 17, 1891, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.


90. Ibid., p. 165.

91. Minute Book, August 17, 1891.

92. C.H. Pierson to editor of Free Lance.


94. Minute Book; J.E. Sirbert, Orange, to C.H. Pierson Fredericksburg, November 14, 1890, Pierson Papers, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

95. Minute Book, July 1, 1892.

96. Ibid., November 19, 1893.


98. Minute Book, July 9, 1892.

99. Ibid., August 20, 1892; October 15, 1892.


103. Ibid., p. 105.


105. cited by Ibid.


107. Ibid.
108. cited by Ibid., p. 96.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary


A thorough essay, well organized and well documented, but generally too broad for my purposes since he dealt primarily with the United States as a whole. His speculations about the future of agriculture in the United States were most often proven false.


Hayne's devoted his study of the New Sectionalism to the U.S. as a whole. I found it useful to apply his theory to Virginia in explaining the different levels of prosperity between Northern and Southern Virginia. He presented much interesting material, but was sometimes vague on dating.


An interesting interpretation of the union of the Populist movement and the Democratic Party under Bryant. He felt the two groups could unite because they were dedicated to principle rather than party. The opposite was true in Virginia, where people clung to the Democratic party because it was the traditional party.


The descriptive narratives of Nadal and Page are valuable because they present a contemporary view of the visual conditions of Virginia. Page was particularly good in his comparison of the north and south. Both authors remembered pre-war Virginia and noted the differences between 1860 and 1890.

Pierson Papers, 1890-1893, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

Bills of sale
letters
Minute Book, 1890-1893, Old Hickory Alliance, #611.
"Prospectus of the Alliance Fertilizer Works of West Point, Virginia," 1893.
Receipts
The bulk of this paper could be credited to the Pierson Papers. The letters and the Minute Book provided a rare incite to the period and the people involved. The most valuable thing gained from these papers was a general feeling about the times: a feeling which is almost impossible to document.

Sheldon Collection, Manuscript Room, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

"Constitution of the Farmers' Alliance of Virginia," Petersburg, 1893.
"Draft - illegible"
"Jone's Combination Chart & Map," 1891.
"People's Party" a printed circular.
People's Party campaign poster
"Trueman & Collarbound," Virginia Sun, May 17, 1893

The papers in the Sheldon Collection deal mainly with the Populist Party rather than the Farmers' Alliance and were not too useful. The Charter, and the Constitution, however, were very useful in filling out the ideas I got from the Pierson Papers.


Stahl strongly defended the patriot farmer and said the farmer is no different from the rest of good middle class America. He denied them their initiative in reform and states that the farmer will follow whatever lead industry sets for them. Apparently he was unaware of the large numbers of farmers involved in the Alliance movement, even in a conservative state like Virginia.

Secondary


Biographical sketch of Colonel Robert Beverley.


Very helpful background information.
Hicks, John D. and John D. Barnhart, "The Farmers' Alliance," North Carolina Historical Review VI (1929) 254-280

Hicks, John D., The Populist Revolt, Minneapolis, 1931.

Both of the Hicks' works were invaluable in setting the national background to the farmers movement in Virginia. Very helpful bibliography.


Anti-Populist. Felt the movement was an honest one, but it sought the wrong ends.


Repetitive of Sheldon on Farmers' Alliance, but good information on the Democratic Party in relationship with the movement.


Dismisses Virginia.


Excellent source, Sheldon is the only person who has studied the agrarian movement in Virginia. His chapter on the Farmers' Alliance provided my background information. Very helpful bibliography and appendix.

Smith, Goëdwin, "The Brewing of the Storm," Forum XXII (1896), 436-446.

Feels the agrarian movement was under the influence of socialists, but that there was some justification in their grievances.
