

Modern US History

Ch. 18, Section 3

Farming and Populism



New Lives on the Plains

- Homestead Act – 1862 US law that gave 160 acres of govt. owned land to people who would move to the land and farm it for 5 years
- Morrill Act – 1862 US law that granted more than 17 million acres of federal land to the states so the states could sell it and use the profits to build colleges that teach agriculture and engineering





Settling the Plains

- People moved from all over the nation to farm as land was expensive back east and women could get land under the Homestead Act (#1)
- Exodusters – Tens of thousands of African-Americans who left the south to avoid discrimination and moved to Kansas and developed farming communities there
- Immigrants from northern Europe formed many small communities on the Great Plains (#3)

Farming the Plains



- Plains farmers faced challenges like extreme weather and root-filled sod beneath the plains grass (#1)
- sodbusters – the nickname for plains farmers for the hard work needed to break up the plains soil to farm it
- dry farming – a new method of farming that shifted the focus away from water-dependent crops such as corn and switched to more hardy crops like red wheat
- The Great Plains became known as the “Bread Basket of the World” due to the large production with fewer workers that was made possible by mechanical farming and railroad shipment to the east (#2)

Problems and Innovations

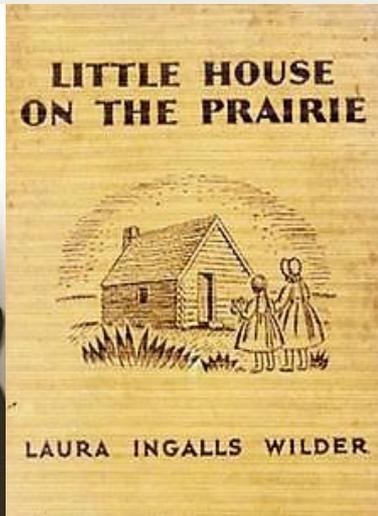
- Lack of wood for houses
 - sod houses
- Lack of wood for fences
 - barbed wire
- Lack of water
 - windmills
- Thick rooted soil of plains
 - steel plow by John Deere
- Hard, labor intensive farm work
 - reaper (harvests crops) by Cyrus McCormick
 - thresher (separates the kernel from the stalk of grain)



Building Communities



Annie Bidwell



- Through their hard work on farms and in towns, women played a key role in building western communities, which helped women to gain the right to vote for the first time in the US in Wyoming in 1869 (#1)
- Annie Bidwell – one of the founders of Chico, California who used her influence to support causes like women’s suffrage and temperance
- Rural farmers built communities, which included building a church and a school, so they could help each other out through the tough times (#2)
- Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about the hardships of farm children on the plains in her “Little House on the Prairie” (#3)

Farmers' Political Groups

- From 1860 to 1900 the number of farms tripled and production increased tremendously with the help of machinery, which helped feed the growing population which doubled during the same time period (#1)



Farm Incomes Fall

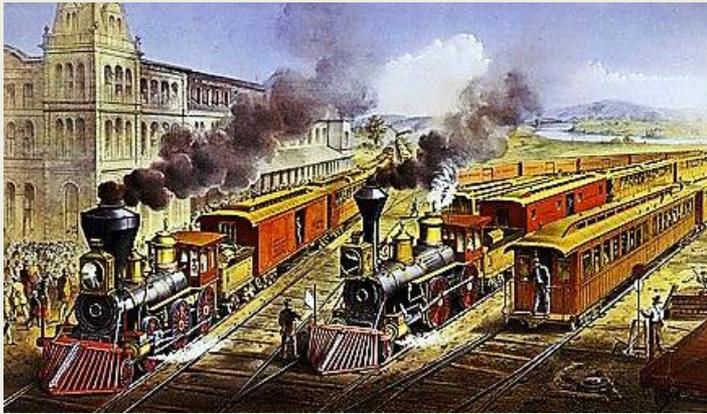
- The combination of more farms and greater productivity led to overproduction, which lowered crop prices and resulted in many farmers losing their farms and becoming tenant farmers (#1)

