

Perspectives on Statehood: South Dakota's First Quarter Century, 1889-1914

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*Prospective homesteaders
survey the land near
Pierre, 1890.*

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It is likely that the year 1914 will be practically forgotten in South Dakota history, for there has been no extraordinary event from which dates may be kept. The people are prosperous and go about their affairs cheerfully and hopefully. Clearly we are growing self-satisfied, but not ungrateful to the Giver of All Good Gifts.

—Doane Robinson, "Progress of South Dakota, 1914"
South Dakota Historical Collections (1916)

In an overview of the history of the states comprising the Great Plains, historian James E. Wright has written that the region and its people moved into maturity between the 1880s and World War I. In the process, Wright continues, its inhabitants "underwent three primary types of adaptation to the new reality of western life: political, technological, and psychological."¹ As every student of South Dakota history knows, the state is not wholly embraced by the Great Plains; nevertheless Wright's generalizations provide a useful framework by which to assess the changes that occurred in South Dakota during its first quarter century of statehood. Of course, turning points or significant events for one group were less so for others. If one noted changes in South Dakota's Indian population in the years 1889-1914, for example, it would be more accurate to speak of psychological change first, and then economic and political change, in that order. Nor would west river and Black Hills turning points likely be those stressed by citizens east of the Missouri. Still, some overall generalizations about adaptation in the first quarter century of statehood can be made, allowing us to explore the paradoxes that result from the diversity of viewpoint.

In order to explain the nature of South Dakota's adaptations in its first twenty-five years, it is necessary to establish starting points by looking at the national and local images of South Dakota in 1889.² Statehood was achieved, of course, when outgoing President Grover Cleveland signed the "Omnibus Bill" on 22 February 1889, only a few days before he was succeeded by President-elect Benjamin Harrison. Up to the 1888 presidential

1. James E. Wright, "Old Myths and New Realities," in *The Great Plains Experience: Readings in the History of a Region*, ed. James E. Wright and Sarah Z. Rosenberg ([Lincoln, Nebr.]: University of Mid-America, 1978), p. 300.

2. John E. Miller, "The Way They Saw Us: Dakota Territory in the Illustrated News," *South Dakota History* 18 (Winter 1988): 214-44, is a superb survey of the images of the Dakotas presented to the American public before statehood.

election, the Democratic party had usually opposed the admission of Dakota, in part because they felt that the territory was likely to become two Republican states. Why, then, had the Democrats relented in 1889 and admitted four western states—North and South Dakota, Montana, and Washington—of which only Montana promised to be Democratic in affiliation? And, after 1889, why did Congress admit Wyoming and Idaho only a year later, then controversial Mormon Utah in 1896, Oklahoma in 1907, and Arizona and New Mexico by 1912?

The most obvious answer is that the four omnibus states and the others were well qualified for admission. All had the population requirements, enough resources to fund the operations of a state government, and the economic, social, and political institutions to sustain statehood. But that had been the case for some time for several states; indeed, South Dakota had written and ratified a state constitution in 1885.³ It was also obvious that the four had conducted effective admission campaigns. Three less obvious factors also contributed to the realization of statehood for the four: (a) a complex sectional compromise in Congress between ex-abolitionist Republicans and ex-Confederate Democrats that in some ways resembled the earlier sectional compromises of 1820, 1850 and 1877; (b) the impact of extremely favorable national images of South Dakota and Washington; and (c) a powerful national urge to settle the "Indian Question" once and for all. Perhaps never before in American history had so many different and often incompatible groups joined together to resolve the fate of America's remaining Indian population in so concerted a way as between 1887 and 1890.

The Omnibus Bill would undoubtedly have become law after Benjamin Harrison assumed office in March 1889 because Harrison had been an ardent advocate of statehood for western territories for many years. The new president had supported statehood for South Dakota in 1885, had headed the Senate Committee on Territories, and had used territorial patronage to entrench Repub-

3. American territorial policy is treated in Earl S. Pomeroy, *The Territories and the United States, 1861-1890: Studies in Colonial Administration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947), and more briefly in Howard R. Lamar, *Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), pp. 1-27. A broad useful overview is Jack E. Eblen, *The First and Second United States Empires: Governors and Territorial Government, 1784-1912* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968).

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licans in many territorial offices.⁴ Moreover, for the first time in many years, both houses of Congress were safely Republican.

Nevertheless, Harrison's election probably had less to do with the success of the Omnibus Bill than the activities of a wonderfully loquacious, noncontroversial New York congressman named Samuel S. Cox. Cox had first been elected to Congress from Ohio in 1856. During the Civil War, he watched his home state tear itself apart politically as pro-southern Copperheads and anti-southern Unionists there vilified one another. Near the end of the war, Cox moved to New York where he was soon elected to Congress from a New York City Democratic district. By the time of his death, he had served thirty years in the House of Representatives. An engaging spread-eagle speaker, he had early won the nickname of "Sunset" Cox after describing a setting sun in a particularly florid speech.⁵

Although Cox's loyalties were always to the Union, as a good Democrat he was determined to see that southern views were heard and respected, and like a brilliant diplomat he assisted in resolving North-South issues. He had resisted extreme reconstruction measures and had favored amnesty for Jefferson Davis and other high-ranking ex-rebels. At the same time, Cox was a true friend of the West, arguing for the territories' admission to statehood and favoring other legislation in their behalf.⁶

