

The Independent.

Vol. XV.

LINCOLN NEB., APRIL 7, 1904.

No. 46.

SMITH COUNTY, KANSAS.

Rousing Populist Convention
—Straight Party Action
the Slogan.

DELEGATIONS.

State Convention, Topeka,
April 12.

E. T. Thompson.
F. Myers.
John Mollison.
Henry Williams.
G. Gibson.
J. C. Bunker.
M. E. Wells.
D. M. Relihan.

Upon poll of delegation,
each delegate declared in open
convention for a straight popu-
list ticket, national, state,
and county.

Congressional Convention,
Colby, May 25.

J. B. Dykes.
D. P. McLaren.
W. Anderson.
W. H. Perry.
John Ward.
Jacob Austler.
T. P. Farrell.
D. M. Relihan.

Delegation instructed for
John Mollison.

State Senatorial, not yet called.
John Elwood.

J. A. Wright.
H. C. Smith.
J. E. George.
W. H. Lyon.

C. Post.
O. P. Gibson.
Charles Townsend.

Smith Center, Kas., April 2.—(Editorial Correspondence.)—If populism were ever really dead out in this western Kansas county, the Old Guard was shrewd enough to select this glorious day, on the eve of Easter, to begin the resurrection. But when I looked in upon the county convention this afternoon and saw in their seats 118 delegates out of a possible 150, representing 20 townships out of 25 in the county, I was convinced that populism had never died in Smith county—it had simply gone to sleep for a brief period.

That the sleep was refreshing and invigorating is evidenced by the keen interest manifested by the delegates in attendance and their activity and determination to pursue a straightforward course. And that the republicans are alarmed, is manifested by the attitude of the republican organ here, the Smith County Pioneer. A few weeks ago Joe Wright, editor of The Messenger, the new populist paper at Smith Center, came down to Lincoln to learn something more than he could find in the papers about the outlook for the coming national convention at Springfield. He spent the day with The Independent, with good advantage to both parties. He related the facts about the meeting of the populist county central committee in Smith Center, where 23 out of 25 townships were represented, and predicted that the county convention, April 2, would be the biggest convention to elect delegates ever held by the populists of Smith county.

The prospect of seeing a Kansas convention, fired with the old-time enthusiasm, resulted in The Independent deciding to have a representative on the ground. Upon Mr. Wright's return home, he announced in The Messenger that one of the editors of The Independent would be present at the county convention and address it. This announcement caused the Pioneer to pour out its vials of wrath upon the populists of Smith county and to comment sarcastically upon their importation of a "big orator from Nebraska," etc., even going to the extent of giving about half a column of what the "big orator" would probably say in his "calamity howling speech."

The populists of Smith county, in county matters, pursued an independent course for twelve years (1890 to 1902) and so completely dominated political affairs that for a time there was scarcely a republican officer,

township or otherwise, in the county. Almost to a man, however, they are ardent admirers of Mr. Bryan, and gave loyal support to the fusion state ticket. Among Kansas democrats there are a good many of the Cleveland variety, or, perhaps, more properly speaking, the "anything-to-win," band-wagon brand; and these men were always persistently pushing themselves to the front in every fusion arrangement. This made it difficult for Smith county populists to accept co-operation; but they did it. As one of them expressed it to me, "We fused with Bryan—not with the democratic party."

Finally, in 1902, the election law had made co-operation impossible as theretofore, and the attempt resulting in a state ticket composed of democrats and populists and one republican—Webb McNall—which went on the official ballot as a "democratic" ticket, the populists of Smith county were induced to abandon their time-honored custom of going it alone in county matters. They fused with the democrats on a county ticket—and got "licked out of their boots."

Following the defeat of 1902 the Smith County Journal, which theretofore had been a staunch populist paper, and had received thousands of dollars in county printing at the hands of populist county officials, flopped over to the democratic column and left the populists without a paper. There was no election in 1903 and, hence, no county convention that year. Accordingly, there was no way of telling whether the people's party of Smith county was dead and buried or simply hibernating.

