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### The farmer's revolt: the election of 1896 in Virginia

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THE FARMER'S REVOLT: THE ELECTION OF 1896 IN VIRGINIA

Thesis

for

Dr. F. W. Gregory

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

University of Richmond

James D. Wright

May 18, 1978

The United States during the nineteenth century passed from its infancy toward its ultimate role as a world power. Delayed by the bitter Civil War, the nation regained its footing moving rapidly toward a goal blurred by the distant future. With the development of a strong industrial backbone, the country was destined to compete with the major powers, France, Great Britain, Germany and Russia. By 1890 the United States led the world in the production of iron and steel and soon surpassed all nations in the mining of coal.<sup>1</sup> With an increased demand for industrial products the need for better transportation became extremely important. Railroads improved to meet the necessary requirements for a more efficient transportation system and mileage rose by more than four hundred per cent between 1869 and 1899.<sup>2</sup> This industrial transformation raised the nation's total wealth tremendously. Both capital and population left the farms to share in this new wealth. This injured agricultural communities and hurt the South especially. The South did not have an equal share in the new prosperity with the North, for this area did not abandon its agricultural heritage.

Still struggling from the aftermath of war and Reconstruction,<sup>3</sup> the South lagged far behind the remainder of the nation in industrialization and urbanization. Workers remained on the farms and their crops usually provided them with their sole source of income. The farmer's average yearly income fell far short of the amount earned by workers in other fields.<sup>4</sup>

Crops did improve both in quality and quantity, but as supply increased, demand dropped sharply resulting in a similar drop in prices. The farmer was hit hard by these low prices and for his seeming impotence he blamed himself and the society that governed his every action. The Southerner blamed the government for allowing this unfair inequality to exist, the financiers and industrialists for cheating the farmer out of his fair income, and finally the political parties which ignored the people's wants. As differences grew, the Southerner's hatred intensified and he entered politics to correct these pathetic conditions.

Virginia, like her Southern neighbors, refused to follow the Northern example by developing industry and remained firmly fixed to her rural past. The Civil War destroyed much of Virginia's land and industries and the impact affected everyone. Virginia now resembled a sluggish pool at the edge of a thundering river. While the North mobilized its financial forces behind the industrialization, Virginia moved hesitantly in that direction. Torn between her past and future the state was unable to decide in which direction to turn. Virginians still proudly wore the aristocratic heritage as a leader of states, but the former greatness vanished after the war. However, the people refused to abandon these memories remaining firmly entrenched in the state's glorious heritage.

Virginia, unlike other Southern states, escaped the full wrath of Reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> In 1869 conservative white Virginians allied with moderate Republicans to end the control of the Radical Republicans.<sup>6</sup> They regained

control of state politics and government by accepting compromise and in the next year Virginia would become one of the first members of the old Confederacy to be readmitted to the Union.<sup>7</sup> The emerging coalition would become known as the Conservative Party. New political leaders emerged to replace those killed or disenfranchised by the war, however, they committed themselves to Virginia's political past. This commitment proved to be impossible to keep and change would soon result.

The uneasy truce between the moderate wing of the Republican Party and the new Conservative Party lasted only for a brief period, then in 1873 the Conservatives ran their own candidate winning handily. Gaining complete control of the state government, they would guide Virginia's political future until dethroned by the state debt controversy. Conservatives refused to dispose of the state debt although there was popular support for this action. They proposed that the school fund be used to repay the state debt in full and thus they were aptly named the Funders. The group opposing the Funders recommended that the debt be paid off but not at its face value. Known as the Readjusters, they received support from moderate Republicans, Blacks and many farmers who believed they were being too heavily burdened by taxation. William Mahone assumed the leadership of the Readjustor Movement and lead them to victory in 1879.

A politician in Virginia, following the War of Succession, could benefit from a brilliant war record or his family background. General William A. Mahone advanced quickly during the Civil War, gaining noteworthy praise for his heroic efforts during the Battle of the Grater

in late 1864.<sup>8</sup> Mahone lacked an aristocratic family heritage, his father had been a tavern keeper as his opponents quickly pointed out, but General Mahone commanded respect despite his family background, his ineloquent voice, and his lack of physical stature. He was a self made man obtaining great wealth and power through his manipulations of men and railroads. Mahone entered politics to further his business goals. Controversy surrounded this man called a dictator by his enemies but praised by the people he helped. William Mahone, through his autocratic control of the Republican Party, guided state politics throughout his life and this influence continued even after his death.<sup>9</sup>

