

Smallholders No More:

The Populist Movement in Gillespie County, Texas, 1846-1896

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*S.K.P.
Kinnelon, New Jersey*

“If the American Way of Life has become a religion, any deviation from it has become a sort of heresy. Regionalism in the typical American view is rather like the Turnerian frontier, a section on the move—or at least one that should keep moving, following a course that converges at not too remote a point with the American Way...If the encampment of regionalism threatens to entrench or dig in for a permanent stand, it comes to be regarded as ‘peripheral and obsolescent,’ an institutionalized social lag.”

– C. Vann Woodward, “The Search for Southern Identity”

“‘Regional’ is an outsider’s term”

– Eudora Welty, “Place in Fiction”

Introduction: The Unfamiliar Territory of Market Production

Within the span of one lifetime, Gillespie County's subsistence farmers found themselves in the unfamiliar territory of market production. A decade before the Civil War, farmers in Gillespie County, Texas kept livestock and grew diverse foodstuffs to feed themselves. Three decades later, they raised cotton that was manufactured into clothing in New England and kept cattle that were butchered and packed in Chicago. Their road to capitalist agriculture was not direct, it required Gillespie farmers to navigate new trails blazed by the Civil War and the postbellum order. Nor was their destination necessarily prosperous. The social relations of capitalist agriculture stripped small farmers of their land, leaving them with only their labor power. In fact, capitalist agriculture changed Gillespie farmers' routines so radically that they organized the Farmers Alliance, to attempt to pave a path that might ensure a future for small farmers.

The Gillespie County Farmers Alliance proposed to reorganize small farmers' routines in response to a crisis of international origins. Postwar poverty, new credit arrangements, and the expansion of railroads were the local directors of an ongoing international drama. Gillespie farmers entered the market, just as English peasants had a century before them and farmers in the so-called Green Revolution would in the century to come.¹ Postbellum Gillespie farmers confronted declining prices, the capitalist reorganization of livestock raising, indebtedness to merchants, and heightened inequality in the countryside. All of which coalesced to strip farmers of their land and force them to sell their labor to meet their basic needs. Historians of Texas Populism have argued that either economic or social factors motivated local organization.² The

¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (New York, New York; New American Library, 1975), xvii-xxii, 189-211.

² Ralph A. Smith, "Macuneism, or the Farmers of Texas in Business" *The Journal of Southern History* 13 no. 2 (May, 1947), pp. 220-244; James Turner, "Understanding the Populists" *The Journal of American History* 67 no. 2 (September, 1980), pp 354-373. In his essay on "Macune-ism," Smith argues

story of Gillespie County farmers' entrance to the market reveals that social and economic motivations were not independent of one another, but were wrapped up in the all-encompassing transition to capitalist agriculture.³

However, while Gillespie farmers organized in the Farmers Alliance, they did not pursue third-party politics like other Populists.⁴ Gillespie farmers supported the Alliance in greater numbers than they voted for the People's Party. In the Gillespie Alliance, farmers established a cooperative store to wean them off of dependence on merchants, a charitable fund to protect their vulnerability to unforeseen shocks, and local lodges to learn of common problems felt by smallholders. But farmers in Gillespie did not charge into politics when the Alliance failed. Gillespie farmers had faced a different road to capitalist agriculture than did farmers in the other non-plantation areas of the South. After the war, its farmers raised both livestock and cotton for market production as opposed to only cash crops.⁵ Their particular brand of changing social relations precluded them from an interest in financial reform—which cotton farmers

that economics motivated local Alliances by using State Alliance records and a detailed analysis of Texas Alliance programs. Conversely, Turner uses statistical comparisons of Democratic and Populist counties to argue that Populists were more socially isolated.

³ Barbara J. Fields, "The Advent of Capitalist Agriculture: The New South in a Bourgeois World," in Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma, *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy* (College Station, Texas; Texas A&M University Press, 1985), 75. Barbara Fields succinctly explains "the essence of capitalist social relations in agriculture." She writes, "Those who work the land are not the property of the landowner, like chattel slaves, nor are they compelled by law to work for the landowner, like serfs of villeins. Instead they are the owners of their own persons, which they may not sell, and of their ability to work (their labor power), which they may sell in exchange for the necessities of life. At the same time, those who work the land do not receive the necessities of life from their masters (as slaves often did), nor do they independently own land, tools, and other means for labor and subsistence (as free peasants and even most serfs did). For this reason they not only *may* sell their labor power—because they own it and it is therefore theirs to sell; but they *must* sell their labor power—because they own nothing else, and therefore can acquire the necessities of life only by working for a wage."

⁴ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, New York; Oxford University Press, 1976), vii-xxiii. Lawrence Goodwyn proposes that Populism had a "movement culture" that culminated in farmers' achieving political consciousness of agrarian interests. He would not call Gillespie's farmers Populists because they did not support the People's Party.

⁵ Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983). Steven Hahn's pioneering study of the Georgia Upcountry has expanded historians' understanding of the changes that some yeomen faced after the Civil War. Historians need to explore the changes to other Southern non-plantation areas such as the Texas Hill Country, the Texas Cross Timbers, and Appalachia.

mistakenly pursued as a solution to all of their ills. The Populist movement failed in Gillespie County because it could not convince livestock raisers and diversified farmers that it preserved smallholding.

The burden of supporting the Civil War and the postwar industrial order transformed Gillespie County's subsistence economy towards the market production of livestock and cotton. Market production was not an abstraction for farmers, it meant reorganizing their routines after the Civil War. After they emigrated from Germany to Central Texas, Gillespie farmers raised diversified crops, let livestock roam on the open-range, and spread out into the countryside. But after the war they faced the new routines of market production: increased indebtedness, the fencing-in of livestock, and heightened disparities between town and countryside. Gillespie farmers negotiated these changes through informal fence-cutting raids and agrarian organizations like the Grange. In the Grange movement, Texas farmers learned to assemble in lodges and began experimenting with cooperative economics. But the more centralized Farmers Alliance overtook the Grange by the 1880s; employing county lodges, cooperative selling, and the rural press. At the 1886 Grand State Alliance conference in Cleburne, Alliance lecturers released a set of seventeen demands that amounted to a moral defense of smallholders from capitalist social relations. After the Cleburne Demands, Gillespie farmers organized an Alliance to maintain small farming.

Gillespie farmers developed cooperative routines in the Alliance in an attempt to prevent the loss of their lands. Through the Alliance, Gillespie farmers established a cooperative store, a cotton yard, and a state cotton exchange that attempted to subvert the relationships that kept them in debt. They erected their own system of lodges and travelling lecturers to learn of comparable conditions and political problems elsewhere. They hoped that by creating a charitable fund for hard times, educating members about the state of agriculture, and by selling

cotton in bulk they might be able to preserve their position as independent ‘producers.’ But expensive programs and dues for lodges strained cash-poor farmers that operated in a credit economy. They were unable to organize to sustain such an expensive infrastructure, unlike the merchants and textile factories that wielded superior organization. They failed to effect much change to their station.

After the cooperative programs failed, the People’s Party’s pursuit of financial reform ended the movement in Gillespie County. Breaking with the Democratic Party to form the People’s Party required farmers to commit to the sub-treasury plan—a solution dear to Southern cotton farmers. Cotton farmers, for whom the threat of tenancy manifested in their indebtedness to merchants, mistakenly hailed financial reform as a solution to all of their ills. But indebtedness to merchants was not the greatest fear of Gillespie’s livestock raisers; they were not convinced that financial reform would maintain their holdings. The rise of the People’s Party attracted few supporters in Gillespie but succeeded in replacing the abandoned Alliance. Members of the People’s Party organized Populist Clubs instead of attending Alliance lodges. But Populist Clubs were disorganized and struggled to attract new members. While the People’s Party won victories in other rural areas, it ran poorly in Gillespie County. The collapse of the Gillespie Alliance left farmers with no way to recuperate the movement after the national Party floundered in 1896.

Through the Gillespie County Minute Book and the official Populist newspaper, the *Southern Mercury*, historians can understand the ‘unusual’ Populist movement of Gillespie County.⁶ The Gillespie Minute Book contains a consistent record of the activity of the county Farmers Alliance during the most active years of the movement (1886-1896). Entries in the *Southern Mercury* allow historians to compare the Gillespie minutes with the activities of other

⁶ Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Austin, Texas.

Alliances across the country. The sources reveal that farmers organized Alliance lodges, newspapers, and stores for more than improved business methods, as some historians have argued.⁷ Gillespie farmers' interest in the Alliance but disinterest in the People's Party ought to emphasize the all-encompassing transformation of agricultural routines that preceded the movement.⁸ Local histories and data from national censuses depict the triumph of capitalist agriculture in Gillespie County. Gillespie small farmers sought to reverse the threat of tenancy through the avenues in which they faced it, rather than seek solutions made for and by cotton farmers.⁹

My essay is not a case study of local organization in the Populist movement; I am not seeking to understand how all county alliances were organized.¹⁰ If I did, I would run the risk of constructing a national movement in the model of Gillespie County's local peculiarities.¹¹ I must acknowledge that other county Alliances were much larger, moved their members into politics more effectively, and had different compositions of farmers. I must also acknowledge, as Steven Hahn has shown, that local peculiarities have national and international genealogies which can explain the presence of widespread movements.¹² Local studies of the Farmers Alliance should

⁷ Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York, New York; Oxford University Press, 2007), 45-67. Charles Postel has argued that improvements to agricultural and business techniques attracted farmers to the Alliance's network of lodges and stores. He argues that Populists were "modernizers" in nineteenth-century agriculture.

⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 175-204. I am indebted to Woodward's depiction of the upheavals that beset the postbellum countryside.

⁹ There is no doubt that access to local records would help to clarify references and would produce a more detailed study of Gillespie's transformation. If I had the resources, I would have addressed this shortcoming.

¹⁰ James Beeby, ed, *Populism in the South Revisited: New Interpretation and Departures* (Jackson, Mississippi; University Press of Mississippi, 2012), ix-x. In the Introduction to this set of speculative essays, James Beeby calls for historians to move beyond the case studies that he considers "common." Although not in the way that he meant it, I am calling for the same. Local studies of Populism ought to challenge national historians rather than confirming their analysis. Case studies are not needed.

¹¹ For a sectional story of the Populist movement see: Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 175-290.

¹² Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 137-169. Hahn reproduces the abstractions of international markets and regional legislation in the changing relationships between cotton farmers and furnishing merchants, land speculators, and townspeople.

investigate how and where the Alliance organized within a place, incorporating a detailed study of its history and institutions.¹³

The promise of independence that motivated Gillespie's original settlers to relocate across the globe was not the reality that their descendants faced in 1896. Running from the rising tide of capitalist development, which reached Northern Europe before it arrived in Central Texas, only kept them from drowning for so long. In fact, by the time they had established themselves in the Texas Hill Country, Gillespie farmers found it outside of their collective power to resist the forces of international markets. Capitalist agriculture remade their routines and transformed their world.

¹³ This judgement about place in history has been informed by many sources. Southern historians C. Vann Woodward and Barbara Fields have written fantastic essays about the subject. See: C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity" in C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 3-25; Barbara J. Fields, "Displacement and Southern History" *The Journal of Southern History* 82 no. 1 (February 2016), pp. 7-26. For literary presentations see: William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York, New York; Modern Library Edition, 1955); Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York, New York; Harper & Row, 1970).

Part One: The Roots of the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance, 1846-1886

Emerging from the Civil War, Gillespie County's small farmers hurtled towards a crisis. The German emigrants that arrived in the Texas hills in 1846 had farmed for subsistence. But the encumbrance of war and the industrial postwar order directed them towards market production. Although Gillespie farmers did not completely embrace cash crops, as other former yeomen did, they nonetheless transitioned to a variant of capitalist agriculture that corresponded to their local geography and history. Postbellum Gillespie farmers faced new routines around increased indebtedness to merchants, the reorganization of livestock raising, and heightened disparities between town and countryside. The collective effort of these new routines threatened to reduce landholding farmers to tenancy; stripping them of their land and leaving them only to sell their labor. Attempting to negotiate these changes in everyday life, Gillespie farmers participated in informal fence-cutting wars, organized to combat declining prices in the Grange movement, and eventually sought out the Farmers Alliance. Gillespie farmers understood that if they wanted smallholding to continue in capitalist agriculture, their lives had to change.

In the early 19th century, artisans and laborers along the Rhine River in Prussia sought emigration as a solution to rural overpopulation. In the kingdoms of Nassau, Baden, Brunswick, Bavaria, Saxony, Pomerania, and Prussia, the surplus of labor in the countryside threatened famine.¹⁴ In many of those same kingdoms, post-Napoleonic capitalist development sought to coerce skilled artisans to work as unskilled labor in growing cities.¹⁵ Many Germans began to

¹⁴ Sarah Sam Gray, "The German-American Community of Fredericksburg, Texas and Its Assimilation," The University of Texas, Austin, (M.A. Thesis, 1929), 16.

¹⁵ Rudolph Leopold Biesele, *The History of German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861* (Austin, Texas: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1930), 2-4; Robert Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas...The First Fifty Years* (Fredericksburg, Texas: Fredericksburg Publishing Company, 1971), 9.

seek emigration as a solution that would allow them to continue their mainly rural customs. In the early 1830s, nobles began to meet and form emigration societies to relocate their peasant class.¹⁶ On April 20, 1842, one such emigration society, called the Adelsverein, was formed in Biebrich ““for the purpose of purchasing land in the free state of Texas.””¹⁷ Single men and whole families purchased tickets for 300 and 600 florins in exchange for transportation and 320 and 640 acre plots, respectively.¹⁸

Both Texas’ need for settlers and spurious advertising about available land encouraged the Adelsverein to settle its emigrants in Texas. According to one historian of German emigration, settlers were attracted to Texas by a popular book written by J. V. Hecke in 1821. Hecke wrote about his travels in Texas and he described the land as open and sparsely populated—which Comanche, Tonkawa, and Kiowa inhabitants would have disagreed with. Influenced by Hecke, emigration societies saw Texas as an ideal location, frequently comparing its climate to that of Italy.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the recently independent Republic of Texas was seeking to accelerate immigration and support its fast dwindling Treasury. In February 1842, Texas’ Congress passed a law allowing the President to sell land grants as colonies.²⁰ On June 24, 1844, the Adelsverein purchased the Fisher-Miller Grant in central Texas for 9,000 dollars.²¹ The first German emigrants arrived in Galveston aboard the *Johann Detthard*, the *Herschel*, and the *Ferdinand* in November and December.²² Setting up encampments along the way to the Fisher-Miller grant, they first settled at New Braunfels in March 1845. But facing a shortage of supplies by the following year, J. O. Meusebach led 120 emigrants eighty miles northwest to

¹⁶ Biesele, *The History of German Settlements*, 16-17.

¹⁷ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 16-20.

¹⁸ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 14-16.

¹⁹ Don H. Biggers, *German Pioneers in Texas*, Gillespie County (Fredericksburg, Texas: Fredericksburg Publishing Company, 1925), 5-8.

²⁰ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²² John R. Crouch, ed., *Pioneers in God's Hills* (Austin, Texas: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1960), 240.

newly purchased land along the Pedernales and Llano rivers. They named the settlement Fredericksburg in honor of Prince Frederick of Prussia.²³



These are the current borders of Gillespie County which were finalized in 1883.
This map was made by Eric Markus in February 2020.

Seeking protection from the Comanches, colonists developed Fredericksburg separately from their outlying farmland. Comanches had historic issues with foreign settlers. In the 1780s, they had encountered Spanish colonists at San Saba, and had forced the Spanish back into Mexico.²⁴ When the Germans arrived at Fredericksburg on May 8, 1846, Adelsverein Commissioner General Meusebach allotted adjacent plots for settlers to build their homes. He then set aside one hundred acre plots outside of town for colonists to raise their produce.²⁵ Colonists built their homes together and plowed their fields separately, concentrating their resources on Fredericksburg. Near town this division of settlement and farmland would persist

²³ Biggers, *German Pioneers*, 28-34.

²⁴ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 37.

