

A HISTORY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

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Alva, Oklahoma

1964

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of  
the Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
May, 1966

*History*

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A HISTORY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

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## PREFACE

The opening to settlement and subsequent development of Oklahoma Territory closely paralleled the great social, economic, and political upheavals experienced throughout the United States during that period roughly beginning in the last three decades of the nineteenth century and ending with the beginning of World War I. New and dynamic forces brought forth by the confrontation of old social traditions with the new and more complex conditions of a growing America wrought momentous changes in all institutions of society. Nowhere was this change more cataclysmic than in the political sphere. When the two major political parties failed to give expression to the changing mood of the people third parties were founded that, while failing to ensure their own longevity, did reflect the popular political sentiments and which served in the end to force the major political parties to adopt many of their principles. One of the leading forces making for such reform was the chronic maladjustment and dissatisfaction of the agrarian population with the growing dominance of the industrial and financial interests. As the last large area of public land of any significant agricultural value left to be opened to settlement Oklahoma Territory reflected and was a moving force in this agrarian unrest. Oklahoma became a refuge for many of the discontented, not only the rural elements but the urban as well, and they stamped indelibly their character upon the nature of Oklahoma politics. It is this fundamental fact that Oklahoma politics grew to maturity during these climatic years that explains in great measure the nature and the successes and failures of the Democratic party in Oklahoma Territory. It is the purpose of this study to review the establishment, development, and ultimate ascendancy of

the Democratic party in Oklahoma Territory from 1889 to 1907; and, to the extent that it is possible, to recreate in some measure the spirit of these years that played so large a role in shaping the nature of the Democratic party in Oklahoma.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to all the members of the History Department at Oklahoma State University who have been a constant help and inspiration. A special debt of thanks is owed to Dr. Norbert R. Mahnken for his time and excellent guidance in this study; to the extent that this study has succeeded in its purpose is largely to his credit. In addition, I wish to thank Dr. O. A. Hilton and Dr. LeRoy H. Fischer for their careful reading and consideration of this paper.

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## CHAPTER I

### ESTABLISHMENT OF GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL MACHINERY

#### Provisional Governments

The first settlers to arrive in Oklahoma Territory in 1889 were without the benefit of Congressionally established government. In its haste to open the new lands to settlement the federal government failed to make provisions for a territorial form of government. Under more normal conditions it would have been proper for the federal government to provide a statutory basis upon which a newly created territory could erect its law and governmental structure. But the opening of Oklahoma Territory was not an ordinary or carefully-planned event, and President Harrison failed to include any provision for governmental machinery in his proclamation opening the Unassigned Lands to settlement on April 22, 1889.<sup>1</sup> Thousands more people than were expected by the administration in Washington flocked to the borders of Indian Territory to await the land rush. Government officials sorely underestimated the lure of excitement and adventure, the dream of a new life in a new land, the widespread discontent among citizens of the other states of the Union, and the mystical attraction of the promise of free land in a land of fading frontiers. The mistake, however, was a natural one. Territories opened in the earlier periods of American history had been gradually over a long period of time brought under extensive settlement. In these earlier territories a long transitional

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<sup>1</sup>James D. Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897. Vol. VII, (Washington: Bureau of National Literature, 1913), 5450.

period from a primitive agrarian culture to a highly developed rural society dotted with thriving cities took place.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this evolutionary process the immediate need for government never existed. This was not so in Oklahoma Territory. From the beginning it was a fully occupied land of settled farms dotted with rapidly growing rural towns.

Within the boundaries of these infant communities in Oklahoma Territory thousands of strangers attempted to live together without any legal machinery to provide law and order. Yet despite these conditions so conducive to chaos and disorder surprisingly little lawlessness prevailed. The long Anglo-Saxon tradition of the rule of law was not lost in those hectic days, and in the absence of statutory or constitutional law the rule of common consent prevailed. To permit the constructive process of settling the land and building the towns to continue, some of the more active townspeople hastily called for the convening of town meetings to establish provisional governments. In most of the towns disputes between individual contestants and rival town factions concerning ownership of claims and control of municipal government occurred, but they were generally settled peacefully and without serious disorder.

At Oklahoma City, as in Guthrie, Kingfisher, and other cities throughout the territory, interested citizens issued a call for a "Mass Convention" to elect temporary city officials. As in any political situation those men who were organized and had a set plan of operation quickly asserted their control and leadership. Attendance at the meeting was large, "perhaps a thousand people", and marked by a great deal of confusion.

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<sup>2</sup>The Ordinance of 1787 was used as a pattern for opening the Unassigned Lands, and, as Stewart points out, "Changed but slightly to meet the needs of the environment of the late Nineteenth Century it was applied to Oklahoma Territory". Dora Ann Stewart, Government and Development of Oklahoma Territory (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Co., 1933), 49.



Before the great body of settlers became cognizant of the true situation an organized few managed to elect their candidates.<sup>3</sup> In similar manner a few ambitious persons in the various towns throughout the territory were able to establish initial control and to achieve many personal ambitions. This rough and practical brand of politics, while not generally involving organized activity of any political party, was a forerunner of the type of politics that was to characterize Oklahoma politics.

These provisional governments, while meeting the immediate needs for law and order in a frontier land, had no basis in law and as such no claim to legality. Years of litigation in the courts resulted from the attempt to untangle the legal complications growing out of these provisional governments. Persons holding claims against these provisional governments in some instances were left unpaid. Because they rested on common consent rather than statutory law such city governments were held not to be bound nor could they bind any one to a contract. Not until a United States Supreme Court decision in 1899 upheld the right of the Oklahoma Territory legislative assembly to validate these claims on moral as well as legal grounds were many of these claims paid.<sup>4</sup>

Such a state of affairs necessitated that something be done to create more formal governmental machinery. Conditions were deteriorating into "political and social chaos".<sup>5</sup> It was clear that a territorial form of government was needed. Oklahomans were insistent in their demands for

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<sup>3</sup>Dan W. Peery, "The First Two years," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VII (1929), 296.

<sup>4</sup>Mayor, etc., of the City of Guthrie v. Territory ex. rel. Losey, 1 Okla. 188 (1892); Blackburn v. Okla. City, 1 Okla. 292 (1893); Guthrie National Bank v. City of Guthrie, 173 U. S. 528 (1898).

<sup>5</sup>John Alley, City Beginnings in Oklahoma Territory (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 108.

governmental provisions; and finally, after successive memorials to Congress and the passage of thirteen months time, they found their requests answered.

#### Territorial Organization

On May 2, 1890, the Organic Act was signed into law by President Benjamin Harrison. Under this act the lands set aside for settlement by the proclamation of April 22, 1889, were "erected into a temporary government by the name of the Territory of Oklahoma".<sup>6</sup> By the provisions of this measure a territorial form of government was established. The executive power was to be vested in a governor appointed by the President of the United States and holding his office for a period of four years.<sup>7</sup> Legislative powers were to reside in a council or upper house consisting of thirteen members and a house of representatives or lower house consisting of twenty-six members. Members of the legislature were to live in the districts from which they were to be elected.<sup>8</sup>

The governor was given the authority to fix temporary county boundaries and establish legislative districts. For purposes of making this apportionment of legislative seats the governor was instructed to conduct a census of the several counties and on that basis apportion "as nearly as practicable among the several counties or districts...giving to each section of the Territory representation in the ratio of its population (excepting Indians not taxed) as nearly as may be".<sup>9</sup>

Under the provisions of the Organic Act each county was to be divided into election precincts and into such political sub-divisions as

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<sup>6</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVI, Part 1, 81.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

that portion of the Nebraska statutes specified.<sup>10</sup> According to the Nebraska law, which was to be applicable until a territorial legislature could meet and adopt a new legal code, the governor was to appoint three county commissioners who were to "proceede [sic] to divide such counties into suitable and convenient precincts" whose boundaries and place of registration were to be posted in one newspaper of general circulation in the respective city in the last issue preceding the day of registration.<sup>11</sup>

Once the first territorial legislature had been elected and had met in session for the first time it proceeded to change the basis for drawing up precinct boundaries. By an act of December 20, 1890, a special election was to be held to elect county, township, and road officers to replace those appointed temporarily by the governor. These specially elected officials were to remain in office until succeeded by permanent officials elected under the first general election laws. The newly elected county commissioners were to divide their respective counties into townships and establish one voting place in each township except where a township contained a city of over one thousand population, in which case a voting place for each ward was to be created.<sup>12</sup> By a later act of May 1, 1891, it was further provided that no election precinct was to contain more than two-hundred and fifty electors.<sup>13</sup>

The first election officials provided for in the Organic Act were to be appointed by the governor until such time as the legislative assembly provided for their election or appointment. Not more than two of the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>11</sup>Nebraska, Consolidated Statutes (1891), c. 10, sec. 824.

<sup>12</sup>Oklahoma, Statutes of Oklahoma (1890), c. 32, sec. 1, 2, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., c. 33, sec. 2.

election officials in any election precinct were to be members of the same political party.<sup>14</sup>

Once the territorial legislature met in session it proceeded to establish its own method for supervising elections to replace the provisions in the statutes of Nebraska. By the act of December 20, 1890, providing for the election of special county officials, county commissioners were directed to appoint three election judges within each township or ward, one each from the Republican, Democratic, and the People's party.<sup>15</sup> By a later act of March 1, 1891, provisions were made for selecting territorial and county election boards. The territorial board was to consist of three qualified electors: two appointed by the governor from nominees submitted by the territorial central committeemen of the two political parties polling the largest number of votes at the last preceding general election; and the governor himself who constituted the third member. At the county level each election board consisted of two appointees from nominations made by the chairmen of the county central committee of the two political parties polling the largest number of votes at the last general election. Once nominated they were appointed by the county clerk of the respective counties, and who comprised the third member of that board.<sup>16</sup>

Voting qualifications as provided for in the Organic Act were as follows:

That all male citizens of the United States above the age of twenty-one years, and all male persons of foreign birth over said age who shall have twelve months

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<sup>14</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVI, Part 1, 87.

<sup>15</sup>Oklahoma, Statutes of Oklahoma (1890), c. 32, sec. 4.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., c. 33, sec. 14, 15.

prior thereto declared their intention to become citizens of the United States [and are residents of Oklahoma Territory at the time of passage of this act] shall be entitled to vote at the first election in the Territory.<sup>17</sup>

At each subsequent elections the legislative assembly was free to determine voter qualifications with the exception for the following limitations: only males over twenty-one years of age and foreign born residents who had declared their intention to become United States citizens were to have the right of suffrage; there was to be no discrimination due to race, color, or previous condition of servitude; all United States military personnel on duty in Oklahoma Territory were excluded from suffrage and the right to hold civil office.<sup>18</sup>

The first territorial legislative assembly, in pursuance of its authority and within the limitations established by the Organic Act, provided that every male person twenty-one years of age or older who had resided in Oklahoma Territory for six months prior to any election and was either a United States citizen, a foreigner who had complied with United States naturalization laws, or Indians not members of any tribe, should have the right to vote.<sup>19</sup>

Like all territorial governments Oklahoma had numerous offices that were to be filled by political patronage. The offices of governor, secretary, chief-justice and associate justices to the territorial court, attorney, and marshal were to be nominated and appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. Other minor appointive offices consisted of United States Commissioners, masters in chancery, Indian agents, postmasters, tax collectors and superintendents and

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<sup>17</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVI, Part 1, 84.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Oklahoma, Statutes of Oklahoma (1890), c. 33, sec. 1.

inspectors.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the large number of offices to be filled by patronage there were still important offices to be filled by the local voters. All territorial legislative seats were to be filled by the electorate, and once the legislative assembly had provided its own laws there would be city and county officers to be elected to replace the governor's appointees.<sup>21</sup> Also a "Delegate to the House of Representatives of the United States" was to be elected by the voters eligible to vote for members to the legislative assembly.<sup>22</sup> And during Presidential elections voters could make known their political sentiments by means of a preferential ballot. Although their votes did not count in determining the outcome of the Presidential election it did provide a means to express the sentiments of Oklahoma Territory.<sup>23</sup> With a government to form and political offices to fill the whole territory anxiously awaited the arrival of the new governor.

George W. Steele, Oklahoma Territory's first governor, did not reach his new home until May 22, twenty days after the Organic Act was signed into law and thirteen months after the first settlers arrived. Governor Steele immediately threw himself into the spirit of the new land, busying himself with fixing county boundary lines, conducting a census of the inhabitants, and apportioning the legislative seats to each of the newly formed counties in preparation for the first territorial election.

Seven counties, complete with county seats but lacking county

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<sup>20</sup>James Ralph Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma, 1907-1949" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1949), 11.

<sup>21</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVI, Part 1, 87.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>23</sup>Scales, 5.

boundaries, had been provided for as follows by the Organic Act: First County, Guthrie; Second County, Oklahoma City; Third County, Norman; Fourth County, El Reno; Fifth County, Kingfisher; Sixth County, Stillwater; Seventh County, Beaver.<sup>24</sup> Figure 1 gives the location of these seven counties and their boundaries as originally established by Governor Steele. Also at the first territorial legislative election the people themselves could vote for a name for their respective counties, the name receiving the highest number of votes being declared the designated county name.<sup>25</sup> Results of this first election renamed the original seven counties as follows: First County, Logan; Second County, Oklahoma; Third County, Cleveland; Fourth County, Canadian; Fifth County, Kingfisher; Sixth County, Payne; Seventh County, Beaver.<sup>26</sup>

According to the enumerators appointed by Governor Steele the population of the new territory at the time of this first census was 60,417, broken down per county as follows: Logan County, 14,254; Oklahoma County, 12,794; Cleveland County, 7,011; Canadian County, 7,703; Kingfisher County, 8,837; Payne County, 6,836; Beaver County, 2,982.<sup>27</sup> From this county population breakdown the thirteen seats in the council and the twenty-six seats in the house of representatives were to be apportioned.

With the preliminaries completed and the governmental and political machinery established the first showdown of political strength in the new territory was approaching. The wide diversity of political ideologies present, and the vigor with which the people engaged in politics promised to make the first political campaign in Oklahoma an exciting one.

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<sup>24</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVI, Part 1, 83.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Reports of the Secretary of the Interior, 52nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1891-1892, 449.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

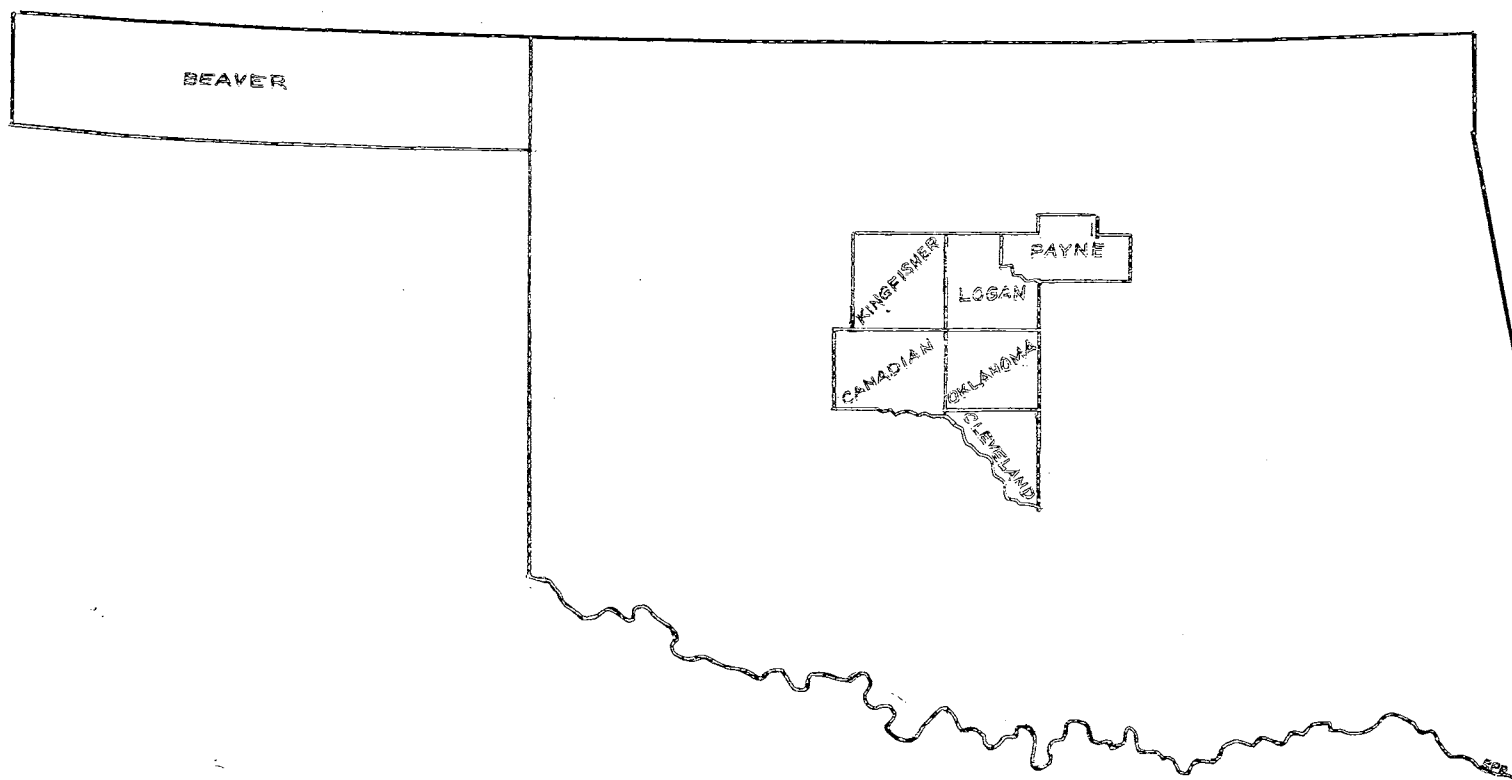


Figure 1. The First Seven Counties in Oklahoma Territory as Originally Established by Governor George W. Steele.



## CHAPTER II

### POLITICAL HERITAGE

#### Agrarian Unrest

The unusual interest accompanying the first election of August 5, 1890, was not peculiar to Oklahoma Territory; rather it was symptomatic of the fevered pitch of national politics during the 1890's. These were unsettled years for the nation's political parties. The South and West were aflame with agrarian unrest. In many sections of the country farmers were in a rebellious mood, and politics became an integral part of farm life. The sources of this unrest were many, but primarily it was due to a loss of economic, social, and political standing by the agrarian population. Agrarian influence in the area of public policy had waned rapidly from the Civil War on, and by 1873 farmers in many sections of the country were in serious condition. With little change the depression conditions of the 1870's continued until 1896. It was these depression years from 1873 to 1896 that produced the unusual amount of agrarian unrest and spurred farmer participation in politics.

The Granger movement was the first organized effort on the part of the agrarian population to alleviate farming conditions. As a result of Granger activity farming interests in several of the Western and mid-Western states supported Reform and Anti-Monopoly parties and enacted important pieces of railroad legislation.<sup>1</sup> Before any lasting results could

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<sup>1</sup>Solon Justus Buck, The Granger Movement (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1913), 3.

be achieved, however, the Granger movement subsided. A combination of returning prosperity, opposition from the railroad interests, and farmer ineptitude and indifference combined to destroy the Granger movement as an effective political force.<sup>2</sup>

Farmers next displayed their dissatisfaction by joining forces with the urban workers in support of the Greenback party and its program of currency inflation. This new coalition made a somewhat impressive political showing when it captured fourteen Congressional seats in the election of 1878. But the election year of 1878 marked the peak of the Greenback party's success and by 1884 it too was a dead political force.<sup>3</sup> The basic social, economic, and political maladjustments at the root of farmer discontent did not disappear, however, and remained as a source of agrarian agitation.

A new, and destined to be even greater, group of farmer organizations were coming to the fore during those same years in which decline had set in for the Granger and Greenback movements. From a local farmers' club in Lampasas County Texas sprang the first Farmers' Alliance.<sup>4</sup> The National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union or the Southern Alliance soon spread throughout the South. In the Northwest and upper Mississippi Valley the National or Northern Farmers' Alliance was organized. After 1889 members of both Alliances attempted to unite the two groups, but serious differences prevented the merger. A formal union of the Southern Alliance and the Northern Farmers' Alliance never was achieved, yet when the People's party was formed in 1892 both groups united strongly behind

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<sup>2</sup>Solon J. Buck, The Agrarian Crusade (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), 43-44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 112.

it.<sup>5</sup> For the first time the farmers appeared to have an effective national political party. The coalition between northern and southern Alliancemen was a shaky one, and it would later founder as a result of fusion with the Democratic party, but it served its purpose in uniting the farmers under one party capable of influencing national legislation.

#### Entry of Agrarian Unrest Into Oklahoma Territory

It is significant for Oklahoma politics that Oklahoma Territory was opened to settlement during the period of the last great effort on the part of the farmers to restore the agrarian community to its lost position and just three years before the People's party was founded. Oklahoma, as the last major agricultural frontier left to be settled, became a refuge for the discontented farmer and his alliance principles. But the restless urge to move was not confined solely to the rural population, and men of all classes and professions came to the new territory. Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin farmers, who had produced the Granger laws and helped to fight the unsuccessful battle of the 1870's came. Alliancemen and Farmers' Union men from the North and from the South moved to fight another day and brought with them their zest for political action. Northern Republicans and southern Democrats came and realigned themselves in much the same fashion as before. All of these diverse elements, and more, became a part of that unique mixture so characteristic of Oklahoma politics. Few other single American political commonwealths were characterized by so many and varied types of political ideologies.

Soon after the first land opening in 1889 both the Democratic and the Republican national organizations had established offices in Oklahoma

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<sup>5</sup>John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1920), 96.

Territory and were busy vying for votes. Members of the Farmers' Alliance, the Agricultural Wheel, the Union Labor Party, and the Knights of Labor were also present and organizing local clubs.<sup>6</sup> The spirited competition among the various political parties coupled with the crusading fervor engendered by the various political and economic reform issues produced a period unique in the history of Oklahoma politics.

#### The Turbulent Years: Character of Oklahoma Politics

The years from 1889 to 1907 were the turbulent years in Oklahoma politics. There were no well defined political precedents; the participants were crude and sturdy pioneers not yet polished by protocol and the finer points of parliamentary procedure. Political issues were present that brought into question the fundamental nature and function of democracy and which evoked strong emotions. Farmers, urban laborers, doctors, lawyers, gamblers, and speculators of all shades were thrown together into the struggle. Each brought with him his own ideals and values, and time did not permit the orderly and evolutionary working out of their differences. It was only natural to expect the clash of these divergent and often incompatible interests to be strenuous. And politics was the most natural, as well as the "most violent", form of expressing these varied ideals and conditions.