The National Grange

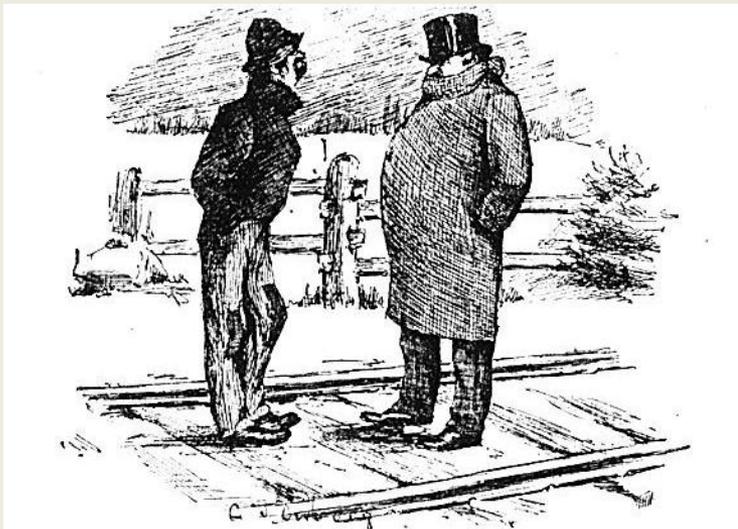
- Farmers formed associations to solve the economic problems they faced, which they blamed on business people (#1)
- Oliver Kelley toured the South as part of the US Dept. of Agriculture and saw firsthand the problems that farmers faced (#2)
- National Grange – an organization founded by Oliver Kelley with local chapters for social and educational purposes
- The Grange campaigned for political candidates who supported farmers' goals and called for laws regulating railroads – known as Granger laws (#3A)



The National Grange (continued)



- Granger laws in Midwest states which regulated railroad rates to protect farmers were upheld by the *Munn v. Illinois* Supreme Court in 1877, but was struck down by the court in the 1886 *Wabash v. Illinois* case as states couldn't regulate trade across state borders (#3B)
- Interstate Commerce Act – Congress created the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1887 to allow the federal govt. to regulate trade between states and railroad rates to further protect farmers, but it lacked power to enforce its regulations



Free Silver Debate

- Farmers hoped that new laws relating to the money supply would help them (#1)
- The US had been on the gold standard , which means that the paper money was backed by gold in the treasury, which grew slower than the population (#2A)
- deflation – a decrease in the money supply and overall lower prices
- One solution proposed by the Free Silver Movement was to allow the unlimited coining of silver to back currency along with gold (#2B)
- Increasing the money supply would increase inflation, which would allow farmers to sell their goods for more and pay back their debts to banks with cheaper money



Free Silver Debate (continued)



William Jennings Bryan

- In the late 1870s many farmers began to support candidates that supported the Free Silver Movement (#3)
- William Jennings Bryan – a lawyer from Nebraska who was elected as a Democrat to Congress who became one of the best-known advocates of free silver
- The two major parties mostly ignored the money issue (#4)
- Sherman Silver Purchase Act – US law in 1890 that increased the amount of silver purchased by the govt., but did not result in much more coinage of silver to increase the money supply