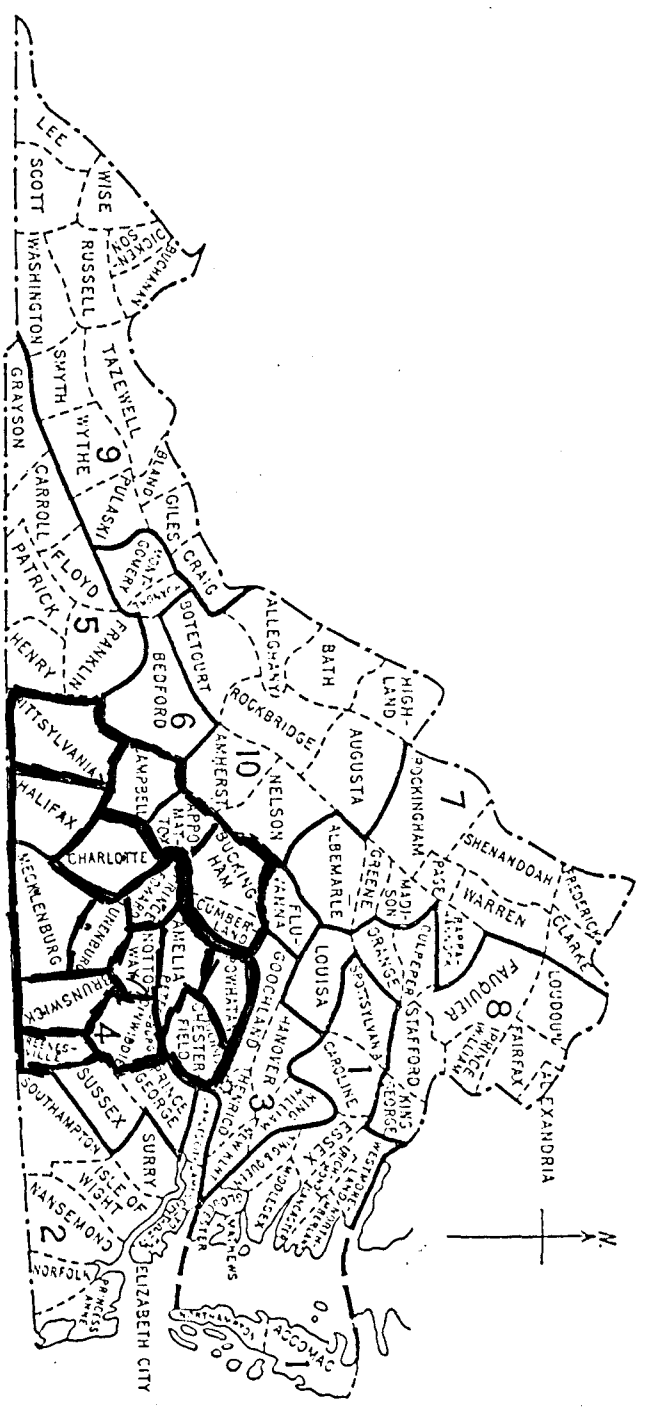
In post war Virginia, the Democratic Party reemerged and forged a highly centralized party machine that would make the Virginia Democratic Party supreme in Virginia politics. As opposition materialized against William Mahone, the party organization strengthened its grip on white voters. White fear of "Black Rule"<sup>10</sup> and discontent within Mahone's party the Democrats quickly seized the reigns of Virginia government. John S. Barbour and later Thomas S. Martin developed a political machine that totally destroyed the Republican organizations within the state. With Mahone's desperate failure to regain the governorship in 1889, Virginia appeared destined to be ruled by the Democratic Party.<sup>11</sup>


One party rule should have resulted with the severe blow to the Republican Party in 1889 and would have had it not been for major discontent among Virginia's farmers. Four major conditions caused the growing farmer dissatisfaction; the growing cleavage between the prosperous areas in Northern and Western Virginia and the poor agricultural areas in Southside Virginia, a worsening economic situation,

increased alienation of the farmer from Virginia's ruling class, and finally changing attitudes pushed the farmer toward political action.<sup>12</sup> The grass roots political action developing because of those attitudes resulted with the growth of farmers' organizations like the Farmers' Alliance. This agrarian group expressed the farmers' fears and hatreds as a whole thus it drew widespread attention. The first Virginia local Alliance formed in Rockingham County in 1887 and from there grew quickly and especially so in the poverty stricken Black Belt.<sup>13</sup> The Alliance never acted as a political party, but by 1892 it became second in importance to the Populist Party as an advocate of farmers' rights.<sup>14</sup>

For the farmer who depended on one crop, low prices for that crop could destroy him financially. Many areas of Virginia still existed on a single crop and tobacco was that chief cash crop. The price of tobacco declined continuously from 1873 to 1890 and as a result the region south of the James River which depended heavily on the tobacco crop appeared destined to live in poverty. By 1890 the price of tobacco was actually less than the cost to produce it. The formation of the American Tobacco Company in the same year further aggravated farmers by dispatching buyers into local markets and establishing low bids thus depressing the price even lower.<sup>15</sup> At the same instance, two other cash crops, peanuts and cotton, important in several counties also yielded low returns for the farmers' investment.<sup>16</sup>

VIRGINIA.



 Designates Black Belt



In desperation the farmers joined the Farmers' Alliance and the Grange, but the agricultural worker still faced bleak prospects in a deepening depression.

The depression for the farmers had actually begun before the "Panic of 1893." Farmers throughout the nation faced falling prices and poor harvests. Between 1891 and 1896 total farm production in the United States dropped by eighteen percent.<sup>17</sup> Also throughout this period prices for farm products continually declined.<sup>18</sup> Compared nationally farm laborers average earnings were lower than most other occupations.<sup>19</sup> Farmers everywhere struggled to earn a living and after 1893 workers in all fields faced lower wages and unemployment.<sup>20</sup> Virginia also faced higher unemployment and with the "Panic" the wave of depression spread to the cities, Richmond and other cities of the state met with problems concerning restless unemployed workers.<sup>21</sup> Virginia and the nation feared the anarchy the future might bring, but everyone except the staunchest reactionary knew some change would occur.

From growing dissatisfaction with the government and the established parties, the Populist Party emerged ready to fight for agrarianism against all that threatened the farmers' ability to earn living. In the election of 1892 the Populists ran a presidential ticket which performed well but the party's importance appears more successful at the local level where they gained control of many state and local governments.

The Democratic Party's choice, Grover Cleveland's position with respect to the farmer, was unknown, but the South, including Virginia, supported him and he won.