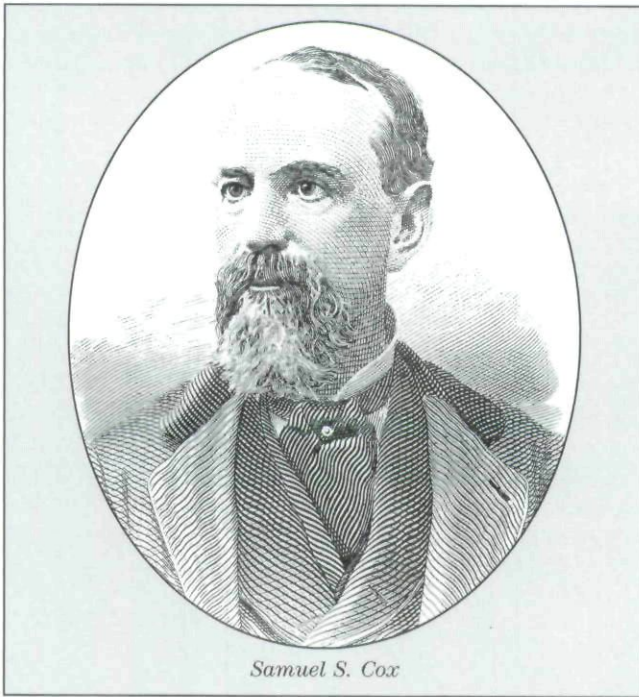
As the agitation for statehood for the Dakotas, Montana, and Washington grew in the fall and winter of 1888-1889, Cox sought to allay southern fears that a northwestern tier of states would be all Republican—that is, would send eight Republican senators to Congress. Democratic congressman William McKendree Springer of Illinois felt otherwise. As head of the House Commit-

4. Harrison believed in both western and imperial expansion. He was an advocate of Hawaiian annexation. *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Harrison, Benjamin," pp. 331-35. His role in promoting South Dakota statehood is mentioned in Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, pp. 256-59, 262, 264.

5. Cox recounted his own congressional career up to 1885 in his *Three Decades of Federal Legislation, 1855 to 1885* (San Francisco: Occidental Publishing Co., 1885), but his role in the Omnibus Bill proceedings is recorded in David Lindsey, "Sunset" Cox: *Irrepressible Democrat* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), pp. 252-54.

6. *Speech in House of Representatives, January 10, 1876* . . . (pamphlet), Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.; *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Cox, Samuel Sullivan." On 16 January 1889, Cox told the House of Representatives that every western territory except Utah should be admitted. *Chicago Tribune*, 16 Jan. 1889.

tee on Territories, he wanted to balance the partisan voting in the House and Senate as nearly as possible by arguing that Dakota Territory be admitted as a single state only. It was thought that Montana would be Democratic and that Washington might go either way. Southern distrust of the northwestern tier of states was so great, however, that they tried to effect a balance by recommending the admission of New Mexico, Arizona, and, if



necessary, even Mormon Utah, for they felt these territories could be persuaded to go Democratic.⁷

7. In an 1886 speech on admission, Harrison complained: "Can we not get rid of this old and disreputable mating business? It grew out of slavery" (Harrison to Senate, 27 Jan. 1886, in *Dakota, Her Claims to Admission as a State*, p. 9, quoted in Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, p. 272).

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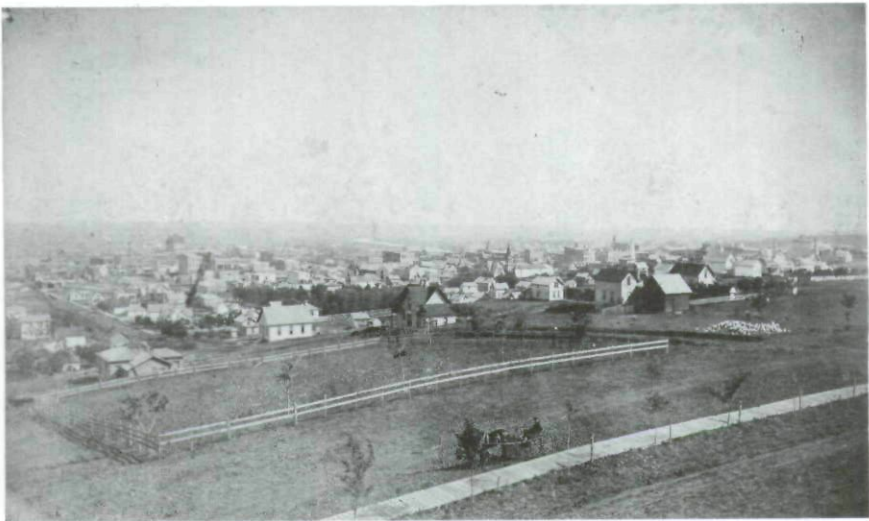
On the very eve of the vote on the Omnibus Bill, sectional tempers flared to the point that Senator Joseph C. S. Blackburn of Kentucky insulted Senator William E. Chandler of Vermont, an ex-abolitionist, and tried to assault him—an incident that was widely reported in the southern newspapers and one which it was said would guarantee Chandler's reelection in Vermont.⁸

It was at this juncture that Cox, aided by Charles S. Baker, a fellow Congressman from New York, called for all to rise above partisanship. He himself helped work out the compromise we call the Omnibus Bill, which, among other things, provided that South Dakota could vote to be separate from North Dakota and that while it would have to hold a constitutional convention it could merely re-adopt and update the 1885 document.⁹ Cox's statesmanship did not go unnoticed in South Dakota. He was invited to give the Fourth of July oration at Huron while he was on a tour of the

8. The episode was reported on page 1 of the *Atlanta Constitution* of 23 February 1889.

9. Cox himself gave a detailed account of his proposals in a Fourth of July oration in Huron, South Dakota, in 1889. Excerpts were printed in *History of the Pacific Northwest: Oregon and Washington*, 2 vols. (Portland, Oreg.: North Pacific History Co., 1889), 2:57-59.