²⁵ Sarah Kay Curtis, "A History of Gillespie County, Texas, 1846-1900," University of Texas, Austin (M.A. Thesis, 1943), 31-32.

into the twentieth century, with nearby farmers retaining “Sunday homes” for weekend visits to the markets, merchants, and churches.²⁶ However, on March 2, 1847, Meusebach and the Comanche chiefs successfully brokered peace, opening the way to colonists’ expansion into the countryside.²⁷ During the cholera outbreak in 1848, the Comanches and residents of Fredericksburg harvested crops together and shared supplies.²⁸

After Meusebach signed the treaty, families began to venture forth from Fredericksburg, establishing farms along the county’s rivers and creeks. Gillespie historian Sarah Kay Curtis writes that the earliest farmers settled along “Live Oak, North Grape, Crab Apple, and Beaver Creeks and along the Pedernales [River] and at Cherry Spring.”²⁹ New rural communities still complained of “disturbances by the Indians,” but lacked the protection of the Adelsverein in Fredericksburg.³⁰ But after 1847, even residents of Fredericksburg could not depend on the Adelsverein. By the end of the year, Gillespie settlers had learned that the Adelsverein’s founders had grossly mishandled finances. The society abruptly declared bankruptcy. The state of Texas and the United States government filled the void left by the collapse of the Adelsverein. The Texas Legislature reissued the original deed of 10,000 acres, distributing to farmers that had already settled and those that were yet to arrive.³¹ Looking to secure its newest state, the United States’ federal government commissioned Fort Martin Scott to clear Native Americans from Gillespie County. Residents of Fredericksburg provided the supplies and the labor that built the Fort, acquiring an influx of new wealth.³² In February 1848, Texas cut the borders of Gillespie County from adjacent Travis and Bexar Counties.³³

²⁶ Curtis, “A History of Gillespie County,” 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹ Gray, “The German-American Community,” 20, 51.

³⁰ Curtis, “A History of Gillespie County,” 44.

³¹ Biggers, *German Pioneers in Texas*, 35-39.

³² Biggers, *German Pioneers in Texas*, 92; Ella Amanda Gold, “The History of Education in Gillespie County,” University of Texas, Austin (M.A. Thesis, 1945), 9.

³³ Curtis, “A History of Gillespie County,” 37-39.

Gillespie's earliest farmers mainly raised livestock. Located on the Edwards' Plateau, Gillespie's soil was rich with deposits of limestone that made clearing land for farming more difficult than preparing it for grazing.³⁴ In 1850, Gillespie had only 2,217 acres of improved farmland but nearly four times that number in unimproved acres. In the decade leading up to the Civil War, the amount of unimproved farmland rose to seven and half times the amount of improved farmland.³⁵ Relative increases in livestock confirm that farmers used this unimproved land for grazing livestock. In the 1850s, the number of hogs grew substantially but herds of beef cattle and sheep skyrocketed.³⁶

But Gillespie's antebellum livestock raisers were not ranchers, who raised animals to be sold elsewhere. Instead, they let their cattle and sheep fend for themselves on the open range.³⁷ Fencing in livestock was uncommon in the antebellum South.³⁸ Animals grazed on lands across the county regardless of who owned the grass that they ate. Farmers in Gillespie followed the open-range, a system that benefitted small landholders and landless tenants that used, ate or sold their livestock locally. Instead of lining their property with expensive wooden enclosures, farmers fenced-in their crops to protect them from grazing animals.³⁹ There were a few ranches in Gillespie County. But Sarah Kay Curtis is able to account for only eight that existed before

³⁴ Terry G. Jordan, John L. Bean, and William M. Holmes, *Texas: A Geography* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), 12, 159-160, 181.

³⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: R. Armstrong, 1853), 514; United States Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 140-141. In 1850, Gillespie County reported 2,217 acres of improved farmland and 8,407 acres of unimproved farmland. In 1860, Gillespie reported 6,645 acres of improved farmland and 49,026 acres of unimproved farmland.

³⁶ United States Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 514, 516; United States Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census*, vol. 2, 140-141. Between 1850 and 1860, the number of non-dairy cattle rose by 4,605%, the number of hogs rose by 1,275%, and the number of sheep rose by 5,744%.

³⁷ Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 83-84.

³⁸ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 58-63, 245-252.

³⁹ Lewis Cecil Gray and Esther Katherine Thompson, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, vol. 2 (New York, New York: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1941), p.842-845; Shawn Everett Kantor and J. Morgan Kousser, "Common Sense or Commonwealth? The Fence Law and Institutional Change in the Postbellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 2 (May 1993), 218-227. This section of Kantor's and Kousser's essay provides a good list of the different groups that had an interest in stock law/fence law debates.

1900.⁴⁰ The widespread presence of the open range suggests that Gillespie farmers believed in a common right for farmers to harness the means of subsistence in unimproved land across the county. Unimproved land was left open as a common resource.⁴¹ Although, new roads to Austin, El Paso, and Kansas did open up limited access to livestock markets in the 1850s.⁴² By 1860, farmers in Gillespie had begun to shear wool and sell cattle as a source of extra income.⁴³ Regardless of occasional market activity, Gillespie farmers were subsistence farmers.

Gillespie farmers' focus on livestock did not preclude them from agriculture, they also grew foodstuffs for themselves. Antebellum Gillespie farmers raised corn, wheat, and potatoes.⁴⁴ In their homes they churned thousands of pounds of butter and made hundreds of pounds of cheese.⁴⁵ But Gillespie County's farmers raised and grew for subsistence, not for market production. They diversified crops on their small farms. Although it neighbored East Texas's plantation belt, Gillespie County was home to only thirty-three slaves in 1860.⁴⁶ Gillespie County was home to no large plantations and harbored no planter class.⁴⁷ However, Eugene Genovese has importantly acknowledged that Southern yeomen were buttressed by slavery.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 83; Biggers, *German Pioneers*, 161-168.

⁴¹ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 267; Steven Hahn, "A Response: Common Cents or Historical Sense?," *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 2 (May 1993): pp. 243-258. Hahn's argument has been criticized by Shawn Everett Kantor and J. Morgan Kousser and more will be said about these debates later.

⁴² Curtis, "A History of Gillespie County," 84.

⁴³ US Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census*, vol. 2, 140-141. In 1860, Gillespie sheep herders sheared 5,136 pounds of wool for domestic production and markets.

⁴⁴ US Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 514. In 1850, Gillespie farmers grew 15,240 bushels of corn, 80 bushels of wheat, and 729 bushels of potatoes.

⁴⁵ US Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 516-518. In 1850, Gillespie farmers churned 4,880 pounds of butter and made 260 pounds of cheese.

⁴⁶ US Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 503; United States Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 476-477, 478-479.

⁴⁷ US Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 517. I do not mean to suggest that there was no inequality between landholders, but simply that there were no slave-owning single-staple planters in Gillespie County. For a more nuanced description of the planter class see: Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, New York; Vintage Books, 1972), 3-48.

⁴⁸ Eugene D. Genovese, "Yeomen Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy" *Agricultural History* 49 no. 2 (April, 1975), 331-342.

As American settlers moved further westward and more Germans arrived in the wake of the Revolution of 1848, Gillespie County's white population increased from 1,235 to 2,703. Subsistence agriculture accommodated this population growth.⁴⁹ By 1860, Gillespie farmers had dropped corn production only slightly, but had dramatically expanded the amount of wheat they grew. In the same year, Gillespie farmers grew only ten bales of cotton, for local manufacture or extra income.⁵⁰



This is a map of Gillespie County that shows the town of Fredericksburg and early hamlets that developed along its waterways. Towns are marked with red icons, and hamlets are marked with blue icons. This map was made by Eric Markus in February 2020.

By the Civil War, Gillespie County's religious and economic development reflected the early disparities between Fredericksburg and the countryside. The county seat remained the center of commercial and religious life. By the summer of 1847, at least fifteen shops had opened

⁴⁹ US Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 503; US Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census*, vol. 1, 476-477.

⁵⁰ US Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census*, vol. 1, 516; US Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census*, vol. 2, 140-141. In 1860, Gillespie farmers grew 10,237 bushels of corn and 18,136 bushels of wheat.

in Fredericksburg.⁵¹ Bringing their trades from Germany, residents worked as furniture-makers, cabinet-makers, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tanners, saddle-makers, saw mill owners, flour mill owners, and candle and soap makers.⁵² Outlying farmers came to Fredericksburg to purchase new supplies and tools. They also came for religious services. By 1852, four Christian congregations—Catholic, Lutheran, Evangelical-Protestant, and Methodist—had been organized in Fredericksburg. Only one resided outside of town: a small Lutheran church to the north in Cherry Spring.⁵³ Close-by farmers returned to their Sunday homes or took day trips to participate in services.⁵⁴ As farmers settled further from Fredericksburg, rural residents had to hold services in their homes. In Harper, residents of different denominations shared the local schoolhouse.⁵⁵

Gillespie County's education system also reflected the more substantial resources available in Fredericksburg. Most of Gillespie's settlers were still crowded around or even lived in town. The concentration of settlement made Fredericksburg the center of educational life in the county. The first school in Gillespie County was established in Fredericksburg in 1846. John Leyendecker held semi-regular hours as its first teacher. In 1852, Heinrich Ochs immigrated from Germany to begin as the first full-time teacher at the Fredericksburg school. In the 1850s, between sixty and seventy students were enrolled, with each paying a tuition of one dollar per quarter.⁵⁶ In 1854, Gillespie County established five school districts in order to begin receiving state aid. The schools also began to teach classes in English, setting aside German as a separate subject.⁵⁷ In 1854, Fredericksburg's district received more aid than that spent on all of the other

⁵¹ Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 8.

⁵² Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 71-72.

⁵³ Biggers, *German Pioneers*, 187-214; Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 110-121.

⁵⁴ Biggers, *German Pioneers*, 189; Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 95.

⁵⁵ Biggers, *German Pioneers*, 208; Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 64; Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 112.

⁵⁶ Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 22-23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

districts combined. By 1856, both a Catholic and a Lutheran school had opened in the town as well.⁵⁸

In the surrounding countryside, schools and teachers were scarce. In Willow City and Harper, larger hamlets, only small one-room schoolhouses had been established by the start of the Civil War. These small schoolhouses employed few teachers and enrolled only ten to fifteen students at a time. Parents paid monthly tuition to keep the schools open; sometimes they only stayed open for three months of the year.⁵⁹ Smaller hamlets such as Crabapple and Rheingold were not able to establish schools. Live Oak Creek established a small school in 1854 using money given to its school district by the state. For a brief time in Meusebach Creek, parents paid Heinrich Ochs to travel to students' homes for a few days of light instruction. Other hamlets in Gillespie collected subscriptions and waited for resources to become available.⁶⁰ For the children of farmers especially, education meant much more than literacy rates. Education was an indicator of class mobility and the potential to escape poverty.

Adults in Fredericksburg also organized educational associations for themselves, especially as their antislavery views put them at odds with the much of Texas and the South. When national debates about the expansion of slavery erupted in the 1850s, most residents of Gillespie County opposed the pro-slavery views of the planters in East Texas. Some German emigrants were more sympathetic to slavery, mainly those in southwest Texas in closer proximity to plantations.⁶¹ In the 1850s, Gillespie County residents founded two societies, the

⁵⁸ Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 26. In 1854, Fredericksburg's district received 151 percent more state aid than the next highest district. In fact, Fredericksburg received 15 percent more aid than that spent on every district combined.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64, 66, 71,74.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 81, 87, 91-92, 96.

⁶¹ Gray, "The German-American Community," 65-69. There is little scholarship that attempts to explain the German-Texan opposition to slavery. More research and writing about the topic might be useful in order to understand why backcountry farmers in the South both opposed and supported pro-slavery causes. It would also round out a better understanding about ideologies about labor amongst German emigrants.

Reform Club and the Society for Good Fellowship and the Promotion of General Information. Gillespie residents used these societies to disseminate anti-slavery propaganda and organize debates amongst themselves. In 1854, a few Gillespie farmers attended a convention hosted by Der freie Verein (“the Free Society”) in San Antonio, where the organization declared slavery to be “a monstrous social wrong that should be abolished.”⁶² It is unclear if most Gillespie residents shared this view about abolition.

When Texas seceded from the Union on February 1, 1861, Gillespie residents faced the distrust of a new government and old neighbors. When the state held a referendum, participants in Gillespie County voted against secession by 400 to 17.⁶³ That spring, representatives of the Confederate States of America travelled to Gillespie to coerce residents to pledge allegiance. Most swore loyalty, but others feared for their lives and ran to the nearby mountains.⁶⁴ Their fears were not unwarranted. During the course of the war, four farmers near South Grape were lynched for their unionist views. In 1864, Live Oak school teacher Louis Schuetze, an outspoken critic of the Confederacy, was abducted and hanged on the outskirts of Fredericksburg.⁶⁵ In 1862, when residents of Gillespie and surrounding counties formed the Union Loyal League to defend their neutral territory, the Confederate government ordered them to disband and swear loyalty. Preferring to avoid violence, Major Fritz Tegener dissolved the militia and fled to Mexico with a group of 61 men to avoid signing an oath. Eight days later, Confederate irregular James M. Duff and his militia intercepted the group and killed thirty-five of them as they attempted to cross the Nueces River.⁶⁶

⁶² Curtis, “The History of Gillespie County,” 53-55.

⁶³ Martin Donell Kohout, *Handbook of Texas Online*, “GILLESPIE COUNTY,” accessed January 04, 2020, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcg04>.

⁶⁴ Curtis, “The History of Gillespie County,” 55-56.

⁶⁵ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 49-50; Crouch, *Pioneers in God’s Hills*, 187-188.

⁶⁶ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 50; Biggers, *German Pioneers*, 57-60; Curtis, “The History of Gillespie County,” 57-60.

Despite wartime atrocities, Gillespie County avoided the destruction that characterized the Civil War experience in other Southern states. During the war, Gillespie County remained untouched by battle and Union raids. Unlike Georgia and South Carolina, Gillespie's fields were not burned, its livestock was not confiscated, and its property was not destroyed.⁶⁷ Gillespie's men also avoided the widespread conscription that characterized wartime life in the backcountry, most importantly by stealing valuable labor.⁶⁸ By 1862, almost 300 men in Gillespie County had volunteered for service in home defense units, which allowed them to work their farms. By March of the same year, only fifty-four men had enlisted in the Confederate army.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, Gillespie farmers incurred serious losses supporting the Civil War. Census data between 1860 and 1870 reveals that the number of cattle declined by one fifth and that herds of sheep and hogs were more than halved. The total value of livestock (including horses, oxen, dairy cows, and mules) declined from \$313,990 in 1860 to \$140,475 in 1870. Presumably, many of these animals were consumed by residents of Gillespie or collected for consumption by the army. Although, it is unclear if conscription officers were active near Gillespie County. Meanwhile, despite an increase of only 233 improved acres, the amount of foodstuffs grown in Gillespie County increased substantially to support the war effort and the devastated section that emerged. In the decade during and after the war, Gillespie farmers began to raise large amounts of rye and oats. The number of bushels of corn surged to more than eight times their 1860 numbers. Only the amount of wheat grown decreased during this period, falling slightly

⁶⁷ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 137-152.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 121-130; Stephanie McCurry *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Boston, Massachusetts; Harvard University Press, 2010), 133-177.