The Populist Party ran on a "free silver" platform which drew many farmers looking for fair treatment. The idea of the free coinage of silver was not a new one, but had ended in 1873 when the United States chose the gold standard. A majority within the masses never understood the issue of free silver, therefore, the arguments for and against showed the influence of emotion rather than knowledge. Free silver advocates believed that a bimetallic currency would increase the circulating currency thereby making money cheaper and helping people pay their debts. Gold standard advocates opposed this because an increase in the amount of currency would mean that all debts would be paid with a currency that was of less value than at the time it was lent therefore the creditor would suffer if this action resulted. These conservatives believed it was morally unjust for a creditor to be cheated from his lawful earnings. However, the farmer, usually a debtor, sided with free silver because he believed that low crop prices stemmed from a shortage of circulating currency and the currency shortage resulted from the wrongful selfish practices of the Wall Street bankers and industrialists who pulled the financial strings of the nation.<sup>22</sup> The farmer saw nothing wrong or immoral with the free silver concept because it would give the farmer what was rightfully his and take it away from those who had cheated him. However, President Cleveland, despite the strength of the silver

forces within the Democratic Party decided that the only way the depression could be ended quickly was by remaining on the gold standard thus maintaining a sound currency.<sup>23</sup> This important decision divided the Democratic Party and the tension caused by the free silver question soon led to the split within the party in the presidential election of 1896.

Virginia politics near the turn of the century showed many signs of the legacy left by the aristocratic oligarchs that ruled Virginia before the War; but many changes occurred and pushed new groups into the political forefront. The common farmer, motivated by his increasing dissatisfaction of the status quo, entered politics in an attempt to generate change within the governmental system. Industrialists and railroad interests showed a keen concern in Virginia politics in an effort to gain concessions from government that would net them increased profits. The Negro<sup>24</sup> also held an important voice in government as a political pawn, but never enjoyed true political power. These three groups combined with the remains of the oligarchy to create a complex picture that clouded the actions in the election of 1896.

Elections still remained much as they had been since the Revolutionary War. Candidates still spoke on the courthouse steps to anyone who happened to listen. Oratory marked the style of politics in the period and a good speaker often succeeded politically by arousing the emotions of his audience. However, anger was one emotion not to arouse by opposing the views of the crowd because the closeness to the public afforded an opportunity for the

people of opposing views to voice their opinions with words, ugly noises, or rotten fruit. Former Confederate officers provided a huge source of post war politicians because of their popularity and the veteran usually became a member of the aristocratic oligarchy.

John Warwick Daniel, a member of the ruling aristocracy, molded Virginia post war politics. He reached his eighteenth birthday during the first year of the Civil War and joining the Confederate Army he quickly gained the rank of Second Lieutenant in the famous Stonewall Brigade.<sup>26</sup> He fought with distinction receiving wounds at Bull Run and Antietam. At the age of twenty the Army promoted him to the rank of Major. Finally at the Battle of Chancellorsville a bullet ended his military career shattering his thigh and crippling him for life. Nicknamed the "Lame Lion" for his noticeable limp and his majestic stature, John Daniel entered the University of Virginia Law School and upon graduation showed himself to be an excellent speaker and a brilliant lawyer. Daniel's capabilities destined him to eventually enter politics which he did in 1869. In that year he was elected to the House of Delegates, then the State Senate in 1874, the House of Representatives in 1885, and finally the United States Senate where he capably represented Virginia. As a member of the aristocratic oligarchy, John Warwick Daniel supported many causes popular with the Virginia voters and because of this policy and his support of free silver, the Democratic Party succeeded in enlisting the support of most white Virginians.<sup>27</sup>

However, a politician shaped by modernization emerged during the generation after the Civil War. Business offered contributions to the politician who voiced business concerns. With the development of more efficient machines in the industrial world, the politician recognized the need for efficient organization so he developed a machine of his own. This party machine ushered a unique politician to the forefront. No longer did a man need a family name or a good speaking style to win a political office, he need only be a loyal member of the party's political machine. Thomas Stapleton Martin controlled the Democratic Party machine in Virginia and used a style totally unlike that of Senator Daniel to gain political office. In a contest for the United States Senate, Martin, a devoted member of the party machine and a man with political and financial connections with the railroads in the state, defeated the popular Fitzhugh Lee, a man with an aristocratic family heritage, with the aid of the efficient Martin organization and by the use of a slush fund,<sup>28</sup> provided by the railroads of the state.<sup>29</sup> This incident proved that the party machine could elect candidates despite popular opinion and showed that indeed a change had occurred in Virginia politics.

As the election approached, it rapidly became apparent that the Democrats would be unable to unite behind one issue or one candidate as they had four years earlier. Clearly, the tariff questions which had united the party in 1892 appeared minor when now compared to the free silver question. For the white farmers in the South, a group which gave much support to the Democratic Party, free silver became the issue on which they were will to fight " the battle of agrarianism against the

growing dominance of industry."<sup>30</sup> The aristocratic oligarchy lead by Senator Daniel also sided with the farmer on the free silver issue because the state remained basically agricultural and many of the ruling class were also farmers.<sup>31</sup> These two groups also refused to support Grover Cleveland because by supporting the gold standard he had in their minds betrayed their trust.<sup>32</sup> Opposing the silverites business interests fought a well financed battle, but they lacked the popular support amond many Virginians. Conservative Democrats also refused to join the free silver cry and in the months leading up to the state convention in Staunton they mustered support for the gold standard. Although the two factions bitterly opposed one another, there appeared to be little chance in an actual split within the Democratic Party.