Sioux Falls, shown as it appeared in 1889, was the site of the 1885 and 1889 South Dakota constitutional conventions.



new northwest states. Soon after his return East, however, he became ill and died in early September 1889. The *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* called him "The Friend of Dakota" and printed an account of his funeral.¹⁰

At the risk of reading too much symbolic meaning into the story of the Omnibus Bill, it does seem that it contained South Dakota's first lesson in political adaptation—namely that factors totally outside of its control, or even its understanding, had determined the conditions of its admission.¹¹ Ironically, it was frustration with an uncaring Washington and experiences with carpetbag federal appointees, and a resulting sense of powerlessness, that had prompted the statehood movement in the first place. That same sense of powerlessness was to surface again and again in both political and economic ways over the next twenty-five years. In short, statehood was no guarantee that South Dakota would get its way in Washington.

The narrow partisanship that characterized the Omnibus Bill seems even more cynical, even sinister, when one realizes that by 1889 the American people appear to have become convinced that North and South Dakota and Washington deserved statehood and that Montana probably did so as well. Memories of the blizzard of 1888, drought, and the slowing of the Dakota boom do not seem to have raised doubts in the public mind. A random sampling of four newspapers, the *New York Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, indicates that the public felt that South Dakota deserved immediate admission and should not be held back by the others.¹² They roundly condemned Congressman Springer's efforts to guarantee an equal number of Republicans and Democrats from the new states. During January 1889, the *New York Tribune* reported with glee that Springer had tried to bolster a statehood movement in New Mexico while scheming to force Dakota to come in as a single state.¹³ When the Omnibus Bill finally passed, the *Tribune* exclaimed in a long headline: "It Was a Hard Dose for Springer and

10. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 9 and 11 Sept. 1889. See also 21 Dec. 1888.

11. The January and February issues of the *New York Tribune* contained several references to the "Southern problem."

12. The testimony of senators and congressmen in favor of immediate admission is reported in the *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 and 18 Jan. 1889.

13. *New York Tribune*, 19 Jan. 1889. Springer's tactics were reported to the *Tribune* by Congressman Isaac S. Struble of Iowa, who strongly supported South Dakota statehood. *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 Jan. 1889.

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His Friends, and Many Democratic Senators Didn't Like It."¹⁴ After Cleveland had signed the bill, the *Tribune* noted that the four states "enter the Union by right, and not by sufferance."¹⁵ A few days later in an editorial entitled "Growing Nation," the paper observed that with the admission of the new states the center of political power had shifted to Indiana. The (Old) Northwest and the new states could now elect a president without New York. "So true it is that the West has become the ruling power in the Republic."¹⁶ So high an opinion did the *Chicago Tribune* have of the Dakotas that it attacked Springer for trying to link the "great wealth and growing population" of Dakota to the "rotten borough of New Mexico."¹⁷ These favorable images suggest that the Dakotas were seen as part and parcel of a region that was an extension of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa in many ways.

The local self-image appears to have been a combination of optimism and nervousness—the optimism due to the prospect of statehood and the hope of opening some eleven million acres of the Great Sioux Reservation to white settlement.¹⁸ A sampling of the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* in 1889-1890 reveals worry about drought and crops, a great interest in irrigation and artesian wells, an unsympathetic view of the local women's suffrage movement, and curiosity about the two major parties and the Farmers' Alliance. Although the paper followed the politics of admission carefully and covered both the South Dakota and North Dakota constitutional conventions, it was fascinated with the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation. A March 1889 headline, for example, declared: "Rush to Dakota.—Excitement Over the Opening of the Sioux Reservation Growing Intense. Towns Are Full of Strangers and More Are Pouring in Rapidly. Every Train Into the Territory Carries Carloads of Eager Settlers."¹⁹ Two months later, the *Argus-Leader* borrowed a phrase from the April 1889 Oklahoma land rush and reported on "Sioux Boomers" at Pierre, commenting that "The Covetous White Looks with Longing Eyes on the Reservation."²⁰ A day later, it reported that Oklahoma boomers were headed for the Sioux reservation. Perhaps

14. *New York Tribune*, 21 Feb. 1889.

15. *Ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1889.

16. *Ibid.*, 24 Feb. 1889.

17. *Chicago Tribune*, 19 Jan. 1889.

18. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 1 Aug. 1888 to 20 Aug. 1889 passim.

19. *Ibid.*, 11 Mar. 1889.