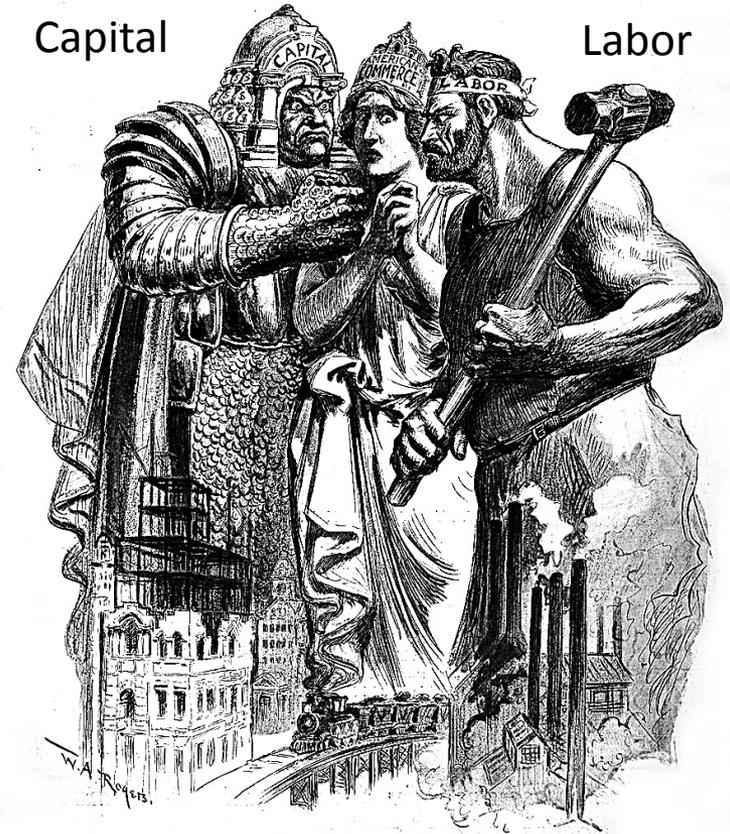
Populist Party

- Farmers' Alliances – new organizations for farmers to elect candidates that would help them (#1)
- The Farmers' Alliances had many victories in the 1890 election and met with labor and reform groups to join to create a national political party (#2)
- Populist Party (People's Party) – a new political party that combined support from farmers, industrial labor groups and reform groups, which called for govt. ownership of railroads and telephone, for free and unlimited coinage of silver, and an 8 hour day and limits on immigration



Capital

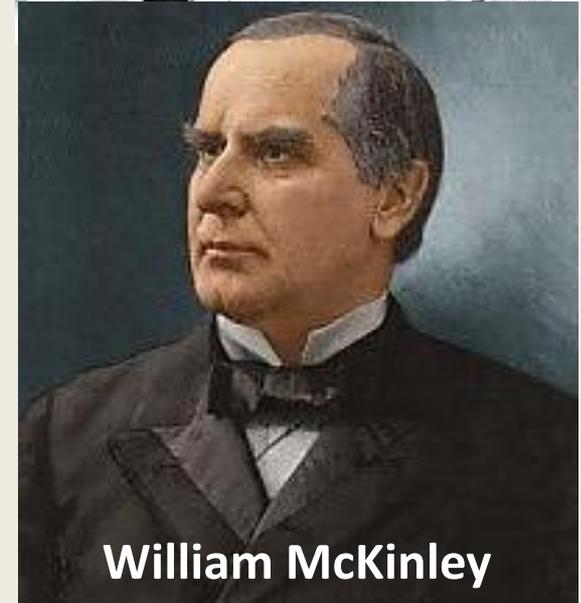
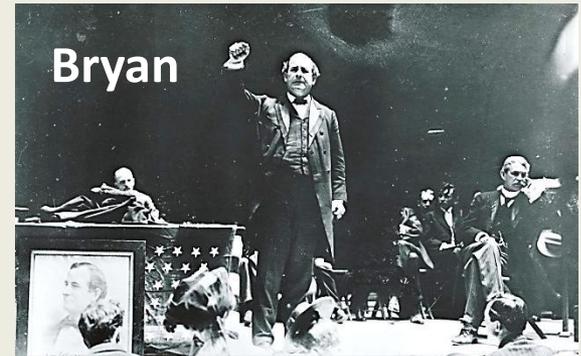
Labor



“COME, BROTHERS, YOU HAVE GROWN SO BIG YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO QUARREL”

Populist Party (continued)

- In an economic depression known as the Panic of 1893 that was partly caused by a shortage of gold, the concerns of the Populists were brought to national attention (#4)
- Due to the depression more people began to back the Populist Party, while the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan, who supported coinage of silver, as their candidate for President (#5)
- The Populists decided to put their support behind Bryan, instead of running their own candidate, in order not to split the silver vote (#6A)
- When the well-financed Republican candidate William McKinley won the election, it marked the end of the Populist Party and the Farmers' Alliances (#6B)



End of the Frontier



- In 1870 only small portions of the Great Plains remained unsettled (#1)
- In 1889 the US govt. decided it would allow homesteaders to buy land that had belonged to Native American tribes in what is now Oklahoma (#2)
- 11 million acres of land was claimed in what is known as the Oklahoma Land Rush, which is seen as the last event that closed the frontier in the US (#3)