The sound money men and the free silver forces waged a war of words before the convention. The silverites under the clear leadership of Senator Daniel organized at an early point with the support of mainly rural voers.<sup>33</sup> The gold standard forces organized too late to exert a considerable influence on the policies to be mapped out in Staunton.<sup>34</sup> Clearly two thirds of the delegates to the state Democratic Convention had been instructed by their county conventions to vote for free silver.<sup>35</sup>

On June 4 the baliff called the Democratic Convention to order but the outcome was already known. The "silver carnival" that followed placed Virginia's delegation to the national convention firmly behind free silver.<sup>36</sup> The gold men succeed in selecting two from the Second Congressional District, centered around Norfolk, to represent them, but the silver forces easily passed the unit rule which said all Virginia delegates to the national convention must vote with the majority on all issues.<sup>37</sup> The platform advocated

the use of silver in the currency at a ratio of 16 to 1, opposed high tariffs, and opposed a president serving three terms.<sup>38</sup> John Warwick Daniel became the great leader of the convention directing everything from above and as one gold man lamented, "his word was simply law."<sup>39</sup>

The convention's outcome was well known even before the opening gavel, but one surprise did result during the convention. Senator Thomas S. Martin, the leader of the Democratic Party machine declared in favor of free silver thus clearing a doubt that had existed in everyone's mind. With this decision he broke with his major support, the railroads, by agreeing with a principle that business interests thought unthinkable. This break appears to have been chosen out of political necessity rather than true conviction, but it ended any chance the gold forces had of maintaining an effective opposition to the silverites within the Democratic Party in Virginia. Now both sides looked to the national Democratic convention that would be held in Chicago.

The gold Democrats shocked at the convention's outcome began organizing their efforts, however, it was too late to reverse the outcome of the state convention. These conservative party members considered free silver "a declaration of war upon private property" and its supporters little better than "communists,"<sup>40</sup> "anarchists," and "repudiators of debt."<sup>41</sup> This war started by the industrialists, railroad interests and monetary conservatives intensified with a flurry of accusations after the state convention. The gold standard found its voice in newspapers controlled by these interests in mainly the cities and large

towns of Virginia.<sup>42</sup> However the leading voice of the gold standard supporters was the Richmond Times run by Joseph Bryan.<sup>43</sup>

Joseph Bryan provided a formidable opponent for the silver forces to contend with. Serving with Mosby<sup>44</sup> in the Civil War, he proved his bravery in battle. After the war he joined the legal profession but this interest soon faded and his interest in railroads replaced it. In 1881 he acquired the Richmond & Danville Railroad, soon followed by the Georgia and Pacific. Meeting with success he branched out, finding new uses for his newly found wealth and eventually this search found him buying the Richmond Times in 1887.<sup>45</sup> The Times, a supporter of the Democratic Party, provided a conservative view of monetary matters while supporting the usual Democratic cry for low tariffs and state banks. With a great risk of a tremendous loss in circulation Bryan, out of his own personal conviction, opposed free silver, thus creating leadership within the gold standard supporters in Virginia.<sup>46</sup>

The silverites lacked an effective voice within the media which could be compared with the Times, but most Virginia papers, especially those in rural areas, supported the free silver cause.<sup>47</sup> However, the silverites found their leadership within the Democratic Party, not in the newspapers.<sup>48</sup> These politicians took the silverites to Chicago for the Democratic National Convention while the Goldbugs could only wait, hope and complain about the proceedings.

The Republicans had already nominated William McKinley<sup>49</sup> when the Democrats began arriving in Chicago on July 4. Immediately divided



into silver and gold camps it rapidly became evident that there could be no compromise. All the major presidential hopefuls supported the silver platform thus little hope remained for the Gold Democrats.<sup>50</sup> The first battle occurred over the selection of the temporary chairman. David Hill, a sound money man from New York, chosen by the committee for this task met opposition and Senator Warwick Daniel of Virginia replaced him.<sup>51</sup> Winning by a resounding margin, the vote marked the doom of the Gold Democrats. The only hope for them remained in "an attempt to curb the impetuous rush to rabid men."<sup>52</sup> Despite Goldbug efforts the platform adopted supported both free silver and an income tax and opposed President Cleveland. This platform greatly pleased the agrarian elements in Virginia and the sound money men were as equally shocked. Now only the candidate remained to be chosen.

The choice for the presidential nominee remained unclear until the day before the balloting began. In an emotional speech in support of free silver, William Jennings Bryan, a man of unknown qualities, excited the delegates into a frenzy. Every silverite saw clarity in Bryan's defense of free silver and attack on the gold standard, so the following day there existed support for this man who had won the delegates' hearts. Rocketed by his "Cross of Gold" speech into the political forefront, Bryan secured the Democratic nomination after the fifth ballot.<sup>53</sup>

The course remained blurred for the Gold Democrat. Two choices remained open for a sound money man. He could accept the nomination and support his old party, or he could oppose his party's candidate. At first the Norfolk Landmark, a gold standard paper, expressed its

opposition to the platform but refused to split from the Democratic organization, stating that the interests of Southern Virginia lie with this party.<sup>54</sup> The Times chose the other path refusing emphatically to support Bryan<sup>55</sup> and began a campaign in opposition to him. The split widened but the Goldbugs remained scattered and still basically unorganized.

The Gold Democrats suffered from a severe problem. They could no longer agree with the party that they had helped rebuild and they despised the Republican Party because it had pushed the Black into power in the South and it was responsible for the humiliation they suffered under Reconstruction. Since neither party was responsive to their interests they had but one choice: build their own party.

A party building process encompasses many separate actions and requires strict organization. The actions had already occurred that shaped the formation of the new party. It must be Democratic,<sup>56</sup> monetarily conservative (gold standard), and have a direct interest in the development of industry. Within Virginia, this movement toward the formation of a new party found leadership from Joseph Bryan and his paper, the Richmond Times. After William Jennings Bryan's nomination in Chicago, the Times and Bryan had become radically pro-gold. Bryan saw no room for compromise and attacked the silverites with the aid of the Times' editor, William Royall. They felt that the American social system would be overthrown by the "iron hand of revolution" if the silverites succeeded and this they could not bear.<sup>57</sup>

The silver papers allied themselves against the Times, the Gold Democrats, and business interests. The Clarksville Chronicle, a pro-

silver oaper, welcomed the Times' break with the Democratic Party and attacked the Times in an editorial stating, "the bolt out of the Richmond Times from the Chicago Democratic annunciation is indeed a veritable godsend to the people of Virginia. The Times has never been anything but a bull in the china shop of our state politics. It is not a newspaper in a strict sense of that term. It is simply a corporation organ and has always devoted whatever power and influence it has acquired to the interest of corporations and monoplies."<sup>58</sup> The Richmond Dispatch, the Lynchburg News and a great number of rural newspapers joined in the attack of the Times and as a result the contest became even more bitter.