Having no gatherings in the way of conventions or committee meetings, and no newspaper talking populism, there was no way of knowing much about the status of the people's party in Smith county. One could guess—but it would be only a guess. The convention today, with its big attendance and enthusiasm, is in marked contrast to the political conditions in Smith county less than six months ago. A bit of history may prove interesting:

Last summer The Independent, taking as a starting point a directory of populist papers published by The Non-conformist in 1891, published a few articles regarding people's party papers and sent marked copies to the old addresses. One of these copies fell into the hands of J. A. Wright, of Lebanon, Kas. He responded with an interesting letter on the rise and fall of populism in Smith county, and this led to further correspondence. When the first 960 letters of invitation to enroll in The Old Guard of Populism were sent out, Mr. Wright's name was on the list. The records show that his enrollment was received December 9, 1903—a prompt response, inasmuch as the letters were mailed December 5. With his enrollment he sent a list of names of Smith county populists, among which was the name of E. T. Thompson, the present chairman of the county central committee.

Mr. Thompson was sent an invitation to enroll. His card bears date of December 25.

Mr. Thompson is a young man, level-headed, clear-sighted. He is peculiarly a man of action. Many men know what ought to be done, but by the time they have made up their minds to do it, the opportunity has passed. Mr. Thompson is not of this mould. He is not rash, but he does not procrastinate.

With his enrollment papers he sent a dollar for the Old Guard expenses and a list of 200 Smith county populists, covering every township in the county. Several issues of The Independent were at once sent to them and later on they were invited to enroll in the Old Guard of Populism.

Up to today the only enrolled members from Smith county are C. W. Acton, John H. Alloway, A. J. Hammond, Ad Kennedy, E. T. Thompson, John W. Ward, M. E. Wells, Harve L. Wright, and Joseph A. Wright—nine out of some 350 who were invited to enroll. I have expended nearly \$20

in postage and printing trying to enroll the Old Guard of Smith county, and have received all told \$2.43 assistance from the nine who did enroll. Looked at from this standpoint only, my experience with Smith county would bear out Gerry Brown's remark at St. Louis that "Bro. De France's attempt to enroll the Old Guard has proved to be a lamentable failure."

But when I saw the rousing big convention here today, I felt that "lamentable failures" are often pronounced successes, if looked at from the proper view-point. But for Chairman Thompson's prompt action at the right time, today's convention would have been no bigger than the Smith county democratic convention a few weeks ago when thirteen men elected a Hearst delegation to Wichita. It was owing to his prompt action that so many Old Guard letters and copies of The Independent were sent into Smith county. These gave encouragement to the discouraged populists. It was owing to his prompt action that Mr. Wright was enabled to buy out the second democratic paper at Smith Center and convert it into a red-hot populist organ. And this gave continued inspiration and encouragement. All of which culminated today in a convention nine-fold bigger than the democratic county convention and somewhat larger than the recent republican convention.

The convention organized this forenoon with Old Guard M. E. Wells as temporary chairman and Old Guard E. T. Thompson as temporary secretary. Committees were appointed on credentials, rules and order of business, and resolutions. Adjournment was then taken until 1:30 p. m.

The committee on rules and organization reported the name of W. H. Perry for chairman and Josias Lambert for secretary.

The committee on credentials reported the following delegates present and entitled to seats in the convention:

Center township: W. H. Lyons, D. M. Relihan, H. C. Smith, W. H. Thompson, M. C. Burr, Ed Chandler, Martin: Wm. Anderson, Henry Plank, Geo. E. Smith.

White Rock: Wm. Kelley, John C. Kelley, J. Wagoner, O. Isom, E. Hubel, W. L. Rogers.

Lincoln: Wm. Long, J. G. Goheen, R. Verhage, W. L. Peters, P. Dunker, A. H. Schoen, J. B. Saunders.

Lane: F. M. Myers, L. Michaels, M. E. Wells, R. G. Badders, E. C. Moore, J. G. Douglass.

Cedar: C. McCarter, F. Grauerholz, L. Grauerholz, W. Bierman, Gid Dimond, C. Bown.

Harvey: N. H. Withington, A. Norberg, W. H. Auker, A. Frutiger, G. Gibson, J. Bergman.

Banner: A. T. Weltmer, W. F. Weltmer, T. F. Lanigan, W. H. Perry, L. B. Harper, J. J. M. Loofburrow.

Beaver: J. Lambert, John Craig, John Skinner, J. Drew, W. H. Bryan, Jay Pounds.

Swan: O. Paxton, G. Burger, W. Dimond, J. C. Walters, W. H. Ingle, C. Allen.

