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The Political Evolution of Edmund Howe in Southeast Nebraska

Edmund Dudley Howe, 1862-1949, spent most of his life on Orchard Grove Farm north of Table Rock in Pawnee County. From August 1892, through July 1894 Howe published two Populist Party newspapers in Table Rock: the Censor, and the Herald. Due to a boycott of the Herald, Howe left the newspaper business, concentrating on family and career. In the early years of the 20th century, he turned his attention to the nascent Nebraska Farmers Union, genealogy and the eugenics movement. In the 1930's Howe moved to Lincoln and was active in the United States Socialist Party.

Edmund Howe's parents were Orville Duane Howe, 1832-1917, and Mary Pepoon Howe, 1831-1903, who purchased the homestead of Alexander Allen in 1869. Howe arrived in southeast Nebraska with his family in 1871, when the railroad was completed. He began his career as a teacher and county surveyor; he graduated from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in 1887. Howe's degree was in engineering.

Howe possessed printing equipment belonging to his grandfather, abolitionist newspaper editor and writer Eber Howe. Eber Howe was editor of the Cleveland Herald and later the Painesville Telegraph. Eber Howe's printing press traveled with his son, Orville Duane Howe, when he moved to Nebraska in 1871. The press was used for Edmund Howe's newspapers, the Censor, 1892, and the Herald, 1893-1894. From his grandfather, Eber, Edmund learned the importance of advocacy journalism. Howe used the press again in 1903 when he published Early Poems, a collection of his mother's poetry. Around 1905, Howe's sons decided to print copy on each other's blond hair, and the press was dismantled.

Many of the Howes were writers and journalists. In addition to the Cleveland Herald and Painesville Telegraph, Howe's grandfather, Eber, wrote Mormonism Unveiled, 1834, and Autobiography and Recollections of a Pioneer Printer: together with Sketches of the War of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier, 1878. Howe's uncle, Edmund Dudley Howe, 1829-1849, for whom he was named, was a promising writer and essayist who studied at Oberlin in 1847. He died of malaria at age 19, showing literary promise. Howe's father, Orville Duane, also wrote: his adolescent diaries from the 1840's and 1850's reveal an emotional temperament and a commitment to reform. Orville was present at the 1848 political convention of the Free Soil Party at Buffalo.

Howe's mother, Mary Pepoon Howe, was a poet and wrote regular newspaper columns. Though much of her poetry has not stood the test of time, her writing reveals keen political interest; her topics include fugitive slaves and the plight of Native Americans. Mary Pepoon Howe was a committed suffragist and temperance advocate: she helped found Nebraska's first women's club in Table Rock in 1879. From 1882 to 1900, Mary wrote for the Table Rock Argus, a Republican-leaning newspaper; the Pawnee City Republican, and the Painesville Telegraph. Her column in the Table Rock Argus was called "North Table Rock News."

Howe's first cousin, Percy Pepoon, a West Point graduate, edited and published a Democratic newspaper in Arkansas: the Hardy Herald, in 1903. The Hardy Herald claimed to speak "For the Democracy of Jefferson, Jackson and Bryan." Percy Pepoon's father, Theodore Pepoon (T.W.), was also a newspaper man. In 1881, Theodore had purchased a half-interest in the Falls City Journal.

Edmund Howe's first foray into writing was an adolescent diary. In 1876, at the age of 14, Howe recorded the meteorological conditions of north Table Rock, something he continued all his life. In addition to records of temperature and rainfall, there are clues about daily life in the community of Bunker Hill north of Table Rock. He wrote about visiting his cousins Percy and Mary, going to the mill,



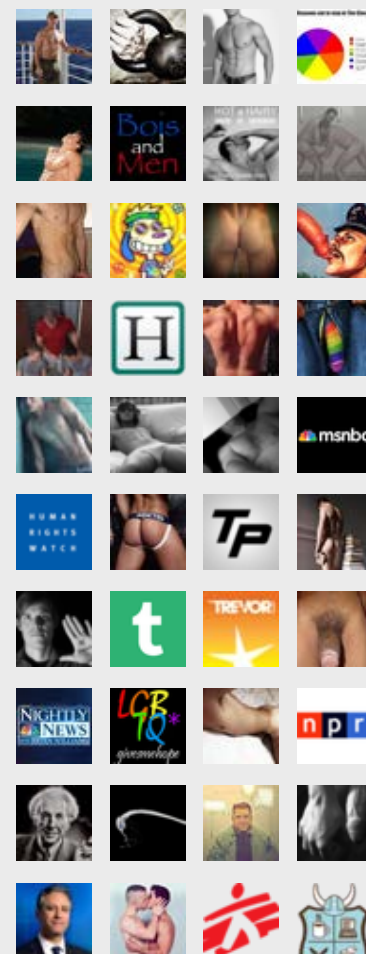
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baking bread, doing the washing. The specter of illness and death was ever-present: on Thursday, April 27, for instance, Howe noted "Mamma is very sick." On Friday, June 16: "Papa is not very well."