As the campaign progress, it appears quite evident that a lack of a moderate point of view existed. Either a man supported Bryan and free silver or he supported the the gold standard. Danville residents who supported sound money complained that Andrew Jackson Montague, a federal district attorney and a rising young politician, had used "the influence of his official position to aid a course which is in the opinion of a large proportion of our people destructive to the best interests of the country." Montague, however, did not stop and worked effectively for William Jennings Bryan in the state.<sup>59</sup> In the local Democratic Party conventions in July and August that nominated candidates for the race in the House of Representatives, silverites won every contest totally excluding the gold faction of the party. Congressman H. G. Tucker of the Tenth Congressional District, a moderate free silverman, refused to run for reelection because he could not support the Democratic platform. In his speech before the convention he defended his record in

the House and re-emphasized his support of free silver saying, "They say that I am a Goldbug but if any man can point out to me from my votes in Congress, a single one that is not for silver, except as to change the ratio, I would like for him to do it." However Congressman Tucker's moderate stand left him open to attack from both sides and at this convention a silverite replaced him.<sup>60</sup>

On August 1 the supporters of the gold standard decided it was time to organize a new party. In Richmond, a Sound Money League was created and announced the intention of placing candidates that would oppose both Republican and Democratic candidates. The Times gave the League its "heartiest endorsement" so the development of a third party that would become the National Democratic Party had begun. Sound money men continued to desert the Democratic Party and on August 3 three members of the Lynchburg Democratic Executive Committee resigned citing their support of the third party as their reason.<sup>61</sup> The silverites accused the bolters of organizing a "McKinley annex...with the purpose of defeating the Democratic candidate for the President of the United States."<sup>62</sup> On August 12 the Richmond Times sent a call to all "true Democrats to attend a state convention with the purpose of selecting delegates that would attend the national convention of the National Democratic Party (Gold Democrats) in Indianapolis.

The names of the parties are confusing. Before 1896 there existed three major parties in Virginia: the Democrats, the Republicans and the Populists. In 1896 the Democrats adopted a "Populist" platform advocating free silver and nominated a candidate with Populist leanings.

The Populist Party decided to support the Democratic candidate and in Virginia the Populist and Democratic Parties merged. Before August 1 there existed only two parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, but soon they were joined by the National Democratic Party, the organization created by Democrats who could not support free silver nor the Republicans.

On August 27 the Virginia National Democratic Party convened and immediately in a cool and efficient manner selected their delegates to the national convention set for September 4 in Indianapolis. The turnout at this convention was small<sup>63</sup> showing the lack of adequate time to organize and a general aversion to third party politics in Virginia. Governor O'Ferrell and former Governor Cameron, two major political figures within the state, supported this convention and became active campaigners for the gold standard.<sup>64</sup> The Goldbugs in this action attempted to thwart a movement they thought would ultimately destroy the nation and the Democratic Party.

One week later in Indianapolis the National Democratic Party Convention outlined a pro-gold standard platform and selected John M. Palmer of Illinois, a former Union general, as its presidential candidate and Simon B. Buckner, a former Confederate general, as its vice presidential candidate. The candidates for all parties now chosen, the battle began in earnest.

The issues were hardly understood, but the people were thoroughly aroused as silver and gold became the symbols of justice and injustice, democracy and plutocracy.<sup>65</sup> Many Gold Democrats endorsed General Palmer,

"a white headed venerable Democratic Statesman," in preference to William Jennings Bryan, "an excitable and emotional boy."<sup>66</sup> In many instances supporters of gold and silver indicated their allegiance by wearing yellow or white chrysanthemums.<sup>67</sup> Emotions controlled the election and for this reason the presidential election of 1896 is especially exciting.

On September 18 William Jennings Bryan stopped in Richmond while passing through the state on one of his many campaign tours. That evening he spoke to an enthusiastic crowd estimated between eight and ten thousand people. The Richmond Dispatch covered the visit publicizing its success, however, the Times in contrast negatively described Bryan as a man "who talks sixteen hours out of every twenty four" and compared him with Benedict Arnold.<sup>68</sup> Goldbugs played down the grass roots support for Bryan, but they could not avoid it.

Less than one week after Bryan's speech, General Buckner heralded as a Confederate hero visited the city. Buckner's wife had been born in Richmond and the gold newspapers played up this connection with Virginia. However, very few people attended his speech and many of those who did disrupted the proceedings. The sound money men, angered by these acts caused by the "mongrel proletarian element,"<sup>69</sup> attacked the silverites for their discourteous behavior.

A great deal of anxiety emerged over the silver issue, but it was not the only issue of the election. The sound money forces received tremendous support from corporations within the state. M.E. Ingalls, president of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, provided a link between

the National Democratic Party and the Republican Party.<sup>70</sup> William Royall, the editor of the Times and a major figure of the National Democratic Party, traveled to New York to seek aid from Mark Hanna, a Republican with big business ties and the campaign manager behind William McKinley's success. Hanna provided approximately \$160,000 to the efforts of Gold Democrats in Virginia. The employees of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad formed the first Sound Money Club in Virginia. The National Democratic Party found as many silverites claimed its source of support from businessmen and corporation employees.<sup>71</sup> This is important because business financial aid kept the party sound and vigorous.