20. *Ibid.*, 7 May 1889.

in an act of wishful thinking, the paper added, "It Promises Soon to Take the Form of a Stampede Toward Dakota."²¹ And when government officials finally did secure an agreement with the Sioux that summer, the *Argus-Leader* declared that it meant the opening not only of eleven million acres of rich farming and grazing land but also of a direct route to the Black Hills.²²

Even the actual opening of the reservation in 1890, however, could not push aside news of the increasing role of the Farmers' Alliance in politics and its announcement at Huron on 6 June 1890 that it would become the Independent party. Naturally, the coming of the Ghost Dance religion to the Teton Sioux and the resulting tragedy at Wounded Knee in the last days of 1890 galvanized the attention of white South Dakotans and of the nation, but for most of the 1890s the great drama for the state's Euro-American citizens was drought, depression, and political protest expressed largely through the Populist party in the state. In the shaping of political adaptation in South Dakota, Populism had a definite role to play.

The phenomenon of Populism in the American West has been analyzed and defined in many different ways: as a radical agrarian movement; as an unrealistic urge to return to a simpler agrarian rural America where the farmer would once more become a centrally important figure; as a narrow, selfish economic movement attacking railroads and big business without understanding; and, on the other hand, as an intelligent critique of the real ills of a burgeoning industrial America.²³ Looking back at the Populist movement from the perspective of 1989, it appears that the South Dakota movement, while exhibiting some of the features described above, was in large part a logical, almost inevitable response to economic problems brought on by drought, depression, railroad and grain elevator rates, deflation, and the world

21. *Ibid.*, 8 May 1889.

22. *Ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1889.

23. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) is the most recent comprehensive, if controversial, general account of the Populist movement. A definitive history of Populism in South Dakota remains to be written, but see Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 3d ed., rev. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), chap. 16, "The Farmers' Alliance and the Populist Party," pp. 223-41, and Alan L. Clem, *Prairie State Politics: Popular Democracy in South Dakota* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1967), as well as Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "The Public Career of Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, 1848-1926," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 34 (1968): 143-311.

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market, as well as problems with political corruption and political inaction. But it could also be argued that it was as much an articulation of attitudes and beliefs of local citizens—that is, it was as much a cultural expression—as it was a political response. The careers of several South Dakota Populist leaders during the turbulent 1890s suggest that it shaped a political lifestyle that has been characteristic of the state ever since.

As Herbert Schell has noted in his *History of South Dakota*, the Farmers' Alliance had been in existence in Dakota since 1881. In 1889, however, it was reorganized, and led by its president, Henry L. Loucks, and its business manager, Alonzo Wardall, it left the National (or Northern) Farmers' Alliance to join the Southern Alliance, which was then replaced by the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union. At first, the South Dakota Alliance worked within traditional party lines, but when their candidates for the United States Senate, Wardall and Alonzo J. Edgerton, were defeated, they left the Republican party and created the Independent party in June 1890. Loucks himself was nominated for governor on a platform that reflected the concerns of the National Alliance organization. As Schell has noted, the new party called for the abolition of national banks and the substitution of legal bank notes for national bank notes. They endorsed a policy of free and unlimited coinage of silver and recommended a national income tax, government ownership and operation of the railroads, a tax on real estate, and the adoption of the Australian ballot.²⁴ Perhaps because we have heard these Populist demands so often and because so many have now been adopted in one form or another, none of them seem revolutionary.

During the 1890s, the Independents, or the Alliance or the Populists as they were more commonly called, managed to elect James H. Kyle to the Senate in 1891, a post he held until his death in 1901. Until 1900, in a series of dramatic ups and downs, the South Dakota Populists tried to bring political reform, railroad regulation, and better times to South Dakota, but they were seldom in total control of the statehouse or the governorship. The result was a constantly shifting set of internal political alliances. Republican senator Richard F. Pettigrew, for example, shifted to the Populists in 1896 and eventually wound up a Democrat. In the election of 1896, Silver Republicans, Populists, and Democrats

24. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 224, 226-36; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 6 June and 9 July 1890.

combined to elect Andrew E. Lee as governor and to reelect Kyle to the Senate, although the latter achieved that goal with Republican help. The election of William McKinley and the Republicans in 1896, the end of the drought, and prosperity brought on by the Spanish-American War prompted the return of key figures to the major parties: Loucks and others to the Republican fold and, as stated before, Pettigrew to the Democrats.²⁵

If the Populist era in South Dakota had ended by 1900, that did not mean that political orthodoxy was dominant. There were so many feuds within the Republican party and factions among the Democrats that, as Larry Pressler has observed in his *U.S. Senators from the Prairie*, "during the eventful early days of South Dakota's statehood when the Populist and Progressive movements were blooming . . . public figures were switching political partners like couples at a square dance. A Populist-Democratic alliance was strong in the first decade of statehood. When this dissolved some Populists stayed in the Democratic fold while others joined the growing Progressive wing of the Republican party. The GOP was ultimately split into two factions with the conservatives, or Stalwarts, on one side and the Progressives on the other."²⁶

Herbert Schell has suggested that despite valiant efforts, "the Populist administration had failed to distinguish itself with any noteworthy achievements."²⁷ In terms of legislation or solutions to larger economic and environmental problems, that is indeed the case. But the local Populist party, as did the national one, played a major role in adapting South Dakota politically to the new realities by confronting and discussing them in unorthodox terms. The Independent party itself was a model of sorts for non-partisanship. It sought what it thought were the best candidates, allied itself with first one major party and then the other, and used fusionist tactics in 1896. Its leaders, such as Loucks, Kyle, and Lee, were greatly respected, and Kyle often infuriated his Populist supporters by voting with conservative Republicans in the Senate on occasion.²⁸ In short, they established a precedent for political flexibility that made it easier for Progressive and fu-

25. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 236-40, and the Kyle and Richard F. Pettigrew profiles in Larry Pressler, *U.S. Senators from the Prairie* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Dakota Press, 1982), pp. 23-40.