⁶⁹ Martin Donell Kohout, *Handbook of Texas Online*, "GILLESPIE COUNTY," accessed January 04, 2020, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcg04>.

from 18,136 bushels to 15,588 bushels. Wartime altered local agriculture, and Gillespie farmers emerged from the Civil War needing to reconstruct their farms.⁷⁰

But postwar violence and political jockeying over the redefinition of plantation labor did not significantly alter Gillespie's economy. Reconstruction did not occur in Gillespie in the ways that it did the South Carolina Sea Islands or the Mississippi Valley, principally because of the absence of plantations.⁷¹ Although, Sarah Sam Gray has noted that many Gillespie residents supported the Republican Party during Reconstruction. But support for the occupying force did not appear to have earned them the ill will of their Democratic neighbors.⁷² It is also unclear whether or not Gillespie's thirty-three slaves remained in the county after emancipation. The census shows that the number of Afro-Americans in Gillespie did increase to 77 in 1870.⁷³ But in 1896, Fredericksburg's Robert Penniger concluded that "little progress is noticeable" when considering "[w]hether the Negroes have gained much through their freedom."⁷⁴

Instead, the new Democratic leadership proposed a more dramatic change to Gillespie farming. In 1872, Democrat Richard Coke won Texas' gubernatorial election, leading a takeover of the statehouse. During the next four years, Democrats across the South returned to political offices, "redeeming" their states through violent voter suppression and political bargaining.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ US Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census*, vol. 2, 140-141; United States Census Office, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*, vol. 3 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 254-255; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, vol. 2, 817. Census data between 1860 and 1870 shows declines in the number of sheep, cattle, and hogs by 56 percent, 17 percent, and 63 percent. In the same period, corn production surged from 10,237 bushels to 82,135 bushels. Oat production jumped from 0 bushels to 841 bushels. In 1870, Gillespie farmers increased their rye production from 20 bushels to 4,520 bushels. One reason for the decline in wheat production might be the "superior economic advantages" that Agricultural historian Lewis Gray has attributed to corn growing.

⁷¹ Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction 1863-1877* (New York, New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 24-27, 71-74.

⁷² Gray, "The German-American Community," 70.

⁷³ Census Office, *Ninth Census*, vol. 3, 254-255.

⁷⁴ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 50.

⁷⁵ C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), 40-51; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 1-22.

The Redeemers, some former planters and others burgeoning industrialists, proposed a future that pleased business-minded Republicans in the North.⁷⁶ They imagined a “New South” rooted in expanding the cotton kingdom and establishing an industrial base.⁷⁷ New South Governors, Senators, and Congressmen invited northern railroads, banks, and factories to their home states with enticing legislation.⁷⁸ In 1876, amidst an electoral dispute, Redeemers compromised with moderate Republicans to trade the Presidency for political support of their agenda.⁷⁹

Both postwar poverty and the industrial vision of the Redeemers steered Gillespie County, and other Southern non-plantation areas, towards capitalist agriculture.⁸⁰ Looking to recover wartime losses, Gillespie farmers began to raise livestock and cotton for profit rather than farming for subsistence. At the same time, Redeemers extended railroads into the backcountry and reorganized the Southern financial system through cross-roads merchants.⁸¹ Furnishing merchants and railroads stimulated the expansion of market production into non-plantation areas. Southern farmers bought cotton seeds and supplies from merchants and shipped their cotton to ports on railroads. But the subsequent increase to the supply of cotton lowered international prices, making it difficult for already indebted farmers to meet their merchant’s bills. Eventually, declining prices and chronic indebtedness led to confiscation of

⁷⁶ Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction*, 55-72; James C. Cobb, “Beyond Planters and Industrialists: A New Perspective on the New South,” *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (February 1988): pp. 45-68.

⁷⁷ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 142-234; C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York, New York; Oxford University Press, 1938), 113-128.

⁷⁸ Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction*, 107-160; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 1-22.

⁷⁹ Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction*, 201-234. Woodward argues that it is more important to understand that the Compromise of 1876 heralded a new national political coalition (between Moderate Republicans and Redeemers) than to understand the Compromise as trading the Presidency for an end to military occupation of the South. In fact, Woodward would say that both of these goals had already been accomplished, and that the Compromise signified solely the reformation of national politics.

⁸⁰ Stephen A. West, “‘A General Remodeling of Everything’: Economy and Race in the Post-Emancipation South,” in Thomas J Brown, ed., *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26-30.

⁸¹ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 180-182.

their lands.⁸² Steven Hahn has described how indebtedness, declining prices, and single staple production in the Georgia Upcountry remolded the yeomen society into a capitalist one. In *The Roots of Southern Populism*, capitalist agriculture's threat to smallholding farmers encouraged former yeomen to organize. In Gillespie County, where cotton production did increase but did not dominate as in Georgia, the market production of livestock and cotton, attempts to implement capitalist livestock raising traditions, and heightened disparity between Fredericksburg and the countryside likewise threatened small farming.

Despite their comparatively low output, Gillespie farmers did begin cultivating cotton for the market in an attempt to recover from Civil War losses. In antebellum non-plantation areas, farmers grew only small amounts of cotton for supplementary income. But the need to recover from the Civil War encouraged farmers to win back their money using the market. The market production of cotton took hold in Gillespie County. In the 1870s and 1880s, Gillespie farmers planted thousands of acres of cotton and yielded thousands of bales every fall. In the same decades, the number of improved acres increased twenty-three fold suggesting further investment in agriculture.⁸³ But Gillespie farmers raised much less cotton than farmers in East Texas plantation areas or even Northern Texas backcountry. The lack of connection to a major railroad and the county's limestone-rich soil explain Gillespie's 'lag' behind other non-plantation areas. Nonetheless, the collective effort of farmers entering the cotton market inaugurated a three-decade-long period of declining prices.⁸⁴

⁸² Fields, "The Advent of Capitalist Agriculture," 81-83, 85-89.

⁸³ Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States*, vol. 3, 242; United States Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, vol. 10 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 396. In 1880, Gillespie farmers planted cotton in 4,082 of their 21, 171 improved acres—yielding 767 bales. In 1890, the number of acres planted rose to 7,633 and the total bales collected reached 4,684. In the same period the number of improved acres jumped to 159,874 acres, suggesting an increased investment in agriculture.

⁸⁴ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 185.

New relationships with furnishing merchants stimulated Gillespie farmers' cotton production. The financial shock of emancipation shattered antebellum credit lines that depended on slaves on collateral. Postwar legislation redirected available credit through a system of local merchants that extended across the South.⁸⁵ Furnishing merchants contracted with farmers and tenants through the crop lien: in which farmers borrowed supplies and seeds during the winter, spring, and summer and settled their debts with harvested crops at the end of the year.⁸⁶ In hamlets around Gillespie County, cross-roads merchants established themselves as the local financiers of cotton production. In Harper, merchants had established a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a cotton gin by the 1880s. In Willow City, Gene Harrison opened a general store around the same time, supplementing Bill Ricks' grist mill. By 1915, the business section of Willow City housed three competing merchants and a cotton gin. In the smaller hamlet of Rheingold, the Gold family owned both the general store and the cotton gin.⁸⁷

The market production of cotton reduced many of Texas' small farmers into tenants. Declining cotton prices and the crop lien made it so that farmers struggled to settle their debts in the fall, when the cotton supply was glutted and prices were at their lowest. After successive seasons of debt, farmers were evicted and forced to rent from landowners or even the very same merchants that confiscated their land. Displaced farmers could not easily acquire land elsewhere. Land speculation to attract new railroads to transport more cotton had raised land prices, making it difficult for evicted farmers to acquire new land. Although Gillespie County only established a railroad in 1913, several unsuccessful attempts to court the Western Texas, Southern Pacific, and Texas and Pacific railroads were made by speculators throughout the 1880s.⁸⁸ The results of declining prices and land speculation made themselves clear in increased

⁸⁵ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 180-182.

⁸⁶ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 26-31.

⁸⁷ Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 63, 70, 86.

⁸⁸ Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 86-90.

tenancy in the surrounding area. In nearby Blanco and Hamilton counties, tenancy rates rose to 27 percent and 30 percent by 1890. But in Gillespie County, the tenancy rate was 10 percent in 1890, smaller than in its more cotton indebted neighbors.⁸⁹

If yeomen in the Georgia Upcountry were dragged into “the vortex of the cotton economy,” then Gillespie farmers were only pulled into a distant rotation. The lack of wartime destruction, the absence of a nearby railroad, and the diversification of local agriculture stymied the cotton conquest of Gillespie.⁹⁰ Despite its postwar expansion, Gillespie’s cotton production was still not a larger priority than were foodstuffs and livestock. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Gillespie farmers produced more corn than cotton. In the 1880s, they even increased the average acres of corn planted per year. In the same two decades, the acres of wheat planted trailed just behind those planted with cotton.⁹¹ Other non-plantation areas continued to produce corn alongside cotton, but the presence of wheat, used in traditional German meals, confirms that farmers raised crops for consumption rather than profit. Nonetheless, the introduction of cotton did ally the fates of Gillespie farmers to those of farmers in non-plantation regions across the South. They participated in the transformation of the sectional economy.

Instead of throwing their lot in with cotton, Gillespie farmers began to raise livestock for local markets. Livestock were easier to maintain in areas without extensive railroads. Long drives to market did not require fast transportation and could be conducted by cowboys.⁹² Where the value of Gillespie livestock had crashed in the 1860s, by 1880 it had rebounded above prewar levels. In the following decade it continued to rise. In 1880, the value of livestock was

⁸⁹ Jordan, *Texas: A Geography*, 155; Turner, “Understanding the Populists,” 360.

⁹⁰ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 139-169.

⁹¹ Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States*, vol. 3, 206; Census Office, *Eleventh Census*, vol. 10, 385. In 1880, 1,215 more acres of corn were planted than acres of cotton. In 1890, corn acreage outstripped cotton again, rising from 5,297 to 8,371 acres. Wheat acreage rounded out a close third to cotton and corn. In 1880 and 1890, Gillespie farmers planted 3,533 and 3,583 acres of wheat respectively.

⁹² Terry G. Jordan, *Trail to Texas: Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 73-75.

more than three times the value of agriculture in Gillespie County. By 1890, Gillespie was one of the largest sheep raising counties in the state. Sheep raising sustained a prominent wool economy that averaged nearly 153, 511 pounds a year in 1890. According to Texas historian Terry Jordan, this area of the Edwards' Plateau dominated national markets for wool and mohair as early as 1900.⁹³ Gillespie livestock raisers also increased their beef cattle holdings substantially.⁹⁴ But increases in the sizes of herds do not suggest that Gillespie farmers received the benefits of growth. Just as the market production of cotton lowered international prices, so too did the market production of beef and wool. In the postwar period, the national prices for cattle and sheep decreased dramatically.⁹⁵ Historian James Turner has estimated that the average farm income in Gillespie County was still meager in 1890: \$386 annually.⁹⁶

In fact, capitalist techniques of livestock raising posed the greatest threat to Gillespie's small herders, cowboys, and farmers. The invention of barbed wire in 1874 made fencing-in livestock widely affordable for the first time.⁹⁷ Concerned that roaming stock would devalue their land, cotton farmers, large ranchers, and land speculators across the South attempted to legislate the fencing-in of livestock in the 1880s.⁹⁸ But fencing-in livestock posed a threat to small landowners and landless tenants who did not have adequate grazing land or direct access to water. Fencing made it so that only large ranchers could keep and raise livestock. If small

⁹³ Jordan, *Texas: A Geography*, 159-160.

⁹⁴ Census Office, *Ninth Census*, vol. 3, 254-255; Census Office, *Tenth Census of the United States*, vol. 3, 134, 171; Census Office, *Eleventh Census*, vol. 10, 308. In 1880, the value of livestock rose to \$373,123—\$259,377 more than the value of farm products. In 1890, the livestock value in Gillespie County rose again to \$397,730. In 1880, the number of sheep in Gillespie rose to 27,158. By 1890, it increased to 40,607. Likewise, in the 1870s, wool production rose by 2,939%. Between 1880 and 1890, the amount of wool produced in Gillespie County jumped further from 130,698 pounds to 153,511 pounds. The number of non-dairy cattle in Gillespie experienced similar jumps to 19,993 and 28,001 in 1880 and 1890.

⁹⁵ Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmers' Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897* (New York, New York; Farrar & Rineheart, Inc., 1945), 208.

⁹⁶ Turner, "Understanding the Populists," 360.

⁹⁷ R. D. Holt, "The Introduction of Barbed Wire into Texas and the Fence Cutting War," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 6 (June 1930), 65.

⁹⁸ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 239-247.

landowners wanted to survive, they would have to contract with merchants to drill wells, buy feed, and acquire fencing. A path of indebtedness that could easily lead to land confiscation. Increased fencing left small farmers to focus solely on agriculture and forced cowboys to find work on farms or ranches.⁹⁹ Stock law was Gillespie farmers' greatest threat of tenancy. In Georgia, many farmers stepped up to defend the open range in politics.¹⁰⁰

Texas small stock raisers', farmers', and cowboys' violently resisted barbed wire, making their existential concerns obvious.¹⁰¹ In the summer of 1883, opponents of stock law in the Cross Timbers, Panhandle, South Plains, and Hill Country reacted to increased fencing by launching widespread fence-cutting raids: cutting wire, freeing livestock, burning pastures, and threatening ranchers.¹⁰² The efforts to increase fencing came during a local drought, and livestock raisers that were already concerned about access to water confronted the reality that fencing threatened to eradicate small stock raisers.¹⁰³ Legislation condemning fence-cutting barely stopped the raiders, only temporary end to fencing did. Gillespie County avoided much of the fence-cutting war. Its farmers maintained the open range until after the turn of the century. But the shock of the fence-cutting war was felt around the state, and the widespread

⁹⁹ Shannon, *Farmers' Last Frontier*, 203-207.

¹⁰⁰ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 239-268. Kantor and Kousser, "Common Sense or Commonwealth?," 201-203, 206-217. Steven Hahn has asserted that their political defense of the open range "embodied distinct ideas about labor, community, independence, and the role of the state—about commonwealth." Rejecting Hahn's assertions as overelaborate, J. Morgan Kousser's and Shawn Everett Kantor's neoclassical analysis reduced the conflict to a question of cost-benefit analysis. They argued that small landowners and landless tenants were naturally motivated to vote with their wallets. The violent nature of Texas' response to stock law evidences that Kousser and Kantor missed the forest for the trees. Clearly, farmers and stock raisers felt a large enough threat to their conception of agricultural life to reply with violence. The violent responses of farmers were not a normal expression of their 'economic interests.'

¹⁰¹ Hahn, "A Response: Common Cents or Historical Sense?," 243-258; Barbara Fields, "The Nineteenth-Century American South: History and Theory," *Plantation Society* 2 (1983), 14-15. Steven Hahn's response to Kousser and Kantor provides a conceptual response to neoclassical analysis. See Barbara Fields' essay in *Plantation Society* for a witty criticism of neoclassical analysis. Fields contends that economists have "[conjured] up a wholly fanciful picture of a rustic *homo economicus*: an instinctive profit maximizer needing only sufficient capital and the stimulus of high prices to turn himself into a capitalist farmer."

¹⁰² Wayne Gard, "The Fence-Cutters," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (July 1948), 1-2, 5-10

¹⁰³ Holt, "The Introduction of Barbed Wire," 68-70, 75-76; Gard, "The Fence-Cutters," 2-4, 11.

implementation of stock law in Texas was very publicly delayed.¹⁰⁴ If fencing had become common in the 1880s, as it did in other non-plantation areas, Gillespie farmers would have faced the rise of ranches much sooner. The rise of ranches loomed as the manifestation of farmers' fear of tenancy, just as merchants symbolized cotton growers' fears.

Meanwhile, newly appointed tenant farmers trekked westward to Texas, expanding Gillespie's population. Evicted from their lands, many Southern farmers travelled to Texas in search of new lives. Between 1870 and 1890, immigration more than doubled the population of Gillespie County. New settlers mostly strengthened the concentration of residents in Fredericksburg.¹⁰⁵ In 1890, the population of Fredericksburg rose as high as twenty-two percent of the county population. But Willow City and Harper also received new settlers from the South's non-plantation areas.¹⁰⁶ Immigration filled out unoccupied lands in the rest of the county, creating a greater demand for social institutions in Gillespie's countryside. Gillespie farmers organized and constructed new Lutheran churches in North Grape, Crabapple Creek, and Lange's Mill in 1884, 1897, and 1898. In Willow City, residents organized a new Methodist congregation in 1885 and erected a church in 1900. Shortly after the war, Harper established a catholic mission.¹⁰⁷

But population growth expanded the education system of Fredericksburg at a faster pace than the rest of the countryside, accentuating existing disparities. Southern investment in education after Reconstruction trailed far behind the national averages. In the 1890s, Texas' per pupil expenditures were 63 percent of the national average—the leading percentage in the

¹⁰⁴ Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County, 83-84; T. C. Richardson and Harwood P. Hinton, *Handbook of Texas Online*, "RANCHING," accessed January 07, 2020, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/azro2>.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850-1915* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 123-132; Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 204-238.