The influence of business provided the silverites with ammunition to fight the National Democrats. Free silver forces claimed a conspiracy existed to place the will of the corporation above the will of the people.<sup>72</sup> The Dispatch asked "if the free silver Democrats are anarchists, are not the bolting Democrats Hannarehists."<sup>73</sup> To the farmer banks, railroads and corporations represented "vampires sucking the life blood of the nation" as if they flourished "upon general misfortune" and rejoiced "with ghoulish glee over poverty and panic."<sup>74</sup> The silverites used the hatred of the people towards the business interests to keep the farmer in opposition to the gold Democrats and it partially succeeded.

As the campaign reached the final month silverites began using the White fear of the Black as a method of stopping party desertions. In 1867 there had existed almost as many Black voters as of White, but by reapportionment, gerrymandering,<sup>75</sup> and harassment Black voting strength declined rapidly. The Democrat Party opposed "Black Rule" and the party leader, John Warwick Daniel,

once said, "I am a Democrat because I am a White Man and a Virginian."<sup>76</sup> This fear of Black domination was used by the Democrats and became a major tool of maintaining party order. However, the Negro had lost many voting rights throughout the early 1890's<sup>77</sup> so by 1896 his influence was reduced significantly. The Gold Democrats aided the silverites by calling for honest elections that would allow the Black to vote. The silver leaders quickly warned the White farmer that the "real leaders in the present movement to Negrofy Virginia are the Democratic bolters."<sup>78</sup> The Lynchburg News warned Whites in Southside Virginia that the National Democrats "would doom the Black Belt of Virginia to the tender mercies of an ignorant majority and their mean White allies."<sup>79</sup> These tactics successfully neutralized much pro-gold sentiment within the state because most Virginians feared "Negro rule" and any attempt to allow Blacks to vote more freely.

As the campaign moved into the final days violence became increasingly frequent. Daily, newspapers reported clashes between Gold and Silver advocates. The Republicans now hopeful for victory increased their activity within the state. On October 6 former President Benjamin Harrison spoke in Richmond before a sympathetic audience. Newspapers advocating the gold standard expressed interest in the Republican move realizing this was the only hope for the sound money cause.<sup>80</sup> The Times, barometer of the National Democratic movement within Virginia, admitted their ticket had little chance and agreed either Bryan or McKinley would win.<sup>81</sup> As the campaign neared a close the National Democratic Party's sole purpose was to pull votes from Bryan to aid McKinley. One week before the election this plan was confirmed




by General Palmer when he told Gold Democrats that he would not "consider it any great fault if you decide next Tuesday to cast your ballot for William McKinley."<sup>82</sup> As a result by election day it was generally agreed it was only a two party contest Republican versus Democrat.


William Jennings Bryan carried Virginia by a safe margin on November 3,<sup>82</sup> but the Democratic majority was approximately 30,000 votes below Cleveland's margin of victory. The Democrats won convincingly east of the Blue Ridge even in the counties that had previously gone Republican largely because this time Blacks were not allowed to vote.<sup>83</sup> West of the Blue Ridge, McKinley gained more votes than Bryan as a result of the railroad influence<sup>84</sup> and its Republican tradition. The Democrats also were victors in the eight Congressional Districts east of the Blue Ridge, but lost the remaining two to the Republicans. Many argued that McKinley would have carried the state if the votes had been counted as cast because many Black votes were thrown out by election officials.

The National Democratic Party ran a full slate of candidates including presidential and congressional aspirants but failed to achieve victory. General Palmer pulled only 2,127 votes out of almost 300,000 votes, but in the final weeks National Democrats lost hope of victory and voted instead for William McKinley.<sup>85</sup> Many credit Republican gains with the switchover of conservative Democrats and in half dozen states the sound money Democrats were responsible for several hundred thousand votes for McKinley.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the Gold Democrats played a much larger role than their vote tallies would indicate.

VIRGINIA.



 Counties voting for Bryan

 Counties voting for McKinley

The election of 1896 marked the end of the Populist Party and the emergence of a new movement Progressivism. Populists by merging their ideas and numbers with the Democratic Party never again mustered the necessary strength to remain an individual unit. Recent studies have claimed that the election of 1896 which marks the beginning of the Progressive era was a conservative movement, but in Virginia the contest had its roots in the Populist organization. Robert Wiebe states that progressivism was a movement to restrain excessive individual freedom, but this movement gains more importance in the State Constitutional Convention in 1901-1902.<sup>87</sup> The election of 1896 was a grass roots election in which the Democratic machine lost its grip but strengthened it after the election. The leaders went along out of political necessity. The movement was democratic<sup>88</sup> and did increase the voice of the people.

The success of the agrarian silver element in Virginia proved that Virginia proved that Virginia in 1896 was basically rural, but the opposition they faced from the Gold Democrats, where presented a new urban industrial society was greater than at any other time before 1896. There had been a considerable number of faithful Democrats who did not support Bryan or the Party's platform, but many voted Democratic because they could not consent to align themselves with Republicans.<sup>89</sup> Those who did vote Republican returned to the Democratic fold after 1896, so after a temporary break in party control the machine again was revived and played an important role in the future of Virginia.

## APPENDIX A

An editorial carried in the Richmond Times on July 19, 1896, and repeated on subsequent days and which clearly shows the position of Gold Democrats within Virginia.

### "The Position of the Times"

"The Times is f \_ \_ \_

For Democratic principles pure and undefiled.

For the maintenance of the country--public and private, national, state and individual.

For the faithful observance of contracts made in accordance with the Gold Standard of value which has prevailed in this country for more than sixty years.

For the continuance of the Gold Standard of value as that best for the interests of all the people of this country and especially for all who live on wages, salaries or other fixed income.