26. Pressler, *U.S. Senators*, p. 41.

27. Schell, *South Dakota*, p. 241.

28. I am indebted to James D. McLaird for a copy of his paper "South Dakota's Political Heritage" (1972) in which he examines the role the Populists played in

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ture third-party movements like the Nonpartisan League and the protest groups of the 1930s to be heard.

After the turbulent 1890s, South Dakota seemed poised for a new takeoff. In 1895, wheat was selling for fifty-one cents a bushel; by 1908 the going price was one dollar a bushel. Older expensive methods of gold extraction threatened to shut down the Homestake Mining Company in the 1890s, but the new cyanide process enabled the firm to boom in the 1900s. On the other hand, while the farming regions east of the Missouri River were suffering, west river areas made available by the Sioux agreement of 1889 were booming through open-range ranching. Because of the drought and other factors, homesteaders did not settle west of the river in large numbers until after the turn of the century.²⁹

The return of prosperous times coincided with the federal government's extracting of over four million acres of new land cessions from the individual Indian reservations. The passage of a law in 1900 abolishing the traditional fees for patenting one's claim made the opportunity to homestead these lands all the more attractive. Beginning in 1907, a large influx of homesteaders, plus the successful transition from open-range cattle raising to modern closed-range operations, seemed almost like a revival of the Great Dakota Boom of the 1880s. Herbert Schell has estimated that more than 355,000 homestead claims were registered between 1904 and 1911, a land rush on the scale of the Oklahoma rushes of 1889 and 1893 that the *Argus-Leader* had hoped would take place in 1890 with the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation. While not even half the claimants stayed, by 1910, 137,689 persons were living in the western half of South Dakota. As James E. Wright has noted, the opening up of Indian reservation lands brought more homesteaders to the Great Plains after 1900 than in all the years before that date.³⁰

shaping the state's political tradition, but see also Pressler, *U.S. Senators*, pp. 34-35. On a less positive note, Peter H. Argersinger, "Regulating Democracy: Election Laws and Dakota Politics, 1889-1902," *Midwest Review* 2d ser., 5 (Spring 1983): 1-19, notes how the Australian ballot and other reform laws actually worked against democratic elections.

29. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 252-57; Richmond L. Clow, "Wasp No. 2: 'The Wonder Mine of the Black Hills,'" *South Dakota History* 15 (Winter 1985): 261-63.

30. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 252-57; Wright, "Old Myths and New Realities," p. 300. The size of the land rushes and the excitement that characterized them are detailed in Edith E. Kohl, *Land of the Burnt Thigh* (1938; reprint ed., St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), but especially pp. 46-63 and 143-63.

Practically speaking, it was the Dawes General Allotment Act as applied by the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft between 1901 and 1912 that had enabled this boom to occur. Roosevelt himself set the tone in his first annual address to Congress on 3 December 1901. "The time has arrived," he said, "when we should definitely make up our minds to recognize the Indian as an individual and not as a member of a tribe. The General Allotment Act is a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass. . . . The Indian should be treated as an individual—like the white man."³¹ In this instance, four "agents," or factors, usually seen as hostile to the fortunes of South



Homesteaders stand near the sod stable at the Gehring Ranch on the Missouri River, 1900.

Dakota—the federal government, the weather, the economy, and the railroads, all acted in benevolent concert to foster a new Dakota boom.

There is, of course, another side to the story of this second Dakota land boom: its impact on Sioux tribal groups whose lands were being taken and the response of these groups. As stated earlier, in 1889 the entire nation was anxious to settle the Indian ques-

31. James Daniel Richardson, *A Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, vol. 8 (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1917), p. 6672.

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tion. The country applauded General Nelson A. Miles when he tracked down the Apache fighter Geronimo in 1885. From the mid-1880s on, newspapers and the public supported the efforts of boomers on the borders of Kansas and Indian Territory to occupy a square of land in the center of Indian Territory called Oklahoma, for they predicted that white settlers would soon spread into adjacent Indian lands and force the Five Civilized Tribes to confine their land claims to individual homesteads and thus put an end to separate "semi-barbarous principalities" in future Oklahoma.³² The means by which the dissolution of Indian reserves could be realized was the 1887 General Allotment, or Dawes, Act. The act called for Indians to claim individual homesteads and allow the surplus land to be opened to white settlement. Senator Henry L. Dawes, enamored of the prospects of his own plan to turn Indians into American farmers, was backed by a host of supporters ranging from Indian Rights Association reformers to general land speculators and railroad promoters. Dawes, in fact, was the chief architect of the bill to acquire and open the vast Sioux reservation in 1889.³³

As students of South Dakota know, Sioux dismay and despair over the prospect of losing their lands were factors that contributed to their embracing of the Ghost Dance religion and to the tragic confrontation at Wounded Knee in the final days of 1890. Curiously, South Dakota newspapers, such as the *Argus-Leader*, carried news of Indian unrest but did not really connect that to Indian hostility over the opening of the reservation.³⁴ One gains

32. In an article entitled "Open Indian Territory," the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 19 Dec. 1888, noted that an "Indian Territorial Convention" meeting at Baxter Springs, Kansas, was "composed of delegates representing the commercial interests of St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago and other cities of the West and South" who wished to bring the whole Indian Territory "under the jurisdiction of the United States; to allot the lands in severalty to the Indian and to surround them with white farmers, school houses, churches, railroads and all that pertains to progressive civilization." The article reported that the delegates "think that for the benefit of the Western states the half-hundred semi-barbarous principalities that exist in their midst should be abolished."