¹⁰⁶ Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 63-66, 70-73.

¹⁰⁷ Curtis, "The History of Gillespie County," 112-113, 119, 120.

section.¹⁰⁸ Most of this money was invested into developing towns and cities. After the Civil War, the residents of Fredericksburg established a four-grade public school. The four teachers at the school offered classes in English, German, geometry, algebra, history, and speech.

Fredericksburg's school district even had enough money to establish a segregated school for the 108 Afro-Americans living in the county. The segregated school only operated for five to six months of the year.¹⁰⁹

In the countryside, new settlers increased the demand for schools but could not raise the resources needed to support them. In Willow City, residents enlarged their schoolhouse in 1881 and erected a second building in 1890. However, the Willow City school struggled to retain regular teachers. No teacher remained in Willow City for longer than two years. In Rheingold, the first school was established in a small log house in 1873. By 1889, residents had saved \$325 to erect a school building to accommodate thirty to forty students. Students paid tuition of 75 cents per month to cover the rest of the costs. In Crabapple, until enough labor and money had been donated by nearby farmers, students attended school in the home of Heinrich Keese. In 1878, farmers around Crabapple erected their first school building. Most students attended during its free months and only those who paid private tuition could attend during its private months. In 1869, Meusebach Creek and Grapetown combined funds to hire Heinrich Ochs to teach in each hamlet for three days a week. In 1889, Meusebach Creek established its own schoolhouse in order to exert better control over its education system. Because Meusebach Creek residents lacked the funding for a separate segregated school, local black and white

¹⁰⁸ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 61; Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in Southern Economy since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1997) 78-80. In the same decade, North and South Carolina recorded per pupil expenditure at 20% of the national average.

¹⁰⁹ Census Office, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 430; Gold, "The History of Education in Gillespie County," 40-47, 59-60.

children attended classes together.¹¹⁰ The absence of cash or excess capital in the countryside prevented the farmers from starting effective schools.

Increased tenancy, the market production of cotton, the threat of stock law, and disparities in education encouraged Gillespie farmers to negotiate changing relationships in everyday life. The non-plantation South awkwardly shifted from its subsistence origins to the market relations of the postbellum economy.¹¹¹ Barbara Fields has designated this as a “transitional situation” in which capitalist production is in the process of eradicating any trace of simple commodity production. In Gillespie County, the transition to capitalist agriculture heralded a period of negotiation about changing relationships.¹¹² Farmers attempted to diagnose their illness by combatting the symptoms they exhibited. In Gillespie and across the non-plantation South, farmers began to organize to provide education, to combat the crop lien and cotton trap, and to prevent declining prices. Already, in Northern cities and Western mines, artisans and laborers similarly met to form unions, such as the Holy Order of the Knights of Labor and the Western Federation of Miners, to combat an analogous set of changes in urban labor and mining.¹¹³

In 1873, Texas farmers sought the Patrons of Husbandry as an organization to unite them against what they believed to be the financial origins of poverty. Within the next four years the Patrons of Husbandry, more popularly known as the Grange, organized around the state, reaching a membership of nearly 45,000. The Grange’s criticism of the postbellum agricultural economy was rooted in a Greenbacker critique of the financial system. Grange activists saw monetary policy as central to rural poverty and pointed to declining prices and strained

¹¹⁰ Gold, “The History of Education,” 70-75, 81-84, 87-89, 96-98.

¹¹¹ Fields, “The Advent of Capitalist Agriculture,” 81-83, 85-89.

¹¹² Fields, “The Nineteenth-Century American South: History and Theory,” 22-24.

¹¹³ Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, New York: The Noonday Press, 1989); Jarod Roll, *Poor Man’s Fortune: White Working-Class Conservatism in American Metal Mining, 1850-1950* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University Press of North Carolina, 2020).

relationships with merchants to back themselves up. Grange organizers traversed the state, establishing a wide array of individual lodges that served beneath the state Grange. Political scientist Roscoe Martin has explained that farmers rallied to Grange lodges to experiment with “new methods of dealing with the business world” and to encourage socializing between farmers. Its members launched political crusades against minimum freight rates, the farm produce tax, and the high interest rates of furnishing merchants—imploping the Texas legislature to see ‘the financial underpinnings’ of farmers’ problems. Grangers were relatively successful securing legislation governing freight rates and interest rates.¹¹⁴

The Grange popularized agricultural cooperatives and local lodges but failed to supplant the existing arrangement of furnishing merchants. The Grange’s Texas Co-operative Association comprised nearly 150 general stores, a few failed textile mills, the Texas Farmer Publishing Association, and the Texas Mutual Fire Insurance Association. Grangers called this the Rochdale Plan. It proposed that farmers supplant the existing system of general stores and mills with one of their own—funded by joint stock notes that aggregated individual contributions. Patrons could hold a maximum of 100 shares and were limited to one vote each. Any profit that would typically be owed to owners was instead returned to stockholders or returned at half-value to those who had not invested in but simply patronized the store.¹¹⁵ But the Texas Co-operative Association was too decentralized. The small size of local operations prevented Grangers from effectively bulking cotton, acquiring cheap goods, and running effective mills. As a result, local retail merchants intentionally undercut the prices of Granger stores, undermining the agrarian cooperative movement. The inability of Grangers to develop effective methods for aggregating

¹¹⁴ Roscoe C. Martin, “The Grange as a Political Factor in Texas,” *The Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (March 1926), 363-368, 372-380; Chester McArthur Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901: Essays and Documents* (New London, Connecticut: Connecticut College, 1946), 50-77.

¹¹⁵ Smith, “Macuneism,” 221-226.

crops and buying in bulk stymied their program. By 1885, the failure of Grange cooperatives crippled the organization in Texas.¹¹⁶

As the Grange declined, the Grand State Farmers Alliance organized in many of the areas where the Grange was once popular. Farmers and ranchers near Lampasas, Texas organized the first Alliance in 1877. Its early members mostly concerned themselves with common defense from organized horse-thieves and landsharks. However, farmers moved their attention to critiques of rural poverty. In 1879, the Grand State Alliance endorsed the Greenback-Labor Party hoping to move their concerns into politics. Loyal Democrats were uneasy by the decision.¹¹⁷ When the Greenback-Labor Party failed, members of the Alliance bolted. But in the early 1880s, the Alliance was reborn in Parker and Wise counties. Travelling lecturers such as Reverend S.O. Daws and William Robert Lamb organized sub-alliances and county alliances across North and Central Texas. Between 1883 and 1885, the number of delegates at the Grand State Alliance convention rose from 56 to more than 600.¹¹⁸

The Alliance created a more centralized organization than the Grange had. Historian Ralph Smith has noted the creation of the county lodge as a substantial advancement for rural organization. A county Alliance allowed farmers to better pool resources for cooperative projects than they could in their local Grange lodges. The county alliance also developed an effective bureaucratic structure for sending delegates to state conventions and upholding local resolutions in state matters.¹¹⁹ In county lodges, Alliance farmers experimented with cotton yards to sell their crops in bulk. County Alliances also began to open up their own general stores.

¹¹⁶ Jeffrey Sklansky, *Sovereign of the Market: The Money Question in Early America* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 169-206; Smith, "Macuneism," 227-228.

¹¹⁷ "The Last Meeting of the First Farmers Alliance," Texas Farmers' Alliance Records, 1880-1907, 1963-1969, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; "Charles Macune Narrative," Bell County Alliance Records, 1889-1897, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 3-4; William Garvin and S. O. Daws, *History of the National Farmers Alliance and Co-Operative Union* (Jacksboro, Texas: J.N. Rogers & Co. Steam Printers, 1887), 14-15.

¹¹⁸ Garvin and Daws, *History of the National Farmers Alliance*, 28-30, 32-47.

¹¹⁹ Smith, "Macuneism," 220-221

These were steps towards much larger cooperative endeavors.¹²⁰ Alliance farmers also made use of the rural press. The official organ of the Alliance, the *Jacksboro Rural Citizen*, carried messages from farmers across the state and republished topical articles from larger papers. The editor, Joseph Noah Rogers, used his paper's affiliation with the Alliance to expand his press' size and influence.¹²¹

In 1886, labor conflicts between the Knights of Labor and both Texas' railroads and shipping companies sparked cleavage in the Alliance about industry in the state. During the spring and summer of 1886, the Knights of Labor undertook a campaign of boycotts in Texas cities. In March, Knights in District Assembly 101 went on strike along the Gould railway system. Nearly 9,000 workers walked out on over 4,500 miles of track. The two-month "Great Southwest Strike" captivated local and national politics.¹²² Many members of the Alliance hoped to aid the Knights in their boycotts. In the pages of the *Rural Citizen*, Alliance business agent William Robert Lamb advocated for joining the Knights' Dallas boycotts. He even proposed boycotting the Gould railway system.¹²³ Lamb hoped for an alliance between what he believed were like-minded organizations. Other members of the Farmers Alliance, fearful of future departures from the Democratic Party, opposed the cooperation with the Knights.¹²⁴

When the Grand State Alliance met for its August 1886 meeting in Cleburne, Texas, delegates had not mended the divided mind about the Great Southwest Strike. In fact, the failure of the strike in May, and further labor agitation during the summer, had widened the distance between members. By the Cleburne meeting, Lamb and several of the other lecturers had

¹²⁰ Garvin and Daws, *The History of the National Farmers Alliance*, 38-39.

¹²¹ Jeff Wells, "J.N. Rogers, the *Jacksboro Rural Citizen*, and the Roots of Farmers' Alliance Journalism in Texas, 1881-1886," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (July 2017), 29-55.

¹²² Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 42-52.

¹²³ *Jacksboro Rural Citizen*, February 25, 1886; Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, 37-39.

¹²⁴ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 82-83.

written and agreed upon a set of seventeen demands that they released in lieu of the typical report from the Committee for the Good of the Order.

The Cleburne Demands, as they came to be known, burst open a chasm between members of the Grand State Farmers' Alliance, but nonetheless declared a defense of small farming. Seeking to ally themselves with labor movements, lecturers demanded federal and state recognition of trade unions and cooperative stores. They also demanded the creation of a National Bureau of Labor Statistics and space for a national labor conference. But the core of the Demands addressed the problems faced by Texas' small farmers. Lecturers demanded an interstate commerce law and a rigid taxation law to regulate railroad monopolies. Bringing Greenbacker analysis from their Grange days, they demanded reforms of the financial system. The Cleburne Demands supported the creation of a federal banking system with a flexible currency, which would hopefully be more helpful to debtors. Alliance farmers even explicitly demanded an expansion of the money supply, which greenbackers considered the root of poverty. Other important demands decried alien land speculation and the fencing-in of livestock. The Cleburne Demands sparked an immediate backlash from Democratic faithfuls. Debates in Cleburne were so exhausting that almost a third of the delegates had walked out before a final vote was held for the Demands. The Cleburne Demands barely passed by a vote of 92 in to 75. Disappointed opponents threatened to leave the Alliance.

The fractured Alliance was front page news across the state in August. The drama of the Cleburne Demands and the ensuing schism invigorated the organizing efforts of both factions of the Alliance. As the Alliance headed toward its January, 1887 summit in Waco, farmers in Gillespie County met to found the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance.¹²⁵ Gillespie farmers sought the Alliance to negotiate their transition to capitalist agriculture and to protect smallholding.

¹²⁵ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 76-83.

Part Two: A Smallholders Club, 1886-1890

The Gillespie Alliance's cooperative routines afforded a last-ditch flotation device that Gillespie farmers clung to in order to prevent their sinking to the depth of a rural proletariat. Recent historians have described postbellum farmers as "agrarian businessmen" that joined the Farmers Alliance to pad their wallets.¹²⁶ But Gillespie farmers joined the Alliance to sustain some shred of independence amidst a transition to capitalist agriculture. The Gillespie Alliance proposed a significant reorganization to agricultural routines, although it did not claim the majority of the county's farmers. The Alliance opened a farmer-owned general store to provide an alternative to dependence on local merchants. In hopes of raising declining prices, Gillespie farmers traded their cotton in bulk at the Texas Alliance Exchange in Dallas. Regular attendance of lodge meetings and an extensive rural press supported these cooperative projects. But this educational network mainly allowed farmers to better understand the common problems that smallholders faced in capitalist agriculture. Learning from each other, Gillespie farmers discussed their common political problems and established a charitable fund to protect against vulnerabilities. But lodges, stores, the exchange, and the charitable fund proved too expensive for cash poor farmers. By combining their individual resources they were unable to permanently prevent capitalist social relations, they could only delay them. When cooperative projects failed, many Gillespie farmers left the Alliance. Others looked to politics as another option.

Months after the Cleburne Demands, Gillespie farmers met to organize their own county Alliance. The Grand State Alliance of Texas' declarations against railroad monopolies, land

¹²⁶ Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 3-68. Charles Postel's *The Populist Vision* contended that farmers converged on the Alliance to learn agriculture and business techniques in concert with a rapidly industrializing country. For examples of modern consensus about the Populists being modernizers see: Worth Robert Miller, ed., "The Populist Vision: A Roundtable Discussion" in *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 32 (Spring 2009), 18-45.

speculation, the financial system, and the enclosure of livestock rippled across the state after the August Cleburne conference. Lecturers from both the Demands' supporters and opponents traversed the state to make their cases.¹²⁷ Supporters presented the Cleburne Demands as a moral defense of smallholding from the ubiquitous problems that they faced: declining prices, dependence on merchants, increased tenancy, and disparities in education. Opponents feared that such radical pronouncements would estrange farmers from the Democrats that ruled the land. Their warnings did not stop Gillespie farmers from endorsing the Cleburne Demands. At its inaugural meeting on December 31, 1886, the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance did little else but that. Gillespie farmers read the seventeen declarations aloud and Secretary pro-tem J. A. Deadrich declared that they were "unanimously favored."¹²⁸ Like thousands of farmers across Texas, those in Gillespie joined the Alliance after hearing the diagnosis proposed by Alliance lecturers.

Gillespie farmers organized their county Farmers Alliance to advance their opinions to the Grand State Alliance. Six suballiances, local lodges situated in the schoolhouses, barns, and churches of Gillespie's rural hamlets, existed before farmers organized the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance. The Gillespie Alliance presided over all of them. At its height in 1888, it claimed twenty-one suballiances.¹²⁹ Suballiances sent delegates to the Gillespie Alliance's quarterly meetings. Each paid dues to remain in the county Alliance, while retaining the prerogative of open disagreement.¹³⁰ In turn, the Gillespie Alliance sent dues to the Grand State Farmers Alliance of Texas. The county Alliance sent one official delegate to the annual State

¹²⁷ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 82-83.

¹²⁸ Minutes for December 31, 1886, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 20-21.

¹²⁹ Minutes for December 31, 1886, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 20; Minutes for April, 14 1888,, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 40-41.

¹³⁰ Minutes for January 11, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 55.

Alliance conferences. At Grand State Alliance conventions, county delegates voted on state-wide issues and coordinated with lecturing campaigns.¹³¹

But even at its most influential, the Gillespie Alliance did not claim all of the county's farmers. Just as Gillespie farmers faced lower rates of tenancy and grew less cotton than farmers in other non-plantation areas, they also converged on the Alliance in smaller numbers.¹³² At its peak, the Gillespie Alliance claimed only 880 members. It was nearly one fifth the size of county Alliances in cotton growing areas.¹³³ Gillespie farmers' focus on livestock raising precluded them from perfect compatibility with the Alliance program. Most farmers in the Grand State Alliance had been snagged by the cotton and crop lien trap. They designed Alliance programs to remedy the wounds inflicted by it.¹³⁴ Only twelve percent of the people in Gillespie County officially joined the Alliance.¹³⁵ Furthermore, observing the whites-only clause from the Grand State Alliance charter, the Gillespie Alliance barred the county's black farmers from membership. Although the Colored Farmers Alliance, established by Reverend Richard Humphrey in 1886, spread across Texas at the same time.¹³⁶ There is no record of a Colored Alliance in Gillespie County. With only 108 Afro-Americans, it is unlikely that those that lived in the countryside would have formed one.¹³⁷ Women were not excluded from the Gillespie Alliance, but they rarely rose to leadership positions at the county level. Farming men were accustomed to working beside women, with whom they often split the burdens of agricultural work. Southern farmers

¹³¹ Minutes for July 12, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 63.