Pleasant: Wm. Zimmerman, C. Post, O. A. Mollison, Aug. Austoff, Ike Rust, John Mollison.

Washington: T. M. Hardacer, John Mussor, F. A. Michaels, J. Hastler, F. J. Flint, E. F. Gardner.

Cora: John Elwood, Ike Rorabaugh, Forrest Maulsby, G. R. Hendricks, J. E. Deeks, E. C. Prownt.

Pawnee: F. Brown, W. R. Williams, D. M. Landreth, G. Roberts, J. D. Brown, L. Barnes.

Oak: H. A. Dykes, J. M. Allen, D. P. McLaren, O. M. Gilbert, Henry Allen, W. H. Flescher.

Dor: Wm. Vinion, G. A. Welch, C. A. Stanhope, Sam Kinion, S. L. Sweet, J. D. Lea.

Webster: S. L. Amis, H. Williams, W. B. Amis, Rob Amis, L. W. C. Shields, C. W. Acton.

Crystal Plains: John Gift, G. Cromer, C. H. Townsend, Nat Pyle, E. Rorabaugh, W. I. Jackson.

Blaine: John Gorman, W. A.

Dickey, J. M. Isom, F. M. Tomlinson, Jim Farrens, E. T. Thompson.

Houston: D. I. Flinn, O. P. Gibson, T. P. Farrell, H. Pitzer, G. Mitchell, H. L. Abercrombie.

The committee on resolutions—Messrs. J. A. Wright, John Mollison, and W. H. Lyon—reported a platform reaffirming the former state and national platforms, declaring for the referendum, initiative and imperative mandate; for a scientific paper money, for public ownership of public utilities; and, touching state matters, some caustic references to State Treasurer Kelly, Senator Burton and Candidate Hoch. It wound up by declaring that the chaotic condition of the old parties renders independent action imperative on the part of the people's party in nation, state and county. This plank was received with the greatest applause.

Election of delegates was then taken up, resulting in the delegations given at the beginning of this correspondence. Every man nominated for delegate was called upon to express his position as to party policy. Every one declared for straight party action and against any attempt at fusion.

The congressional delegation was instructed to use all honorable means to secure the nomination of John Mollison for congress and well informed men tell me that his chances are good for securing it. Mr. Mollison is one of the Old Guard, having "come all the way over the trail." He was one of the early greenbackers in Illinois in the seventies and has been fighting for reform ever since. At one time he lived in Cass county, Neb., near Weeping Water. He wears the little bronze button of the G. A. R.

The only crime I could find charged up against John Mollison is that he has too kind a heart. Back in the alliance days out here John started a store. There was an agreement on his part to be content with ten per cent profit on his investment—or, rather, to sell his goods on a margin of ten per cent, which is somewhat different. On the other hand there was an agreement by the alliance people to pay cash. Everything worked like a charm for a time; but finally the blue days of '93 and '94 came around. Cash payments were impossible. People must have the necessities of life—or starve. Mollison's big heart could not send away empty handed the teller of a tale of hard times. The ten per cent margin was retained—but the cash payments were abandoned.

For a time he was doing a fifty thousand dollar business. He quit in debt, with thousands of dollars owing to him. "My debtors," he told me, "are scattered over Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington, Texas and elsewhere—some of them live here yet. After I quit, I went into the bridge business and made money enough to pay the debts I owed—but I can't get anything that's owing to me."

I am looking for the populists of Smith county to clean the platter this fall. They have the air of success about them, and with such a man as Thompson at the head of the campaign and Joe Wright making The Messenger a stronger populist paper every week, I don't see how they can lose. The republicans are scared—that's evident; and there aren't very many democrats.

Socialism isn't making much headway here, I find. One of the leading populists some time ago made up his mind that the people's party was simply walking around to save an undertaker's bill, and accordingly subscribed for the Appeal to Reason with the intention of becoming a socialist. "I studied it faithfully," he said, "but the more I read the farther away I got from socialism. It may go all right with factory hands, but there's nothing in socialism for farmers."

I have enrolled the 118 delegates to the Smith county convention as members of The Vanguard of Populism. Two of them have already enrolled in the Old Guard, and 41 of them have Old Guard invitations which they have neglected to answer. Letters will be sent to the remainder. We