In this teenage diary, Howe noted the family's attendance at the Grange and "Lodge." The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry is a farmer's organization that advocates modest agricultural reform based on the Rochdale principles of fairness and ethics. The "Lodge" was the Independent Order of Good Templars, (IOGT), a temperance organization to which the Howe family belonged.

Temperance was important to the Howes, though they were not teetotalers. Mary Pepoon Howe's recipes include instructions for wine and brandy sauces. Year later, when Howe edited the Herald, he devoted considerable ink to the Prohibitionist Party. Howe was critical: in the August 31, 1893 edition, he wrote: "It seems to us that the Prohibitionists of the state are rather unreasonable in opposing, in their platform, nationalization or state control of the liquor traffic" (p. 3). The Howe family opposed consumption of hard liquor especially at saloons, but private consumption of hard cider or wine was permissible.

Attending Grange or IOGT meetings didn't involve travel for the Howes: both organizations met in the unfinished upstairs of their home throughout the 1870's. Howe's cousin, Henry Boone, wrote "The upstairs at Uncle Orville's [Howe] was not finished off for some years and that big room up there was the community center of those days. Both the Grange and the Good Templars Lodge met up there." Boone observed that some of the Pepoon relatives would not join the Templars because "the ritual was too religious." (Harry O. Boone, Bunker Hill Items, January 22, 1939, unpublished). Neither the Howes, Pepoons nor Boones had church affiliation.

The Howe's political views were on the reformist vanguard throughout the 19th century; their interests ranged from abolition to women's suffrage and temperance. In the 1872 election, Boone notes that "our folks all supported Greeley." Greeley ran as a Liberal Republican. Part of Greeley's appeal for the Howes was his interest in spiritualism and socialism, beliefs they shared. Greeley died during the election, and Grant was re-elected.

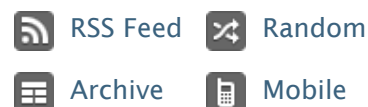
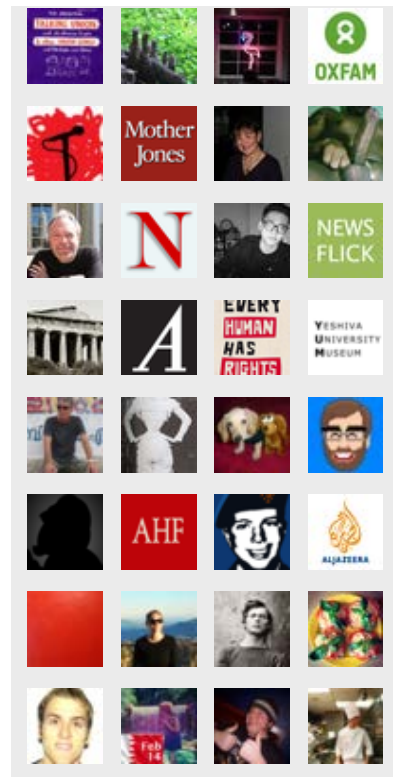
In the early 1880's, Howe taught at Bunker Hill School. The small community of Bunker Hill was home to around 50 of Howe's relatives, from his mother's side of the family. There were so many Pepoons in north Table Rock that the public schoolhouse, built by Orville Duane Howe, was known as the "Pepoon School" from the 1870's through the 1890's (Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star, September 17, 1939). Since Howe's father, Orville, was the superintendant, and built the school, teaching was not a difficult job to procure.

In the mid 1880's, Howe moved to Lincoln to get his degree in engineering at the University of Nebraska. In 1887, he returned to Pawnee County to farm and commence the newspaper business.