For the use of silver to the fullest extent consistent with the continuance of gold in free circulation.

For free banking and the repeal of the 10 percent tax on state bank notes.

For the preservation of law and order and the greatest possible liberty of every citizen consistent therewith.

For honest elections as the safeguard of our liberties.

The Times is \_ \_ \_

Against the taxation of one citizen for the benefit of another, under the guise of bounties, of a protective tariff, or in any other form.

Against any tax which creates classes of citizens and discriminates in favor of one class as against another. All citizens are and should be equal before the law, both in receiving its benefits and bearing its burdens.

Against the free, unlimited, and independent coinage of silver by the United States as a delusive scheme, fraught with incalculable trouble and loss to our country.

Against all assumption of authority or interference by government in the lawful business of citizens.

Against the Government ownership or control of railroads, telegraphs, or any other business which citizens can do.

Against the Government forbidding contracts to pay borrowed money in the kind of money borrowed which have been lawful for thousands of years, and which in themselves are just and right.

Against all forms of Populistic Paternalism or Anarchistic incendarism.

## APPENDIX B

## RETURNS OF THE ELECTION OF 1896, BY COUNTY, IN VIRGINIA

<u>County</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Others</u>
Accomac	3115--62%	1675--33%	214
Albemarle	2628--57%	1918--41%	76
Alexandria	322--31%	713--69%	4
Alleghany	720--29%	1711--68%	91
Amelia	663--42%	899--57%	9
Amherst	1751--59%	1190--40%	14
Appomattox	946--61%	598--38%	13
Augusta	3066--50%	2823--46%	228
Bath	508--51%	471--48%	9
Bedford	3085--57%	2248--42%	67
Bland	498--56%	388--41%	1
Botetourt	1494--47%	1614--51%	41
Brunswick	1372--59%	956--41%	15
Buchanan	509--44%	695--56%	--
Buckingham	1247--50%	1199--49%	32
Campbell	2115--55%	1696--44%	16
Caroline	1293--46%	1502--53%	18
Carroll	1528--48%	1673--52%	6
Charles City	272--42%	362--56%	12
Charlotte	1458--71%	538--26%	64
Chesterfield	1727--50%	1273--42%	36
Clarke	1114--68%	490--30%	25
Craig	490--65%	249--33%	18
Culpepper	1704--60%	1113--39%	24
Cumberland	618--48%	657--51%	9
Dickenson	547--50%	534--49%	11
Dinwiddie	1099--59%	741--40%	8
Elizabeth City	572--37%	919--60%	39
Essex	924--58%	669--42%	4
Fairfax	2109--58%	1877--46%	30
Fauquier	2744--63%	1553--36%	31
Floyd	848--35%	1525--64%	14
Fluvanna	919--56%	708--43%	15
Franklin	2305--57%	1711--43%	8
Frederick	1848--68%	845--31%	35
Giles	993--54%	777--42%	66
Gloucester	819--59%	549--40%	17
Goochland	676--43%	897--56%	13
Grayson	1328--47%	1473--52%	30
Greene	533--48%	581--52%	22
Greensville	850--64%	471--35%	6
Halifax	3231--61%	2050--38%	53
Hanover	1499--52%	1337--46%	63
Henrico	2332--55%	1817--43%	61
Henry	1409--44%	1783--56%	14

ELECTION RETURNS(continued)

Highland	553--53%	489--46%	9
Isle of Wight	1264--63%	727--36%	10
James City	261--47%	291--52%	3
King & Queen	853--56%	655--43%	8
King George	582--46%	681--53%	9
King William	592--37%	990--62%	11
Lancaster	1073--63%	599--35%	20
Lee	1475--50%	1470--49%	27
Loudan	2741--57%	1991--41%	105
Louisa	1366--49%	1391--50%	35
Lunenburg	1045--68%	475--31%	10
Madison	1089--60%	724--40%	5
Mathews	797--62%	444--35%	37
Mecklenburg	2099--47%	2353--52%	32
Middlesex	688--50%	680--49%	8
Montgomery	1317--44%	1594--54%	68
Nansemond	1300--55%	1060--44%	19
Nelson	1492--55%	1183--44%	43
New Kent	369--45%	446--54%	8
Norfolk	2137--38%	3475--61%	62
Northhampton	1086--56%	802--42%	32
Northumberland	953--51%	904--48%	16
Nottoway	936--65%	478--34%	18
Orange	1324--57%	957--42%	24
Page	1166--44%	1454--54%	50
Patrick	886--43%	1140--56%	13
Pittsylvania	3987--55%	3196--44%	61
Powhatan	528--45%	637--54%	4
Prince Edward	991--50%	979--49%	28
Prince George	518--56%	394--43%	1
Prince William	1341--65%	727--35%	9
Princess Anne	790--53%	687--46%	8
Pulaski	1109--42%	1489--57%	11
Rappahannock	1076--65%	569--34%	9
Richmond	667--49.5%	667--49.5%	10
Roanoke	1116--42%	1484--56%	48
Rockbridge	1634--40%	2290--57%	127
Rockingham	998--65%	524--33%	127
Russell	1520--51%	1475--48%	13
Scott	1793--44%	2206--55%	15
Shenandoah	2052--48%	2102--49%	98
Smyth	1407--47%	1546--52%	15
Southampton	1438--76%	439--23%	20
Spotsylvania	887--49%	903--50%	8
Stafford	629--37%	1084--63%	6
Surry	709--53%	609--46%	10
Sussex	769--64%	418--35%	6
Tazewell	1582--38%	2525--61%	17
Warren	1172--65%	875--32%	45
Washington	2374--47%	2869--52%	36
Westmoreland	705--46%	827--53%	10
Wise	966--44%	1230--56%	6
Wythe	1683--46%	1882--52%	80
York	722--75%	223--23%	17