33. Two standard accounts of this era in Indian policy are Henry E. Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860-1890* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), and Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Assault on Indian Tribalism: The General Allotment Law (Dawes Act) of 1887*, America's Alternatives Series (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1975).

34. Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), pp. 246-63, and his *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963). Without

an insight into the general Indian response to the land cessions through Frederick Hoxie's excellent case study of the groups on the Cheyenne River reservation between 1889 and 1914. In addition to lands already ceded, in August 1901 other areas of the Cheyenne River reservation were opened. In that same year, the Rosebud reservation sold a large portion of its lands to the government. In 1907, Senator Robert Gamble, who seems to have made land cessions a major focus of his political career, introduced a bill to take further portions of the Cheyenne River reservation for homesteading. Despite fierce Indian objections, Theodore Roosevelt signed the bill into law in 1908.³⁵ A year later, Gamble introduced still another bill, this time, as Hoxie has noted, for the purpose of authorizing "the sale of all unallotted land on the Cheyenne River Reservation."³⁶ The filing of claims by whites had gone so slowly since 1908, however, that this bill and a new version submitted in 1911, failed to pass, although bills throwing open more lands at another reservation were approved. Hoxie attributes the successful defeat of further allotments at the Cheyenne River reservation to the rise of coordinate Indian "business" councils on the reservation whose members had learned to make united protests to Washington and to negotiate with federal officials. In effect, the Cheyenne River Indians, after having endured defeat, psychological despair, and economic deprivation had "adapted" by using new political methods to protect their reservation.³⁷

In retrospect, it begins to look as if the second decade of South Dakota's first twenty-five years of statehood was characterized by a set of paradoxes or even contradictions. On the one hand, the western half of the state was a new frontier full of new settlers whose experiences replicated those of earlier frontiers. It was a hard but rewarding process that seemed to fit the American dream of free land for all. On the other hand, Indian residents were suffering severe losses, actual and cultural, at the same time in the same place. East of the river, a classic booster spirit was

seeming to know what it meant, the *Argus-Leader*, as early as 3 January 1890, carried such headlines as "Government Troops in the Sioux Reserve to Keep Order—Boomers [on] the Offensive," and on 25 January described troubles between settlers and Indians at Fort Pierre.

35. Frederick E. Hoxie, "From Prison to Homeland: The Cheyenne River Indian Reservation before World War I," *South Dakota History* 10 (Winter 1979): 1-24.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

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being expressed by villages and towns to foster trade and insure prosperity. This was the time when Mitchell promoted the Corn Palace, when railroads advertised excursions, when both the state and certain towns had annual fairs. Educational institutions were active, and football rivalries between the University of South Dakota and Nebraska were followed in the papers.³⁸ It was perhaps a mark of a more respectable booster spirit that the legislature repealed the easy divorce law that had attracted men and women to sojourn in the state briefly to receive a divorce.

The most striking paradox of all was that while the west river population was "proving up" and ranchers were adjusting to herd laws and fences, South Dakota was also the home of a genuine Progressive movement of the sort that swept the country between 1901 and World War I. This came about in part because South Dakotans were much taken with the brand of regional Progressivism advocated by Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin and Governor Albert B. Cummins of Iowa. These two leaders addressed with specific legislation ills in the economy that had long troubled South Dakotans: unfair railroad and grain elevator rates, or unfair tax systems, political corruption, and the like.³⁹

At the same time, prosperity due to good weather and good prices permitted deliberate political experiment. The states' citizens also admired Theodore Roosevelt, whom they considered a westerner at heart, and endorsed many of his progressive reforms. The local Progressive movement began in 1903 when Coe I. Crawford challenged the leadership of Alfred B. Kittredge, an old-guard machine politician. After Crawford's election as governor in 1905, a series of progressive reforms were enacted that echoed those adopted in Wisconsin and nationally. The movement sent Crawford to the Senate in 1909 and caused Senator Gamble, temporarily at least, to break with the old-guard Republican leaders in the state. In the election of 1912, the progressive spirit was

38. The *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 15-16, 22 Sept. and 2-13 Oct. 1904, discusses the State Fair at Yankton, activities at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, and Aberdeen's street carnival. Advertisements encouraging enrollment at the South Dakota School of Mines, the University of South Dakota, and the State Agricultural College at Brookings were printed in the paper, as well as football scores. Cleata B. Thorpe "Education in South Dakota, 1861-89," in *The Great Plains Experience*, ed. Wright and Rosenberg, pp. 233-42, traces the history of some South Dakota educational institutions beyond 1889.

39. Richmond L. Clow, "In Search of the People's Voice: Richard Olsen Richards and Progressive Reform," *South Dakota History* 10 (Winter 1979): 39-40.



By the end of the first quarter century of statehood, towns east of the Missouri River had a permanent, settled look, while west river towns still showed a rugged frontier character. Mitchell's busy street scene in 1913 (below) contrasts sharply with a 1911 view of Philip's first post office (above).