¹³² Turner, "Understanding the Populists," 360-361. A rigorous statistical comparison of the holdings of listed members of the Gillespie Alliance and those that did not join might reveal that Alliance members were wealthy enough to pay dues, had larger landholdings, or farmed cotton more than raised livestock. All of which could be reasons for the Gillespie Alliance's smaller numbers.

¹³³ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 272.

¹³⁴ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 76-83, 143. The Kansas Alliance did eventually open a multi-state livestock exchange but it was insignificant in size.

¹³⁵ Census Office, *Eleventh Census*, vol. 1, 41.

¹³⁶ Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson, Mississippi: Univ Press Of Mississippi, 2012).

¹³⁷ Census Office, *Eleventh Census*, vol. 1, 41.

considered the household, not the individual, to be the basic unit of production.¹³⁸ Nevertheless men held the deeds to land and were commonly regarded as the head of the household. In the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance, Emily Striegler and Anna Moore eventually rose to the office of Secretary. But their promotions only occurred after substantial declines in membership.¹³⁹

Gillespie Alliance meetings also did not place its members on equal footing. A few historians have mischaracterized Alliance lodges as “a new democratic language” because they supposedly united a broad class of farmers against consolidated capital.¹⁴⁰ But members of the Gillespie Alliance were not of one class.¹⁴¹ Although the number of tenants in Gillespie was relatively low, those that participated in the Gillespie Alliance had different interests than landowning farmers. They did not own land, tools, or even all of the crops that they raised. They depended on merchants to provide all of these.¹⁴² The Gillespie Alliance also had a hierarchy of elected offices such as President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Lecturer, and Chaplain. Officers were elected by delegates during the summer session of the Gillespie Alliance.¹⁴³ Many of the same names appear regularly in the Gillespie Alliance’s offices and committees: Jennings, Grobe, and Striegler. Gillespie Alliance meetings followed an orderly agenda beginning with roll call, followed by reports from the committees, and ending with new business.¹⁴⁴ Delegates observed parliamentary procedure that prevented regular members from butting in. Motions to “extend limits of debate” or “refer a question” had to be seconded by another member. Some

¹³⁸ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York, New York; Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-9.

¹³⁹ Minutes for April 19, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 57; Minutes for October 13, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 117.

¹⁴⁰ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, xi,vii-xv; Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York, New York; Hill and Wang, 1992), 83-107.

¹⁴¹ Turner, “Understanding the Populists,” 360-361.

¹⁴² Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 161-165.

¹⁴³ Minutes for July 12, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 48-49.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes for July 12, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 47.

procedures such as motions to “lay on the table new information” or to “postpone discussion indefinitely” were restricted to Alliance members of a certain rank.¹⁴⁵



This is a map of the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance’s locatable suballiances.
This map was made by Eric Markus in 2020.

Nevertheless, the Gillespie Alliance did propose changes to the entire county through a network of suballiances and by publishing its minutes in county newspapers. By 1888, the Gillespie Alliance had claimed twenty-one suballiances that spanned the county. Its largest were in Stonewall, Willow City, and Nebo Mountain. The only locale in which the Alliance was noticeably absent was the town of Fredericksburg.¹⁴⁶ Gillespie Alliance delegates travelled to different locations throughout the county for their quarterly meetings, occasionally they did meet in the Fredericksburg courthouse. Although official members paid dues and upheld vows of secrecy, the Gillespie Alliance published its minutes publicly in the *Fredericksburg*

¹⁴⁵ Centennial Suballiance Minutes, 1891–1897 (ledger book; Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin), 1.

¹⁴⁶ Minutes for April, 14 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 40-41.

Wochenblatt and *Gillespie County News*.¹⁴⁷ In the *Wochenblatt* and *County News*, residents of Gillespie County read about the ongoing movement in both German and English.¹⁴⁸ Even if the majority of Gillespie residents were not in the Alliance, they were certainly aware of its presence.

However influential within the county, the future of the Gillespie Alliance depended on the survival of the Grand State Farmers Alliance. Farmers had learned, from past pursuits in the Grange, that local cooperation could not supplant furnishing merchants. The opponents of the Cleburne Demands did not so much fear the defense of smallholding as they feared the political action it might lead to. Their taboo about politics was partly informed by memories of the failed Greenback-Labor Party. But most opponents worried that political action would require a break with the Democratic Party. Many Texas farmers had served in the Confederate army and viewed voting with the Democratic Party as an obligation to history. But the Texas Democratic Party, controlled by allies of industry, looked unfavorably upon financial reform, railroad legislation, and restrictions on land speculation.¹⁴⁹ Acting-President of the Grand State Alliance, Charles Macune, a staunch Democrat himself, understood that if the Grand State Alliance were to continue it must move away from politics. He called an emergency meeting of both factions to be held in Waco, Texas during January 1887.

At the Waco conference, Macune extended a bridge over the Cleburne divide by proposing a statewide cooperative Exchange. In the conference's opening speeches, Macune presented a plan for the cooperative buying of supplies and selling of cotton on a larger scale than ever attempted before: the state level.¹⁵⁰ Prior to Waco, county cooperative stores had purchased supplies in bulk and some counties attempted to market cotton in competition with

¹⁴⁷ Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 450-454.

¹⁴⁸ Minutes for February 12, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Alwynn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin, Texas; University of Texas Press, 1971), 38-124.

¹⁵⁰ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 83-86.

furnishing merchants. But merchants often undercut the prices of Alliance stores. And bulking cotton at the county level did not raise international cotton prices significantly.¹⁵¹ Macune argued that his proposed Farmers Alliance Exchange of Texas would equip the Alliance to buy directly from factories—bypassing both furnishing and wholesale merchants—to achieve the cheapest prices. Simultaneously, statewide cooperative selling would monopolize Texas’ supply of cotton and lift international prices. The Exchange would also sell cotton directly to Eastern factories, again cutting out the furnishing and wholesale merchants that held farmers in debt.¹⁵² Farmers in the Grand State Alliance enthusiastically responded to the Texas Exchange, seeing it as a non-partisan path away from the crop lien and cotton trap.

The scale of the Texas Alliance Exchange convinced Gillespie farmers that they could affect the international markets that connected them to India, Britain, and New England. By cooperating in their relationships of production, farmers ceased to see the economy as an abstraction and began to see it as a metaphor for the multitudes of decisions that determine prices and outputs.¹⁵³ New county committees on trade sent yield estimates to the State Exchange. County business agents weighed cotton to be sent to Dallas. This attention to the collective supply of cotton made the market tangible for farmers scattered around the state.¹⁵⁴ Members of the Grand State Alliance even supported the Texas Exchange through the combination of their individual cash contributions. Macune proposed that each member of the Grand State Alliance be assessed two dollars to make up for the 500,000 dollars worth of stock that the Alliance Exchange had issued.¹⁵⁵ The Grand State Alliance had already solicited 100,000 dollars worth of property, deferred rent, and cash from the city of Dallas, which covered some of

¹⁵¹ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 114-124

¹⁵² Jeffrey Sklansky, *Sovereign of the Market*, 169-206.

¹⁵³ Barbara J. Fields, “The Crisis of the Slave South,” *History of the South* (March 5, 2020). This analysis of economy as a metaphor is borrowed from Barbara Fields’ fantastic undergraduate lecture.

¹⁵⁴ Minutes for April 1, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 23-25; Minutes for July 12, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 46-50.

¹⁵⁵ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 125.

the expenses for offices and a warehouse. Supporters and opponents of the Cleburne Demands alike saw Macune's Texas Exchange as sufficiently extreme and cautious. It proposed organized cooperative routines on scale previously unheard of without relying on a political solution.¹⁵⁶

But cash poor farmers in the Gillespie Alliance struggled to give money to fund the offices, salaries, and the treasury of a statewide cooperative. After special stipulations lowered the amount of the Dallas deal to a meager 3,500 dollars, the Texas Alliance Exchange depended even more on individual contributions.¹⁵⁷ However, despite the seemingly insignificant size of a two dollar contribution, most farmers in the Grand State Alliance could not pay for the Exchange. In January 1888, the Gillespie Alliance sent only thirteen dollars to the Texas Exchange—significantly less than if every member were to have met the two dollar goal.¹⁵⁸

Capitalist farmers operated in a credit economy based on loans and debt. Farmers forwarded their labor to merchants in exchange for seeds, supplies, and food. Very little cash circulated in the countryside. If farmers had any they used it to pay off their debts to furnishing merchants.¹⁵⁹ Although they did not always contract their livestock with merchants, Gillespie farmers still depended on cash stores for clothing, foodstuffs, and anything they no longer produced in their households.

The Texas Exchange also tasked Gillespie farmers with investing what little cash they had in a local cooperative store and a cotton yard. As early as April after the Waco meeting, members of the Gillespie Alliance began discussion of establishing an Alliance general store in Fredericksburg. In April 1887, they appointed twelve Alliance delegates from various suballiances to a board of directors.¹⁶⁰ After calculating the costs of land, construction, and

¹⁵⁶ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 83-86.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

¹⁵⁸ Minutes for January 13, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 38.

¹⁵⁹ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 137-203.

¹⁶⁰ Minutes for April 1, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 24-25.

management, the board estimated that establishing a store would cost about 2,000 dollars. Members paid for the store through shares that they purchased in addition to the fees they sent to the Texas Exchange. Because the burden of supporting cooperative programs was so great, Gillespie farmers even amended the by-laws of their store to allow for the transfer of shares between members. If they needed quick access to cash, farmers could exchange their shares with farmers who happened to have cash.¹⁶¹ By the fall of 1887, the Gillespie County Alliance Cooperative store was open for business in Fredericksburg. The Gillespie Alliance also opened a cooperative cotton yard that it shared with Bexar county.¹⁶² Unfortunately, the Gillespie Minute Book left no record of the cost of the cotton yard. But between supporting the cotton yard and 2,000 dollar cooperative store, it is easy to understand why cash poor Gillespie farmers would have had little money left-over to fully support the state Exchange.¹⁶³

Convincing farmers to pledge their crops to the Texas Exchange and give up their savings to purchase shares required more than individual hopes for higher prices and cheaper supplies; the Gillespie Alliance had to unify its members in support of a cooperative program. In regular meetings of the Gillespie Alliance, lecturers and state circulars helped to reinforce the Exchange and store. On January 13, 1888, Grand State Alliance circular “no. 39” was read aloud to the meeting, prompting comments from the members on “The subject of Cooperation.”¹⁶⁴ At the April, 1888 meeting, Brother Jennings won the office of Lecturer after a thirty minute speech in defense of the Texas Exchange. Alliance Secretary Charles Grote compared his persuasive ability to that of “Cicero.”¹⁶⁵ Sometime in the fall 1887, the Gillespie Alliance even called a meeting at the Enchanted Lodge to “settle some misunderstanding concerning the cooperative store.”

¹⁶¹ Minutes for July 1, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 27-28.

¹⁶² Minutes for August 20, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 31.

¹⁶³ Minutes for April 1, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 24; Minutes for August 20, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes for January 13, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Minutes for April, 14 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 40-41.

Delegates had called the meeting to discuss the question of who had “controll” over the store. The minutes left by the Secretary do not record much more discussion, but the meeting adjourned quickly after the misunderstanding was resolved. It was settled that the board of directors presided over the store and the Alliance proceeded with its plans.¹⁶⁶

The *Southern Mercury*, the official organ of the Grand State Alliance, also informed Gillespie farmers about the status of the Texas Exchange and other cooperative stores throughout the state. The *Southern Mercury* did not only publish relevant essays written by Alliance editors. Covering its first five pages were letters and reports from farmers across Texas and in nearby states. Nearly all members of the Gillespie Alliance affirmed that they consistently read the *Mercury*.¹⁶⁷ Through letters in the *Mercury*, farmers learned about the successes and failures of cooperative stores in rural areas which they would not have contacted otherwise. During the spring 1888, contributors to the *Mercury* wrote letters in favor of the Texas Exchange. Regular contributors answered questions posed by curious farmers in the Alliance. New contributors were even inspired to write to the *Mercury* after reading the opinions of their fellow members.¹⁶⁸ Most farmers in the Alliance used information from the *Mercury* to form their opinions of cooperative programs.

Attending lodge meetings, listening to travelling lecturers, and reading the *Southern Mercury* made it possible for Gillespie farmers to learn about comparable conditions elsewhere. At picnics, members of the Gillespie Alliance gathered to have group discussions and hear lecturers from the Grand State Alliance.¹⁶⁹ In the pages of the *Southern Mercury*, farmers read each others’ advice for making coffee last longer, opinions about universal suffrage, and anger at

¹⁶⁶ Minutes for Called Meeting, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 35.

¹⁶⁷ Minutes for October 4, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 67.

¹⁶⁸ *Southern Mercury*, July 31, 1888, pg 2.

¹⁶⁹ Minutes for January 11, 1890, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 70.

state corruption.¹⁷⁰ Contributors discussed the weather, crop yields, and the prospects of drought. If they asked questions about the Alliance, contributors hoped to have them answered not just by editors but by other farmers.¹⁷¹ Travelling lecturers and the *Southern Mercury* extended a network of information across Texas, putting small farmers in closer contact with one another.

The Gillespie Alliance recognized lecturing, lodge meetings, and the *Mercury* as a substitute for the education system that the countryside lacked. Farmers in the Alliance clearly valued lodge meetings and lectures as more than tools to support economic programs. Lectures at regular meetings spoke about reading Alliance literature, “why we organize,” and “the necessity of education.”¹⁷² County lecturers and delegates attended Teaching Institute meetings in Fredericksburg, such as the one in 1890 that supported bilingualism.¹⁷³ The Gillespie Alliance’s “education” was as a necessary social institution that connected farmers across wide rural expanses. Through lecturing, lodge meetings, and the *Southern Mercury* they gained a better understanding of the conditions of capitalist agriculture. Gillespie County lacked many of the schools and churches that would have otherwise supplied this information. The Alliance’s educational programs connected like-minded farmers in far away places just as Reform clubs in the 1850s did for antislavery advocates.

Information in the *Mercury* about the small farmers’ vulnerability to unexpected shocks encouraged the Gillespie Alliance to establish a charitable fund to protect its members. In the pages of the *Southern Mercury*, members of the Alliance often pleaded for financial assistance when they ran into unexpected illness, tragic loss, or a failed crop. Any of these tragedies could

¹⁷⁰ *Southern Mercury*, May 17, 1888, pg 2; *Southern Mercury*, April 19, 1888, pg 2; *Southern Mercury*, May 3, 1888, pg 3.

¹⁷¹ *Southern Mercury*, April 19, 1888, pg 2.

¹⁷² Minutes for October 13, 1893, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 109; Minutes for April 12, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 114.

¹⁷³ Minutes for April, 1890, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 71.

have resulted in farmers losing their land or being unable to harvest their crops. In August, 1887, Sister Anderson and her two children “were reported being in a destitute condition.” The Gillespie Alliance made “an application for aid on their behalf” to the *Southern Mercury*.¹⁷⁴ The following spring, Bro. A. L. Moses proposed to replace the *Mercury*’s “Appeals” system with a county “Charitable Fund.”¹⁷⁵ Similar to mutual aid societies, Moses’ plan reserved a portion of the Gillespie Alliance Treasury for members in need. In October, 1889, the Gillespie Alliance used the fund to grant eight dollars and twenty-five cents to “a brother of [the] Live Oak Alliance” that fell ill with “pneumonia.”¹⁷⁶ The Gillespie Alliance’s charitable fund used information from the Alliance’s education system to reduce vulnerability common amongst small farmers in the Alliance.