Both national economic conditions and individual poverty influenced the political climate. Many a pioneer who settled upon the land carried "only such few possessions as could be loaded with his family in a single

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<sup>6</sup>Alley, 101-102. By 1906 the list of local political parties had increased to include the following: Socialist; Farmers; Farmer-Labor; Independents. Scales, 34.

wagon and what little cash was in his pants pocket".<sup>7</sup> For others their economic distresses were less acute, but for many this was an accurate picture. Large numbers of early farmers, even when finally settled upon the land, depended for their livelihood solely upon the goodness of nature from one year to the next. One Logan County resident living during this period, in looking back at her early years as a young girl, remarked, "My best recollection of these years is the discussion of the drought at every meal time".<sup>8</sup> Year after year of working the soil, fighting both nature and the reputed handicaps placed upon them by unscrupulous politicians and financiers, made political radicals out of the most conservative farmers.

Education was another factor greatly affecting the character of Oklahoma politics. It was a scarce but priceless possession in the new territory. By 1891 only 9,893 children out of a total of 21,337, between the ages of six to twenty-one, were enrolled in school.<sup>9</sup> Many of those that were educated were self-taught or had spent a few months in some rural school and possessed only the bare essentials of formal education. It has been written that by 1897 Greer County had only one Democrat that possessed a first grade education, and there were other counties where this same condition was closely approximated.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1898-99, 658.

<sup>8</sup>Ina Lee Robinson, "Farm Life in Logan County in Oklahoma Territory," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXVII (1959), 304.

<sup>9</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Reports of the Secretary of the Interior, 52nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1891-1892, 457.

<sup>10</sup>Oklahoma governors from 1890 until 1907 were lavish in their praise of Oklahoma's school system. It should be pointed out, however, that such high praise was largely unwarranted, and it grew partly out of the people's pride in their accomplishments and the desire to impress Congressional leaders with the new territory's qualifications for statehood. James Albert Barnett, "A History of the Empire of Greer," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1938), 120-121.

Most of the settlers looked up to and respected a person that possessed an education and usually considered him as a logical choice for filling a political office. When sent to the territorial legislature or other political offices in the counties the politician seldom forgot the conditions from whence he came and under which his constituents lived. As one office holder during this period put it, "we were living on boiled kaffir corn and turnips while we paid good salaries to the men we hired to carry on our county business, so we reduced them to something like our level".<sup>11</sup>

The limited nature of their education and the pressing urgency of their economic conditions precluded any great preoccupation with the theoretical aspects of politics. For the most part a practical outlook characterized Oklahoma politics and politicians. Day to day experiences set the guidelines and determined the nature and content of their politics.<sup>12</sup> It was enough for the farmers to know they were getting less for their products in proportion to the money being paid out for necessary living expenses without having to be told it was merely the working out of Darwinian philosophy or that it all could be justified in the name of the "Gospel of Wealth". And when it came to seeking solutions to their problems these practical settlers were not bound by any such theoretical philosophies of economics or government. No philosophical abstractions or immutable laws existed in their political philosophy.

Political meetings were always also social gatherings, and every social gathering was potentially a political meeting. Political issues were popular objects of conversation, and a chance to discuss them was

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<sup>11</sup>Angie Debo, "Albert H. Ellis," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVIII (1950-51), 384-385.

<sup>12</sup>Angie Debo, Oklahoma: Foot-Loose and Fancy Free (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 41.

never passed over. Also, social events of any type, especially during the earliest years of the territorial era, were almost non-existent; and it was natural that any event allowing time off from work and presenting an opportunity for meeting with neighbors from other parts of the county or territory would be an event of some note. A pioneer of those early days recalled that "nothing could call together a bigger crowd than to advertise a political debate, unless it was a debate between a Methodist and a 'Campbellite' upon the question of how much water it should take to baptize a person".<sup>13</sup> The "literary at the sod schoolhouse" where the politicians and the rustic philosophers debated the popular and important questions of the day was a natural outgrowth of the people and their conditions.<sup>14</sup> Even the lack of a suitable meeting place was no handicap, and frequently political meetings were held out in the open by a creek or under a grove of trees.<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of where they were held, political meetings were always lively and often rowdy. While some individuals knew the points of parliamentary procedure and were able to conduct a meeting with proper order most knew little or nothing about such procedure and cared even less. Yelling, hollering, heckling, and furniture throwing were the frequent modes of expressing points of view.<sup>16</sup> A description given of the Democratic congressional convention held in August of 1892 would fit that of many such meetings. Called to order, so ran the description, the convention soon became "a display of cowboyism....For long periods no voice could be heard

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<sup>13</sup>Peery, "The First Two Years," 428.

<sup>14</sup>Angie Debo, Prairie City (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), 25.

<sup>15</sup>Debo, "Albert H. Ellis," 384-385.

<sup>16</sup>Angelo C. Scott, The Story of Oklahoma City (Oklahoma City: Times Journal Publishing Co., 1939), 106.

and the chairman's tatoon, for order, on the table with a club, was the most intellectual feat discernible".<sup>17</sup>

The territorial Democratic convention held at El Reno in 1900 was a typical example of turbulent territorial politics. Paul Nesbitt, a delegate to that convention, observed that "in those days a convention that did not raise the roof and tear up furniture was a dud. We had a glorious one at El Reno that year".<sup>18</sup> The main purpose of the convention, since the appointment of territorial officials was in the hands of the Republican president and governor, was to elect delegates to the Democratic National Convention at Kansas City. Supporters of Jimmy Jacobs, a resident of Shawnee, succeeded in organizing the convention; and selecting the presiding officials; but the arbitrary methods used to achieve control caused a split in the convention, and supporters of Jasper Sipes, a resident of Oklahoma City, proceeded to hold their own convention. After a brief outburst of throwing and overturning of furniture supporters of Sipes reversed their chairs and began to face the other half of the hall and to elect their own delegates. The results were that two sets of delegates from Oklahoma Territory were sent to the national convention, and the credentials committee of that convention ended up giving each Oklahoma delegate one-half of a vote.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Royden Dangerfield, "Royden Dangerfield Manuscripts Collection" (Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma). This and subsequent citations to the Dangerfield Collection, except where otherwise noted, are taken from an unpublished manuscript dealing with the early political history of Oklahoma. The manuscript is fully documented and where possible this author has checked the validity of its sources finding them to be correct. Hereafter this source will be cited, except where otherwise noted, as the "Dangerfield Manuscript".

<sup>18</sup>Paul Nesbitt, "Daniel William Peery," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XX (1942), 6.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



Another incident showing the nature of political meetings and the participants involved William H. Murray. At a Democratic state committee meeting held at Ardmore during the 1907 gubernatorial race Murray had risen to speak and was abusively heckled by a one Stillwell Russell. In the style so typical of "Cucklebur Bill", Murray answered his critic by caustically commenting, "Russell if I had the brains that you have guts, I would be a power in this meeting".<sup>20</sup> Such was the temperament of early Oklahoma politics.

Victory celebrations were just as expressive of the times. When Grover Cleveland was nominated for President in 1892 Mangum settlers met at the town blacksmith shop and celebrated the event by exploding charges of black gun powder placed in the blacksmith's anvil. This energetic fun-making lasted way into the night.<sup>21</sup>

At times the celebration was a little premature and ill-timed as in the case of the mayor's race in Oklahoma City in 1890. The Democratic nominee, I. W. Folsom, a second cousin of Mrs. Grover Cleveland, after winning the nomination went out on a victory celebration. Before the night was over Folsom had managed to become intoxicated and to make a spectacle of himself before a large portion of the town's people. The Democrats beat a hasty retreat, and early the next day Folsom's name was quietly removed from the ticket.<sup>22</sup>

Territorial politics also had its share of vice and corruption. Frontier conditions always extended a situation ripe for this sort of thing.

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<sup>20</sup>William H. Murray, Memoirs of Governor Murray and True History of Oklahoma, Vol. III, (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1945), 219.

<sup>21</sup>Thad M. Foster, "The Development of Mangum, Oklahoma" (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1941), 19.

<sup>22</sup>Albert McRill, And Satan Came Also (Oklahoma City: Britton Publishing Co., 1955), 22.

Many gamblers and dealers in whiskey and in women came to the new territory for this very reason. Oklahoma City was the most notorious for its illicit activities. It was here that Mrs. Anne Wynn, better known as "Big Anne", became "a power in the vice and political domain of Oklahoma City" from the first day of the Opening in 1889. Some critics of contemporary politics charged that "Big Anne" and her crowd of "big-time gamblers, haughty madams, and arrogant saloon-keepers" kept local politicians dangling like puppets on a string.<sup>23</sup> Most of this type of corruption, however, existed extensively only in the larger cities where for the most part it was confined to local city elections. While the scandalous and sensational always stood out, the more law abiding rural elements set the general political climate of the territory.

Under such politically charged and disruptive forces and the sudden gathering together of a large diverse population it is not surprising that political alliances were not always cohesive. Often intra-party disputes were more fierce than the disputes taking place between rival political parties. Throughout territorial days crudeness continued to characterize politicians, and political meetings often resembled riots rather than conventions. But efficient organization was a prerequisite to political success and rival factions and individuals did attempt to work in unity.

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<sup>23</sup>Mrs. Anne Wynn came to Oklahoma Territory by way of the mining camps around Leadville, Colorado. Ibid., 26.

## CHAPTER III

### DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION

#### Establishment of Local Democratic Clubs

The people of Oklahoma and their political parties took seriously the business of organizing the territorial government and of shaping the political future of the new commonwealth. Political parties were spurred to greater efforts by the knowledge that the first victories would be perhaps the most important and would no doubt play a large role in determining the political complexion of Oklahoma Territory as well as that of the future new state. Because victory in the final analysis would rest largely on the best disciplined party the speedy development of an effective political organization was of the utmost importance. Democrats were especially conscious of this fact since the Republicans possessed the advantage of holding control of the federal government and all territorial patronage.

For the most part the more immediate needs of law and order and the absence of any legally constituted government kept partisan politics in the background during the establishment of provisional governments, but after passage of the Organic Act on May 2, 1890, political interest was immediately revived.<sup>1</sup> The fact that there were no political offices to fill from the date of the first opening in 1889 until passage of the Organic Act thirteen months later, however, did not deter many of the more politically astute and ambitious men from beginning early to build a party

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<sup>1</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

organization.<sup>2</sup> Men interested in building a strong Democratic party and in advancing their own political fortune traveled throughout the territory making acquaintances and establishing local Democratic organizations. Local Democratic clubs were the primary means of achieving this purpose.

Daniel W. Peery, an energetic young Democrat from Oklahoma County, was typical of this type of organizer. Helping his friends organize a Democratic club on Crutch Creek, Peery then traveled throughout the remainder of the county setting up other such clubs. This experience and exposure to people over the county later contributed significantly to electing Peery to the first territorial legislature as representative from Oklahoma County.<sup>3</sup>

While Democratic clubs were organized in both cities and rural areas it was primarily the strategy of the Democratic party, as well as that of the Republican party, to concentrate more heavily on the cities. It was this emphasis on urban inhabitants that hurt first the Republican party and then the Democratic party in Oklahoma Territory. Among the rural elements the Farmers' Alliance and the Agricultural Wheel were more effective in setting up political clubs.<sup>4</sup> Later the People's party replaced the Alliance and the Wheel as representatives of a large portion of the rural population. The Democratic party did not become fully representative of the agrarian population or the majority party in Oklahoma until it embraced the principles of the People's party.

On September 6, 1889, there appeared in the column of the Oklahoma City Times the statement that "young democrats of Oklahoma 'contemplate

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<sup>2</sup>Alley, 99.

<sup>3</sup>Dan W. Peery was an Eighty-Niner settling first in Oklahoma County. Nesbitt, "Daniel William Peery," 4.

<sup>4</sup>Alley, 101-102.

the organization of a young men's Democratic club...so that they may intelligently participate in politics."<sup>5</sup> A short time later on December 23 the Democratic club of Oklahoma City elected a committee for organization and that committee addressed a circular letter to all interested Democrats throughout the territory calling for the organization of local clubs.<sup>6</sup>

The establishment of local Democratic clubs went on rapidly until practically every region of the territory had its own Democratic organization. But these local clubs, while providing an opportunity to meet and to discuss important political issues, failed to meet the full needs for a permanent political organization. Local Democratic clubs were not a part of the territorial party machinery. Operating outside the regular party committees these local clubs were used to attract party followers and to obtain funds.<sup>7</sup> To carry on an effective campaign and to keep the party intact year in and year out, however, Democrats needed a permanent party organization.<sup>8</sup>

#### Establishment of Permanent Democratic Committees

On February 8, 1890, just three months prior to the arrival of Governor Steele and six months before the date of the first territorial election, territorial Democrats moved to effect a permanent party organization. On this date the Democratic club of Lexington issued a call through all newspapers in the territory for interested Democrats to convene in Oklahoma City on March 11, 1890, for this purpose. "WHEREAS, our

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<sup>5</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Charles W. McKenzie, Party Government in the United States (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1939), 255.

<sup>8</sup>Committees have been referred to as the "continuing organs" of a political party. Charles Edward Merriam and Harold Foote Bosnell, The American Party System (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), 166.

political opponents," the call stated, "have already marshaled their forces for the coming conflict, with the view of precipitating an obnoxious government upon the people," the Democratic party hereby declares itself to be the "pronounced opponents of all trusts and combines" and in favor of a "plain economic system of government."<sup>9</sup>

Normally the various county committeemen would have met in what amounted to a state or territorial convention to elect a territorial central and executive committee, but county boundaries were as yet not created, and the local Democratic clubs served to fulfill this function. And for the purpose of electing a central and executive committee the proposed Democratic convention was scheduled to be convened in Oklahoma City on March 11.

Responding to the call issued by the Lexington club, representatives from the various Democratic clubs met to consider the merits of such a proposal. J. M. Hedden of Norman was elected temporary chairman and P. R. Smith of Lexington temporary secretary of the meeting. Members at this meeting not only gave their approval to the Lexington call but set up a committee to further supervise and aid in the organization of the Democratic clubs in each township. Members selected to this organizational committee were B. M. Woodson, Oklahoma City; H. S. Butler, Oklahoma City; J. E. Grigsby, Norman; and P. R. Smith, Lexington. Representatives to this meeting also made a change in the apportionment of delegates to the territorial convention of local Democratic clubs scheduled to meet in Oklahoma City on March 11. The Lexington call had stipulated that local

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<sup>9</sup>The Republicans were first to organize, holding their first territorial convention on January 17, 1890, at Oklahoma City. The credentials committee at this time declared the Republican party to have twenty-two local Republican clubs throughout the territory. The largest of these clubs was the Guthrie Pioneer Club, 1,000 members; Kingfisher Republican Club, 1,112 members; Lincoln Republican Club, 1,180 members. Dangerfield Manuscript.

clubs would be represented on the basis of one delegate for every twenty-five club members plus one delegate for a fraction of fifteen club members or over and in addition one delegate at large for all clubs with a minimum of fifty members.<sup>10</sup> Modifying this method of representation the representatives of the local clubs acting as a whole resolved that each township should be represented by one delegate at the coming convention.<sup>11</sup>

When the scheduled Democratic convention met in Oklahoma City on March 11, 1890, the delegates immediately displayed a disposition to quarrel, a trait that was to be a recurrent handicap to the Democratic party throughout territorial days. A lively fight over the seating of contesting delegations and for control of the convention broke out. It was largely due to a speech made by J. B. McCoy of El Reno asking that all Democrats, irrespective of contesting delegates, be permitted to take a seat that order was achieved and the convention permitted to proceed with its business.<sup>12</sup> As expected a fight for leadership broke out and only after considerable time and oratory were the permanent officers elected. Judge Amos Green, a resident of Lexington, was made permanent chairman. Two secretaries were elected, B. P. Green of Guthrie and E. J. Simpson of Reno City. J. E. Jones of Oklahoma City was made chairman of the territorial central committee, and T. E. Berry of Norman was elected secretary of that committee. Membership of the newly created central committee reflected the relative strength and influence of the cities. Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and Kingfisher were all represented by two members each while the smaller towns were represented by only one member each. In addition to the representatives from the cities and towns each land district

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Peery, "First Two Years," 321-322.

was also represented by one member at large. The total membership of this first Democratic territorial central committee was twenty-three.<sup>13</sup> After three days in session and with the work of the convention completed the delegates adjourned amid joyous merrymaking and a solemn promise to work for the good of the Democratic party. It was observed that the "peace and harmony" with which the convention adjourned was a marked contrast to its "stormy" beginning.<sup>14</sup>

Once the Democratic territorial central committee had been established it moved to complete the party's territorial organization. On June 24 the central committee issued a call for local meetings of Democrats to elect county committeemen and nominate candidates for the territorial legislature. As previously observed no local county offices were to be filled at this time, county appointments were initially appointed by the governor, and these appointees would remain in office until such time as the legislative assembly provided for electing new men to these posts. All Democrats were to meet on July 11 in their respective townships for this purpose.<sup>15</sup>

#### Regulation of Political Parties

There was little statutory regulation of party organization or nominating procedures during territorial days. In regards to nominating procedures for public office the Organic Act merely stated that only those "persons authorized to be elected" were eligible to fill a seat in the legislative assembly or other public offices in the territory, without defining what constituted this authorization.<sup>16</sup> Nebraska election laws were

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<sup>13</sup>Stewart, 217.

<sup>14</sup>Norman Transcript (Oklahoma), March 15, 1890, 1.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVI, Part 1, 81.



made applicable to Oklahoma Territory by the Organic Act until such time as the first territorial legislature provided otherwise. However, they provided only that any convention or primary meeting

...representing a political party which, at the last election before the holding of such convention or primary meeting, polled at least one per centum of the entire vote cast in the state, county, or other division or district for which the nomination is made<sup>17</sup>

was qualified to present a slate of candidates for election to public office. But due to the fact this was the first election to be held in Oklahoma Territory the clause, "at the last election before the holding of such convention or primary meeting", contained in the Nebraska statute did not reply. As a result there was no regulation of the nominating process except only insofar as the political parties policed themselves.

Under these conditions a few influential Democrats rather than the great mass of the party determined the candidates to be voted upon. Only those few persons who made it a point to attend the various local precinct and county committee meetings had any voice in the selection of candidates. Even then the more influential persons or groups of persons working toward a common objective dominated the nominating process.

Many hopeful candidates, like Daniel W. Peery, "had in mind the thought of serving in Oklahoma's first legislature before the country opened."<sup>18</sup> Helping to organize local Democratic clubs and seeking out the support of active party workers was the manner in which Peery and other

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<sup>17</sup>Nebraska, Consolidated Statutes (1891), c. 15, sec. 1747.

<sup>18</sup>"Kickapoos" was a name given in general to that organized group of Oklahoma City townspeople who opposed the efforts of an organization perfected at Topeka, Kansas, known as the Seminole Town Company. It was the design of the Seminoles, who had actually entered Oklahoma Territory illegally before the time set forth in President Harrison's proclamation, to not only monopolize the choice city lots in Oklahoma City, but to control the city government. Peery, "The First Two years," 431.

political hopefuls promoted their candidacy. Peery, in this case, had the backing of the Crutch Democratic club and the "Kickapoo element" of Oklahoma City. Once the Kickapoos had given their endorsement of Peery influential members of that group began to promote his candidacy. R. W. McAdams, the publisher of the Oklahoma Chief, printed Peery's name along with other candidates receiving Kickapoo support on a ticket which was distributed to Kickapoo workers in all the Oklahoma City precincts.<sup>19</sup> With the backing of the Kickapoo element Peery had little difficulty in getting nominated.

Later changes in the method of nominating for political office were initiated. By an act of March 1, 1891, the legislative assembly retained the Nebraska provisions, which specified a political party must poll one percent of the total vote cast in the last general election before it could nominate candidates for public office, but added to it the right to nominate candidates by right of petition. Any candidate not nominated by party convention or primary meeting could officially qualify for public office if his candidacy was supported by the following number of signatures: for territorial legislature, 500 signatures; for congressional representative, 200 signatures; for county office and legislative assembly, 25 signatures; for township and ward offices, 20 signatures.<sup>20</sup>

With the adoption of the State Constitution in 1907 political parties were required to nominate their candidates for public office by means of a direct primary system. According to Article III, section 5, of the Constitution "The Legislature shall enact laws providing for a mandatory primary system, which shall provide for the nomination of all candidates in all elections for State, District, County, and municipal officers, for

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Oklahoma, Statutes of Oklahoma (1890), c. 33, sec. 16.

all political parties."<sup>21</sup> No change was made, however, in the number of votes that a political party was required to receive at a last preceding general election before it could legally nominate its candidates.

Finally, in 1913, steps were taken to raise the voting qualification of a political party and to control the number of political parties allowed to participate in the direct primary. House bill number 119, directed against the Socialist party, declared that

...a political party is a affiliation of electors representing any political organization which, at the next general election preceding, polled for President or Governor at least five per centum of the entire vote cast for either of said respective officers....When such political parties fail to receive at two general elections, following each other, ten per centum of the vote cast for the party receiving the highest number of votes, it ceases to be a party.<sup>22</sup>

While the Constitution of 1907 contained a clause providing for the use of the direct primary in all nominations to public office it was not to go into effect until the people endorsed it at the first state election and the elected Oklahoma legislature could appropriate money to finance the primary elections. The Democratic party, however, did adopt the primary system as the means of nominating the Democratic candidates to state offices for the first state election and then financed the primary through party funds. This strategy won the Democratic party the support of many voters, especially those living in the rural areas. The primary system was very popular among rural progressives who believed it would put an end to corruption and the control of politics by the financial and industrial interests.<sup>23</sup>

The Democratic party as a whole was not easily won over to the direct

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<sup>21</sup>Oklahoma, Constitution, Art. 3, sec. 5.

<sup>22</sup>Oklahoma, Session Laws (1913), c. 157, sec. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Debo, Prairie City, 122. Scales, 58.

primary system, and it had been largely for political expediency that it was used in the state elections of 1907. A good example of the early opposition faced by supporters of the direct primary was shown in the position of the Cleveland County convention held in 1894. The Daily Oklahoman on May 8, 1894, devoted considerable space to denouncing those elements in the Democratic party blocking adoption of the primary system as a party policy. A last minute reversal by the convention, after it had already voted to give its support to the direct primary, instructing its delegates to the territorial convention to vote against the adoption of the direct primary prompted the editor of the Daily Oklahoman to charge that "grafters" had been at work.<sup>24</sup>

#### Party Discipline

Party organization was not so efficient as to compel a strict party discipline or to insure party solidarity, but the Democrats of territorial Oklahoma were much more successful in quieting party quarrels than were the Republicans. With the Democratic party largely excluded from territorial patronage Republicans were much more prone to feel secure and to fight among themselves over the political spoils. The editor of one Republican newspaper in the territory, in somewhat extravagant fashion, stated this view by commenting that "While the Republicans are rustling each other and losing lots of sleep over the appointive offices of the territory, the Democrats are as unruffled as elms."<sup>25</sup>

The first territorial elections were illustrative of the nature of party discipline during much of territorial days. In this first election

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<sup>24</sup>Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), May 8, 1894, 5.