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so strong, the voters gave Roosevelt a ten-thousand-vote lead over his opponents.⁴⁰

Here again, if one reads between the lines, South Dakota politics were not strictly partisan but a medley of constantly shifting alliances in which Republicans feuded with other Republicans. Unlike the Populist era, the fight was not so much against outsiders and certainly not against Rooseveltian Washington, which supplied South Dakota with all kinds of largess, as it was over patronage, personality, and deep-seated political beliefs. It was a scrappy, somewhat disorganized progressivism, that, as Herbert Schell has observed, did not move to a "second and more positive phase" until the remarkable Peter Norbeck was elected governor in 1916.⁴¹

40. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 259, 264; Pressler, *U.S. Senators*, pp. 41-62.

41. Schell, *South Dakota*, p. 265. See also John N. Olsgaard, "Dakota Resources: The Peter Norbeck Papers at the University of South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 10 (Spring 1980): 147-51, which summarizes his career. Gilbert C. Fite, *Peter*

The 1911 South Dakota legislature convened in the newly constructed capitol in Pierre.



Despite the presence of a widespread genuine Progressive movement in South Dakota, it continued to be full of contradictions. The legislature provided free textbooks for schoolchildren, but adopted measures that forced Indian children out of public schools. The state was for prohibition but opposed woman's suffrage. With the exception of Norbeck, there appear to have been no real advocates of conservation—a favorite concern of Roosevelt's.⁴² Generally, the state's Anglo-American settlers had not yet accepted the German-Russian settlers into the mainstream of state life. It was, then, a state still maturing, advanced in politics and reform, but much less so in the realm of racial, gender, and social concerns. The tradition of legislating against forces that threatened to make them powerless was established, yet no one had a solution for controlling drought, which struck the state in 1910-1911 and caused many west river settlers to leave. Even if Progressives could not solve all the problems, the important thing is that they tried. James McLaird has noted that the Populist and Progressive periods in South Dakota set patterns for political flexibility and experimentation that would be used over and over again in the 1920s, the New Deal era, and on down to the present.⁴³ It is a heritage of which the new state could be proud.

In terms of technology, the record of adaptation and achievement was more mixed. The state had a good network of railroads whose owners were more responsive and responsible carriers than they had been in the 1890s. Artesian wells had not proved to be the solution to aridity, however, nor was large-scale irrigation yet feasible; thus, periodic droughts still spelled disaster. Farmers embraced mechanized farming and the corollary temptation to farm larger plots because the efficiency of the machinery allowed them to do so. But that meant increasing indebtedness.⁴⁴

Although it is impossible to measure a state or its people psychologically, by 1914 it appears that optimism was mixed with the

Norbeck: *Prairie Statesman*, University of Missouri Studies, vol. 22, no. 2 (Columbia, 1948), contains a full biography.

42. Norbeck's devotion to conservation is touched on in Olsgaard, "Peter Norbeck Papers," p. 149, and in Pressler, *U.S. Senators*, p. 80.

43. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 255-57; William G. Robbins, "'At the end of the cracked whip': The Northern West, 1880-1920," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 38, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 6; McLaird, "South Dakota's Political Heritage"; Howard R. Lamar, "Populism and Progressivism: Political Adaptation in the Great Plains," in *The Great Plains Experience*, ed. Wright and Rosenberg, pp. 311-19.

44. Wright, "Old Myths and New Realities," pp. 301-2.

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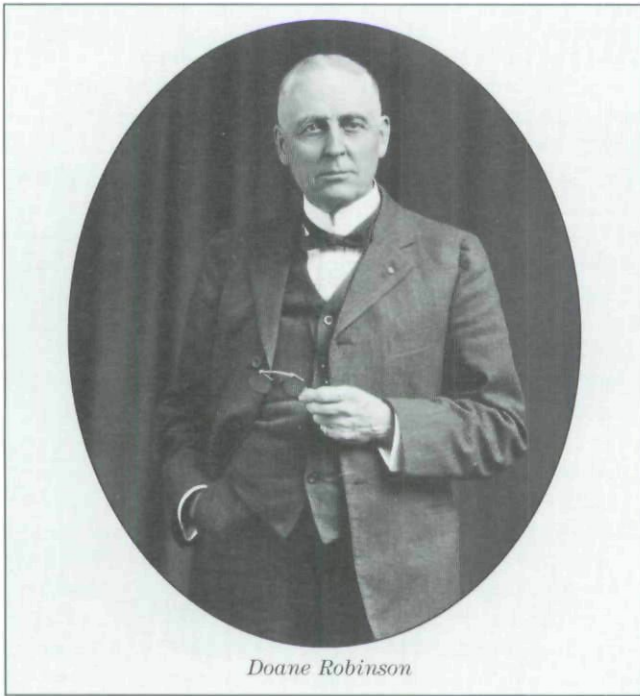
realization that the state's resources were more limited than they had seemed in 1889. The famous Homestake Mining Company brought more wealth to its owners than to the state, and its work force suffered from low wages. Farming and ranching had led to prosperity but not of an exceptional kind. The rate of population growth was not as great as that occurring in Oklahoma.⁴⁵ Sioux Falls was a true urban center, and other towns were growing, but small hamlets completely dependent on railroads might rise and fall quickly. Yankton appears to have been stable rather than booming. In the Oklahoma land rushes between 1889 and 1909, there were never enough homesteads for the number of claimants. In South Dakota, there tended to be more homesteads than homesteaders.⁴⁶ One method of psychological measurement is to determine if the state had produced leaders who had identified major problems and posed solutions. In effect, Coe I. Crawford and others provided this kind of leadership during the Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft administrations and Governor Norbeck did from 1916 onward. But none of them could solve the problems of an economy that was based on agriculture, cattle, and mining, all at the mercy of national and international markets and the weather.