The *Southern Mercury* and lodge meetings also informed the Gillespie Alliance of political grievances associated with rural life. County Alliances published political resolutions from meetings in the *Southern Mercury* for other members to read. On May 17, 1888, a farmer in Pennington pleaded for better postal service in rural areas. In the same issue G. Gordon Pulsford argued that agricultural tariffs were against the interests of farmers.¹⁷⁷

The Alliance’s taboo on political action did not hinder Gillespie farmers from recognizing their common political problems. In county Alliance meetings, farmers passed resolutions about state and national legislation. On April 14, 1888, the Gillespie Alliance formally opposed the Sunday Law—prohibiting the buying and selling of alcohol on Sundays. In the same meeting, the Gillespie Alliance ironically passed a resolution condemning emigration syndicates and the land speculators that operated them. Most notably, the Gillespie Alliance passed a resolution in favor

¹⁷⁴ Minutes for August 20, 1887, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 31.

¹⁷⁵ Minutes for April 14, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 42.

¹⁷⁶ Minutes for October 4, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 66.

¹⁷⁷ *Southern Mercury*, May 17, 1888, pg 2, 8.

of the Blair Education Bill.¹⁷⁸ The Bill, which would have provided federal support for public schools, would have substantially increased the funds for local schools in Gillespie. Redeemers welcomed the increased federal funding, as it made up for their low education spending. Old South Democrats resented the intrusion of the federal government into local affairs. Members of the Gillespie Alliance saw the Blair Bill as a solution to their underfunded schools. They used the Alliance to advocate its passage to other farmers.¹⁷⁹ All farmers in the Alliance understood that they held common political problems. The questions about politics really concerned whether or not farmers would continue to support the Democratic Party.

Ahead of the elections of 1888, writings in the *Southern Mercury* spurred the Gillespie Alliance to confront the issue of non-partisanship. In the *Mercury*, many farmers still expressed a wariness of political action. In one letter, a farmer tried to ease the concerns of Democrats who worried about the Alliance entering politics that fall.¹⁸⁰ Other farmers did not see non-partisan as non-political. The Bell County Alliance resolved that they hoped local and state politicians would honor their opinions. Alliances in Bonita and Lavacca counties agreed to oppose candidates that supported legislation about the Homestead law.¹⁸¹ During the summer, sisters in the Alliance advanced arguments about women's suffrage, claiming their votes would help the Alliance in politics.¹⁸² The Gillespie Alliance resolved to vote as a group in their 1888 county convention. In April, members of the Gillespie Alliance arranged to attend their county nominating convention as a group, publicly wearing the same "ribbon" in solidarity. They agreed to "nominate [their] own [County] officers." If they failed then they agreed not to support or vote for anyone "in favor of the Protective Tariff" and "no one in the habbit of becoming intoxicated."

¹⁷⁸ Minutes for April, 14 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 40-44.

¹⁷⁹ Allen J. Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill" *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 no. 2 (September, 1957), pp. 267-290.

¹⁸⁰ *Southern Mercury*, April 19, 1888, pg 3.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pg 3-4; *Southern Mercury*, May 3, 1888, pg 5.

¹⁸² *Southern Mercury*, June 28, 1888, pg 2.

¹⁸³ Members of the Gillespie Alliance proposed less than a party but more than individual voting. They acknowledged that they held a common cause, even if they could not organize politically around it. Lists of the Officers provided by Robert Penniger do not show that the Alliance was successful, by their numbers alone they could not have been.¹⁸⁴

Some entries in the *Southern Mercury* did propose that the Grand State Alliance endorse the new United Labor Party, threatening many farmers' loyalty to the Democrats. Founded in the midst of the labor unrest of 1886, the United Labor Party ran several municipal and state campaigns across the Northeast and Midwest in 1887 and 1888. Using the organizing capacity of national union the Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, the Labor Party hoped to transition organized labor decisively into politics.¹⁸⁵ In the Southwest, the United Labor Party cemented relationships with Grand State Alliance President Evan Jones and Kansas Alliance editor Henry Vincent to try the same with the Farmers Alliance.¹⁸⁶ But non-partisan members, led by National Farmers Alliance President Charles Macune, warned the Grand State Alliance of endorsing the United Labor Party. Macune argued that accusations of the United Labor Party's "communistic tendencies" would tarnish the image of the Alliance. He feared that if Grand State President Evan Jones accepted the nomination for governor, it would permanently link the Alliance to a third party.¹⁸⁷ After members pleaded for him to stay with the Democratic Party, Jones announced in the *Southern Mercury* that he would not accept the nomination. In the speech he stressed his responsibility as the Alliance President.¹⁸⁸

Meanwhile, emphasizing the exchange rather than endorsing politics, Macune expanded the cooperative program into the Southern states. In the spring of 1888, the Texas Alliance sent

¹⁸³ Minutes for April, 14 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886–1896, 41-42.

¹⁸⁴ Penniger, *Fredericksburg, Texas*, 56-57.

¹⁸⁵ Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 36-66.

¹⁸⁶ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 22.

¹⁸⁷ *Southern Mercury*, May 10, 1888, pg 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Southern Mercury*, June 7, 1888, pg. 5

over twenty-four organizers into Missouri, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Kentucky. Many of these lecturers returned to their former home states, setting up lodges in the counties in which they were born. Alliance organizers were widely successful especially in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Louisiana. As the Alliance expanded it absorbed Arkansas' Agricultural Wheel and Louisiana's Farmers' Union. Instead of competing with similar organizations, the National Alliance made common cause with them and merged.¹⁸⁹ Farmers in Gillespie and across Texas happily endorsed the Alliance's mergers.¹⁹⁰ New Southern State Alliances established cotton exchanges in the model of Texas'. Farmers supported these exchanges through assessments of various sizes made directly to their members.¹⁹¹ Macune's plan to expand the Alliance's cotton monopoly appeared to be successful, which should have come as good news to Gillespie farmers.

Instead, the high cost of the cooperative store and the Texas Exchange exposed Gillespie farmers to major financial losses, and the Gillespie Alliance was forced to hold its members accountable more frequently. The financial risks of cooperation encouraged farmers in the Alliance to punish members for missteps. When suballiances failed to pay their quarterly dues, the Gillespie Alliance banned them until they could pay back the owed amount.¹⁹² On January 11, 1889, the Gillespie Alliance threatened to fine its members twenty-five cents for leaving the assembly early, reminding them that they needed permission from "a majority vote" to depart.¹⁹³ In April, 1888, the Gillespie Alliance brought charges against a Brother Pfeil for "passed conduct." The Committee for the Good of the Order required that he apologize to this body. When he tried to submit his apology by proxy, the Alliance refused to accept it and required him

¹⁸⁹ Daws and Garvin, *History of the National Farmers Alliance*, 48-60.

¹⁹⁰ Minutes for April 18, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 58.

¹⁹¹ Daws and Garvin, *History of the National Farmers Alliance*, 60-62.

¹⁹² Minutes for July 12, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 62.

¹⁹³ Minutes for January 11, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 54.

to come in person. A committee was appointed to hear his “statement verbally” and only then did he “[receive] pardon of his sins.”¹⁹⁴ Action taken against suballiances, unruly members, and Brother Pfeil reflects a pattern of behavior in which the Gillespie Alliance acted to maintain the unity and responsibility of its membership.

Disputes between members threatened solidarity and the Gillespie Alliance arbitrated between them to protect smallholders in the county. As early as April, 1888, the Gillespie Alliance created the position of “Arbitrator” to settle incidents such as that with Bro. Pfeil.¹⁹⁵ But in April of the next year, the Alliance dealt with the first dispute between its members. It is not clear from the Minute Book exactly what the “Impoff Land Question” was. But we know that it involved Brothers Impoff and J. A. Holder. We also know that it was only resolved by sending the case to “the grand jury of Gillespie Co.” After hours of deliberation, the Committee on the Impoff Land Question found that the dispute in question was actually a “violation of the statute of the state of Texas.” But the fact that the dispute came to the Gillespie Alliance first and that the Gillespie Alliance moved quickly to bring “Charges” against J. A. Holder reveals a major assumption of authority. Brother Impoff, the presumed “plaintiff,” did not seem to want to be a true plaintiff, and looked to the Alliance instead of the courts.¹⁹⁶ His action places the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance as the presumed authority between farmers—an arbitrator ahead of the law.

But support for cooperative programs and solidarity between members could not solve the credit problems inherent to the Texas Alliance Exchange. By the time it opened in September 1887, the Texas Exchange was already severely undercapitalized. Farmers across the state struggled to pay the two dollar assessment, and after the fall season of 1887, the directors

¹⁹⁴ Minutes for April 14, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 41-42.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁹⁶ Minutes for April 19, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 57-59.

of the Texas Exchange understood that they needed more capital if they wanted to secure loans to buy supplies. In November, 1887, the directors announced a joint-note plan. It allowed cash-poor farmers to send joint-notes, pledges that they would deliver cotton, to the state Exchange in return for purchased supplies. Directors of the Exchange hoped that joint-notes could be used as collateral for bank loans.¹⁹⁷ But by the spring, the Texas Exchange found that banks would not honor the joint-notes as collateral. Macune and Jones explained the bank's withholding as the result of a "combination to crush the Exchange." But reasonably, banks had little reason to trust agricultural pledges, especially when many farmers were already pledging their crops to furnishing merchants.¹⁹⁸ In April, 1888, amidst unease about the Exchange's future, Brother Jennings ardently defended the Exchange to the Gillespie Alliance.¹⁹⁹ His actions, like those of other Alliance lecturers, drummed up support for a massive pledging campaign that took place on June 9 in courthouses across the state. Despite the nearly 200,000 dollars that members raised in the summer, the Alliance Exchange still struggled to make it through the 1888 selling season. The Texas Exchange desperately needed more cash.²⁰⁰

In the winter of 1889-1890, the Gillespie Alliance's call to support the Exchange finally failed to convince members to invest. In April, 1889, the Gillespie Alliance urged its suballiances to "take at least one share in the F. A. Exchange."²⁰¹ But by the summer, the Texas Exchange had limited its purchases and farmers had become wary of sending their crops to be sold in Dallas. Again it survived the fall of 1889, but across the Alliance members began to pull away from the undercapitalized Exchange. In October 1889, Brother Jennings urged his fellow members to pay "the 2.00 Assessment for the Exchange" and asked them to "support" the Alliance store.²⁰² But

¹⁹⁷ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 110-153.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-131; Smith, "Macuneism," 233-234.

¹⁹⁹ Minutes for April 14, 1888, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 43.

²⁰⁰ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 131-134.

²⁰¹ Minutes for April 19, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 57-59.

²⁰² Minutes for October 4, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 67.

members were clearly taking their business back to stores run by local furnishing merchants. In January, 1890, the Gillespie Alliance ordered Brother Houston Parker “to lecture” Brother Augustus Paulus “to convince him that we should support our store.” But Brother Paulus contested his need to be lectured.²⁰³ By April, 1890, lecturers could not muster support for the Exchange, and the Gillespie Alliance officially waited to see if the Exchange would go “down or up.” By the summer, the Texas Exchange was liquidated and the largest cooperative Exchange in the country had failed.

The collapse of the Texas Exchange undermined farmers’ confidence in the Gillespie Alliance, and by the fall of 1890, it had convinced many to withdraw. Between July 1889 and October 1890, membership in the Gillespie Alliance declined from nearly 400 to only 230. In the same time frame, Gillespie lost nine suballiances. The heaviest losses occurred during the spring months of 1890 when members of the Gillespie Alliance lost hope in the Exchange. Having invested so much in the Alliance Exchange program and the Grange before it, and facing the declining prices of oversaturated markets, farmers in Texas could not feasibly sustain involvement in the Alliance. Both the credit arrangements of late nineteenth century farming and indebtedness to the crop lien system made the task of establishing the infrastructure for a cooperative monopoly difficult for small farmers in Texas. Farmers left the Grand State Alliance because they failed to see how membership would allow them to overcome the structural problems presented to them.

The National Farmers Alliance, on the other hand, continued to gain strength in the more recently organized Southern states where exchanges were smaller and avoided risky cooperative selling. In Southern states, where the Alliance was newer and the cotton economy had pulled subsistence farmers into cycles of debt, members of the National Alliance still looked

²⁰³ Minutes for January 11, 1890, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 69.

to the cooperative exchange to help them, albeit in a different way than those in Texas had. The Georgia Exchange was founded in Atlanta in 1889. Wary of the problems of the already failing Texas Exchange, the one in Georgia altered its charter to focus more on cooperative buying than the more risky selling of cotton. Its goal was not to subvert the system of merchants but to force them to lower the prices of their goods. In Mississippi, Arkansas, and Tennessee, the state exchanges never gained a large following, and they merged in 1890 to buy only limited goods for farmers.²⁰⁴ The National Farmers Alliance and Cooperative swelled in the South and numbers continued to grow despite membership losses in Texas.

Growing National Alliance membership made it possible for the Gillespie Alliance to continue defending small farming during an Alliance boycott of the jute bagging trust. In the summer 1888, a cartel of fifteen major jute bagging manufacturing mills colluded to raise the price of jute bagging, the material used to wrap and package cotton. Motivated by declining prices resulting from the proliferation of smaller mills, the St. Louis conglomerate Warren, Jones, and Gratz convinced other major manufacturers to withhold bagging and double the price by August. They argued that smaller competitors could not make up the shortage on the market. Historian William F. Holmes has estimated that the unexpected rise imposed a burden of 42 cents on every bale of cotton prepared by farmers.²⁰⁵ By September, Texas farmers took to the *Mercury* to denounce the jute cartel.²⁰⁶ In Georgia, the Alliance threatened to withhold its cotton that fall unless prices were lowered, it did not succeed and farmers ate the burden of more expensive jute. States in the cotton belt began to propose using cheaper cotton bagging as a replacement for the next season.²⁰⁷ In April, 1889, the Gillespie Alliance dispatched business

²⁰⁴ Robert C. McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina; The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 48-50.

²⁰⁵ William F. Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel" *The Journal of Southern History* 60 no. 1 (February 1994), pp. 59-80.

²⁰⁶ *Southern Mercury*, September 1, 1888, pg. 4; *Southern Mercury*, September 18, 1888, pg. 4.

²⁰⁷ Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel," 71-72.

agent Fred Striegler to Dallas to figure out “any measure he may adopt to break up the Bagging Trust.”²⁰⁸ During the next month, the National Farmers Alliance met in Birmingham, Alabama and endorsed the use of cotton bagging produced by friendly mills. In their summer meeting, members of the Gillespie Alliance voted to “use no Jute. Cotton Bagging only.”²⁰⁹

The jute bagging boycott succeeded because the jute cartel was new and disorganized, not because national cooperation was superior to that at the state level. By the fall of 1889, the boycott and demonstration against the cartel brought the price of jute bagging down by 32 percent, cheap enough for many farmers to begin purchasing again. By 1891, the price dropped several cents below its 1888 value signalling success for the Alliance.²¹⁰ Cooperative boycotting in the Alliance created a crisis of overproduction for jute bagging manufacturers. The sudden loss of buyers left the market supply far above the demand. Overproduction caused distrust in the new cartel, and members left and lowered the prices of jute. A cooperative exchange at the national level would have nevertheless run into the same issues of cash scarcity and farmers’ credit dependence. Despite the success of the boycott, the prices of cotton were still falling and small farmers were hurtling towards an overproduction crisis of their own.

Cooperative economic programs in the Farmers Alliance only worked when they did not require farmers to overcome the superior forces of international markets. It was noticeably easier for merchants and corporations to organize than it was for farmers that were scattered across the South and the West. Credit dependency and the absence of excess capital prevented farmers from organizing to sell cotton in bulk. These were fundamental problems of capitalist agriculture. For corporations in cities who stored profits in banks, the process of coordinating and funding new enterprises was significantly easier. In the case of the jute bagging boycott,

²⁰⁸ Minutes for April, 19, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 58.