<sup>25</sup>Norman Transcript, March 8, 1890, 1.

local issues, in many instances, took precedence over party considerations. Traces of the Seminole-Kickapoo conflict were evident in Oklahoma County elections, and the strategic maneuvering or "battle of the cities" for location of the capital became a major factor disrupting partisan politics. Republicans and Democrats ran side by side on some tickets, and when the election was over two Republicans joined with the Democrats of Oklahoma County in an attempt to locate the capital at Oklahoma City.<sup>26</sup>

In this first battle of the ballots the Republicans came out the winner. In the lower house of the territorial legislature the Republicans captured fourteen seats leaving the Democrats only eight and the Populist four. Results in the council were a little better for the Democrats as the Republicans captured only seven seats in comparison to five for the Democrats and one for the Populists.<sup>27</sup> Republicans, however, were not as successful, in view of the extent of their victory, as they might have been. The Republican majority of seats in the territorial legislature and any political advantages that might have been derived from it were largely wasted when Republicans became bogged down in local squabbles, especially over the location of the territorial capital.

Theoretically it was the responsibility and purpose of the Democratic territorial central committee to guide and set the tone of the Democratic party. Often, however, the chairman of the central committee was a figurehead with some influential persons behind the scenes making the major decisions.<sup>28</sup> This was not always true, though, as in the case when L. P. Ross was chairman of the Democratic central committee. When Grover

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<sup>26</sup>Peery, "The First Two Years," 452.

<sup>27</sup>Scales, 6.

<sup>28</sup>Merriam and Foote, 260.

Cleveland was elected President in 1892 Ross, a close friend of Cleveland's, was so influential he became known as the "Political Czar" of Oklahoma.<sup>29</sup> Yet it was true that the powers and duties of the territorial central committee were not well defined, and, moreover, the guidance of the Democratic party in its formulation and execution of policies remained largely in the hands of an influential few outside the committee, especially during the years of Cleveland's presidency accompanied as it was by Democratic officeholders.

One of the most important jobs of the central committee was the responsibility of overseeing and conducting the territorial campaigns. Given the candidates and the platform the central committee had the responsibility of selling them to the people.<sup>30</sup> Often candidates and platforms failed to agree or public opinion would begin to shift, and it was up to the central committee to make the necessary corrections. During the congressional delegate race of 1892 the Democratic central committee observed, with some help from the Republicans, that Democratic speakers were placing too much emphasis on national issues in their speeches and, as a result, ordered all speakers to emphasize local issues more. Despite the switch of emphasis the Democratic congressional candidate, O. H. Travers, lost by some 2,000 votes to his Republican opponent Dennis T. Flynn.<sup>31</sup>

The Democratic territorial central committee was more successful in its direction of the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1906. In this instance by urging all Democratic candidates to endorse the resolutions set forth by the Farmers' Union and labor unions forty-nine

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<sup>29</sup>McRill, 25.

<sup>30</sup>Merriam and Foote, 173.

<sup>31</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

Democrats were elected from the Oklahoma Territory side of the new state.<sup>32</sup>

Authority of the Democratic central committee completely broke down during the 1907 United States Senatorial race. Intra-party strife and confusion was so great that no one knew "who was who" concerning the political leadership in the various party committees.<sup>33</sup>

The selection of a territorial congressional delegate was also one of the major responsibilities of the Democratic central committee. Prior to the convening of each congressional convention the central committee issued a call for the selection of delegates. The central committee also determined the apportionment of these delegates among the various counties. At the first Democratic congressional convention held at Norman on October 9, 1890, over 200 delegates were present. In this the Democrats scored a first since it was the first congressional convention ever to be held in Oklahoma Territory.<sup>34</sup> At this first congressional convention J. B. McCoy of El Reno was nominated as Democratic candidate for the long term to the Fifty-second Congress and J. L. Matthews from Payne County was nominated as candidate to serve during the remainder of the Fifty-first Congress. Both were soundly defeated by the Republican opponent, D. A. Harvey.<sup>35</sup>

There was no set procedure for the central committee to use in apportioning the delegates to the congressional conventions. An example of the way this apportionment was distributed was the Democratic congressional

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<sup>32</sup>True Bennett Emerson, "The Oklahoma Constitutional Convention," (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1931), 43.

<sup>33</sup>Oklahoma State Historical Society, "Democratic Party File," (Oklahoma State Historical Society Library). "The Democratic Party File" contains miscellaneous newspaper clippings and publications of the Democratic party from 1890 to the present.

<sup>34</sup>Benjamin F. Harrison (comp.), The Oklahoma Red Book (Tulsa: Democrat Printing Co., 1912), 354.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 305.

convention of 1892. In the case of this convention delegates were apportioned as follows: Logan County, thirty-two; Oklahoma County, thirty-four; Cleveland County, twenty-nine; Kingfisher County, twenty-one; Canadian County, twenty-six; Payne County, fourteen; County A, fourteen; County B, eighteen; Beaver County, six; Counties C, D, E, F, G, and H, eight each.<sup>36</sup> The total delegates present then was 242 and approximately what it had been in 1890. The apportionment usually, however, was based on the estimation of the total population rather than the extent of the local Democratic strength.

Much of the discipline that was present in the Democratic party was due to the hard work on the part of various individuals outside the permanent organization. Judge Mose Anderson, better known as a result of his organizing efforts as "Moses of Oklahoma Democracy", was a good example of this type of contribution. Actually it was the Republicans who first began to fix this title on Mose Anderson. Fellow Democrats credited Anderson for almost singlehandedly being responsible for the good showing made by the Democratic party in the territorial elections of 1902. By beginning to lay the groundwork in early January of the previous year and through "energy and good political judgment" Anderson was able to hold the feuding Democratic elements together and to effect a working party spirit. Not only did he gain the willingness on the part of the members to work together, but he induced them to contribute over \$1500.00 to the campaign fund, the first time this had ever happened.<sup>37</sup>

Factionalism along sectional and local lines was the greatest cause for a breakdown in party discipline. Sectional prejudices, a result of

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<sup>36</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>37</sup>Oklahoma State Historical Society, Barde Collection, (Oklahoma State Historical Society Library).



the many diverse social, economic, and political backgrounds carried in from outside the territory, were a strong force making for party disunity. For two neighbors, one a southerner and one a northerner, separated only by the bridgeable gap of a quarter section of land, the scar left by the Civil War proved a mighty barrier --- not only politically but socially as well. As late as 1904 the El Reno Democrat was calling attention to the presence of the sectionalism within the Democratic party. There was, the Democrat asserted, "a spirit running rampant among the southern democrats to make this a southern state" but they will never succeed for "Oklahomans by a stupendous majority favor making Oklahoma the queen of American states, with no north, no south, no east, no west."<sup>38</sup>

In this atmosphere of sectionalism it was inevitable that friendship among some members of the Democratic party was highly strained or failed to exist at all. And where there was suspicion and distrust party solidarity failed to exist. Slowly, however, the necessity of working the land and building a new state together served to break down most of this sectional hostility and suspicion. In time the various peoples were formed and assimilated by the land and one another sufficiently to form a more homogeneous political and social unit.<sup>39</sup>

The split in the Democratic party was not always along sectional lines. Quite often personal acquaintances and friendship took precedence over party label; especially was this true in local elections. Frank J. Wikoff, a Republican and early settler in Payne County, tells an interesting story of how Payne County Democrats supported their Republican friends in local elections. During Wikoff's race for re-election as county

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<sup>38</sup> El Reno Democrat (Oklahoma), November 8, 1904, 8.

<sup>39</sup> O. H. Richards, "Early Days in Day County," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVI (1948), 319-320.

attorney, though, he offended some of his Democratic friends and supporters who happened to be in the majority. In order to teach Wikoff a lesson his Democratic friends voted against him and he was defeated. Wikoff learned his lesson and said that he never forgot that "Votes are the thing no matter where you get them."<sup>40</sup> In this local vote swapping among friends, however, it is suspected that the Democratic party suffered no worse than did the Republican party.

Loyalty to the Democratic party and its organization was always under scrutiny and attack from some source. In a searching criticism of the Democratic party failures the Daily Oklahoman remarked "there is among the democratic leaders of this territory, either a gross lack of political sagacity and judgment, or an almost criminal neglect of party fealty and duty." The Oklahoman did go on to express the view that much of the deficiency could be attributed to the immense popularity of the Populists. But even so, it could be pointed out that some cities did not even have a Democratic ticket to be voted on, examples being Ponca City, Cross, and Mulhall. Even the city of Perry, formerly Democratic, was lost to Republicans, and Norman, "the county seat of the banner democratic county of the territory...was carried by Populists with but two exceptions." In contemplation of the future disposition of those disloyal Democrats within the Democratic party the Oklahoman held that "The surgeon's knife is not pleasant to contemplate, but its use is frequently necessary to preserve the life of the patient," in this case the Democratic party.<sup>41</sup>

Territorial and local issues [to be discussed in a later section] were perhaps, next to sectionalism, the most divisive force in the Democratic party. The most humorous and noteworthy example of this occurred

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<sup>40</sup>Berlin Basil Chapman, The Founding of Stillwater: A Case Study in Oklahoma History (Oklahoma City: Times Journal Publishing Co., 1943), 18.

<sup>41</sup>Daily Oklahoman, May 10, 1894, 4.

toward the end of the territorial period and was precipitated over the question of prohibition. The result of this incident was that William H. Murray, on a campaign speaking tour of the western counties of Oklahoma which called for speaking engagements first at Hooker in Texas County, then Beaver, Buffalo, and Woodward, ended up clear out of Oklahoma and into Kansas. It so happened that Murray favored prohibition in Oklahoma Territory along with the prohibition that was required in Indian Territory by the Enabling Act. However, the Democratic party chairman of Texas County was a saloon-keeper; Murray upon finishing his address at Hooker inquired of the Texas County Democratic chairman where his itinerary would next take him with the subsequent reply being that "you are instructed to go to Liberal, Kansas, on the next train." Murray took the next train and "stood around the Hotel [at Liberal] until Sundown" before deciding that he had been hoodwinked. Through extra effort, though, Murray was able to make up the lost time and to be present at all the arranged places at the right time. As a result no serious damage was done and the Democratic party carried all four of these western counties. But it is expected that the saloon-keeper and his friends had an unforgettable laugh. And just what Kansas voters Murray thought he would address in Liberal, Kansas, on the virtues of Oklahoma statehood was never disclosed.<sup>42</sup>

#### Election Campaigns

Election campaigns were often an open invitation to any and all kinds of antics and political maneuvering. Practical as the land and the people from which it originated the "Bull Calf" campaign of 1907 serves as a good example. Frank Bault, self-styled campaign manager for the second

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<sup>42</sup>Murray, I, 332.

congressional district at Geary, hit upon the unique idea of giving away, at his own expense, a bull calf to each county making a twenty percent Democratic gain over the vote of two years previous. Just how much of the overwhelming Democratic victory of 1907 can be attributed to this added incentive is not known, but Bault did make good his promise.<sup>43</sup>

Once support came from an unexpected source. In fact, the very first convention held by the Republican party in Oklahoma Territory ended with a Democrat in control. Michael O'Flaherty, a Democrat from Hennessey, was able, through means not known, to secure proxy cards from the various local Republican clubs and have them signed over to him. When the convention opened O'Flaherty held several hundred more proxies than did all the rest of the convention combined. Repeated attempts were made to get O'Flaherty to admit he was a Democrat and to disqualify himself, both of which he refused to do. Hopelessly deadlocked, with O'Flaherty holding out for a convention expression of support for his choice for territorial governor, J. V. Admire, and with the other members of the convention urging O'Flaherty to disqualify himself, the convention adjourned to hold an election of new delegates.<sup>44</sup>

The soliciting of campaign funds was a difficult task carried out in many different ways. There was no set procedure for soliciting campaign funds. At times such individuals as Judge Mose Anderson, as previously observed, took it upon themselves to fill the party coffers. Usually the central committee would call upon the various county committees to solicit

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<sup>43</sup>Bault walked into Democratic headquarters at Geary one day and found it deserted and without a manager so he appointed himself as the campaign manager. "Democratic Party Files".

<sup>44</sup>A letter from D. T. Flynn to Dr. Dangerfield. Dangerfield Collection.

funds.<sup>45</sup> The Democratic central committee on July 31, 1906, gave out official instructions to the financial committee not to solicit or accept campaign funds from any source that was seeking concessions harmful to the people as a whole (presumably the railroads and the national banks). Instead, campaign funds were to be solicited in small sums from the people themselves. In addition an itemized record of all monetary contributions was to be kept by the financial committee and made available to the interested public. But in practice the financing of campaigns was conducted quite differently. It was during the election of 1906 that the chairman of the Democratic central committee, Jesse Dunn, was charged by Republicans with building a campaign fund in excess of \$100,000 made up by contributions of "trusts" in St. Louis.<sup>46</sup> During the 1907 senatorial race the competition became so bitter that Democrat fought Democrat as well as Republican, and instead of keeping restrictions on expenditures, "campaign money...flowed like water."<sup>47</sup>

Voter apathy even in these politically conscious years was a factor for territorial Democrats to contend with. This was especially true during the final stages of a long tiresome campaign. To cope with the problem of negligent voters the Democratic territorial central committee at times sent out small leaflets or "Warnings to Voters" to remind the people of the issues at stake and the need to support the Democratic party.<sup>48</sup>

Not infrequently voter apathy was a convenient rationalization for defeat. This was the case when the Daily Oklahoman, a strong Democratic journal in these days, assessed the election results of the 1894 elections.

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<sup>45</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>"Democratic Party Files".

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

Rather than see the loss of Democratic voting strength as showing up in the strong showing made by the Populists, the Oklahoman observed that the Democrats believed as had Republicans two years earlier that it was the stay-at-home vote that did the damage.<sup>49</sup>

#### National Affiliation

The political interest of Oklahomans was not confined just to territorial politics. Although restricted from participation directly in national elections Oklahomans could, and did, express their feelings in a Presidential preference primary. Both the Democratic party and the Republican party sent delegates to their respective national party conventions and in other ways sought to become a party national in scope. Representation of local Democrats at these territorial conventions for selecting delegates to the national conventions varied with the method of selecting delegates adopted. But illustrative of the general method that was adopted was that used by the territorial convention selecting delegates to the national convention held at Kansas City on July 4, 1900. Here the delegates from each county were selected on the basis of one for every 100 votes cast for the Democratic candidate, J. R. Keaton, in the congressional delegate election of 1898.<sup>50</sup>

Attempts to seek national affiliation extended beyond the permanent party committees. To create a better party organization and to establish a closer association and understanding with the national party the Democratic clubs in Oklahoma Territory sent delegates to the National Convention of League Clubs meeting at Chicago on July 1, 1892. For purposes of selecting the delegates to this convention Judge Amos Green called a

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<sup>49</sup>Daily Oklahoman, November 9, 1894, 2.

<sup>50</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

territorial convention of the Democratic clubs to meet at Oklahoma City on June 16. As a result of this meeting a Democratic League was formed of the various local Democratic clubs and E. L. Dunn was named as its secretary. W. J. Donovan, Oklahoma City; Roy Hoffman, Guthrie; and J. H. Krider, Hennessey, were named as League delegates to the national convention.<sup>51</sup>

What is important for Oklahoma politics is that the Democratic party, unlike the Republican party, built a strong local political organization. As long as the territorial status continued and the Republican party remained in control of the federal government the Republican party in Oklahoma Territory remained a nationally oriented party without sufficient grass-roots strength. Excluded from organizing the federal government in all but four of the eighteen years of territorial days the Democratic party was forced to be locally oriented and to effect a strong grass-roots party organization. When the moment came to test party strengths in a showdown vote to construct a new state free of territorial guardianship the Democratic party had the benefit of a strong grass-roots party organization.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUES

#### Home Rule

From the beginning it was a natural desire for Oklahomans to want to govern themselves. Under the provisions of the Organic Act the President and the territorial governor had jurisdiction over all territorial appointive offices. It had been generally hoped, however, that these appointments would be made from among applicants already residing within the territory. When it became evident that President Harrison, Republican platform to the contrary, was going to appoint men living outside the territory to federal appointive offices extreme disappointment was aroused among many of the people.<sup>1</sup> The editor of the Daily Oklahoman State Capital voiced a sentiment shared by a majority of Oklahomans when he stated "President Harrison and the Republican party cannot afford to insult this proud, marvelous young territory by sending in Carpetbaggers to fill the high offices."<sup>2</sup>

Oklahoma Territory, however, was far from Washington, and the sensitivity of this young commonwealth's feelings was not so keenly felt or highly respected that administration officials considered it in any way superior to party patronage. Furthermore, when President Harrison appointed Governor Steele and other non-resident Oklahomans to fill federal offices in Oklahoma Territory he was only following a well established

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph B. Thoburn, A Standard History of Oklahoma. Vol. II (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1916), 653.

<sup>2</sup>Peery, 423.



tradition. Territories had always been, for the political party in control of the federal government, a patronage pool to reward the politically faithful, and Oklahoma was to be no exception. In fact Oklahoma Territory was more than just an ordinary source of political patronage, it was a politician's paradise containing at one time a larger number of offices available for patronage dispensing than in any other congressional district in the Union. One prominent Republican who had a hand in dispensing of a large amount of that patronage described Oklahoma as "a rich fold which the hungry wolves from surrounding states were ready to raid if ever the bars were let down."<sup>3</sup>

The charge of "carpetbagger" was a ready made political issue for the political outs to exploit against the political ins. Since the Democratic party was the minority party in Congress throughout territorial days and a Democratic President was in the White House in only four of the eighteen territorial years it was to be expected that the term "carpetbagger" would be a cardinal Democratic campaign slogan. It was a favorite cry of Democrats to denounce "carpetbag" officials as agents of the trusts and financial interests, especially the railroads and the oil companies.<sup>4</sup> This political strategy was most effective among rural voters who had a deep suspicion of these particular corporate interests.

Republicans in Oklahoma, from the beginning, saw the probable effects "carpetbag" government would have upon their political future and worked to rid themselves of the stigma. It was for this reason, and for some individuals to insure their own chances for federal appointment, that the Republican territorial convention, meeting on January 17, 1890, resolved

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<sup>3</sup>A letter from D. T. Flynn to Dr. Dangerfield. Dangerfield Collection.

<sup>4</sup>Scales, 3.

"that all offices, both executive and judicial, should be filled by the appointment of actual residents of the territory."<sup>5</sup> When President Harrison ignored their expressed wishes by appointing Governor Steele and four others from outside the territory to top territorial appointive posts, there was nothing local Republicans could do but try to make the best of the situation.

Governor Steele's appointment, despite certain political side effects, was largely a salutary one. It was no doubt a good thing that someone from outside the territory was appointed who had no personal involvement and could best be objective in weighing the local needs and interests. That this is true was largely proven in the struggle for location of the capital which erupted during the early days of the first territorial legislature.

Governor Steele's fairmindedness in distributing the political offices was attested to by no less than a Democrat, Daniel W. Peery. According to Peery Governor Steele appointed highly qualified persons to the appointive offices under his control.<sup>6</sup> Frequently Governor Steele would solicit the advice of Peery before making such appointments. On one such occasion Governor Steele passed over two Republican candidates and appointed instead a Democrat recommended by Peery, Dr. E. W. Witten of Oklahoma City.<sup>7</sup> Peery did observe, however, that the majority of political offices went to ex-Union soldiers and in matters of priority "The recommendation of the G. A. R. went further with Steele than that of the Republican Committee".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Peery, 320.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 426.

<sup>7</sup>Dan W. Peery, "George W. Steele," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII (1934), 389.

<sup>8</sup>Peery, "The First Two Years," 426.

Democrats soon had their opportunity for distributing patronage, and the Republicans were afforded the opportunity to turn the foreign rule issue to their advantage. After his inauguration in 1893, President Cleveland did prove considerably more disposed toward home rule than had President Harrison, but his firm stand on appointing non-residents to local land offices caused local Democrats a great deal of embarrassment. Although Cleveland's stand was softened somewhat when he agreed to appoint only one-half of the land office officials from a list of non-residents, the home rule principle had been violated in name if not in fact and that was all the ammunition the Republicans needed.<sup>9</sup>

No sooner had President Cleveland appointed non-residents to hold land office positions than the principal Republican organ, the Daily Oklahoma State Capital, on June 9 suggested that "They [Democrats] should howl so loudy that Cleveland will sink back in shame."<sup>10</sup> Later when President Cleveland appointed William C. Renfrow, a Norman banker, as territorial governor the Republicans, unable to attack him as a foreigner, settled for the fact that he was a political unknown. Immediately after the appointment was made public a Guthrie newspaper headlined: "Who in H--L is Renfrow."<sup>11</sup> But despite the Republican efforts to exploit the home rule issue they were handicapped in doing so by the fact that the label "carpetbagger" had become a rallying cry of the Democratic party, and Republicans hesitated for that reason to draw too much attention to the slogan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Stewart, 250-251.

<sup>10</sup>Daily Oklahoma State Capital (Guthrie), June 9, 1893, 4.

<sup>11</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>12</sup>Peery, "The First Two Years," 423.

When J. Y. Callahan was elected as congressional delegate on a Democratic-Populist ticket in 1896 Democrats and Populists were in a position to cause the Republicans difficulty in the dispensing of patronage. It had been customary to work through the congressional delegate in handing out the patronage, but when a Republican, William McKinley, was elected as President along with a majority of Republicans to Congress it was necessary to change this procedure to prevent Callahan from getting his hands on any political appointments. As a result the Republicans set up a patronage board to dispense appointive offices in the territory. In attesting to the functioning of that board Dennis T. Flynn, himself a congressional delegate at one time, stated that some "Democrats were retained in office simply because no replacement satisfactory to the board could be agreed upon."<sup>13</sup>

From 1897 to 1907 the Republican party continued to control territorial patronage, and the political leverage gained from it was of considerable benefit in retaining Republican dominance of territorial politics. The benefits gained, however, were of a short term nature and in the end amounted to a Pyrrhic victory. Democrats exploited the "carpet-bagger" issue to good advantage, and when the people of Oklahoma Territory went to the polls to elect their delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1906 the outcome was in no small measure a protest against foreign rule which had come to be so closely associated with the Republican party.

#### Negro Question

Oklahoma Territory was characterized by two important elements which

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<sup>13</sup>Letter from D. T. Flynn to Dr. Dangerfield. Dangerfield Collection.

had previously been present only in those states where the racial issue has not been a problem. It had a strong two party system, and the Negro population was relatively small in comparison to the white population. Yet it has been written that Oklahoma, like other southern states, has experienced its anti-Negro politics and has "demonstrated a remarkable attachment to the Democratic party."<sup>14</sup> While this is true the question could be asked whether Oklahoma Territory need have experienced the effects of the racial issue, leastwise to the extent it did.