Twenty-five years after admission, Doane Robinson wrote a "state of the state" report entitled "Progress of South Dakota, 1914." In his laconic deadpan summary of recent local and state elections, he noted the existence of factions within the Republican party who disagreed about the best candidates for governor and senator. In the primary election, the liberal candidate won the gubernatorial nomination, and the conservative candidate captured the senate nomination. Besides Democratic party candidates, Richard O. Richards became an independent candidate for governor, and Henry L. Loucks declared for the Senate. Full tickets were also presented by the prohibitionists and the socialists. In the November election, Republicans gained almost all offices except that Edwin S. Johnson, a Democrat, made it to the United States Senate and his fellow Democrat, Harry L. Gandy, was elected to the House of Representatives. A split election of this

45. Oklahoma's population doubled between 1900 and 1910, according to Edwin C. McReynolds, *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 307. Although the population of the western half of South Dakota increased 214 percent between 1900 and 1910, it was already declining by 1915. Schell, *South Dakota*, pp. 256-57.

46. Schell, *South Dakota*, p. 255; Hoxie, "From Prison to Homeland," p. 14.

sort would have been big news in other states but not in South Dakota. Indeed, Robinson felt there was no news worth reporting in 1914. Property values, for example, had gone up only \$26 million between 1913 and 1914, from \$1,195,141,854 in 1913 to \$1,221,420,354. In that same period, the state's population had declined by about 3,328.⁴⁷ The state debt had declined, and bank deposits were up a bit, but Robinson concluded that "the people are slow to undertake new enterprises."⁴⁸ The total value of



Doane Robinson

"productions of earth" had increased by \$21 million over 1913; a similar pattern of modest increase had occurred in the value of products marketed outside of the state. Robinson also noted that little railroad or general building had taken place.⁴⁹

47. Doane Robinson, "Progress of South Dakota, 1914," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 8 (1916): 55-57, 63.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

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In Robinson's record of the passing of South Dakota pioneers and prominent figures in 1914, it is interesting to note who they were and how Robinson identified them. Out of the total fifty listed, sixteen were called pioneers, although the word "pioneer" was often associated with a profession: "pioneer orchardist," "pioneer banker," and so on. Of the fifty persons, eleven had been active in public life (one had been a weatherman), having been either elected or appointed to office. Three were bankers and three were businessmen, but only one was called a farmer. A single Indian, Little No Heart of the Cheyenne River Agency, who had been a judge in the native court, was included.⁵⁰ Clearly, South Dakota took its public figures seriously.

To a relative "outsider" called upon to review the first twenty-five years of South Dakota statehood, the fact that stands out most is that its people, whether Indian, Anglo-American, or European, had experienced so much in so brief a time: Wounded Knee, a decade of drought and depression, and turbulent third-party movements. Further, it was a very rural state that somehow had managed to support a large number of public and private educational institutions and an impressive number of churches.

Additional paradoxes often existed: the South Dakota homesteads, ranches, and mines were often physically isolated. Their families were sometimes desperately lonely. Yet recent studies suggest that a sense of community existed.⁵¹ Moreover, they were curious about local and national events, which by 1914 they knew affected their lives. These concerns probably help explain certain other paradoxes, of which one was the belief that South Dakota was a homogeneous state when in actuality it had a heterogeneous population of Indians, Scandinavians, German-Russians, and Anglo-Americans. Moreover, religious affiliations ranged over a half-dozen denominations from Lutheran to Catholic. The denial of race, ethnicity, and cultural pluralism was not just a local manifestation, it was national; and indeed was a feature of the American Progressive movement, so that South Dakota's self-image as being homogeneous was not unique.⁵²

50. Ibid., pp. 62-63.

51. Community is a strong theme in Kohl, *Land of the Burnt Thigh*, and in Paula Nelson, *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986).

52. Frederick C. Luebke, "Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (Oct. 1977): 405-30. See also Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press for the Center for Great Plains Studies, 1980).

There were other paradoxes as well: a belief in homesteads, of land as a symbol of freedom. This concept was the counter image of the incessant hunger for Indian lands. At the same time, the grim realities of homesteading, of trying to farm in drought years, made the settlers of South Dakota glad to be past the pioneering stages. Wright has said that by World War I farmers no longer felt they were in control of their own destiny. William G. Robbins has described the Northwest states as being at the "end of a cracked whip."⁵³ Even so, in 1914, though embattled and much more aware of the nature of Dakota, citizens of South Dakota still had eyes ablaze with a vision of the future rather than a nostalgia for the past. The state's Indian population was still resistant, and its ethnic minorities were biding their time. Nineteen fourteen may have been a quiet year to Doane Robinson, but it was really a calm between all too familiar political, economic, and ethnic storms.

53. Wright, "Old Myths and New Realities," p. 300; Robbins, "'At the end of the cracked whip,'" pp. 2-11, but especially 5-6.

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