²⁰⁹ Minutes for July 12, 1889, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 62.

²¹⁰ Holmes, “The Southern Farmers’ Alliance and the Jute Cartel,” 75-76.

farmers were able to utilize an existing network of rural papers and traveling lecturers to animate landowning farmers against a weak and relatively new trust. They succeeded only because they had already built the infrastructure that they needed. In the case of the Texas Alliance Exchange, the expectation that farmers erect a warehouse, support officers, and coordinate cotton sales with whatever scraps they had saved was unrealistic. The failure to overcome the superior organization of merchants and textile factories doomed the Gillespie Alliance and cooperative buying and selling.

In response to the failure of the Texas Alliance Exchange, National Alliance President Charles Macune proposed financial reform as the solution to the threat of tenancy. Influenced by currency theorists from the Greenback-Labor Party, Macune believed that “the principle cause of [farmers’] depressed condition” was not international markets, but the fixed money supply created by the government’s adoption of the gold standard. By faulty economics, he argued that the fixed money supply left little cash available to compensate for the increased demand at harvest time. Thus, cotton buyers were forced to lower their valuation of cotton every fall because there was simply not enough money to value it higher. The resulting low prices kept farmers in debt and expelled them to tenancy.²¹¹ At the National Farmers Alliance’s December, 1889 convention in St. Louis, Charles Macune unveiled his solution: the sub-treasury plan. He proposed that the United States Treasury abolish the current system of using private banks “as United States Depositories” and establish sub-treasuries “in every county in each of the states.” At sub-treasuries, farmers would deposit their crops and receive a bank certificate that they could use as legal tender to purchase supplies until they would sell the whole certificate to the “highest bidder.”²¹² Members of the National Alliance, largely familiar with currency reform

²¹¹ “Charles Macune St. Louis Speech Supplement,” Centennial Alliance Records, 50-71.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 50-71.

from their Granger days, celebrated his plan and added it to proposals from the Cleburne Demands which they retitled the St. Louis Demands.

Macune's proposed radical remaking of the national banking system necessitated political action that threatened the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance. A loyal Democrat, Macune's solution created a problem for him and many other members of the Alliance about how to enter the sub-treasury debate into national politics. Both major parties had been strong advocates of the gold standard since Reconstruction. In 1890, members of the Alliance at the national, state, and county levels needed to decide whether or not to pursue an alliance with an existing party or to create their one of own. But the process of entering politics to enact the sub-treasury plan moved farmers' focus from altering local relationships between farmers and cotton production, furnishing merchants, and education to changing national legislation and winning political battles. In the early 1890s, farmers in the Alliance rallied to the sub-treasury plan to make this transition to political advocacy. But the transition moved their attention towards a panacea. This is not to suggest that once they adopted the Sub-Treasury plan, members of the National Alliance forgot any of their other concerns. Instead, the National Alliance's focus on the politics of the sub-treasury made much of the Gillespie Alliance more expensive than was economically productive. As the Alliance crumbled, so too did the network that connected farmers across the movement.

Part Three: The Politics of a Panacea, 1890-1896

Farmers' pursuit of politics did not undermine Gillespie's Populist movement, their pursuit of the politics of the sub-treasury did. National Alliance President Charles Macune's sub-treasury plan proposed to single-handedly end small farmers' dependency on furnishing merchants, prevent declining crop prices, and inject capital into impoverished rural communities. When it was explained as a catch-all solution to the threat of tenancy, the sub-treasury plan convinced farmers to abandon the Alliance and enter politics. The trauma of breaking with the Democratic Party, a necessary consequence of the panacea, fused the two ideas of party and plan. By the election of 1892, the People's Party was synonymous with the sub-treasury plan. But enthusiasm for the sub-treasury plan destroyed the Gillespie Alliance. Financial reform did not appeal to the majority of Gillespie farmers, for whom credit relationships were not as strained as they were for cotton farmers. The few that were convinced by the sub-treasury did organize People's Party clubs, but were unsuccessful at recruiting voters during election years. Populist clubs were not Alliance lodges; they could not sustain the cooperative projects that originally attracted Gillespie farmers to the movement. As the politics of a panacea wore on, the Gillespie Alliance collapsed. Without the Alliance, Gillespie's Populist movement came to an abrupt end.

After the St. Louis conference, the Gillespie Alliance upheld Charles Macune's sub-treasury plan, but small farmers' loyalty to the Democratic party prevented them from immediately entering politics. In April 1890, Samuel Ealy Johnson delivered "a talk" on the sub-treasury plan that prompted "a lengthy discussion" between Gillespie Alliance members. After the collapse of the Texas cotton exchange severely reduced Gillespie Alliance membership, the few remaining farmers sought Macune's new program as a path toward recuperating the

movement.²¹³ But Gillespie farmers were slow to move towards political action. Southern farmers' service in the Civil War and their endurance of Reconstruction had made Democratic loyalty an extension of their personal histories. In their July 11, 1890 meeting, the Gillespie Alliance encouraged "all who had sympathy with the laboring class" to attend the annual Grand State Alliance convention rather than propose to hold a separate political meeting. In its next resolution, the Gillespie Alliance agreed to "support no Lawyer or Banker for Legislator or State Senator" but stopped short of opposing specific candidates or parties.²¹⁴ Gillespie farmers were wary of overt actions that could provoke the Democratic Party until the Grand State Alliance of Texas had decided on the proper course that fall. But a week before the Texas Alliance convention could have questioned support of the Democrats, the farmers revolt was abruptly postponed. Texas' Democratic Party endorsed reform candidate James Hogg for governor on a platform that included long awaited railroad regulation. Members of the Grand State Alliance happily agreed to support Hogg in the coming election rather than discuss an alternative.²¹⁵

In the same election year, farmers in the Kansas State Alliance, lacking an equivalent history with either major party, ran successful third-party campaigns. In the spring 1890, county Alliance presidents met to critique Kansas Republicans' inability to act in the interests of farmers. Kansans had voted Republican in most elections since they achieved statehood, but many voters, especially laborers and farmers, held sympathies with the Democratic and Greenback-Labor parties. During an impromptu open convention in June, the Kansas Alliance moved to nominate a full ticket of independent candidates. By August, they had nominated county lecturers, organizers, presidents, and secretaries for state and national offices. They

²¹³ Minutes for April 1890, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 71.

²¹⁴ Minutes for July 11, 1890, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 74.

²¹⁵ Donna A. Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers Alliance and People's Party in Texas* (Austin, Texas; University of Texas Press, 1984), 117-118; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 217-225.

called themselves the People's Party. The new National Alliance President, Leonidas L. Polk of North Carolina, even travelled to Kansas to stump for the candidates. In the fall election, Kansas Populists won five of seven Congressional seats, 96 of 125 seats in the state house, and unseated nationally-known Senator John Ingalls. The success of Kansas' People's Party in the fall of 1890 encouraged supporters of the third-party movement to broach the subject at the National Farmers Alliance conference in Ocala, Florida.²¹⁶

But at the Ocala convention, Texas Alliance members appealed to Southern delegations' loyalty to the Democrats to delay a national third-party. When Kansas Populists and their allies raised the question of forming a third-party, members of the Texas Alliance urged delegations to instead seek cooperation with friendly Democrats. They gestured to recently elected politicians, such as Texas Governor James Hogg and South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman, that won offices on platforms endorsed by state Alliances. Former Alliance President Charles Macune, a Democratic stalwart, argued that the Alliance ought to wait until the next election cycle to discuss the creation of a national party. In the meantime, he announced that he would travel to Washington D.C. to lobby for a sub-treasury bill. Delegates from his home state of Texas and other Southern states applauded Macune's statements and voted to table the topic until 1892.²¹⁷ Instead, the Alliance republished their earlier St. Louis Demands as the Ocala Demands. The National Alliance urged members to make sure that their elected officials measured up to the "Ocala Yardstick."²¹⁸

However, when Texas Governor James Hogg took office Gillespie farmers found him several inches shorter than they had hoped. By the summer of 1891, any Gillespie Alliance support for the Hogg administration had completely vanished. The split began over the Railroad

²¹⁶ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 182-201.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 225-232.

²¹⁸ "The Ocala Platform" in George Brown Tindall, ed., *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders* (New York, New York; Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 88-89.

Commission, which had brought members of the Texas Alliance to support Hogg in the first place. The Governor preferred that members of the commission be appointed, so that he could remain in control of the committee. The Alliance, fearful of the return of proper Redeemers, pleaded with Hogg to hold elections for members. Hogg ignored them.²¹⁹ When the Alliance criticized his decision, Hogg's administration twisted the knife further by refusing to work on legislation for the sub-treasury plan.²²⁰ In the meeting after Hogg's betrayal, the Gillespie Alliance endorsed the Ocala Yardstick in full. It was a statement of disapproval. In its July 1891 meeting, the Gillespie Alliance called upon the Governor to prevent the state house from repealing a law preventing foreigners from speculating in Texas' land. Hogg did not prevent the state house from allowing foreign corporations to purchase land grants.²²¹ In October, the Gillespie Alliance called upon the state to pass a "Stay-Law" to give farmers extra time to pay merchants. Farmers cited "the depressed condition of agriculture and, the low price of Cotton" as sufficient reasons for support. Neither the governor nor the state house passed any relief legislation.²²²

As their hopes for a Democratic alliance evaporated, members of the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance regrouped behind the sub-treasury plan. In late April 1891, Texas Alliance officers Evan Jones, William Lamb, Charles Macune, and Stump Ashby called a National Alliance education conference in Waco. They had called the unprecedented meeting of county lecturers to correct misunderstandings about the sub-treasury plan amid section-wide Democratic resistance to the plan.²²³ The Gillespie Alliance sent Brother P. G. Temple to Waco to attend the conference and return with a report.²²⁴ When the Waco conference adjourned, Grand

²¹⁹ Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin, Texas; University of Texas Press, 1971), 120-125.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

²²¹ Minutes for July 11, 1891, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 81.

²²² Minutes for October 10, 1891, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 85.

²²³ McMath, *American Populism*, 144-145.

²²⁴ Minutes for April 10, 1891, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 79.

State Alliance President Evan Jones embarked on a speaking tour across the state. He stopped in Gillespie County to speak to the farmers about the sub-treasury plan.²²⁵ As Democrats failed to live up to the Ocala Yardstick, the Farmers Alliance stressed the sub-treasury plan as necessary to the relief of farmers. The simultaneous failure of Democratic Party and the success of education initiatives fused the third-party effort with the sub-treasury plan.

By the fall 1891, the Gillespie Alliance was convinced that they needed both a third-party and the subtreasury plan. Dissatisfaction with the Hogg administration and the education initiatives of the summer encouraged an early resumption of the debate about a national third-party. The pages of the *Southern Mercury* were covered in letters arguing about political action. During its summer meeting, the Gillespie Alliance condemned *Southern Mercury* contributors who took an “obstructive course” to the formation of a third-party. In August, a frustrated minority of Grand State Alliance members assembled in Fort Worth to publicly oppose the attempts to form a third-party in Texas. The Gillespie Alliance “condemn[ed]” the conference as “creating dissensions in our ranks and seemingly trying to disrupt the Alliance in Texas.”²²⁶ Advocates of the sub-treasury tried to storm the convention but were barred from entry. Instead, they assembled at another location in the city to proclaim the founding of the Texas State People’s Party.²²⁷

In February 1892, members of the National Alliance followed the lead of Texas and announced the formation of the People’s Party of the United States. Despite the preventative attempts of Macune and other Democratic stalwarts, Alliance President Leonidas Polk led the formation of a national third-party at a convention in St. Louis. Southern delegations, having faced the same frustrations that plagued the Texas Alliance, endorsed the decision

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²²⁶ Minutes for July 11, 1891, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 83.

²²⁷ Roscoe Martin, “The People’s Party in Texas: A Study in Third Party Politics” in *The University of Texas Bulletin* 3308 (Austin, Texas; The University of Austin Press, 1933), 36-39.

enthusiastically. They saw it as their only hope of enacting the sub-treasury plan. Macune swallowed his tongue and moved cautiously with the Alliance into politics.²²⁸ In its spring meeting, the Gillespie Alliance endorsed the People's Party of the United States. In the same meeting, it passed six more resolutions condemning Democrats, praising Populists, and advocating policies from the Ocala Demands.²²⁹ By the spring of 1892, the overwhelming support for the People's Party brought Fort Worth dissidents back into the movement.

But Gillespie farmers failed to elect People's Party candidates in the fall 1892. When they formed the People's Party, Alliance farmers expected to nominate Leonidas Polk to head their national ticket. His unexpected death before the convention left them without a viable Presidential candidate. However, the eventual nomination of the perennial third-party candidate James Weaver cannot account for the People's Party's meager results in Gillespie County.²³⁰ In addition to the national ticket, the Texas People's Party had nominated popular lecturer Thomas Nugent for Governor and local lecturer Samuel Ealy Johnson for state legislator in Gillespie's District. But turnout for the popular Johnson mirrored that for the unpopular Weaver. In November 1892, 377 residents of Gillespie county voted for Weaver and 387 voted for Johnson. Most Gillespie voters supported Democratic Presidential candidate Grover Cleveland and Democratic state legislator Clarence Martin, with 618 and with 846 votes respectively.²³¹ Data for the county's gubernatorial vote are difficult to locate, but Nugent finished a close third behind runner-up Republican George Clark, earning only 25 percent of the total state vote.²³² Gillespie Populists, who had once brought nearly 880 members to their county Alliance, failed to motivate even half of that number for the 1892 campaigns. Even if half

²²⁸ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 264-267.

²²⁹ Minutes for April 8, 1892, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 91-92.

²³⁰ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 270-272.

²³¹ Gregg Cantrell, "Lyndon's Granddaddy: Samuel Ealy Johnson Sr., Texas Populism, and the Improbably Roots of American Liberalism" in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 118 no. 2 (October, 2014), 150; *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; N. W. Ayer & Son, 1895), 1185.

²³² Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion*, 142.

of the Gillespie Alliance was composed of women, who were unable to vote, Gillespie Populists still failed to win over a significant number of the farmers that had not joined the Alliance's expensive cooperative programs. The People's Party failed to convince Gillespie farmers to support the sub-treasury plan.

Gillespie farmers were not convinced by the sub-treasury plan's promise to prevent small farmers from being reduced to tenancy. Not only had the Gillespie People's Party debuted poorly in the fall elections, but by their October 1892 meeting, the Gillespie Alliance had shrunk to only seven suballiances and approximately 140 members.²³³ In Gillespie County, the sub-treasury plan did not hold as much sway as it did in cash crop farming areas. Gillespie's livestock herders were historically less dependent on merchants because they did not need to be loaned seeds nor did they need to contract for transport. Livestock bred with each other and were driven to market by cowboys. With an open-range on which livestock could graze, Gillespie farmers did not need to contract with merchants to dig a well or borrow feed, as some ranchers had to.²³⁴ As a result, Gillespie farmers experienced lower rates of tenancy than farmers in cotton farming areas. Furthermore, where cash crop farmers saw hope in storing their crops at sub-treasuries to avoid the seasonal dump at harvest, livestock owners could not store their animals at federal depositories to raise declining prices. Gillespie farmers did not locate their misfortunes in their relationships of exchange with merchants, and therefore the sub-treasury did not draw them to the People's Party. They saw the threat of tenancy in declining livestock prices, threats to the open range, and poverty in rural education. The sub-treasury did not address those concerns. The Gillespie Alliance had done that, despite its shortcomings.

Those Gillespie farmers that were convinced by the sub-treasury plan did assemble local People's Party clubs. But Populist clubs could not sustain the organized meetings, charitable

²³³ Minutes for October 8, 1892, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 99.