Oklahoma, as the last reservoir of public land of any agricultural value left to be settled, was a natural haven for displaced and dissatisfied Negroes. Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas, with their large Negro population, were close enough that those dissatisfied with their conditions could escape to Oklahoma Territory. There were also a number of Negroes who were freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory and who took advantage of the free land in Oklahoma. And too, the soil and climate in southern Oklahoma was favorable for growing the same crops found in other southern states, especially cotton. Yet in spite of these conditions the Negro population in Oklahoma remained small relative to the number of white inhabitants.

Population and school censuses give us sufficient evidence of the small number of Negroes settling in Oklahoma Territory. The first population census taken in Oklahoma Territory in 1890 shows that out of a total population of 60,417, only 3,289 or 5.4 percent were Negroes.<sup>15</sup> The school census for 1900 places the percentage of Negro children of school age (six to twenty-one years of age) to that of white children of

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<sup>14</sup>Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., The Democratic South (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1963), ix.

<sup>15</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 52nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1891-1892, 449.

school age at 5.3 percent. By 1903 the percentage of Negro school age children to that of white school age children had dropped to four percent.<sup>16</sup> So it can be observed that the Negro vote never exceeded approximately five percent of the white vote and had actually declined to less than four percent just prior to statehood.<sup>17</sup>

While the Negro vote, considering the territory as a whole, never was large enough to threaten white supremacy there were certain local areas where it was large enough to carry the balance of voting power. The school census of 1900 shows only seven counties with over 300 Negro children between the ages of six and twenty-one years of age. Out of these seven counties only one, Pawnee, can be considered a northern county. The other six counties, Logan, Kingfisher, Blaine, Oklahoma, Lincoln, and Pottawatomie are located in the central and southeastern part of the territory.<sup>18</sup> According to the territorial governor's report of 1903 the Negro population was still concentrated primarily in these same areas.<sup>19</sup> Among these counties it was Kingfisher, Logan, and Oklahoma counties that possessed the largest Negro population, with the latter two counties experiencing the most racial trouble politically. It was in these three counties that the Negro vote was strong enough to be of importance in an election.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1901-1902, 342. Ibid., 58th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1904-1905, 575.

<sup>17</sup>Any attempt to determine the percentage of the Negro voting population to that of the white voting population by using school censuses can only be approximate. And in using such figures it should be kept in mind the higher birth rate of the Negro population, a fact that would tend to lower the Negro voting population figure even more.

<sup>18</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1901-1902, 342.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 58th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1903-1904, 453.

How then to explain the extent to which the racial issue effected politics in Oklahoma Territory? Briefly it can be stated that the racial difficulties existing in Oklahoma politics developed from the selfish maneuverings of a few scheming politicians and their supporters. Both the Democratic party and the Republican party were guilty of playing politics with the Negro. There is no doubt that the Republican party used the Negro as a political foot-stool while at the same time giving token recognition to racial equality. The Democratic party, on the other hand, was guilty of stirring up racial prejudices for political advantage. Democrats and the Democratic press played both sides of the fence first tossing about slogans of white supremacy to arouse the prejudices of the people, and then wooing the Negro in an effort to separate him from the Republican party.

It has been said that Negroes were moved into Guthrie and the surrounding area by a few aspiring Republicans who wished "to make the city and the county both safely Republican."<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the accuracy of this statement, which is open to considerable question, there was a close relationship between the Negroes and the Republican party in Oklahoma. Such a relationship was nothing new or unique to Oklahoma but rather was a result of the events coming out of the Civil War. In most cases the Negroes living in Logan county did dutifully stamp the Republican ticket, but not always. There were times when they would become dissatisfied with their bargain and bolt the ticket. An interesting story is told about a caucus of these bolting Logan County Negroes and Frank Greer, a prominent Republican and editor-owner of the Daily Oklahoma State Capital. Entering the meeting place, while the caucus was in session, Greer gained the floor and openly charged, though falsely, that the chairman of the caucus had

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<sup>20</sup>Joseph B. Thoburn, "Frank H. Greer," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIV (1936), 287.

taken \$4,640.80 from "Old 'Cap' Taylor", treasurer of the Logan County Democratic Committee, and demanded that he account for the money. While the surprised chairman groped for words to defend himself Greer walked out and the caucus collapsed.<sup>21</sup>

Oklahoma County was claimed to also have had its Negro problems. The Daily Oklahoman charged, in a style illustrative of the Democratic racist propaganda, that during a period of eighteen months of 1893 to 1894 large numbers of Negroes were moved into Oklahoma County by Republicans for the express purpose of influencing county elections. According to this account the total Negro vote registered 600 and that their voting as a solid bloc swung the county for the Republicans in the 1894 election.<sup>22</sup>

The Daily Oklahoman on September 8, 1907, made a similar charge concerning Kingfisher and Elaine counties and the Negro vote involving Governor Ferguson. While chairman of the Republican central committee of Elaine County, Ferguson, and other Republican leaders, according to the charge, were supposed to have transported the Negroes of Elaine and Kingfisher counties throughout both counties and caused them to vote "at many polling places under different names".<sup>23</sup>

Despite the questionable accuracy of these charges there is no doubt that the Republican party attempted to use the Negro vote to good political advantage. But the small number of Negroes in Oklahoma Territory and the desire on the part of most people to forget the past made Republican plans largely ineffective.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Daily Oklahoman, November 8, 1894, 2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>24</sup>Buck, "Settlement of Oklahoma," 74.



Another example of the racial propaganda put out by the Democratic press concerned the 1898 elections in Oklahoma County. When the Republican party of Oklahoma County placed a Negro on the county ticket and then removed him a short time later because the "lily whites" and fearful members became apprehensive of voter reaction the Daily Oklahoman in an article headed, "WHITE vs BLACK" admonished Republicans "that the affairs of the county would be in safer hands with the colored boys than with the lily whites, and silverites who cannot support their party nominees will do well to investigate into the merit of the colored ticket."<sup>25</sup> Such words as these, when it is remembered the Democratic party and the Democratic press had taken a strong anti-Negro stand throughout territorial days, could only be for purposes of political expediency. In fact that same newspaper, two years later, charged that any person voting for a Republican candidate "will be doing his best to forever fix the mixed school system upon the people."<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of the formal lip service a few Republicans and Democrats gave to Negro civil rights the Negro was during the late 1890's firmly segregated in all things social, economic, and political. Schools were generally segregated and as the governor's report of 1905 remarked, "probably no other State or Territory has built a stronger barrier against mixed schools." A territorial law enacted in 1901 not only made it unlawful for a Negro to attend a white school, but also no white person was allowed to attend Negro schools.<sup>27</sup> Only in the earliest days, "when the people were too poor to provide separate schools for the races," and when

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<sup>25</sup>Daily Oklahoman, October 18, 1898, 2.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., October 5, 1900, 4.

<sup>27</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 59th Cong., 1st Sess., 1905-1906, 359.

the tide of racism had not swept over the nation did some Negroes attend white schools, but this was rare and only in a few isolated districts.<sup>28</sup>

The best summary of the feelings of extreme racist among Oklahomans concerning the Negro was provided by William H. Murray when making his first address to the Constitutional Convention. In outlining the various points that should be provided for in the Constitution Murray stated, when coming to the racial issue, that

...we shall protect him [Negro] in his real rights...we must provide the means for the advancement of the negro race, and accept him as God gave him to us and use him for the good of society...He must be taught in the line of his own sphere, as porters, bootblacks and barbers... in which he is adept, but it is an entirely false notion that the negro can rise to the equal of a white man in the professions or become an equal citizen to grapple with public questions.<sup>29</sup>

Reducing the Negro to an inferior position in the Constitution presented some problems and raised some fears and apprehensions. Under the terms of the Enabling Act the Oklahoma Constitution was forbidden from infringing upon the civil or political rights of any person on the basis of race or color, and unless Oklahoma lawmakers complied with this provision the Constitution was subject to rejection by the President. Many Oklahomans felt, as did W. A. Ledbetter, chairman of the judiciary committee of the Constitutional Convention, that so long as Oklahoma complied with all other aspects of the Enabling Act the President could not refuse Oklahoma the rights granted other states in segregating the Negro. Ledbetter was especially concerned with the segregation of transportation facilities. According to Ledbetter certain "weak kneed democrats and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention, November 20, 1906-November 16, 1907, (Muskogee: Muskogee Printing Co., 1907), 21.

republicans" were afraid to include the segregation of transportation facilities out of fear the President would refuse to accept the Constitution. What made Ledbetter most reluctant in this matter was that most states had achieved this type of segregation through statutory rather than constitutional law. But the Democrats had waged their campaign on this promise, and now Ledbetter and others felt compelled to fulfill their promise. Most Oklahomans were in favor of such a provision in the Constitution and as Ledbetter stated, the promise had "won us many votes, and we can ill afford to break faith with the people."<sup>30</sup> Fear of having the Constitution rejected, however, prompted the members of the Constitutional Convention to exclude segregation of transportation facilities from the Constitution.

Racial inter-marriage was not prohibited under the Constitution. An early draft of the Constitution permitted inter-marriage after the third generation if one ancestor of each of the three generations had been a white person. This was changed later, however, when Lee Cruce, a candidate for governor, attempted to use it as a campaign slogan claiming that C. N. Haskell and the Constitutional Convention forces favored inter-marriage between races.<sup>31</sup> The Constitution as finally written defined the Negro as "all persons of African descent" but did not prohibit inter-marriage. The exclusion of a provision prohibiting inter-marriage was no doubt prompted out of fear of having the Constitution rejected.

What can be said then for the effects of the Negro politically in Oklahoma Territory? There was certainly a similarity between Oklahoma Territory and other states in the South concerning the racial issue. But the Negro population in Oklahoma Territory, unlike most southern states,

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<sup>30</sup>Private letter from W. A. Ledbetter to John W. Daniel, January 7, 1907. Oklahoma State Library, Oklahoma State Capital Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>31</sup>Murray, II, 77.

was not large, and the two major political parties were relatively equal in strength. These factors somewhat minimized the exploiting of the Negro issue.<sup>32</sup> In fact the Negro vote was so negligible, speaking of the territory as a whole, that Democrats could and did feel free to engage in party disputes without fear of handing the balance of voting power to the Negro, a condition not present in the South. There is no instance mentioned where fusion between Democrats and Populists was justified or opposed in the name of white supremacy. This was not true in the South where the Populists were faced with humiliating defeat should such an attempt at fusion end in failure. Should such a failure occur the only avenue open to the southern Populist was to return to the Democratic fold, lest white supremacy be placed in jeopardy.

Interesting enough the Republican party played largely the role in Oklahoma Territory that the Bourbon Democrats did in the South by attempting to hold the reins of political power through controlling the Negro vote. Ironically, it was the very presence of the Republican party itself, making for a real two party system, as well as the small number of Negro population, that prevented Republicans from maintaining political supremacy through manipulation of the Negro vote. Like the home rule issue, the only benefits the Republican party gained from exploiting the Negro were of a short term nature and in the long run only served to strengthen the position of the Democratic party. Once racism had set in among Oklahomans, itself greatly aided by the racial propaganda of the Democrats, the Democratic party enjoyed a majority of the popular support in its stand on racial segregation. Racism had a way of coloring other issues and the benefits the Democrats gained from their position was of great importance to building its majority.

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<sup>32</sup>Buck, "Settlement of Oklahoma," 74.

## Statehood

Most Oklahomans were in agreement that the question of statehood should not be a political one. And it was this attitude on the part of the people in general that was responsible for removing much of the partisan politics from the issue of statehood that would have otherwise been present. Statehood, to the people, was more than politics; it was a matter of personal welfare, of social and economic progress, and of democracy. The people were immensely proud of their accomplishments in building the new territory, and "they felt with increasing intensity that their own calloused young hands should forge its destiny."<sup>33</sup> Territorial guardianship was especially irritating to those persons actively interested in politics and who felt "as powerless to help [their] favored candidate, as are the peons of Mexico or the serfs of Russia."<sup>34</sup> For Congress to deny them these basic rights and safeguards, they felt, was a violation of the republican principles of government. To permit petty politics to enter into the issue of statehood was wholly distasteful to the majority of Oklahomans. This feeling was demonstrated in the way, from the earliest days, the people formed joint party conventions and memorialized Congress to grant statehood in the interest of all the inhabitants, regardless of political affiliation.

The first public expression on behalf of statehood in Oklahoma Territory was the non-partisan statehood convention held at Oklahoma City on December 16, 1891. A list of attributes possessed by both Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory justifying immediate statehood along with a resolution declaring all peoples of all political parties in both territories

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<sup>33</sup>Debo, Prairie City, 120.

<sup>34</sup>Daily Oklahoman, November 24, 1904, 1.

to be in favor of single statehood was embodied in a memorial to Congress. This was only the first of many public expressions on behalf of statehood.<sup>35</sup>

As early as December 18, 1889, a bill known as the Springer bill calling for statehood was introduced into Congress. The Springer bill was only the first of many bills introduced into Congress between 1889 and 1906 calling for statehood in some form. From 1895 to 1901, however, none of these bills or memorials received serious consideration from Congress.<sup>36</sup> What seemed of vital importance to Oklahomans was only of minor concern to the officials in Washington. After 1901, though, it became increasingly difficult for Congress to ignore the qualifications of Oklahoma Territory as a candidate for statehood. By this time statehood was being anticipated and actively promoted by almost all Oklahomans and as one territorial newspaper put it "the important question before Oklahoma at the present time is statehood. Beside it all other questions sink into insignificance."<sup>37</sup> From this date on it was not a matter of whether statehood was desirable, but when and how it would be achieved.

While the question of statehood was not a matter of disagreement among a majority of Oklahomans the manner in which it would be achieved was. Should it be single or separate statehood? That is, should Oklahoma Territory be admitted separately as a state in its own right or should both Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory be joined together and admitted as one single state. Then there was also in circulation a modified version of the single statehood plan whereby Oklahoma Territory would be admitted as a state immediately and Indian Territory would be joined

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<sup>35</sup>Stewart, 327.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Daily Oklahoman, September 8, 1904, 4.

piecemeal to Oklahoma Territory as its various sections qualified for statehood.

The usual argument for single statehood ran as follows:

With a population several times greater than that of any Territory ever admitted to statehood and greater than that of thirteen different States of the Union at this time; with a taxable valuation greater than that of any State of the Union at its admission; with a school population almost double the average population of all of the States when granted self-government; with an area almost equal to that of the State of Ohio, and greater than that of thirteen other States; with a free school within easy distance of every home and a higher college or university education offered without price to all of the youth of the Territory, of whatever race or sex or condition; with well-governed cities and counties and laws enforced in every way; with a people 96 per cent American born and all loyal and patriotic citizens; with an annual production of 25,000,000 bushels of wheat, 60,000,000 bushels of corn, 150,000 bales of cotton, other agricultural products in proportion and herds that pass the million mark; with a financial record without a stain of default or repudiation; with a financial, commercial, and business growth equaled by no other State or Territory, is not Oklahoma clearly entitled to admission to the sisterhood of States?

And if ...Oklahoma and Indian Territory shall be admitted only as one State, how much stronger is our claim for immediate recognition.

For the Indian Territory has a population almost equal to that of Oklahoma, and combined the State would have a population exceeding a million, or about eighteen times the average population of the States of Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, Missouri, Arkansas, Michigan, Florida, Iowa, Wisconsin, California, Minnesota, Oregon, Kansas, Nevada, Nebraska, or Colorado when admitted as States.<sup>38</sup>

The arguments by most Oklahomans against single statehood were directed chiefly against conditions existing in Indian Territory. The El Reno Democrat voiced the sentiment of a significant minority of Oklahomans when it stated that the "turbulent, discordant, uncivilized conditions in Indian Territory make double [separate] statehood the only answer."<sup>39</sup> To many people living in Oklahoma Territory the inhabitants and conditions in Indian Territory were strange and unfamiliar. Not too infrequently the

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<sup>38</sup>Oklahoma, Territorial Governor's Annual Report, 1901 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1901), 6.

<sup>39</sup>El Reno Democrat (Oklahoma), November 1, 1894, 1.

inhabitants of Indian Territory were looked upon as unfit and incapable of self-government.<sup>40</sup> For some Oklahomans the Indians were still half-civilized savages and the thought of joining with them to form a new state was looked upon with apprehension and disapproval. But this same argument against union with Indian Territory often became a justification for single statehood. Speaking of the chaotic conditions found in Indian Territory Governor Jenkins observed that "it becomes not only our right, but our duty, if we are to be withheld from statehood until that Territory reaches a condition to be admitted with us, to use every effort to advance the social and political development of that Territory to the end that we may be admitted to statehood together."<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to single statehood from the viewpoint of a majority of the people in Oklahoma Territory opposing such a plan was the matter of financing the new proposed state. Indian lands would generally be non-taxable for a period of some twenty-five years, so the argument ran, and the burden of financing the new state would surely fall on the inhabitants of Oklahoma Territory. Not only this, but Indian Territory was the territory which most needed schools and other public services that demanded tax dollars.<sup>42</sup> Efforts to offset this argument usually took the form of Governor Jenkins annual report in 1901 which read as follows:

It is claimed by many that the conditions are not right in the Indian Territory for statehood, and it is true that there are conditions there which present a serious problem for the future, but they can be worked out as well, or even better, under State government.

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<sup>40</sup>Scales, 14.

<sup>41</sup>U. S. Congress, House Documents, Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1901-1902, 444.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 59th Cong., 1st Sess., 1905-1906, 310.



True there is no land to tax at present, but the time is rapidly coming when there will be, and a careful and very conservative estimate of the property there that would be taxable before statehood could be fully completed were an enabling act passed this winter is \$25,000,000, which is greater than the taxable valuation of the States of Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, California, Oregon, or Kansas at the time of their admission, and 25 per cent greater than the taxable valuation of Oklahoma five years after its organization as a Territory.<sup>43</sup>

Among the more discerning and business minded, the limitations of both territories were justification enough for single statehood, and most agreed with Governor Renfrow that

The taxable property of Oklahoma alone is too small to support a State government properly. A large portion of the western part can be used only for grazing purposes. Already the burden of taxation is as heavy as is consistent with prosperous business. The necessary expenses of erecting a statehouse, penitentiary, asylums, college buildings, etc., would be a heavy burden upon the people of either State. I do not believe that any greater mistake could be made than to create two States out of a Territory just large enough for one.<sup>44</sup>

For the most part it can be said that from 1889 to 1900 Oklahomans in general favored immediate separate statehood or such form of single statehood that would allow immediate statehood for Oklahoma Territory and the piecemeal following of Indian Territory. After 1900 when it became increasingly clear that the federal government was not going to permit separate statehood under any circumstances the overriding sentiment changed to single statehood and the preparation of Indian Territory for statehood as quickly as possible.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from these non-political factors and despite the tendency on the part of most Oklahomans to play down the political implications surrounding statehood, the fact remained partisan politics played a

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1901-1902, 322.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 53rd Cong., 3rd Sess., 1894-1895, 449.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 59th Cong., 1st Sess., 1905-1906, 310.

significant role in shaping its final outcome. For both the Democratic party and the Republican party statehood was very much a partisan issue. From the standpoint of political reality, the Democratic party had by far the most to gain from statehood, single or separate, since through control of the national government and party patronage in the territory the Republican party dominated territorial politics. Even during the brief four years of President Cleveland's administration that the Democratic party was in control of territorial patronage sectional conflict within the party precluded any harmonious division of the spoils and led some members to call for statehood. Republicans, on the other hand, had more to gain by delaying statehood. Territorial patronage was for the greater part securely in their hands and if past territorial and national elections were a reliable indication prospects looked bright for the future. And when it became evident to Oklahoma Republicans that any new state made out of union of the two territories was certain to be overwhelmingly Democratic they had all the more reason to delay statehood in any form.

Political considerations did not immediately cloud the issue of statehood. In the beginning both the Democratic party and the Republican party expressed the feelings of most Oklahomans by calling for immediate statehood on any terms. All Republican territorial governors from Seay to Ferguson had expressed their desire for statehood "upon such terms and with such boundaries as may seem best to Congress". Governor Barnes in his report of 1899 even expressed the view that it would probably be better for statehood to be postponed until such time as a union of the two territories could be effected.<sup>46</sup> Not until the territorial Republicans began to oppose the idea of being sacrificed in any future union with heavily Democratic Indian Territory for the sake of the national Republican

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 56th Cong., 1st Sess., 1899-1900, 743.

party did they reverse their stand and began to call for separate statehood.

Local Republicans believed Oklahoma Territory to be strongly Republican in sentiment; and not until the Constitutional Convention elections of 1906 were they brought to the realization of its changing political complexion. To preserve their supposed majority Republicans opposed a merger with predominately Democratic Indian Territory.<sup>47</sup> This new change in Republican attitude was expressed by Governor Ferguson when he declared, "It is now a matter of politics with us [Oklahoma Republicans] as it has always been a matter of politics with Congress."<sup>48</sup>

Republican leaders in Congress viewed party welfare from a different angle and preferred sacrificing a local Republican majority in Oklahoma Territory to ensure there would be only one Democratic state created instead of two. It is interesting to note that the popular belief, shared by Republicans and some Democrats in Oklahoma Territory, that Oklahoma Territory was destined to be Republican was not shared by the Republican leaders in Congress. Especially, after the Democratic-Populist fusion victory in 1896 Republican leaders began to get suspicious of Oklahoma's real political complexion, and for good reason. Not only did the Republican leaders in Washington refuse to create two Democratic states, but they wished to delay the creation of even one as long as possible.

President Roosevelt, while expressing his dislike for bringing partisan politics into the question of statehood, made it known he was set against two Democratic states when it could be avoided. But more than opposition just to the Democratic party, it was the taint of Bryanism and

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<sup>47</sup>Roy Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 245.

<sup>48</sup>Charles Wayne Ellinger, "The Drive for Statehood in Oklahoma, 1889-1906," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXXI (1963), 31.

Populism that colored Democratic principles in Oklahoma to which Roosevelt and his Republican friends objected.<sup>49</sup>

Significant also in the attempt to delay statehood was that group of "carpetbaggers" who wished to protect their jobs. These patronage appointees were for the most part Republicans and only a small minority, but they were an influential minority and played an important role in detaining statehood.<sup>50</sup>

Much of the opposition to statehood derived from patronage considerations was centered in the Department of the Interior. The Secretary of the Interior had far reaching control over political patronage in the territory and largely built up an interest of its own apart from the President and the Congress. Evidence of this nature can be observed with Ethan A. Hitchcock, President Roosevelt's Secretary of Interior. In a personal letter Roosevelt remarked that "Hitchcock...I think, at the bottom of his heart would like to have me...stop all business in the future state of Oklahoma until we could arrange to have the entire population investigated for say from six to ten years by a special agent."<sup>51</sup>

Territorial Democrats, prompted by exclusion from territorial patronage, made their first official pronouncement concerning statehood on January 11, 1894. The Democratic central committee met and issued a call for a meeting at Perry on January 24 to elect delegates to a statehood convention. At this meeting it was resolved that Oklahoma Territory be admitted to statehood immediately and that Indian Territory be brought into the sisterhood of states piecemeal as conditions permitted.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Elting E. Morison, ed., The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, Vol. III (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 40-41.