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- 3 Kenneth M. Stamp, The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965).  
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- 5 Stamp, Reconstruction, revises the traditional outlook on Reconstruction.
- 6 Nelson M. Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent. (Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie, 1935).
- 7 Raymond H. Pulley, Old Virginia Restored of the Progressive Impulse, 1870 - 1930. (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1964), pp.7-18.
- 8 The Battle of the Crater was fought in Petersburg as Lee defended Richmond from Grant. The Federal Troops placed a keg of gunpowder in a tunnel under the Confederate Lines to break through the trenches. The Confederates were ready and led by General Mahone drove back the Union troops.
- 9 Blake, Mahone. This is the only biography of Mahone and sympathetically covers all details of his life.
- 10 Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia. (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1961).
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- 12 William Sheldon, Populism in the Old Dominion. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1935), pp. 28-30.
- 13 Sheldon, Populism, p. 1. See map. Counties in Black Belt: Amelia, Appomatox, Brunswick, Buckingham, Campbell, Charlotte, Chesterfield, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Greensville, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Pittsylvania, Powhatan, Prince Edward.
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- 17 Hoffman, Depression, p. 29.
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- 20 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South. (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, pp. 26-65.
- 21 Joseph R. Hollingsworth, The Whirligig of Politics. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 3.
- 22 Hollingsworth, Whirligig, p.3..
- 23 Hollingsworth, Whirligig, p. 34.
- 24 The use of the term, Negro, is not exactly for the present, but it was a term in widespread use in 1896.
- 25 Moger, Origin, p. 190.
- 26 The Stonewall Brigade was under the command of Stonewall Jackson and after the Battle of Bull Run, it became an elite unit in the Confederate Army.
- 27 William M. Thornton, John Warwick Daniel. (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Alumni Bulletin, July, 1915).
- 28 A slush fund is one in which special interest groups pool money for politicians to use as they please.
- 29 William Larsen, Montague of Virginia. (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), pp. 41-42.
- 30 Hollingsworth, Whirligig, p. 34.
- 31 Allen W. Moger, "The Rift in Virginia Democracy in 1896," The Journal of Southern History IV (August, 1938): pp. 296.
- 32 Hollingsworth, Whirligig, p. 34.
- 33 Hollingsworth, Whirligig, p. 298.
- 34 Richmond Times and Lynchburg News 4 June 1896.
- 35 Larsen, Montague, p. 46.
- 36 Richmond Times 5 June 1896.
- 37 The unit rule would mean that even two gold men elected from the Second Congressional District must vote for silver.

- 38 Richmond Times 6 June 1896.
- 39 Sheldon, Populism, p. 123.
- 40 The use of the word "communist" has no connection with what the word means today, but refers to communal living where all live as equals under a group and not as individuals.
- 41 Richmond Times 12 April 1896.
- 42 John Stewart Bryan, Joseph Bryan: His Times, His Family, His Friends. (Richmond, Va.: Macrae Smith Co., 1935), p. 255. Richmond Times, Petersburg Index Appeal, Alexandria Gazette, Portsmouth Star, Norfolk Landmark, and the Richmond State all supported the gold standard.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Mosby's Partisan Rangers were under the leadership of John Singleton Mosby. It was a cavalry regiment that specialized in guerilla tactics. It was one of the most effective regiments of the war.
- 45 Bryan, Bryan, pp. 247-250.
- 46 Bryan, Bryan, p. 256.
- 47 Larsen, Montague, p. 46.
- 48 Sheldon, Populism, p. 123.
- 49 Nominated by Republicans on June 18, 1896.
- 50 Lynchburg News, 5 July 1896.
- 51 Richmond Times, 8 June 1896.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Richmond Times, 9 June 1896.
- 54 Norfolk Landmark, 11 July 1896.
- 55 Richmond Times, 23 June 1896.
- 56 The word "Democratic" is ambiguous and meant what a person wanted it to in Virginia. The flexibility of the word also reflects the flexibility of the party.
- 57 Richmond Times, 19 July 1896.
- 58 Clarksville Chronicle, 24 July 1896. Sheldon, Populists.
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- 60 Henry St. George Tucker, Speech Made at Amherst County Courthouse (Lexington, Va.: Rockbridge County News Print, 1896), pp. 3-6.
- 61 Richmond Times, 4 August 1896.
- 62 Lynchburg News, 4 August 1896.
- 63 Richmond Times, 28 August 1896. Norfolk Landmark, 28 August 1896.
- 64 Richmond Times, 12 August 1896.
- 65 Moger, "Rift," p. 306.
- 66 Richmond Times, 20 September 1896.
- 67 Moger, "Rift," p. 308.
- 68 Richmond Times, 20 September 1896.
- 69 Sheldon, Populism, p. 107.
- 70 Moger, "Rift," p. 311.
- 71 New York Times, 30 October 1896. Moger, "Rift," p. 306. William L. Royall, Some Reminiscences, (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1909), pp.202-203.
- 73 Ibid.
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- 80 Richmond Times, 6 October 1896.
- 81 Richmond Times, 11 October 1896.
- 82 H. Wayne Morgan, From Hayes to McKinley. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p. 521.
- 83 Moger, "Rift," p.311.

- 84 Richard L. Morton, The History of Virginia, Volume 3. (New York: American Historical Society, 1924), p. 301.
- 85 Hollingsworth, Whirligig, p. 100.
- 86 Moger, "Rift," p. 312.
- 87 Ralph C. McDaniel, The Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1901-1902. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928).
- 88 The word "democratic" excludes Blacks but for the White Southerner, it was a democratic movement.
- 89 McDaniel, Constitution, p. 10.

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#### Norfolk Landmark, 1896.

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