²³⁴ Shannon, *Farmers' Last Frontier*, 221-226.

funds, and cooperative buying/selling that originally drove Gillespie farmers to the Alliance.²³⁵ Very little literature exists about Populist clubs, but Political Scientist Roscoe Martin's depiction of them differs dramatically from the highly organized Gillespie County Farmers Alliance. Martin acknowledges that there were periodic gatherings to hear outside speakers. But more often, Populist clubs met informally to hold fireside discussions between local men. Clubs did nominate candidates for county offices, but only in the months before elections. Martin writes that membership would decline in off-years and during the wintertime.²³⁶ Martin does not say if members needed to pay dues to Populist clubs, but surely dues could not have been greater than those of the Alliance, which had to pay for a number of expensive programs. Populist clubs did not propose the remaking of rural relationships through local institutions—which drew Gillespie farmers to the Alliance in the first place.

As the People's Party overtook the Alliance, the remaining members of the Gillespie Alliance tried to recover losses by holding open-door meetings, inviting German-speaking lecturers, and lowering the age requirement for members. In January 1892, the Gillespie Alliance "discussed at length" holding an open door meeting to attract curious farmers.²³⁷ In April of the following year, the Gillespie Alliance agreed to allow E. O. Meitzer to lecture to their county in German hoping to attract older county residents who still spoke German as their first language.²³⁸ In July, the Gillespie Alliance lowered the "age necessary to become a member from 16 to 14 years."²³⁹ But by the fall, the membership in the Gillespie Alliance still hovered somewhere between 140 and 110.²⁴⁰ Despite the market crash and ensuing depression in the spring of 1893, Gillespie farmers still did not see the Alliance as a path towards prosperity.

²³⁵ Cantrell, "Lyndon's Granddaddy," 145.

²³⁶ Martin, "The People's Party in Texas," 147-148.

²³⁷ Minutes for January 9, 1892, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 89.

²³⁸ Minutes for April 7, 1893, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 104-105.

²³⁹ Minutes for July 15, 1893, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 107.

²⁴⁰ Minutes for October 13, 1893, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 108; Minutes for January 13, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 111.

Both the Grand State and Gillespie Alliances were wary that losing county and local lodges would undermine the Populist movement. In April 1894, the Grand State Alliance sent a circular to inquire after the “evident becoming dormant of Alliance work in [Gillespie] County.” The Gillespie Alliance discussed the “causes” and responded to the state Alliance accordingly.²⁴¹ In the summer and fall of that year Brother Gibson and others urged “the necessity of keeping up the Alliance to reform movement.” Gibson warned that reform could not be accomplished through “church or political parties,” only the Alliance could ensure “the benefit of future generations.”²⁴² Despite the presence of Populist clubs, the Gillespie Alliance referred to itself as “the foundation of the peoples-party.”²⁴³ The remaining members of the Gillespie Alliance expressed a fear that the loss of the Alliance would end the agrarian movement.

During the state elections of 1894, the People’s Party of Texas gained strength in cities but stagnated in rural areas where county and local lodges were failing. Data for the state campaigns of 1894 are difficult to obtain without access to county archives, but Roscoe Martin reports that Gillespie failed to elect a single People’s Party candidate in 1894. The People’s Party again nominated Thomas Nugent for Governor and this time he carried 36 percent of the vote, only falling short of Democrat Charles Cumberson’s 49 percent.²⁴⁴ Populists elected twenty-two legislators to their state house of 108 seats and three state senators of twenty-one seats.²⁴⁵ Worth Robert Miller and Stacy Ulbig have run regressions on Texas state electoral data and have concluded that the increased support for the 1894 Populist campaigns came predominantly from

²⁴¹ Minutes for April 12, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 113.

²⁴² Minutes for July 13, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 115; Minutes for October 13, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 118.

²⁴³ Minutes for July 13, 1894, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 115

²⁴⁴ Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion*, 156.

²⁴⁵ Worth Robert Miller and Stacy G. Ulbig, “Building a Populist Coalition in Texas, 1892-1896” in *The Journal of Southern History* 74 no. 2 (May, 2008), 219.

urban areas. They argue support in rural areas, such as Gillespie County, diminished in the months between the elections of 1892 and 1894.²⁴⁶

After the failed elections of 1894, the Populist movement in Gillespie county slowly faded. In April 1895, members of the Gillespie Alliance met at the “Alliance store” to hear and discuss a letter from the Grand State Alliance Secretary. The Secretary urged Gillespie to “select someone to reorganize the County.” Samuel Johnson was “nominated and duly elected” to take up the task by all members present.²⁴⁷ At its next meeting, “Bros P Hansen, F. C. Striegler, M. C. Ludwick and L. C. Gibson” were dispatched to reorganize the suballiances of the county. The only lodges remaining at that point were those at Willow City, Stonewall, and Enchanted.²⁴⁸ But by October, the organizers reported that “their attempts had been in vain.” Upon news of the organizers’ failure, the Gillespie Alliance debated if “Is it any use trying to keep up the Co. All.” The officers and four delegates present “decided to try.” But by its next meeting, the Gillespie Alliance could not even meet a quorum.²⁴⁹ On July 18, 1896 the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance folded and left all of its remaining treasury to the “Executive Committee of the People’s Party.”²⁵⁰ The Gillespie County Populist movement had ended.

The national movement did not last much longer. Days before the collapse of the Gillespie Alliance, the Democratic Party endorsed William Jennings Bryan for President upon a reform platform that touted the unlimited coinage of both silver and gold. Bimetallists, taking up the incorrect financial theory of their Greenbacker predecessors, argued that increasing the money supply would make money more available for buyers to value goods at higher prices. At its convention on July 24, the People’s Party divided over whether or not to second the

²⁴⁶ Miller and Ulbig, “Building a Populist Coalition,” 280-284.

²⁴⁷ Minutes for April 13, 1895, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 119.

²⁴⁸ Minutes for July 13, 1895, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 121.

²⁴⁹ Minutes for October 12, 1895, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 124-125; Minutes for January 11, 1896, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 125.

²⁵⁰ Minutes for July 12, 1896, Gillespie County Alliance Minutes, 1886-1896, 126.

nomination of Bryan or to nominate a separate Populist candidate. Loyal Populists stressed that the Democrats still did not acknowledge the sub-treasury plan, but loyal Democrats and eager politicians forced through the nomination of Bryan. They were looking for a quick political victory. During the late summer and fall, People's Party lecturers stumped for Bryan and brought out strong support. But in November Republican William McKinley won the Presidency, employing intimidation tactics and brandishing a large war chest. The Populists were left with no silver lining. Bryan's loss shattered the People's Party. The absence of the Farmers Alliance network prevented farmers from ever regaining a significant following. The Party continued to run campaigns until 1908, but it never challenged the major parties again.²⁵¹

The same plan that had propelled farmers into politics also destroyed the movement. The sub-treasury plan demanded that farmers enter politics and leave behind alternative solutions such as those proposed in the Alliance. Cotton farmers believed it to be a panacea, because it proposed to revise their relationships with merchants, the most apparent manifestation of the threat of tenancy. It became synonymous with the People's Party. Gillespie farmers, who saw tenancy in declining prices and the capitalist reorganization of livestock grazing, were not misled by the panacea. They might not have understood the threat of tenancy to be the result of increased production, but they understood that it did not lay exclusively in the relationships of exchange with merchants. In Gillespie County, the rise of the People's Party killed both the County Alliance and the Populist Movement. Gillespie small farmers saw no reason to continue as Populists.

²⁵¹ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 264-290.

Conclusion: Gillespie County in History

Gillespie County's Populist movement reveals a crisis in the postbellum United States that asks historians to reinvestigate farmers' organization in the late nineteenth century. Faced with the social relations of capitalist agriculture, small farmers organized in the Populist movement. Gillespie farmers' rebuff of the People's Party asks historians to examine the varied paths that farmers took to capitalist agriculture. Gillespie farmers' bend for livestock should call upon historians to better understand how Alliance cooperatives dealt with farmers that were not single-staple producers. Gillespie's geographical proximity to the Alliance's Western states should emphasize how little has been written about postbellum agriculture in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. And the story of the People's Party in Gillespie County should provoke historians to write more about farmers' transition from the Alliance to politics. Ultimately, I hope this essay reaches a thorough understanding of why Gillespie farmers converged on local lodges in the 1880s.

The encumbrance of the Civil War and the rise of Redeemers dragged Gillespie County's subsistence farmers into market production. Capitalism was not an abstraction to farmers in postbellum non-plantation areas; it meant reorganizing local routines. Gillespie farmers encountered new social relations based on indebtedness to merchants, the threat of fencing-in of livestock, and heightened educational inequality between the town and countryside. Collectively new relations threatened to reduce Gillespie farmers to tenancy.

Capitalist agriculture did not invent coercion, instead it developed new, impersonal means to coerce agricultural labor. Early Gillespie farmers avoided the personal avenues of coercion familiar to slaves through historical revolt, racism, and, near the end, political

necessity.²⁵² But after emancipation cleared the way for a new ruling ideology, subsistence farmers were remade into agricultural producers. If they could not meet their lien or resisted planting cotton, the invisible hand of the market would manifest in the very visible confiscation of their land or starvation. Only land stood between small farmers and the reduction to a dependent rural proletariat. It remained the last relic of their independent past.²⁵³

Farmers negotiated change in everyday life, just as they faced it. Although, negotiation might be too polite a description for violent fence-cutting raids and popular agrarian organizations like the Grange. In the Grange, Texas farmers learned to meet in local lodges and experiment with cooperative stores. But the Farmers Alliance taught them to harness these tools in concert with the logic of the market.

Gillespie farmers united their individual efforts to protect smallholding when they organized their county Alliance. Through the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance, Gillespie farmers attempted to establish cooperative routines that ensured their survival in the market. County stores and state exchanges sought to subvert the credit arrangements and declining prices that kept them in debt. Gillespie farmers erected their own system of lodges to learn of comparable conditions and political problems elsewhere in the Alliance. They hoped that by creating a charitable fund and uniting around common political problems they might preserve their station as “independent” producers. But in their cooperative effort, they were unable to defend themselves. Despite limited success, Gillespie farmers could not sustain an expensive infrastructure of new institutions. Capitalist agriculture kept them dependent on credit and left them with little profit.

²⁵² Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), 213-316; Genovese, “Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders Republic,” 331-341. Morgan explains how labor arrangements in colonial Virginia produced slavery and subsistence farming. Genovese’s essay explains how subsistence farmers maintained their way of life through support of slavery.

²⁵³ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 15-49. Hahn cautions us to not assume that yeomen were totally independent, but surely more independent than their market producing descendents.

Cooperation could not save Gillespie farmers because it worked within the logic of a market that had no need for a class of small landholders. Theoretically, staple farmers and stock raisers could have manipulated the international quantity and price of a good through collective action. But in an actual market where credit-dependent farmers needed to gather their excess cash to cobble together an organized exchange, the task was effectively impossible. Especially when their resources are compared to those wielded by private banks, railroads, and textile corporations. However, it would have been an even greater task if farmers had, by some unknown means, returned to subsistence farming and resisted market production altogether. In hindsight, the Populist movement might seem foolish. But Gillespie farmers, and hundreds of thousands of others across the country, rushed to prevent their complete reduction to a rural proletariat; cooperation was the best means available to them under the hegemony of the market.

The People's Party was not the solution either, something that Gillespie farmers only understood because of inherited geography and history. After the collapse of the Texas Alliance Exchange, cotton farmers mistakenly pursued the sub-treasury plan as a panacea. They located the threat of tenancy in their indebtedness to merchants, and therefore felt that changing their relationships of exchange might save their land. But Gillespie farmers understood that the sub-treasury only proposed to shift their indebtedness from merchants to the government. They did not support the People's Party because they located the threat of tenancy in livestock enclosures and declining cattle prices. The sub-treasury plan did not address the concerns of livestock raisers.

Cotton farmers' pursuit of national politics undermined interest in the Gillespie County Farmers Alliance. Those Gillespie farmers that supported the sub-treasury organized Populist Clubs, but could not recruit new members. While the People's Party won victories in parts of

Texas, Kansas, Georgia, Nebraska, and North Carolina, in Gillespie County it ran meagerly. Following a loss of membership, the Gillespie Alliance collapsed. After the national People's Party fused with Democrats in 1896, so too did the Populist movement.

In the coming decades, agriculture in the American South continued its capitalist transformation. In the years after the Alliance, the cotton kingdom expanded further in the Texas Hill Country. The eventual end of the open range heralded a new era of large ranches spanning from the North Texas Cross Timbers all the way to the Southwest Texas border. More farmers lost their land and began work as sharecroppers or tenants. Many even left the rural world altogether. In the decades after the turn of the century, machines abounded where people once walked the soil. The changes that agriculture faced are more complicated than I have presented them in this brief space.²⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the era of the small subsistence farmer had ended.

Gillespie's Populist movement is not a lost cause, it is the source of a common heritage. If it is difficult to resist wistfulness for a "pre-capitalist" world when reading the tragedy of Gillespie farmers, be assured. Any of the so-called pre-capitalist modes of organization, especially those that arranged for the labor of the many to sustain the lives of a few, forced our ancestors to account for novel contradictions of their own.²⁵⁵ I fear that, indirectly, I may have been too kind to the antebellum South in my analysis of capitalist agriculture. Some historians have adorned different rose-colored glasses, and look upon the Populist movement as a golden age of political organizing. Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise* confirms this belief and essay collections that quarrell about the "Temper" of the Populists do not help to rid us of it.²⁵⁶ All that

²⁵⁴ For a more informed history see: Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 1-22.

²⁵⁵ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 3-7.

²⁵⁶ Sheldon Hackney, ed., *Populism: The Critical Issues* (New York, New York; Little, Brown, and Company, 1971), 67-146; Miller, ed., "The Populist Vision: A Roundtable Discussion," 18-45. In his essay, Miller ponders "This is the point where I wonder if the dichotomy of backward-looking versus forward-looking is helpful. Can a late nineteenth-century farmer, laborer, or middle-class reformer be

historians need to correct their bias is the recognition that since their movement many Populist reforms have come to fruition. And yet, we have not arrived at their promised cooperative commonwealth. Instead, Gillespie's Populist movement marks one occurrence of the international severing of people from the land.

In the nineteenth-century, farmers across the globe began to produce for national and international markets. What began in England and Northern Germany reached India, Egypt, Russia, the United States, and eventually Brazil. Capitalist agriculture won its contests with serfdom, feudalism, slavery, yeomenry, and many others and replaced them with new social relations: rigidly enforced property ownership, new credit arrangements, and cash crop production. Capitalist social relations did not take hold everywhere in the same ways, they arrived along trails blazed by local history and in agreement with the dictates of local geography. Nonetheless, the stakes were the same everywhere. The majority of the world still lived in the countryside, and tenancy thrust them towards sprouting towns and swelling cities. Farmers across the world rebelled against their expulsion from the land: the rocks and soil that some called home for centuries. Those that lost their homes were deprived of what the novelist Eudora Welty called "the crossroads of circumstance."²⁵⁷ Hired laborers and urban workers were removed from the places that contained their history and sent elsewhere to sell their labor for their basic needs. Such an upheaval in farmers' conception of life was justified as supporting the progress of mankind.

committed to values derived from the republicanism of the American Revolution and still be a modernizer?" Professor Miller concludes that "changed circumstances" enabled farmers to land the ideological jump to support big government. But he should have realized that when they spoke of republicanism and democracy they were speaking of their own world, not the world of the American Revolution. They may have inherited words from the Enlightenment, but they applied them to ideas that were novel and of their experiences. They were not forward-looking or backward-looking, but of their own time. To say that they could see the future or conjure up the past would make them time travellers that they never were.

²⁵⁷ Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction" in Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling, eds, *Eudora Welty: Stories, Essays, & Memoir* (New York, New York; The Library of America, 1998), 783.

Truthfully, the transformation of Gillespie agriculture, and that of other farming areas around the world, did support the economic growth of so-called developing countries. International agriculture markets allowed for dense living arrangements far away from food growing areas. Many farmers left for jobs in towns and cities. Those that remained became agricultural producers or those that labored for them. The world's relationships with food, place, and working were intractably changed by the beginning of capitalist agriculture. The overwhelming demand for this new way of life defeated Gillespie farmers' revolt. The vision of progress dragged Gillespie Populists kicking and screaming into the world of capitalist agriculture.

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