<sup>50</sup>Scales, 12.

<sup>51</sup>Morison, V, 333.

<sup>52</sup>Stewart, 338-339.

Although the Democrats were the first to call for immediate statehood for Oklahoma Territory they soon abandoned this stand. As they became aware of their chances for success in a state consisting only of Oklahoma Territory the Democrats began to play it safe and called for union with heavily Democratic Indian Territory. It was beneficial to the Democratic party that in the long run this stand became the one accepted by most of the people in Oklahoma Territory.

That the political nature of the statehood question was well understood by the voters themselves was demonstrated by their voting in the territorial congressional delegate race. In all but one election (1896) Oklahoma Territory returned a Republican delegate to Congress to work with a Republican Congress. It was generally accepted that it would be politically too much to hope for to expect a Republican Congress to give credit to a Democratic or Populist congressional delegate for passage of any statehood bill. This sentiment was popularly expressed in the 1902 congressional delegate election between the Democratic candidate, Bill Cross, and the Republican candidate, Bird McGuire, when it was generally accepted that "a vote for Cross means waiting four or five years for the Indian Territory; a vote for McGuire means statehood this winter."<sup>53</sup> But even this conviction was based on political naivete for Republican leaders in Congress as early as 1896 were opposed to admitting Oklahoma Territory under any terms other than union with Indian Territory and then were determined to delay until the problems of Indian Territory and the work of the Dawes Commission were terminated. The Daily Oklahoman, a banner spokesman for the Democratic cause, was cognizant of this Republican attitude when it stated that "a vote for McGuire instead of being a vote for statehood, is a vote for two years more of McGuirehood" and

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<sup>53</sup>Debo, Prairie City, 121.

nothing more.<sup>54</sup>

Regardless of how the people of Oklahoma Territory viewed statehood until the people of Indian Territory were won over to union of the two territories a major obstacle to statehood remained. The Five Civilized Tribes were overwhelmingly opposed to any plan calling for statehood other than that which permitted an Indian commonwealth. A few of the Indian leaders, however, saw with increasing clarity that the Indian was not to be allowed a state of his own and slowly worked to condition their people for single statehood. The Sequoyah Convention was the last serious effort to achieve a separate Indian state, and when it failed the Democratic party leaders turned to building a union of the two territories. This decision was given formal recognition at a Jackson Day Dinner on January 8, 1906, held in Oklahoma City when Charles N. Haskell, one of the principal speakers and prominent men of Indian Territory, called for a merging of the Democratic parties of both territories for the purpose of achieving single statehood.<sup>55</sup> With both territories committed to single statehood all major obstacles were removed, and events moved rapidly until finally statehood was achieved on June 16, 1906.

Statehood became a partisan political issue despite the efforts of most Oklahomans to assert that this should not be the case. The Republican party went from a stand for immediate single statehood with piecemeal admittance for Indian Territory to separate statehood when they feared being outnumbered by Democrats in any state created by uniting the two territories. Only after it became clear to territorial Republicans that Republican leaders in Congress had no intention of admitting two Democratic

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<sup>54</sup>Daily Oklahoman, November 1, 1902, 4.

<sup>55</sup>Amos D. Maxwell, The Sequoyah Constitutional Convention (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1953), 107-108.

states did they resign themselves to the inevitable and again call for immediate single statehood.

Democrats were equally guilty of political expediency over the statehood issue. After originally taking a stand for immediate statehood for Oklahoma Territory with piecemeal admittance for Indian Territory the Democratic party switched to immediate single statehood when Republican chances for controlling any state created out of only Oklahoma Territory seemed likely.

Despite the partisan stand taken by both the Democratic party and the Republican party it was the fortune of the former to benefit politically from the long delay in achieving statehood. When local Republicans made their stand against absorption by Democratic Indian Territory they were opposing the only avenue left open to the people of Oklahoma to gain statehood. And while they soon reversed their decision a certain amount of political damage had already been done. Too, the Republicans of Oklahoma were forced to bear the onerous effects created by the opposition to statehood on the part of Republican leaders in Washington. Democrats, on the other hand, had the fortune of having their pie and eating it too. While their stand on the statehood issue was based on political considerations they were fortunate enough to have it coincide with the stand ultimately supported by the people in general. As such the Democratic party suffered no ill effects from their position and instead actually gained from it.

## CHAPTER V

### DEMOCRATIC ASCENDANCY

#### Republican Factors

The completeness with which the Democratic party has dominated Oklahoma politics since becoming a state in 1907 might lead one to suppose that this was the case from the first day of Oklahoma's founding as a territory. That such a supposition is unwarranted we have already observed. But it can be argued, with some degree of exactness, that Oklahoma from its beginning was destined to become a Democratic commonwealth. If destined is too strong a word then it can be stated that there were conditions present in Oklahoma Territory and the nation as a whole which made it almost impossible that Oklahoma should not become a strong Democratic state. It will be helpful in presenting this rise in the ascendancy of the Democratic party to begin with an outline of the many factors that initially strengthened the Republican party and which the Democratic party had first to overcome if it was to be a majority party.

There were many factors to explain why Republican sentiment was a dominant influence in the political life of Oklahoma Territory. From the beginning inhabitants of Oklahoma Territory were indebted to a Republican administration for their land. For many Oklahomans President Harrison's proclamation opening the Unassigned Lands was a benevolent act ever to be remembered by voting the Republican ticket. And it was under another Republican administration that the highly popular Dennis T. Flynn secured free homes for many Oklahomans. This act alone was credited with saving



Oklahomans over \$15,000,000.<sup>1</sup> Flynn was also popular in other ways. Rural free delivery brightened the secluded and dull life of many an Oklahoma farmer, and a Logan County pioneer recalled how "we all felt we owed our rural free delivery to Congressman Dennis T. Flynn."<sup>2</sup> It was a Republican administration, too, that sponsored the Organic Act providing a legal basis for territorial government. Perhaps most significant was the fact that fourteen of the eighteen years that Oklahoma remained a territory a Republican administration was in control of the national government and administered the affairs of Oklahoma Territory. The nature of territorial status and the political patronage accompanying it served in many ways to build the Republican party in Oklahoma. Not only were political conditions propitious for the Republican party, but the background and heritage of Oklahomans themselves were strong elements making for Republican supremacy.

Contrary to popular belief Oklahoma Territory was not settled predominantly by people from southern states. The southern mannerisms and customs so characteristic of many Oklahomans have, in large measure, been the result of over two generations of exposure to southern latitude and association with other southern states. Actually by 1900, 41.4 percent of the inhabitants living in Oklahoma Territory formerly resided in northern states in comparison to only 35.1 percent formerly from southern states. Not only were more Oklahoma inhabitants former residents of northern states but 49.8 percent of them were from west of the Mississippi River in comparison to only 26.7 percent from east of that river.<sup>3</sup> A

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<sup>1</sup>Oklahoma, Territorial Governor's Annual Report, 1901, 86.

<sup>2</sup>Robinson, 304.

<sup>3</sup>Buck, "Settlement of Oklahoma," 74.

preponderance of early settlers, therefore brought Republican convictions and loyalties with them.

A major cause for this predominant northern and western element was the intensive advertising campaign which mid-western railroads conducted in an effort to sell passage fares, and to people a land from whence more profits could be taken.<sup>4</sup> Another cause for this predominance of northern settlers involved the activities conducted by the Republican territorial administration in Oklahoma. In his annual report of 1898 Governor Barnes credits the circulation of 75,000 copies of previous Oklahoma governors' reports in the North and East, telling of the prosperity and opportunities available in Oklahoma Territory, for "turning the faces of thousands toward Oklahoma".<sup>5</sup> There was no mention of how many copies were circulated in the South, and it is likely there were few and that this instance was not an isolated one.

The method adopted by the Republican party for opening Oklahoma to settlement was also an important factor making for this predominance of northern and western settlers. The United States District Attorney to Oklahoma under President Harrison hit upon the scheme of opening the land in Oklahoma Territory by beginning in the north and working south, reservation by reservation. This procedure would make it easier for people living in the northern states, which were more heavily Republican, to settle upon a claim while at the same time placing a handicap upon people living in the southern states, which were more heavily Democratic. Through this scheme Republicans hoped to prevent Oklahoma Territory from becoming "irredeemably Democratic."<sup>6</sup> The results of this northern or western

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<sup>4</sup>Clarence H. Matson, "Oklahoma, A Vigorous Western Commonwealth," American Review of Reviews, XXXII (1905), 316.

<sup>5</sup>Oklahoma, Territorial Governor's Annual Report, 1898, 60.

<sup>6</sup>A paper by A. T. Volwiler entitled "The Opening of Oklahoma as Seen Through the Benjamin Harrison Papers," read before the Twenty-Eighth

origin of a large number of Oklahoma residents would naturally be that a greater number of the people in Oklahoma Territory voted more frequently for the Republican party at the time they entered Oklahoma Territory than for any other political party.

Election results give convincing proof of the voting habits of the people and the strength of the Republican party during territorial days. Seven out of eight territorial delegates to Congress were Republicans.<sup>7</sup> Five out of eight lower houses in the territorial legislature contained a Republican majority over the combined total of both the Democratic and Populist seats, and in one other session the Republican seats in the lower house were equal to the combined total of the Democrats and the Populist. Almost the same Republican dominance was present in the council where four out of eight sessions resulted in a Republican majority over all other political parties combined, and in one other term Republican seats in the council equaled the combined number of both the Democrats and the Populists.<sup>8</sup> This same Republican dominance was true of the Presidential preference elections where only in one year (1896) the Republicans failed to poll a plurality of votes.<sup>9</sup> Tables I and II show respectively the Republican strength in the territorial legislature and Presidential preference elections.

As impressive as these Republican victories are they still fail to reveal the true extent of Republican strength and weakness. Frequently

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Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. The paper was never published. Elmer Ellis, "The Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXII (1935), 231-250.

<sup>7</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 305-306.

<sup>8</sup>Scales, 6.

<sup>9</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 308.

TABLE I  
STRENGTH OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Year	House of Representatives			Council		
	Rep.	Dem.	Pop.	Rep.	Dem.	Pop.
*1890	14	8	4	*** 6	5	1
***1892	13	9	4	** 6	5	2
*1894	16	3	7	* 7	1	5
**1896	3	23		** 0	13	
*1898	16	8	2	* 8	4	1
*1900	15	11		** 5	8	
**1902	12	14	0	* 7	6	0
*1904	15	11	0	* 8	5	0

	House	Council
* Years of overall Republican majority	5	4
** Years of overall Democratic or Democratic-Populist majority	2	3
*** Years of equal representation	1	1

TABLE II  
PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE ELECTIONS

Year	Candidate	Vote
1892	Harrison (Rep.)	9,478
	Cleveland (Dem.)	7,390
	Weaver (Pop.)	4,348
1896	McKinley (Rep.)	26,267
	Bryan (Dem.)	27,435
1900	McKinley (Rep.)	38,253
	Bryan (Dem.)	33,539
	Debs (Pop.) <i>Sec</i>	780
1904	Roosevelt (Rep.)	51,454
	Parker (Dem.)	49,864
	Debs (Soc.)	4,443
	Twallow (Proh.)	11,580
	Watson (Pop.)	1,836

the Republican party lacked unity as the result of factional disputes between federal appointees and grass-roots Republicans over dispensing appointive offices and failed to vote as solidly as it otherwise could have, a factor the Democrats were largely spared. Also, the Republican party, since it was in control of the federal government for the greater part of territorial years, suffered from the "carpetbagger" issue far more than did the Democratic party.<sup>10</sup>

Sectionalism, too, was a divisive force within the Republican party as northern and southern Republicans carried on rivalry for control of the party machinery. In addition there was a tendency for southern Republicans to be indifferent to local issues, a holdover from the days of living in the solid South, and to concentrate more heavily on national issues, thus allowing local elections to suffer.<sup>11</sup>

What this Republican record during territorial days all points up is what a well known member of the Republican party in Oklahoma during those days said when he reminisced that, "Still in those territorial days, while the Republicans were always outyelled, the Democrats were nearly always out voted".<sup>12</sup> Yet in spite of all these factors making for Republican supremacy in Oklahoma, the Democratic party by 1906 was the majority party. What had happened to the Republican party's once dominant position? How could a political party with so many factors in its favor lose its position? The answer to these questions is found in recounting the steps taken in the rise of Democratic ascendancy in Oklahoma Territory.

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<sup>10</sup>Scates, 5.

<sup>11</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>12</sup>Scott, 106.

## Influence of the Land

It can be correctly stated that the ultimate ascendancy of the Democratic party in Oklahoma Territory was, in the final analysis, due to the forces of nature and the conditions present in both the national and territorial experience and not to the genius of individuals.<sup>13</sup> The land was profound and lasting in its influence upon the character and nature of Oklahoma politics. The task of settling a new land was replete with hardships which only made the burden of existing farming conditions more difficult. Economic resources of the new settlers were meager, and the lack of sufficient rainfall or severe drought in some years of the mid-1890's depleted the resources of the farmers even more. When Oklahoma farmers were able to harvest a good crop the prices they received for their produce was relatively lower in proportion to the goods they were required to buy. Faced with such hardships Oklahoma farmers were willing to seek relief from any source, even if it meant changing their political affiliation. Like Charles Lester of Prairie City, the settler being "starved out in western Kansas, he had made a fresh start in Oklahoma. Originally a Republican he had been converted by hot winds and grasshoppers into a Democrat with People's party learnings."<sup>14</sup>

This transformation of party allegiances was at times slow but never ceasing to evolve. The influx of settlers from traditionally Republican states outnumbered those from the traditionally Democratic states and the adherence to old political ways was not easily broken down. Throughout territorial days Republican sentiment remained strong but for the

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<sup>13</sup>Daniel W. Peery has written that "Oklahoma was 'South of 36' and from its very latitude and from its longitude it was thought that this territory was destined to become a great democratic commonwealth." Peery, "The First Two Years," 321.

<sup>14</sup>Debo, Prairie City, 14.

Republican party the political winds were blowing in the wrong direction.

A movement away from the Republican party in some mid-western states, a fact that was later true in Oklahoma after 1889, and into third political parties born out of the agrarian discontent was in early evidence. The Republicans were in control of the state governments in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Minnesota where the Reform and Anti-Monopoly parties were most active and consequently the reform opposition was directed primarily at the Republican party. Subsequently, large numbers of grass-roots Republicans joined Independent parties; whereas, the Democratic party tended to endorse Independent candidates or fuse outright with the new reform parties.<sup>15</sup> In large part this Republican exodus to other parties was due to the feeling on the part of many Republicans that all hope of changing the basic course of the Republican party was useless. Democrats, on the other hand, outside the states of the Bourbon South, tended to retain their belief that the Democratic party could be changed and remained within the party to this end. Throughout the 1870's and the 1880's this trend continued with the result that the political ideology of Democrats and Populist drew closer and closer together.<sup>16</sup> A major shift in this direction was the split between the gold and silver factions within the Democratic party. When William Jennings Bryan and the silverites carried the day at Chicago in 1896 and the People's party subsequently endorsed the Democratic party's candidate it was but a formal declaration of the events that had been taking place during the previous two decades. With the subsequent demise of the People's party many Populists and ex-Republicans found the next step into the Democratic party a

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<sup>15</sup>Buck, Granger Movement, 90.

<sup>16</sup>Elmer L. Fraker, "The Spread of Populism into Oklahoma Territory," (Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1938), 41.

natural one.

### Democratic-Populist Fusion

Fusion between the People's party and the Democratic party was a vital issue both on the national level and in Oklahoma Territory. The early successes of the People's party and the defeat of the Democratic party in the congressional elections of 1894 prompted many Democrats to seek ways to espouse some of the Populist principles, especially free silver, in an effort to prevent a movement of Democrats over to the People's party. To this end a convention was held at Memphis in June of 1895 by Democratic silverites in hopes of convincing and winning over Populist and silver men of all parties to the Democratic party.<sup>17</sup> But the endeavor was not to be an easy one.

Standing squarely in the path of any re-shaping of the Democratic party in the direction of Populism and away from Bourbonism was the titular head of the Democratic party, President Grover Cleveland. Cleveland was just as determined to maintain, what he considered to be the sanctity of the principles upon which the Democratic party was founded as were the silverites, such as William Jennings Bryan. Before any espousal of Populism could be achieved by the Democratic party Cleveland would have to be replaced as head of the Democratic party. The final break between the gold and silver forces of the Democratic party came after President Cleveland spearheaded the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. As the opposing Democratic forces moved into battle position each raised its standard, one of gold and one of silver, at the head of the column and prepared to do battle against the forces of evil. Both

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<sup>17</sup>J. Rogers Hollingsworth, The Whirligig of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 35-36.



combatants were sure they were on the side of right and justice and no quarter was to be given.

It was unfortunate for the Democratic party that the two metals should become the embodiment of all that was good and evil politically. For conceiving of the issue in terms of good and evil rather than in terms of strategic political considerations could not help but end in disaster for the Democratic party at the national level. Not only did it divide eastern and western as well as northern and southern Democrats at the grass-roots and create an irreparable split in the Democratic party, but it made both Cleveland and Bryan hardened in their determination to carry or split the Democratic party.<sup>18</sup>

With the triumph of the silver forces at the Democratic presidential nominating convention in Chicago in 1896, the Democratic party split and the gold Democrats left it, determined to defeat the silver Democrats, even at the expense of aiding the Republicans. The Populists, by purposely delaying the convening of their national convention, had little choice other than to support the Democratic candidate. This fusion of national organizations was to have the greatest of consequences for local politics in Oklahoma.

The free silver issue in Oklahoma Territory, as on the national level, embodied the whole struggle taking place between gold and silver Democrats and between eastern Democrats and western Populists. Not all silverites in the Democratic party supported the whole of the Populist

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 238. James A. Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XVII (1930), 425. In a private letter President Cleveland wrote, "we can survive as a party without immediate success at the polls, but I do not think we can survive if we have fastened upon us, as an authoritative declaration of party policy, the free coinage of silver." Allan Nevins, ed., Letters of Grover Cleveland, 1850-1908 (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1933), 433.

platform, and certainly the Populists were concerned with more than just the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one. However, in the heat of battle the issue of free silver colored and carried every issue with it.

Many Oklahoma Populists were quite in agreement with Populists from other states, especially those from the South, that "If it [Democratic party] swallowed some of the People's party 'fallacies' now, it was with a view to swallowing the People's party later on."<sup>19</sup> Republicans and gold Democrats also feared a fusion of silver Democrats and Populists for the future political implications it threatened. Only the silver Democrats and Populist fusionists favored a Democratic-Populist fusion ticket and even among these two groups fusion was not easy.

Since Oklahoma Territory was a border area, fusion politics produced many conflicting emotions among local politics. While it was quite easy for northern Democrats and northern Populists to fuse it was another thing for southern Populists to join with southern Democrats. The battle between Bourbon Democrats and Populists in the South had engendered intense hatred.<sup>20</sup> This mutual distrust and hatred was transported into Oklahoma Territory, and old memories were hard to forget. A good example of this conflict was that surrounding Thomas P. Gore, ex-Populist turned Democrat, in the 1907 senatorial race. While a Populist in Texas, doing battle with the Democrats, Gore had stated "Republicans stand for principle, though the principle might be wrong, and will always fight you in the open. But the Democratic party is Judas-like it will kiss you and betray".<sup>21</sup> This statement by Gore was in later years reprinted in the

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<sup>19</sup>Hicks, Populist Revolt, 345.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>"Democratic Party Files."

newspapers throughout the territory by his opponents and did his candidacy much damage.

After 1890 it gradually became quite clear to all interested persons that a combined vote of the Democrats and the Populists would, in many instances, produce a majority over the Republican vote in Oklahoma Territory. With this realization the issue of fusion of Democrats and Populists became a more pressing and attractive one.<sup>22</sup> For those willing to forget old differences and anxious to get on with the task of winning political offices fusion became an attractive political expedient. Expressing this attitude in an editorial the Oklahoma City Evening Gazette pointed to the supposed absence of rigid party tradition against fusion in a new state and charged that any Democrat or Populist "who objects to fusion is doing his uttermost to save the Republican party. The two parties had better kill the Republican bear before they fight for its hide."<sup>23</sup>

A serious look at the possibility of fusion was taken by the Democrats after the territorial elections of 1894. The Democrats captured only three seats in contrast to sixteen for the Republicans and seven for the Populists in the house of representatives and only one in the council while the Republicans captured seven and the Populists five. The completeness of their defeat prompted Democrats to send out feelers to test the possibility of fusion. Here again the sectional divisions were reflected with the northern counties generally favoring fusion and southern counties such as Cleveland, Roger Mills and Greer, generally opposing any such action. But for the anti-Cleveland elements, located mainly in the northern and western counties, the knowledge that President Cleveland's

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<sup>22</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

faithfulness to the gold standard was a basic cause of the Democratic defeat prompted them to act.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of the Democratic defeat and the growing split between the Clevelandites and the anti-Clevelandites Democrats from the western counties met at a closed meeting held in the law office of B. W. Cummins of Kingfisher and declared their opposition to Governor Renfrow and other Cleveland supporters. It was further decided at this meeting that Cummins would travel throughout the territory to solicit support in their fight.<sup>25</sup>

By late 1894, as a result of the growing opposition to the conservative actions of Cleveland and his supporters in Oklahoma, a majority of Oklahomans had been converted to many of the planks in the Populist platform, especially the principle of free silver. There was still a significant number of Democrats remaining loyal to Cleveland, however, and they put forth a strong effort to force the anti-administration forces to follow their lead.<sup>26</sup> A leader in this respect was Governor Renfrow who put up a hard fight to obstruct fusion attempts.<sup>27</sup> As one die-hard Cleveland supporter said in expressing his continuing loyalty, "he [Cleveland] will regain his prestige and go down in history as one of the wisest and most popular of executives."<sup>28</sup> But despite such loyal support, the administration forces by 1895 were losing their control, and leadership of the Democratic party in Oklahoma was slipping into the hands of

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Daily Oklahoman, April 17, 1894, 4.

<sup>26</sup>Norbert R. Mahnken, "William Jennings Bryan in Oklahoma," Nebraska History, XXXI (1950), 249-250.

<sup>27</sup>Stewart, 263.

<sup>28</sup>Daily Oklahoman, May 9, 1894, 4.

fusionists and silverites.<sup>29</sup>

Fusion in Oklahoma was given a great boost from its soon to be most eminent spokesman, William Jennings Bryan. Bryan, from the beginning, was a disciple of many Populist teachings. Both Bryan and Populism were products of the great mid-west and it was only natural that Bryan should possess similar sentiments. Whether Bryan himself fully realized it or not it was his primary aim to "make the cause of the west the concern of the Democratic party".<sup>30</sup> While delivering an address at Oklahoma City on June 25, 1895, Bryan spoke to a crowd made of a relatively equal number of Republicans, Democrats, and Populists. In his characteristic eloquence Bryan made a moving appeal for silverites of all parties to forget party lines, as their opposition did, and unite in a common cause. As a result of this meeting a Territorial Silver League was organized to attract silver supporters of all parties. When the meeting adjourned few would deny that the attractiveness of fusion and the silver issue had increased.<sup>31</sup>

With the election year of 1896 approaching there was a larger than usual amount of political excitement in the air. All Democrats in a position to know or care knew the future course and nature of the Democratic party would be decided before this election year was out.

B. V. Cummins and other anti-Clevelandites had laid their groundwork well and the meeting of the Democratic central committee at El Reno in late April turned into a real fight. The purpose of the meeting was to select six delegates to the Democratic National Convention to be held in

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<sup>29</sup>Mahnken, 250.

<sup>30</sup>Barnes, 424. Also see Mahnken, 247-274, for a good account of William Jennings Bryan's travels and influence in Oklahoma.

<sup>31</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

Chicago. Of more importance was the issue of whether the delegates would support a free silver candidate or Cleveland. Leading spokesman for the Cleveland forces was L. P. Ross. Joseph Wisby led the anti-administration forces. In a "Battle royal...revolvers and chairs being brought into play" the anti-Clevelandites won out. G. F. Mitchell of El Reno; M. L. Bixler, Norman; W. S. Denton, Enid; O. H. Brunt, Chandler; A. J. Beale, Oklahoma City; and Temple Houston, Woodward, were elected as delegates to the national convention and instructed to support Richard P. Bland of Missouri for President and work for the inclusion of free silver in the Democratic platform. It is interesting to note that Oklahomans, who later were to become some of the strongest Bryan supporters, only hesitatingly switched and instructed their delegates to vote for Bryan after it was certain Bland had no chance of being nominated.<sup>32</sup>

With the nomination of Bryan as Democratic candidate for President and his subsequent endorsement by the People's party, fusion in Oklahoma became a more pressing question. While on the national level the Democrats went hunting the Populists, in Oklahoma Territory the Populists came hunting the Democrats. J. Y. Callahan, the Populist nominee for territorial delegate to Congress, and other Populist leaders who were in favor of fusion presented themselves at the Democratic congressional convention that met at El Reno on September 3 in order to take advantage of similar fusionists sentiments also present within the Democratic party. From the outset the convention was divided between fusionists and anti-fusionists. A number of Democrats came to the convention supporting Callahan and worked to bring him before the convention to speak. In a question and answer session Callahan managed to skirt the political pitfalls encountered, some neatly planned, and to win the convention's

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

support. After Callahan had made his "separate but equal" declaration on the Negro issue and succeeded in sidestepping prohibition by declaring it not to be a political issue Dan Peery came to his rescue by leaping upon a chair and moving that the convention endorse Callahan. Immediately supporters of Callahan let loose with "hoots and hollers" of approval. When the question was put to a vote a majority favored supporting a fusion ticket. To show their protest the delegates of Cleveland County and a few others opposing fusion walked out of the convention.<sup>33</sup>

The next day after the convention the editor of the Daily Oklahoma State Capital, in typical Republican language and with some wishful thinking, charged "Callahan promised the democrats if elected he will treat them fairly in federal appointments if Bryan got there and the fools jumped at the chance...Flynn badges sprung up in Democratic button holes this morning after hearing of Callahan's endorsement like daises in a field after a rain". More correct was the Capital's description of the Democratic convention as a "howling mob".<sup>34</sup>

The campaign of 1896 was a spirited one in Oklahoma and like Debo's Prairie City, "the atmosphere...fairly cracked with political argument".<sup>35</sup> Not only were the territorial elections the object of exuberance, but the excitement of the people at the opportunity of expressing their preference for President spilled over into the Presidential election as well.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Daily Oklahoma State Capital, September 3, 1896, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Debo, Prairie City, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Debo, Foot-Loose and Fancy-Free, 40.

Bryan and free silver were the watchwords of the day. Even the "real dirt farmer", who never concerned himself much with the philosophical aspects of political history, sensed the eventful change that was in the process. In a real sense this seemed his year, a year in which his vote was to somehow count for more than it had in the past.

Free silver had grown in popularity among Oklahomans and many who traditionally voted Republican supported the Democratic-Populist ticket. When Callahan appeared at Oklahoma City to make a campaign speech hundreds of "old time Republicans" were visible in the crowd and wearing Callahan campaign buttons.<sup>37</sup> Even the popular Dennis Flynn, the Republican candidate for congressional delegate, recognized the growing danger to the Republican predominance of the question of fusion and was quick to admit that when the Democrats and Populists fused "my defeat was a foregone conclusion. The issue was free homes versus free silver. Free silver won."<sup>38</sup>

Callahan's victory was a victory for the farmer and the wage earner. The fact that the Democratic-Populist standard carried the day in Oklahoma while going down in defeat at the national polls was indicative of the changing nature of Oklahoma politics. Disappointing though Bryan's defeat was to most Oklahomans the results of the territorial elections could not have been more rewarding. The Democratic-Populist ticket won a complete sweep of all seats in the council and twenty-three of twenty-six seats in the house of representatives, besides electing Callahan as delegate to Congress.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Elmer L. Fraker, "The Election of J. Y. Callahan," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIII (1955), 355.

<sup>38</sup> Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>39</sup> Scales, 6.



The Democratic-Populist victory, however, was not a complete success. Except for proving the necessity of combining the Democratic-Populist forces, the fusion victory produced little in the way of tangible political benefits. The burden of working with a Republican congress and a Republican governor proved too great a handicap for delegate Callahan and the territorial legislature. The Daily Oklahoman charged that after Callahan was elected, Flynn traveled to Washington and warned his Republican friends that if a free homes bill was permitted to pass during Callahan's term, "Oklahoma would be lost to the Republicans forever."<sup>40</sup> In this respect the Daily Oklahoma State Capital was right when it declared that Callahan, if elected, would be a man without an administration in Washington.<sup>41</sup>

The opposition of anti-fusionists in both the Democratic party and the Populist party and the largely ineffective results of the fusion candidates, after being elected, promised to make the issue of fusion an even more controversial one in 1898. Yet as undesirable as fusion was to many members of both parties, a majority of Democrats and Populists realized the necessity of working together. But while both parties were willing to accept fusion neither wished to be assimilated by the other.

Callahan, disillusioned by the experience of working two years with a Congress controlled by the opposition party, declined to stand for re-election and the task of agreeing upon a replacement appeared.<sup>42</sup> The Populists, meeting earlier than the Democrats in territorial convention, elected a conference committee to confer with a Democratic conference

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<sup>40</sup>Daily Oklahoman, September 16, 1900, 4.

<sup>41</sup>Daily Oklahoma State Capital, September 5, 1896, 3.

<sup>42</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

committee to be elected when the Democratic territorial convention convened. On July 13, the conference committees of both parties meeting in joint session, presented a proposal to the Democratic territorial congressional committee whereby a "Free Silver Convention" made up of Populists, Democrats, and Republicans would select a fusion candidate. Under this plan the "Free Silver Convention" would consist of 160 Populists, 160 Democrats, and 30 Silver Republicans who would nominate a fusion candidate by a two-thirds vote. The proposal was wholly unacceptable to Democratic delegates from some eight counties and they walked out of the convention to return only after they were promised that the Democratic delegates to the "Free Silver Convention" would vote as a bloc.<sup>43</sup>

The "Free Silver Convention" had all the attributes of a political compromise without the principle of compromise itself. Both the Populists and the Democrats, while desiring fusion, were determined not to be assimilated by the other. The Populists delegates came instructed to vote for a Populist "first, last, and all the time". The Democratic delegates, likewise, came instructed to cast 160 votes for Keaton "first, last, and all the time". Caught in the middle of this impasse, the Silver Republicans switched from one side to the other throughout seventy-three ballots. Way into the night the balloting continued until finally on the seventy-fourth ballot the Populists gave in, but not without compensation, and voted the nomination to the Democratic candidate, J. R. Keaton.<sup>44</sup>

In payment for the Populist support of Keaton the Democrats agreed to nominate a majority of the legislative candidates from Populist ranks in those legislative districts where it appeared likely fusionist candidates could win. A joint meeting of the territorial central committees of both

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<sup>43</sup> People's Voice (Norman, Oklahoma), July 15, 1898, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

parties was held at El Reno in mid-August to fulfill this promise. Democrats in Noble County and such individuals as D. O. Lewis of Oklahoma City and A. A. Byers, permanent chairman for the Democratic congressional convention, refused to accept such political horse-trading and in the case of Lewis and Byers went over to the Republican party.<sup>45</sup> A Democratic newspaper commented later that Lewis "should be given a large dose of paregoric" for his abberation, but allowed that surprisingly few Democrats bolted their party.<sup>46</sup>

The Democratic-Populist fusion of 1898 in Oklahoma Territory was even less rewarding than the fusion effort of 1896. Factions in both parties were alienated by the fusion and political horse-trading that occurred, and all to no avail. Republicans captured sixteen seats in the house of representatives in comparison to eight seats for the Democrats and two seats for the Populists. This was a gain of thirteen Republican seats in the house of representatives over the election of 1896. In the council the Republicans, while capturing no seats in 1896, secured eight seats in comparison with five for the combined Democratic-Populist ticket. In the congressional delegate race the Republican candidate, Dennis T. Flynn, polled over 8,000 votes more than did the Democratic-Populist candidate, Keaton, and the non-fusionist Populist candidate, Hawkins, combined. It was a sweeping Republican victory. But what is most significant, this election marks the beginning of the decline of the Populist party in Oklahoma Territory. Polling only two seats in the lower house in comparison to eight for the Democrats and only one in the council in comparison to four for the Democrats, the Populists star was visibly in

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Daily Oklahoman, October 21, 1894, 2.

its descent.<sup>47</sup>

Results of the Democratic-Populist fusion and the elections of 1898 were well summarized eight days after the "Free Silver Convention" by the People's Voice, a Norman Populist newspaper, when the following statement appeared in its columns:

...we doubt if the fusion pops fancy their ill-smelling quarters in the stomach of the Democratic whale. Even the Democrats themselves, it is feared, feel much like the Indian who, after gulping down a bottle of soda pop, in disgusted amazement declared it was only 'heap big nothing'.<sup>48</sup>

The Democrats and Populists did fuse again in 1900 with some good results, but were unable to overcome the Republican majority in either house of the territorial legislature. In the lower house the Republican lead was reduced by one seat to a total of fifteen, and in the council the Republican seats were reduced from eight to five. This was the last year in which the Democrats and Populists formed a fusion ticket and the last in which the Populists gained a seat in either house of the territorial legislature.<sup>49</sup>

With the demise of the Populist party the Populists were cut loose from their political moorings and set adrift. Many were looking for a new home. Some returned to the Republican party, a few joined the infant Socialist party, but for most Populists the experience of fusion had created a common bond with the Democratic party. The Norman Democratic-Topic expressed this view when it observed that "the populist rank and file are today looking for a party to join, as their party is disintegrated beyond all hope....No party offers better prospects for betterment of whole

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<sup>47</sup> Scales, 6.

<sup>48</sup> People's Voice, July 22, 1898, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Scales, 6.

people than democratic party."<sup>50</sup>

The Daily Oklahoma State Capital, after the Democratic party had endorsed Callahan in 1896, headlined the following: "THE FUSES FUSE. No More Democratic Party in Oklahoma."<sup>51</sup> The observation should have read no more Populist party, for the Populist party was dead, the victim of fusion. The Democratic party in Oklahoma did suffer from the effects of its fusion with the Populist party but it gained far more than it lost. For the principles of the Populist party were to live on in the platforms of the two major political parties. But it was the Democratic party which reaped the lions share. The Democratic party was no longer the party of Cleveland and his Bourbon predecessors; it was the party of Bryan and of the west. The elections of 1896 and 1900 had ended in defeat for the Democratic party, but even in defeat there was victory for "Bryan rescued the party from the paralysis into which the depression and Mr. Cleveland placed it."<sup>52</sup>

An illustration of the growing influence of Populism in the Democratic party was the emerging of former Populists to positions within the Democratic party. Jesse Dunn of Alva and Roy Stafford of Oklahoma City, editor of the Daily Oklahoman, became members of the Democratic territorial committee, with Dunn serving as chairman of the committee.<sup>53</sup>

#### Farmers' Union and the Democratic Party

Also instrumental in producing Democratic ascendancy in Oklahoma

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<sup>50</sup>Norman Democratic-Topic (Oklahoma), June 24, 1904, 1.

<sup>51</sup>Daily Oklahoma State Capital, September 5, 1896, 4.

<sup>52</sup>Mahnken, 254.

<sup>53</sup>Stewart, 323.

Territory was the Farmers' Education and Cooperative Union, more commonly known as the Farmers' Union. Founded in Rains County, Texas, in 1902, the Farmers' Union within a very short time had its local organizations established in both Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory. Mainly the membership of this new organization consisted of former Farmers' Alliance members.<sup>54</sup> Organization in the two territories had proceeded so well that by the time of the 1905 Texas State Convention held at Fort Worth, Texas, Oklahoma delegates submitted their request for entry into membership as a state union. As early as February of that year the total membership of both Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory numbered 29,365.<sup>55</sup>

Rivalry and difference of opinion had existed between Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory farmers from the very beginning of Farmers' Union organization. The conflicts had not been so serious, however, as to prevent union under one state union known as Indiahoma. The rift widened, though, and while preparations were underway within the two territories and in Congress to unite the two in single statehood, the farmers within the Indiahoma Union fell out with the result being two separate state unions being formed.<sup>56</sup> Not until 1907 were the two former groups reunited and again organized into one union, the Oklahoma State Farmers' Union. On the surface, at least, the feuding was put aside and as the president of that national organization stated, "Oklahoma has been through the fire often" but now it is united and ready to pull together.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Carl C. Taylor, The Farmers Movement (New York: American Book Co., 1953), 338.

<sup>55</sup>Charles Simon Barrett, The Mission, History and Times of the Farmer's Union (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Co., 1909), 203-204.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 206.

The first meeting of the Indian Territory Union was held at Tishomingo on July 18-21, 1905, when over 109 delegates and visitors were present. S. O. Daws, a former Allianceman, was elected president of the union.<sup>58</sup> At this time Oklahoma Territory had 315 Farmers' Union locals and Indian Territory had 524. Enthusiasm among the farmers continued high in both territories, and the Farmers' Union grew apace. In Oklahoma Territory alone membership climbed between 1904 and 1907 to 80,000.<sup>59</sup>

While the Farmers' Union played a decisive role in forging Oklahoma politics, it founded no separate political party nor did it officially support one single party. It is significant to note that the constitution adopted by the Farmers' Union declared "This is in no degree a political party and shall forever abstain from even so much as a discussion of partyism".<sup>60</sup> But this was by no means to be considered as a complete denunciation of political activity, and at his first presidential address, C. S. Barrett clarified this point to the Farmers' Union in national convention:

But while we hold fast to the splendid neutrality of our position we must never hesitate in political life to defend and to advance the original purposes of this organization. To this end as individuals and as an organizational body without party names, we must not hesitate to ballot as a unit against those things which would seek to oppress or degrade us....<sup>61</sup>

The same statement was made by Barrett somewhat later only with less mincing words. "The only way to impress your purpose upon them [oppressors

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>59</sup>The Oklahoma Farmers' Union (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union, 1920), 4.

<sup>60</sup>Taylor, 358.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

of the farmer<sup>7</sup>," stated Barrett in words more familiar to agrarian militancy, "is to shoot them in the neck with the ballot. They are pretty apt to remember a wound of this character and how they came by it."<sup>62</sup>

Principally, the Farmers' Union stood for fair treatment of the farmer. To achieve this it looked primarily to two sources: farmer co-operatives and indirect political action. The main concern for establishing co-operatives was to control markets and in so doing create profitable prices and stable markets. Illustrative of the farmers' conditions was the article carried by the Daily Oklahoman on October 2, 1898. A visiting Republican speaker had addressed a Republican rally and remarked of the farming conditions that "if the farmer of Oklahoma would raise more cotton and less hell there would be more prosperity." In reply the Oklahoman asserted that even Republicans should know that "it is nothing short of Gehenna to raise cotton at the good old republican price of four and one-half cents per pound".<sup>63</sup>

The anger of the farmer was particularly directed against the cotton exchanges. In order to combat the "parasitical" exchanges the farmers made attempts to withhold cotton from the markets. But this met with only partial success. To enable the farmers to better keep their cotton from the markets the Farmers' Union put into operation a plan to implement the "warehouse system". Under the "warehouse system" scores of warehouses were constructed whereby one-fourth of Oklahoma's cotton could be stored and withheld from markets in hopes of "destroying the mighty and tyrannical power of the Cotton Exchange".<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Barrett, 48.

<sup>63</sup>Daily Oklahoman, October 2, 1898, 2.

<sup>64</sup>Barrett, 205.



Active participation in politics, however, was necessary, no matter how successful co-operative schemes might be, to insure the welfare of the farmer. The "trusts and financial interests" were actively engaged in politics and it was the belief of the Farmers' Union that farmers were no more likely "to injure the country anymore desperately than the trusts or other great institutions which have chosen the political road to attain their ends".<sup>65</sup>

The first real political success of the Farmers' Union in Oklahoma grew out of their second state convention held at Shawnee on August 21 to August 25, 1906. W. J. Fields, president of the Farmers' Union, was made chairman of the convention and J. Harvey Lynch, a labor union man, was elected as secretary. Out of one hundred and twelve delegates present, one hundred were Democrats, convincing proof that the Democratic party had become an agrarian party.<sup>66</sup> Members of this convention drew up a list of twenty-four "demands" that candidates for seats in the Constitutional Convention were required to adopt if they were to receive an endorsement from the Farmers' Union and labor unions. It was further resolved by the convention that the membership of the organizations there represented in convention should "support a brother farmer or laborer in preference to any other profession".<sup>67</sup> Subsequent endorsement of the "twenty-four demands" by a majority of the Democratic candidates aided in an overwhelming Democratic victory in the Constitutional Convention elections. So successful were the Farmers' Union's efforts that it claimed it elected thirty delegates from Oklahoma Territory and thirty-four from

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<sup>65</sup>Tbid., 48.

<sup>66</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>67</sup>C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, Vol. IX of A History of the South, eds. Wendell Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 388.

Indian Territory committed to its principles. The result was a state constitution drafted with the farmers and laborers in mind.<sup>68</sup>

In August of 1907 the Farmers' Union convention was again held at Shawnee. Also present at this meeting were the delegates and representatives of the coal miners, railroad laborers and farmers. In the state elections of this year farmer and labor interests again supported the Democratic party and was responsible for another overwhelming Democratic victory. At two very crucial points in the political history of Oklahoma the Democratic party, its ranks infused with support from ex-Republicans and Populists, was able to exert its strength over the Republican party.

#### Democratic Strengths and Weaknesses

By 1906 there was little doubt that the Democratic party had replaced the Republican party as the majority party in Oklahoma. The factors bringing about this Democratic ascendancy had been many. The taint of "carpetbagger" government attached to the Republican party, the Republican delay on statehood, Republican espousing of the Negro cause and the subsequent propaganda the Democratic press gleaned from it, the superior organization of Farmers' Union and labor unions that eventually backed the Democratic party, the effects of fusion and the influx of ex-Republicans and ex-Populists into the Democratic ranks, and the more effective political organization of the Democratic party, all combined to bring about the decline of Republicanism and the rise of the Democratic party.

Voting statistics reveal that this reversal of party positions did not suddenly emerge in the Constitutional Convention election of 1906.

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<sup>68</sup> Scales, 35.

A look at the congressional delegate election statistics contained in Table III show that after 1890 a slight but steady decline in Republican voting strength had set in. This in spite of the fact that in only one year (1896) did the Democratic or Democratic-Populist fusion ticket win. After 1896 and the Populist debacle and accompanying discrediting of the Democratic party, the congressional elections of 1898 and 1900 showed substantial Republican pluralities; but it was only a momentary gain as the election of 1900 produced a 5,000 plus drop in Republican plurality over that of 1898, and the succeeding elections of 1902 and 1904 continued to show a decreasing Republican plurality.<sup>69</sup>

This same Democratic trend is also true of the Presidential preference elections. Table IV shows that while only in one Presidential election (1896) the Republicans failed to win a plurality, the remaining years, with the exception of 1900 which was the result of the Democratic-Populist debacle of 1896, show a rapidly declining plurality over the combined vote of its opponents. And much of the impressive Republican vote cast in 1904 can, no doubt, be attributed to the immense popularity of Theodore Roosevelt. But the exuberant and likeable Roosevelt, while handing the Democratic candidate, Alton B. Parker, one of the most overwhelming defeats in Democratic history, was only able to best him by 1,590 votes in Oklahoma Territory--a good indication of the growing strength of the Democratic party in Oklahoma.<sup>70</sup>

Results of the Constitutional Convention elections give conclusive evidence to this Democratic superiority. So true was this that in the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention, voters in Indian

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<sup>69</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 305-306.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 308.

TABLE III

## CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATE ELECTIONS

Year	Candidate		Vote	Winners Plurality Over Opponents Combined Vote
1890	Harvey	(Rep.)	4,398	+391
	Matthews	(Dem.)	2,543	
	Diehl	(Pop.)	1,464	
1892	Flynn	(Rep.)	9,390	-2,310
	Travers	(Dem.)	7,302	
	Ward	(Pop.)	4,398	
1894	Flynn	(Rep.)	20,499	-7,547
	Wisby	(Dem.)	12,058	
	Beaumont	(Pop.)	15,988	
1896	Flynn	(Rep.)	26,267	+1,168
	Callahan	(Dem.-Pop.)	27,435	
1898	Flynn	(Rep.)	28,456	+8,106
	Keaton	(Dem.-Pop.)	19,088	
	Hankins	(Ind.-Pop.)	1,262	
1900	Flynn	(Rep.)	38,253	+2,724
	Neff	(Dem.-Pop.)	33,529	
	Allan	(Ind.-Pop.)	789	
		(Soc.)	796	
1902	McGuire	(Rep.)	45,896	-2,511
	Cross	(Dem.)	45,409	
	Smith	(Soc.)	1,963	
	Van Cleave	(Proh.)	1,035	
1904	McGuire	(Rep.)	51,454	-6,237
	Mathews	(Dem.)	49,868	
	Loudermilk	(Soc.)	4,443	
	Brown	(Proh.)	1,544	
	Straughen	(Pop.)	1,836	

TABLE IV  
PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE ELECTIONS

Year	Candidate	Vote	Winners Plurality Over Opponents Combined Vote
1892	Harrison (Rep.)	9,478	-2,260
	Cleveland (Dem.)	7,390	
	Weaver (Pop.)	4,348	
1896	McKinley (Rep.)	26,267	+1,168
	Bryan (Dem.)	27,435	
1900	McKinley (Rep.)	38,253	+3,934
	Bryan (Dem.)	33,539	
	Debs (Soc.)	780	
1904	Roosevelt (Rep.)	51,454	-16,269
	Parker (Dem.)	49,864	
	Debs (Soc.)	4,443	
	Twallow (Proh.)	11,580	
	Watson (Pop.)	1,836	

Territory, believed to be predominantly Democratic, cast 444 fewer Democratic votes than did the electorate of Oklahoma Territory.<sup>71</sup> And this was accomplished with Oklahoma Territory possessing some 51,000 less population than Indian Territory.<sup>72</sup> Not only were more Democratic votes cast in Oklahoma Territory but only 5,548 more Republican votes were cast in Oklahoma Territory than were cast in Indian Territory as well.<sup>73</sup> The election was a significant victory for the Democratic party in Oklahoma Territory as it polled 53.1 percent of the total vote cast in the Territory.<sup>74</sup> Out of fifty-five delegates to the Constitutional Convention apportioned to Oklahoma Territory, forty-nine Democrats were elected.<sup>75</sup>

Voting returns during this period also show the sectional strengths and weaknesses of the Democratic party. Like the sectional division on a national basis between the predominately Republican northern states and the solid Democratic south, Oklahoma was also divided along a north-south sectional basis. The southern counties were more heavily Democratic while the northern counties were more heavily Republican.

Figure 2 gives the Democratic majority for each of the districts laid out for the Constitutional Convention election and shows this sectional division. With but a few cases Democratic strength gets stronger as one moves county-wise from northwest to southeast. A surprisingly strong

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 292.

<sup>72</sup>Scales, 21.

<sup>73</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 292.

<sup>74</sup>Oklahoma, Oklahoma Votes, 1907-1962, Bureau of Government Research (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1964), 33.

<sup>75</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 292.

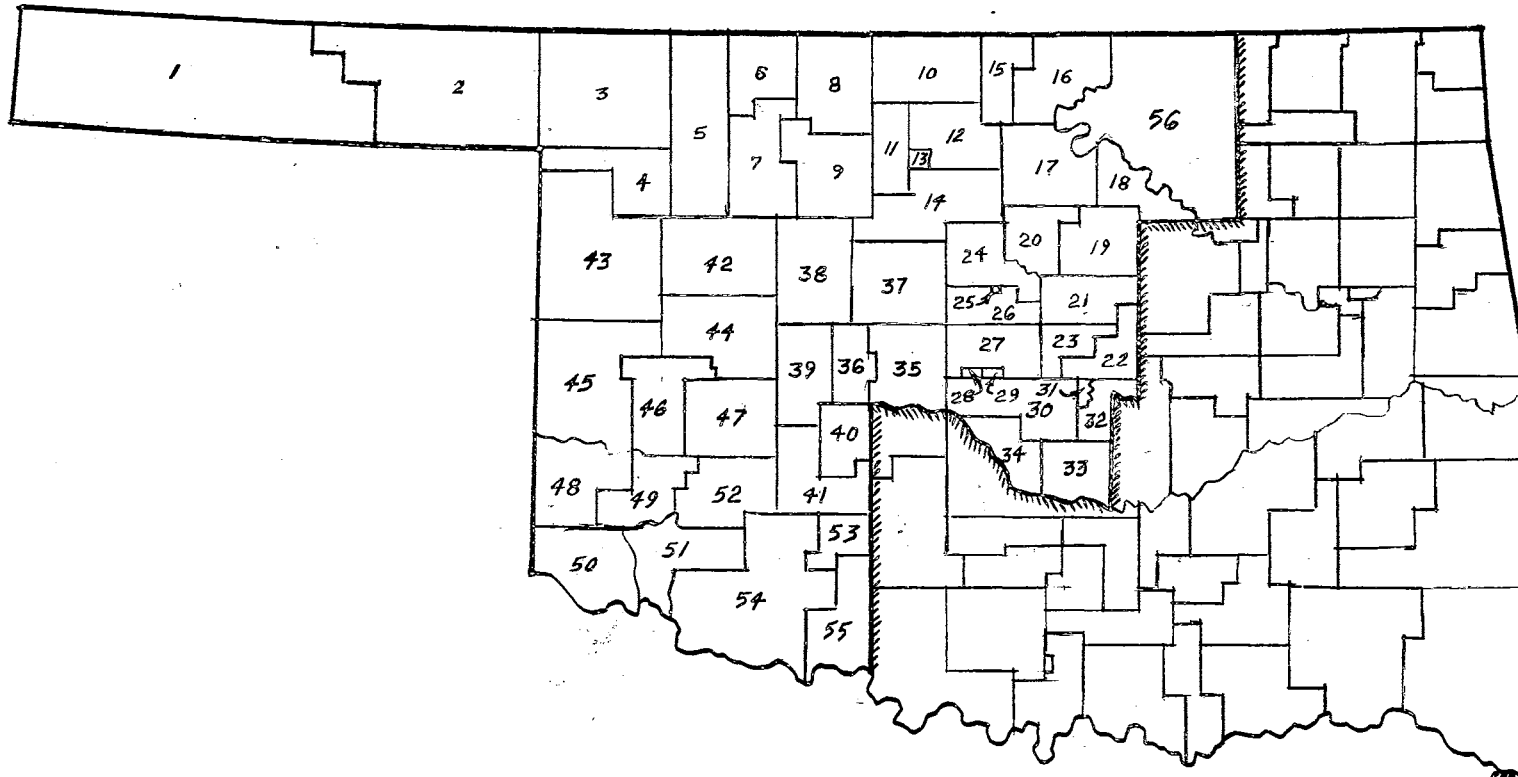


Figure 2. Democratic Majority in the Constitutional Convention Election of 1906 by Districts. Voting statistics for this illustration are continued on page 98.

Figure 2.

(Continued)

1. 83	26. Republican - 557
2. 319	21. Republican - 317
3. 22	27. 341
5. 127	23. Republican - 65
6. 261	22. 300
4. Republican - 17	28. 285
8. 239	29. 461
7. 227	45. 346
9. 43	46. 20
43. 113	44. 404
10. 363	39. 194
11. 142	36. 204
12. 86	30. 115
13. 143	31. 255
42. 86	32. 291
38. 51	47. 247
14. 140	40. 103
37. 55	34. 452
15. 198	33. 589
16. 295	35. 479
37. 55	41. 247
56. 320	48. 335
17. 314	49. 479
18. 264	52. 348
20. Republican - 1	50. 416
19. 146	51. 620
24. 44	54. 549
25. Republican - 557	53. 342
	55. 393



Democratic vote in some of the isolated counties in the north can in some measure be attributed as a vote against territorial rule which had come to be so closely identified with the Republican party.<sup>76</sup>

Looking also at the voting returns available on a county basis for the gubernatorial election of 1907 contained in Figure 3 serves to emphasize this sectional division. In this election the following northern counties, located in what used to be Oklahoma Territory, registered a Republican majority: Harper; Ellis; Woods; Woodward; Alfalfa; Major; Blaine; Garfield; Kingfisher; Noble; Logan. Eight other counties located in this northern section showing a heavy Republican vote were as follows: Cimarron; Texas; Beaver; Grant; Kay; Osage; Pawnee; Payne. By contrast it can be observed that the counties showing a Democratic majority were located primarily in the southern and eastern sections of the territory.<sup>77</sup> Time has served to accentuate this division and fifty years after Oklahoma first became a state Republican strength has continued to grow stronger in the north and northwest and gradually extending eastward while Democratic strength has been solidified in the south and southeast. Figure 4, giving the distribution of party strength as indicated by the gubernatorial election returns from 1907 to 1962, illustrates this point.<sup>78</sup>

Viewing the gubernatorial election figures of 1907 in a little different way serves to illustrate an interesting point. While the northern counties tended to vote Republican and the southern counties to vote Democratic, percentage-wise the northern counties voted more strongly Democratic (45 percent) than the southern counties voted Republican (44 percent). The difference is slight but it does offer some indication

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<sup>76</sup>Oklahoma, Election Returns Constitutional Convention, Minutes of the Meeting of the Territorial Canvassing Board.

<sup>77</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 289-290.

<sup>78</sup>Oklahoma, Oklahoma Votes, 38.

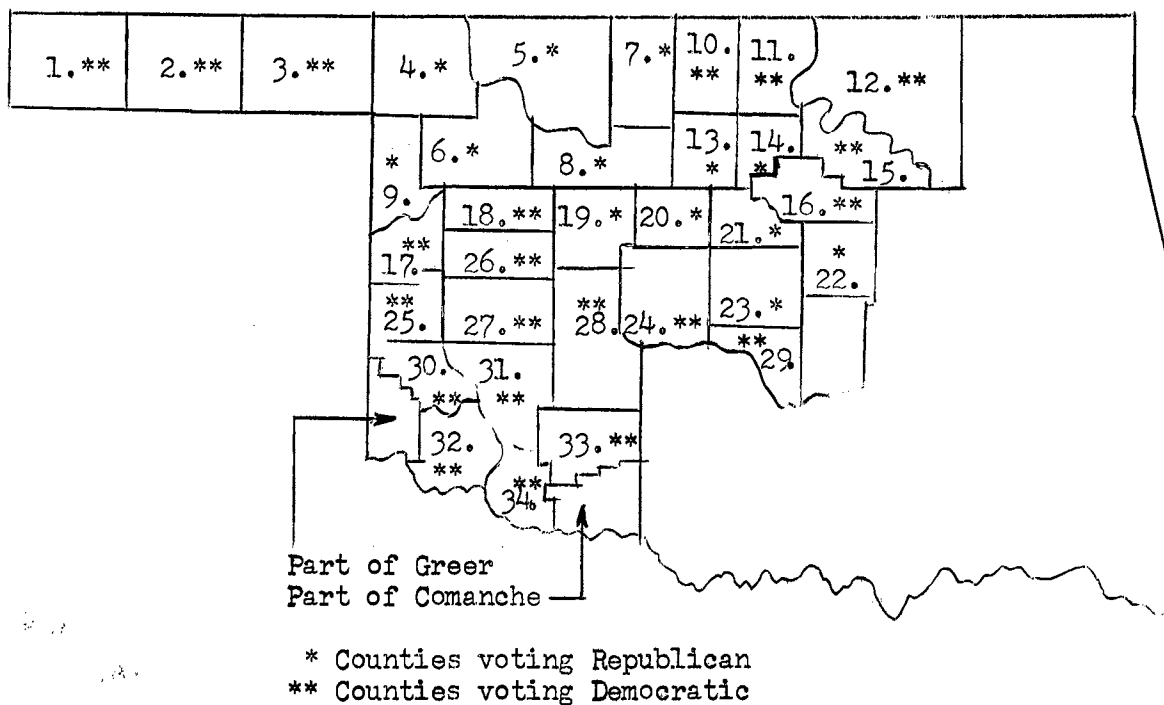


Figure 3. Sectional Division of Democratic Party in Oklahoma Territory as Revealed in the Gubernatorial Election Returns of 1907.

County	Vote		County	Vote	
	Rep.	Dem.		Rep.	Dem.
1. Cimmaron	397	540	18. Dewey	1,137	1,179
2. Texas	1,353	1,576	19. Elaine	1,735	1,469
3. Beaver	1,235	1,245	20. King- fisher	2,204	1,688
4. Harper	735	729	21. Logan	3,831	2,179
5. Woods	1,424	1,276	22. Lincoln	3,562	3,432
6. Woodward	1,416	1,327	23. Oklahoma	5,944	5,038
7. Alfalfa	1,698	1,323	24. Canadian	1,790	2,103
8. Major	1,296	968	25. Beckham	778	2,010
9. Ellis	1,328	1,326	26. Custer	1,523	1,930
10. Grant	1,729	1,799	27. Washita	1,152	2,100
11. Kay	2,562	2,651	28. Caddo	2,873	3,161
12. Osage	1,357	1,693	29. Cleveland	1,188	1,853
13. Garfield	3,237	2,219	30. Greer	864	2,151
14. Noble	1,494	1,459	31. Kiowa	1,529	2,610
15. Pawnee	1,599	1,714	32. Jackson	604	2,143
16. Payne	2,093	2,261	33. Comanche	2,538	3,132
17. Roger-Mills	854	1,290	34. Tillman	557	1,472

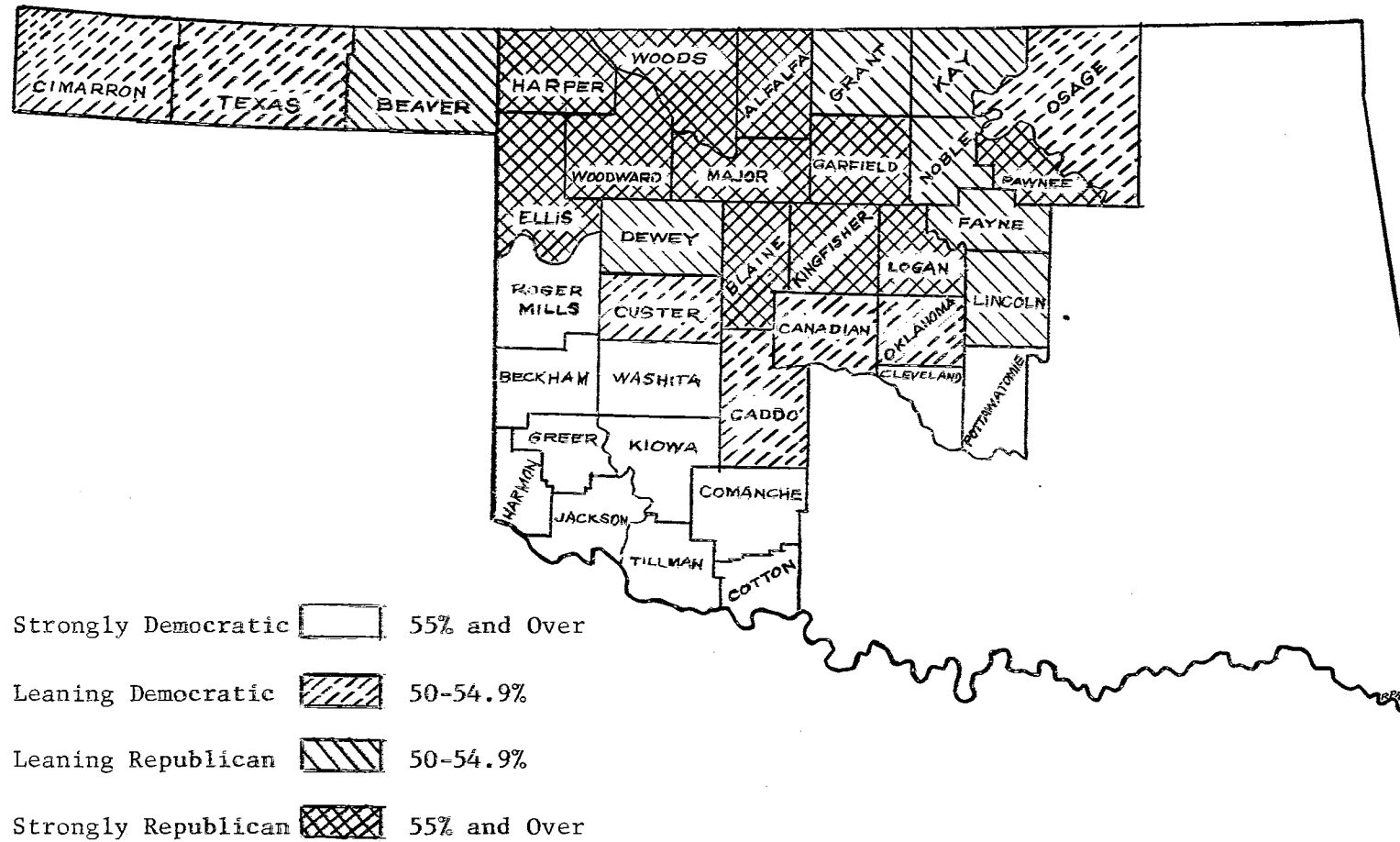


Figure 4. Distribution of Party Strength for Governor, 1907-1962.

of the growing strength of the Democratic party in the northern counties at this time.

The significance of these voting figures, aside from showing the sectional makeup of the Democratic party, is this: from 1890 on the Republican party was in a state of decline in Oklahoma Territory and once the opposition united, or were later assimilated into the Democratic party, the Republican hegemony was proven for what it was, illusory. Actually the Republican party quite probably polled a heavier vote in the various territorial elections than it would otherwise have if not for the fact it dominated the federal government and territorial patronage. The Democratic party in Oklahoma was at last victorious, it had reached the pinnacle of its success. But defeat followed victory. No sooner had Oklahoma Democrats asserted their numerical superiority over Oklahoma Republicans than they were steamrolled by the Democrats of Indian Territory.

## CHAPTER VI

### DEFEAT IN VICTORY: THE TWO DEMOCRATIC PARTIES MERGE

#### Constitutional Convention

Achievement of statehood was a critical point in the political history of Oklahoma. When the Enabling Act declaring that "the inhabitants of all that part of the area of the United States now constituting the Territory of Oklahoma and the Indian Territory, as at present described, may adopt a constitution and become the State of Oklahoma" was signed into law it opened up the whole question of the political future for the heretofore separate territories.<sup>1</sup> For both the Democrats and the Republicans statehood meant that to be successful they must quickly merge their respective territorial organizations. In this the Democratic party succeeded and the Republican party failed.

Although the two separate Democratic territorial organizations had developed along different lines the nature of their development had not been too dissimilar. There was a basic unity underlying both territories that no imaginary line could eradicate. The land, the climate, the people and the common experience of territorial status, all bore similarities, if for no other reason than one depended upon and complemented the other. And there had been considerable inter-relationship and official contact between the two parties over the question of statehood so the new political union was not to bring together total strangers.

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Statutes at Large, XXXIV, Part 1, 267.

There was a considerable degree of suspicion and distrust between members of the two Democratic parties, however, which led to some jockeying for leadership in the new unified party. Democrats in Indian Territory distrusted the so-called "machine" politicians in Oklahoma Territory, especially in Oklahoma City and Guthrie. This distrust was shared by the rural elements in Oklahoma Territory as well and served to benefit the Democrats of Indian Territory in their fight for leadership of the party. Another factor aiding Indian Territory Democrats was the larger population in the eastern half of the proposed new state. The special census of 1907 listed the population of Indian Territory at 733,062 and that of Oklahoma Territory at 681,115.<sup>2</sup> Democrats of Indian Territory, as a result of their larger population and the fact that Indian Territory was considered to be more heavily Democratic, expected to play the dominant role in any newly united party. The assumption that members of the Five Civilized Tribes could be counted on to vote rather solidly for any candidate from Indian Territory was no doubt another factor giving confidence to eastern Democrats.

Territorial differences were sufficiently played down, though, to permit a union of the two Democratic parties at this crucial time. Not three weeks had passed after signing of the Enabling Act before Democrats of the two territories met in joint convention at Shawnee on July 10, 1906, and consummated a union of the two parties.<sup>3</sup> The haste involved was to prepare the Democratic party for the contest for seats in the coming Constitutional Convention. Working in harmony, a campaign committee representing both territories was established to dispense campaign

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<sup>2</sup>Scales, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 31.

propaganda. Members of this committee were Jesse J. Dunn of Alva, chairman; Charles D. Carter, Ardmore, secretary; Joseph Johnston, Alva, treasurer; W. D. Cardwell, Oklahoma City, chairman of speakers bureau; Paul Nesbitt, chairman of the press bureau; and Robert L. Owen, Muskogee, vice-chairman.<sup>4</sup>

The platform adopted by the Democratic territorial committee at Oklahoma City for endorsement by Democratic delegates to the Constitutional Convention was calculated to win the support of the powerful farmer and labor elements. The platform itself was largely an endorsement of the farmer-labor resolutions made at a convention called by Farmers' Union and other labor organizations held at Shawnee on August 21-25, 1906.<sup>5</sup> Consequently the success of the Democratic party was virtually assured when its candidates wholly endorsed this platform. Some of the outstanding provisions contained in this platform were the initiative and referendum, opposition to government by injunction, anti-monopoly legislation, exclusion of farmer contracts at producer level from anti-trust legislation and the fellow servant law.<sup>6</sup>

Failure of the Republican party to unite its separate organization in the two territories destroyed what little chance it might have had for a strong voice in the Constitutional Convention. But the Republicans, under the leadership of Governor Frank Frantz, put forth a hard, if futile, effort. To aid in this effort no less a Republican figure than Marcus Alonzo Hanna was brought into Oklahoma to make several speeches

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Nesbitt, "Governor Haskell Tells of Two Conventions," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIV (March, 1936), 190. Wyatt W. Belcher, "Political Leadership of Robert L. Owen," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXI (Winter, 1953), 368.

<sup>5</sup>Scales, 32.

<sup>6</sup>Emerson, 44-47.

and to appeal to the people to vote Republican.<sup>7</sup> The campaign was hard fought and reflected the helplessness of the Republican party. Realizing its declining strength the Republicans struggled in vain to prevent defeat.<sup>8</sup> But the Republican cause was a losing one and despite their stubborn and bitter effort the trend of politics since 1890 made defeat inevitable.

Results of the Constitutional Convention election indicated a solid Democratic victory. More precisely it was a victory for the Democrats of Indian Territory. For while both Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory went into the Constitutional Convention with equal representation, forty-nine Democratic delegates and six Republican delegates from each side of the state, it was the delegates from Indian Territory that succeeded in organizing the Convention. With but two exceptions all the convention officials were men living in Indian Territory.<sup>9</sup> Victory for this group of Democrats, however, predated the assembling of the Constitutional Convention.

#### Urban-Rural Split in Oklahoma Territory

From the first day of the Opening in 1889, Oklahoma Territory had not only been divided between Republicans, Populists, and Democrats, but between rural and urban elements as well. Settled rapidly by the surge of white settlers during the land rushes, Oklahoma Territory from the first days was a land with numerous towns of various sizes, whereas, Indian Territory remained an area with only limited city-building until

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<sup>7</sup>Stewart, 321-322.

<sup>8</sup>Mahnken, 261.

<sup>9</sup>Scales, 35.



after the Dawes Commission completed its work in 1905.<sup>10</sup> The result was to create a division within political parties in Oklahoma Territory that largely did not exist in Indian Territory. It is true that there existed in Indian Territory various Indian factions that bitterly opposed one another, but when in common opposition to the white man the split largely disappeared.

The significance for this urban-rural split in Oklahoma Territory, when the two territorial Democratic parties were pitted against one another, can be readily appreciated. As long as Democrats in Oklahoma Territory were pitted only against Republicans the split remained largely hidden, but when it became a struggle of Democrat against Democrat in dividing the victory spoils at the Constitutional Convention and in writing a state constitution the division was to be along other lines, namely the urban-rural split. Attempts by urban Democrats, especially Oklahoma City and Guthrie Democrats, to dominate the Democratic party in Oklahoma Territory manifested themselves early and were deeply resented and looked upon with suspicion and fear by rural Democrats. Consequently when the Constitutional Convention assembled Oklahoma Territory Democrats were divided. Urban Democrats tended to support W. C. Hughes of Oklahoma City for president of the convention, while the rural Democrats found more in common with William H. Murray and the delegation from Indian Territory.<sup>11</sup> It is somewhat ironical that the Farmers' Union, which played a major role in producing Democratic ascendancy in Oklahoma Territory, should be the

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<sup>10</sup> The U. S. Census of 1900 lists Oklahoma as having fifty incorporated cities: eleven with more than 2,000 population of which nine had less than 3,500 and two cities with more than 10,000. Oklahoma, Territorial Governor's Annual Report, 1901, 106.

<sup>11</sup> Dangerfield Manuscript.

instrument for this new alignment between Oklahoma farmers and Indian Territory Democrats.

What is significant about the Farmers' Union in Oklahoma Territory is that it was more strongly representative of the southern counties.<sup>12</sup> The farmer of the southern counties, where the Democratic party showed the greatest strength, had little in common with the wheat farmer on the high plains in the counties to the north. Making this even more so was the fact the Republican party was strongest among farmers in the northern counties. In fact the Farmers' Union and farmers of the southern counties in Oklahoma found much more in common with the Farmers' Union and farmers of Indian Territory. Not only were their farming lands and methods very similar but they came largely from southern stock and therefore tended to share similar social experiences and to vote more strongly the Democratic ticket.

#### Triumph of Indian Territorial Democrats

The result of these factors was to place control of the Constitutional Convention in the hands of the Democrats of Indian Territory. Finding no common cause with W. C. Hughes or his urban Democratic followers the Democratic delegates from Oklahoma Territory, largely representative of the Farmers' Union, went to the Constitutional Convention willing to put their personal interest above the welfare of the Democratic organization in Oklahoma Territory and united with the Democrats of Indian Territory. Party politics occupied a minor place in the minds of these practical rural politicians. Their chief aim was to curb the financial

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<sup>12</sup>Cotton, a crop grown predominantly in the southern counties, was the primary object of market control by the Farmers' Union. In addition all union conventions were held in the cities of the southern part of the territory. Evidences of northern influence seem to be lacking.

and industrial interests; which, in part, Oklahoma urban politicians resembled. To these farmers and their representatives, as Angie Debo states, "It was like writing a great charter of human freedom on a clean sheet of paper".<sup>13</sup>

Democrats like William H. Murray and Charles N. Haskell of Indian Territory were conscious of the difference between the rural elements and the "machine" politicians from Oklahoma City and Guthrie. Even before the Enabling Act was signed into law they were looking ahead to the Constitutional Convention. Haskell, in anticipation of the events to come, reportedly remarked to Murray on one occasion, "I want you...to keep tab on all the delegates elected from both Territories....You know the farmers and they know you....We will try to see that the politicians around Oklahoma City and Guthrie do not run the State."<sup>14</sup>

Murray, in writing his memoirs later, stated, "the farmers in both Territories knew who I was, and those that were not communistically inclined had regard for my leadership".<sup>15</sup> As events later proved Oklahoma farmers were not "communistically inclined" and willingly supported his candidacy. Murray was no stranger to the farmers of Oklahoma. He had been a charter member of the Farmers' Union in Indian Territory and had on several occasions met with members of the Farmers' Union from Oklahoma Territory. For a brief period the two territorial unions, as previously

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<sup>13</sup>Debo, Prairie City, 122.

<sup>14</sup>Murray, I, 319. Hines gives a somewhat different version of this conversation between Haskell and Murray. According to this view Haskell remarked "The fellows around Oklahoma City and Guthrie will try to shut out the Indian Territory crowd and representatives from the western end of the Oklahoma country." Regardless of the inconsistency of these two statements, it is certain that both Murray and Haskell were determined to control the Constitutional Convention at the expense of Oklahoma delegates. Gordon Hines, Alfalfa Bill (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Press, 1932), 187-188.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 296.

noted, were united under one union known as Indiahoma, but friction and difference of viewpoint had forced their breakup. Differences were later patched up, however, and when the two rejoined to form one state union at Shawnee in 1906, Murray was present to aid in the reconciliation.<sup>16</sup>

W. C. Hughes was the first to openly announce his candidacy for president of the Constitutional Convention and opened his headquarters at the Royal Hotel in Guthrie. Vague on the principles in his platform, Hughes reportedly had no particular issues in mind and contented himself with saying he favored those principles uniformly held by the Democratic party throughout the state, whatever that meant. The Hughes candidacy, backed as it was by the businessmen's organizations of Oklahoma City and opposed by the rural delegates, never got off the ground.<sup>17</sup>

Murray's candidacy was inaugurated in a somewhat different manner. Haskell, in a joking air, but containing a great deal of truth, outlined the strategy. In a conversation to Murray and Robert L. Owen, Haskell remarked "a week before the Convention meets, I will take one stenographer and one wife and go to Guthrie. Then about four days later Bill Murray will drive up, looking like he had lost no sleep, and it is all over but the shouting".<sup>18</sup> Victory was not quite that easy but it was never in doubt. Murray's supporters did work to keep his name as a potential candidate before the electorate. Yet even the story of how the list of potential candidates for president to the Constitutional Convention was manipulated, each time dropping and adding names to the list, and always

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<sup>16</sup>"I attended all the Farmers' Union County meetings," Murray stated, "and the State Meetings when all of those separate Communities met to organize a State Union at Shawnee." Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>18</sup>Murray, I, 320-321. Hines, 189.

keeping Murray's name among those in the running, was quite needless to insure Murray's election. The combined farmer vote was sixty-four, twelve over the required two-thirds majority needed, and their minds were already made up. The final vote for president of the Constitutional Convention gave Murray sixty-two to twenty-six for Pete Hanraty, a labor leader and also from Indian Territory.<sup>19</sup> Victory for Murray and the Democrats of Indian Territory was complete. Oklahoma Territory Democrats were bowled over, "with a silent smoothness that flattened them out before they even saw it coming".<sup>20</sup> All offices of the Constitutional Convention, with the exception of secretary and chaplain, were filled from candidates from Indian Territory.<sup>21</sup> Some of the delegates from Oklahoma Territory "were not greatly enthused" over their exclusion from important positions in the Constitutional Convention, but were forced to make the best of it.<sup>22</sup>

#### Statehood

The first major political battle for control of the new state had been fought and won by the Democrats. A lengthy and detailed Constitution had been written providing extensive control over the industrial and financial interests and insuring protection for the farmer and laborer. As a result any future change in these provisions would now require constitutional amendment and not merely the enactment of statutory law. The

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<sup>19</sup>Murray, II, 7. C. N. Haskell states that Murray received only fifty-nine votes to Hanraty's twenty-six. Nesbitt, "Governor Haskell Tells of Two Conventions," 209.

<sup>20</sup>Peery, "The First Two Years," 428.

<sup>21</sup>Edward Everett Dale and Morris L. Wardell, A History of Oklahoma (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), 311.

<sup>22</sup>Nesbitt, "Haskell Tells of Two Conventions," 191.

Democrats had made a great stride forward in providing that the course of the new State of Oklahoma, whether it be guided by Democrat or Republican, would be a progressive one. But it is not the nature of political parties to rest on past achievements and the Democrats hoped to do as William Jennings Bryan suggested and "place the Constitution in the hands of these democratic candidates who believe in it".<sup>23</sup> It was for this purpose that the Democrats of both territories continued to work in harmony.

Shortly after the Constitutional Convention completed its work, the state Democratic central committee of the two territories was organized. It held its first meeting at the Tate Brady Hotel in Tulsa on March 26. Preparations were made here for the nominating of candidates for the coming state elections. The principal event of the meeting was Charles N. Haskell's announcing his candidacy for the office of governor. There was considerable opposition to his nomination among members of the meeting due to his past connections with railroad promotion and construction. Many felt Haskell's past relations in this respect smacked of political dishonesty. William H. Murray recalls that Haskell "became discouraged and came to me. He said: 'Murray, you better run for Governor. You can win. I fear I cannot. You could appoint me attorney for the Corporation Commission, and I can keep in the lime-light and be the second Governor'".<sup>24</sup> Murray stated that he declined the offer and persuaded Haskell to push his candidacy. Furthermore, Murray stated he promised Haskell he would ask the people of Oklahoma to vote against him (Murray was running for the house of representatives) if they could not

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<sup>23</sup>Dangerfield Manuscript.

<sup>24</sup>Murray, II, 80.

vote for Haskell and the result would be they both would be elected.

Besides announcing his candidacy for governor Haskell also secured the adoption of several resolutions at this meeting, one of which proved very important. In accordance with the resolutions all campaign funds to be expended were to be voluntarily limited and based on a graduated scale depending upon the office. It was further agreed that each side of the new state was to elect a United States Senator, and most significantly the direct primary was adopted by the Democratic party to nominate its candidates. Since no appropriations were available for this first election the Democratic party itself financed the cost of holding these primary elections. Since the direct primary had great support among the voters it greatly aided support for the Democratic party in the first state elections.<sup>25</sup>

On June 18, Democrats from the two territories met at Oklahoma City in state convention to write a platform and to establish campaign organization for the approaching state elections. Oklahoma Democrats, largely from the Oklahoma City and surrounding area, attempted to ward off control of the convention by Democrats from the eastern half of the state, but like their efforts at the Constitutional Convention, they were not successful. Haskell, who was running hard to win the Democratic nomination for governor, wished William H. Murray to be permanent chairman and had little trouble in getting him elected by an overwhelming majority.<sup>26</sup> The most trouble caused by the Oklahoma County delegates was to make a disturbance and annoy Murray during his speech.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Scales, 58.

<sup>26</sup>Angie Debo, And Still the Waters Run (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 168. Murray, II, 81.

<sup>27</sup>Murray, II, 81.

The first state elections under the new Constitution were bitterly waged. For the most part Republicans spent their time attacking the Constitution and the Democrats attacking one another. Political stakes were high and there were an abundance of political offices to fill, but politicians sprouting everywhere, "were as thick as the weeds in the empty fields" and equal to the task.<sup>28</sup> It has been written that "If the usual Oklahoma political campaign was a circus, the campaign of 1907 was a three-ringed circus."<sup>29</sup>

It was well known that the Republican administration in Washington disapproved of the Constitution. In a letter to his Attorney General on May 26, two months before the Constitutional Convention adjourned, President Roosevelt suggested the objectionable features of the Oklahoma Constitution be pointed out, and then if Oklahoma "fails to make amends the fault will be with them....It is a very serious thing to refuse to admit the State....and we must make our position clear".<sup>30</sup> William H. Murray contended that the Republicans regretted enacting the Enabling Act when the Constitutional Convention turned out to be controlled by the Democrats and wished then to undo their work by rejecting the Constitution.<sup>31</sup> According to Murray President Roosevelt instructed a visiting delegation of Republicans that "If Frantz [Governor Frank Frantz] be elected, I will admit the state. If he is defeated I shall refuse to admit the state; but defeat the Constitution if possible, which in itself would defeat Statehood."<sup>32</sup> How accurate this charge is or how far President Roosevelt

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<sup>28</sup>Debo, Prairie City, 125.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>30</sup>Morison, V, 673.

<sup>31</sup>Murray, II, 56.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 332.



would have gone in rejecting the Constitution is not certain, but it is clear the Republicans were disappointed over the Constitution and called for its defeat at the polls.<sup>33</sup>

The Republican party, following the advice of Governor Frank Frantz, did make the defeat of the Constitution the major plank in their platform. The wisdom of this political strategy, however, was highly questionable. To ask the people of Oklahoma, especially Oklahoma Territory, to vote against that which they had so long worked and hoped for was politically misguided to say the least. As William H. Murray said, Governor Frantz was running to be elected as governor of a state which, if the Constitution was defeated, would never exist. It is interesting to note, however, that the people living in the northern counties, which tended to be more heavily Republican, did vote more frequently against the Constitution, the exact percentages being 36.9 percent in the north and 26.2 percent in the south.<sup>34</sup>

Democrats relied chiefly upon the support of the farm and labor vote during the campaign. It has been pointed out previously that at the 1906 Farmers' Union and Labor Convention one hundred of the 112 delegates in attendance supported the Democratic party, a strong indication of farm and labor sentiments. Again at their state convention in 1907 the Farmers' Union and labor union groups adopted a platform that was subsequently supported by most of the Democratic candidates. Campaign leaflets were circulated among the farmers by the Democratic central committee telling "Why Every Farmer in Oklahoma Should Vote For the Ratification of

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<sup>33</sup>Edwin C. McReynolds, Oklahoma, A History of the Sooner State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 316.

<sup>34</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 292-293.

the Constitution and the Democratic Ticket."<sup>35</sup> The leaflet referred to such provisions contained in the Constitution as the initiative and referendum, primary election laws, and limitations on corporations. Playing up the Constitutional clause excluding corporate ownership of land outside of incorporated cities the leaflet ended with an eloquent reminder that "From that day [Fall of Adam and Eve] to this it has never been contemplated under God's providence that any being that was not capable of sweating and toiling under the sun should own land".<sup>36</sup> In the end Murray again kept the farmer vote in line while Pete Hanraty, an influential labor leader, corralled the labor vote for Haskell.

The Daily Oklahoman, the next day after the election, carried the following headline: "CONSTITUTION SAFE, HASKELL IS ELECTED."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Haskell was elected and the Oklahoman might have included so was virtually all the rest of the Democratic ticket. Out of 258,518 votes cast in the gubernatorial race, the Republicans polled 110,293, the Socialists 10,646, and the Democrats 137,579.<sup>38</sup> This Democratic vote of 137,579 was good for a majority of 16,640 over the combined vote of all other parties and a 27,286 vote plurality over that of the Republican vote alone. This Democratic victory gave the Democratic party thirty-nine seats out of a total of forty-four in the senate and ninety-two seats out of a total of 109 seats in the house of representatives. The respective Democratic percentages of both houses were 88.6 percent and

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<sup>35</sup>"Democratic Party Files".

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Daily Oklahoman, November 17, 1907, 1.

<sup>38</sup>Oklahoma, Red Book, II, 289-290.

84.4 percent.<sup>39</sup>

The political victories of 1906 and 1907 placed the Democratic party in a virtually unassailable position in state politics. Any chance the Republican party may have had for a quick and decisive counter stroke to stem the oncoming Democratic tide was lost. Against significant and considerable odds the Democratic party had emerged as the majority party by 1906, and any chance for a reassertion of Republican dominance was forced to await the evolution of time. As previously observed, a strong element of Republicanism remained and served as a base for a gradual strengthening of the Republican party; but the decisive Democratic ascendancy that emerged from the victories of 1906 and 1907 has never been reversed, and the dominance of the Democratic party over state politics still remains, over half a century later, undisputed.

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<sup>39</sup>Scales, 70-71.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Agrarian unrest and reform played a vital role in shaping the nature of Oklahoma politics. Oklahoma was created, settled, and developed in those years when the agrarian population of America was rebelling against their place in society and the domination of all areas of society by the corporate interests of the country. Oklahoma's location midway in the nation and the fact it was the last of the public lands of any significant agricultural value yet unclaimed attracted and opened it to farmers and urban dwellers from all sections of the Union. Oklahoma Territory became a representative cross-section of American life. And what is important for the political history of Oklahoma few other single American political commonwealths could boast of so many and varied types of political ideologies. Politically Oklahoma was, while geographically a part of the South, a composite of all sections of the Union. What these diverse human elements did have in common, however, was a desire for widespread reform. Most settlers had been participants in one agrarian reform movement or the other, and when they came to Oklahoma Territory they brought with them their desire for political action and reform.

The spirit of reform that permeated all aspects of Oklahoma life combined with the meager economic resources, inadequate education, and sectional suspicion and distrust experienced by the early pioneers to create a turbulence and turmoil that was unique in Oklahoma politics. For the most part the settlers were crude and sturdy pioneers not yet polished by social and intellectual refinement. Philosophical

abstractions or immutable laws did not exist in their political thinking or place any part of government or politics beyond the reach of reform. There were few changes that people considered to be too radical.

The great amount of popular interest commanded by politics made it only natural that particular attention would be given to the organization of political parties. Organized political activity was present in Oklahoma from the time of the first opening in 1889. Most of the minor political parties prevalent throughout the country along with the Democratic party and the Republican party set up offices in the new territory. Not even the lack of congressionally established government discouraged the establishment of local political organizations in the days before the Organic Act was passed. The contest for votes was always strenuous with the Republican party largely dominating territorial politics from 1890 to 1906. But in the end the Democratic party was able, at the more decisive moment, to assert its ascendancy.

With but few exceptions the Democratic party had most of the factors making for political strength of any fundamental and long-term nature in its favor. For a political party to be the outs has in certain respects advantages not accorded the party in power if for no other reason than eventually the mistakes of the political ins catch up with them.<sup>1</sup> And it is this condition that explains much of the Democratic successes in Oklahoma. The effects of this condition was first observed in the efforts of the political parties to build a political organization. The very fact that the Democratic party was largely excluded from controlling territorial administration through congressional political appointees forced it to be locally oriented and to build a strong grass-roots party organization.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel W. Peery expressed this view when he remarked that the "Republicans had been in power a long time and all blame for governmental ills was laid at their door". Peery, "The First Two Years," 209.

Republicans, on the other hand, distracted with dividing the political spoils and relieved of the necessity of looking to local support, remained nationally oriented and failed to cultivate a strong local following.

Much the same statement can be made in regards to the issues of home rule and the Negro question. It was only natural that the Democrats, being excluded from control of political appointments, would oppose "carpetbaggers" and call for home rule, a position which fortunately for the Democratic party happened to coincide with the feelings of a majority of Oklahomans. As for the Negro question, the Republicans by fortune of their stand in 1854 and subsequent dominance of national politics from 1860 on were placed in a position of supporting the Negro in his fight for civil equality. Oklahoma Territory in the period from 1890 to 1907, politically speaking, was neither the time or the place for espousing the Negro cause. When the spirit of racism of the period swept across Oklahoma the Democratic party was able to make the cry of white supremacy an effective political force.

Democrats were in an equally fortunate position as regards the question of statehood. It was natural that the Democratic party favored union with heavily Democratic Indian Territory since it would insure a Democratic majority in the new state. It was to the Democratic party's favor that the Republican leaders in Congress refused to create two states instead of one out of old Indian Territory thereby sacrificing the welfare of the Republican party in Oklahoma and forcing local Republicans to oppose the only form of statehood left open to the people. When Republicans insisted, as did the Democrats, upon viewing statehood from the standpoint of political expediency they ran afoul of popular sentiment. It was to the good fortune of the Democrats to have their pie and eat it too.

What is most significant for the ultimate ascendancy of the Democratic party in Oklahoma was the fact that it came to embody the principles and spirit of the agrarian reform movement sweeping over the territory. This transformation was brought about by two decisive and historic changes in the Democratic party. The first change, and the one which permitted the second change to take place, was brought about when progressive Democrats succeeded in winning control of the Democratic party from President Cleveland and his followers. The struggle within the Democratic party in Oklahoma was only a part of the larger struggle taking place within the Democratic party throughout the country. However, the success of the progressive wing of the Democratic party in Oklahoma predated the triumph of William Jennings Bryan and the free silver forces in 1896. Governor Renfrow and his group of Cleveland supporters had by 1895 lost their fight to retain control of the party. The second change was the adoption of the major portion of the People's party's platform by the Democratic party. Acceptance of Populist reform measures by the Democratic party was achieved first by partial and intermittent fusion with the People's party and then finally by outright assimilation of both the Populist principles and the People's party. This change was significant in that it precluded the necessity of the continued existence of the People's party. It rallied also all reform elements to the Democratic standard. Free silver was the bridge, so to speak, that spanned the gap between Democrats and Populists, and across this bridge eventually rolled much of the Populist platform and many of the Populists and ex-Republicans by way of the People's party. It was no coincidence that the Farmers' Union, whose membership was made up largely of former Farmers' Alliance-men, came over to the Democratic cause at two very crucial points in the history of the Democratic party: the Constitutional Convention election of 1906; and the statehood elections of 1907. The Democratic party had

accomplished what any political party must do to be a majority party in Oklahoma -- win the support of the rural population.

Victory though ever so sweet is often short-lived. And no sooner had Oklahoma Democrats exerted their mastery over the Republican party of Oklahoma Territory than they were subjected to dominance by their fellow Democrats from the eastern half of the proposed new state. It was somewhat ironical that the bride, Miss Indian Territory, so ceremoniously taken in marriage and sworn to trust her keeping to her new bridegroom and master, Mr. Oklahoma Territory, should so quickly and completely assert her dominance and control over her mate in all things political.

The failure of Oklahoma Democrats to secure an equal, if not superior, role in forging the affairs of the new state was due, however, not to any innate intellectual superiority on the part of Democrats from Indian Territory but to a split within their own ranks. Just as Oklahoma farmers and laborers distrusted financial and industrial interests residing within the Republican party so did they distrust the Bourbon elements still remaining in the Democratic party. In one respect this split among Oklahoma Democrats can be attributed to the failure of the progressive elements within the Democratic party to win a complete victory over the conservative forces within the Democratic party in Oklahoma during the party battle of the 1890's. Evidences of this split were hardly visible so long as the foe was a common enemy -- the Republican party. But when it became a matter of choosing not between Republican and Democrat but between the type of Democrat -- progressive or conservative -- the split fully emerged. After all, most rural Oklahoma Democrats reasoned, a new state was being created, and what was once two separate territories were to be merged and their separate identity lost. What mattered now was that the interest of the farmer and wage earner be safeguarded in a constitutional and statutory framework, and to this end



old political alignments were expendible.

With the advent of Oklahoma into virtually a one party state, after the sweeping Democratic victories of 1906 and 1907, this new alignment of rural versus urban within the Democratic party would continue. Frequently, the old rivalry between West and East as a hangover from territorial days emerges but the major characteristic of Oklahoma politics remains to be the shifting of rural and urban strength on the Democratic spectrum.

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