In August of 1892, Howe, along with his cousin, Fred Boone, began publishing the Table Rock Censor, a Populist Party newspaper. Bert Boone, Fred's brother, was the business manager. Bert and Fred were sons of Eli Boone and Eunice Pepoon Boone. Eli Boone, along with Mary Pepoon Howe's brothers, Joseph and Silas, served in the Union Army with the First Oregon Cavalry. Eli and Eunice (Pepoon) Boone and Joseph Pepoon received homesteads in Pawnee County because of their military service. In 1867, the Boones and the Joseph Pepoon family moved to Nebraska, along with another brother, Theodore Pepoon.

Howe and the Boone brothers were influenced by the National Reform Press Association, NRPA, which thrived in the 1890's. The NRPA began in 1890 with Charles Macune, and served as the outreach branch of the Farmer's Alliance. The Alliance, along with the Knights of Labor, formed the Populist Party. William Peffer of Kansas was the NRPA's president, which, by 1896, included some 1,500 newspapers ("Lessons from American Populism" p. 1). Most Populist papers were modest operations put out by anyone associated with the party that owned a press.

The Censor and Herald were professional eight page weekly newspapers: they contained numerous editorial cartoons and drawings. Most of the editorial cartoons in the Herald came directly from the National Reform Press Association; none of the drawings originated in Table Rock. The Herald, before its abrupt demise, even featured an illustrated fashion section.



It is unclear how long the Censor was published: the third newspaper, volume 1, number 3, September 10, 1892 seems to be the only copy in existence today. Table Rock's newspaper of record was the Argus, but the archives of the Argus for 1892 were destroyed by fire. It's not known if the Argus mentioned its new rival. The Herald occasionally references the Argus in its 1894 editions; the Herald was published before and after Howe was the owner/editor, but Howe's tenure changed it considerably. When Howe sold the paper, the format changed abruptly.

The Censor is a patchwork of articles borrowed and edited from other Populist news sources. The newspaper from which the Censor borrows most frequently is the Indianapolis Nonconformist. The Herald cross-promotes the Nonconformist, as well as Wealth Makers, offering specials for readers who subscribe to all three Populist papers. Wealth Makers was both a newspaper and press run by George Howard Gibson; Howe had a long association with Wealth Makers, and may have known Gibson personally.

Authorship in Howe's newspapers is occasionally vague, as in the front page article of the Censor: "The People and the Party," attributed to "Farmer, Waycross, Georgia." In other places, only initials are used, like "D.N.A, Harrisburg, Ill." Howe is occasionally coy; a poem written by his mother is simply "contributed" (July 13, 1894, p.1). Family members and friends knew the author, but since Mary Pepon wrote for the rival newspaper, Argus, her identity wasn't disclosed. If no attribution for an article was given, Howe himself was the author.

Howe wrote more of the articles in the Herald, and frequently refers to himself in the third person: "Eddie and Myrta Howe are intending to hear Mrs. Lease at Pawnee City Tuesday evening" (Herald, 10/19/94, p.1). Myrta Eunice Howe, 1868-1904, was Howe's sister. In the June 1, 1894 Herald, the "Programme" benefiting the Library Association and Woman Suffrage Society was printed: the play featured E.D. Howe in the role of "Udolpho Holloway, a Retired Merchant" (p. 1).

Though published in the small farming community of north Table Rock, Howe's newspapers contain scant articles on agriculture, apart from a few ads. Methods of farming are never discussed. In both the Censor and the Herald, financial issues are paramount, and Howe links economic policy to the predicament of farmers. The 1873 Coinage Act, sometimes called the "Crime of 1873," began a financial depression which lasted for years. Credit became tight; farmers, who relied on credit till harvest time, were especially hard hit. In 1893 there was another nationwide economic crisis as severe as the one in 1873; both depressions were devastating for farmers. For the Populists as well as "Silver Democrats," remonetization of silver was crucial for economic recovery.

The 1873 imposition of the gold standard resulted in a "decline in agricultural prices of about 3% a year" (Micheloud p. 3). This annual devaluation of crop prices was a catastrophe for farmers. Howe noted that "Wheat is dropping in the great wheat marts. Still, the gold bugs cry aloud to the farmer that it will be better next year, and that we are having prosperous times generally. Yes, prosperous for the gold bug, but death to the farmer (Censor p. 6)."

In 1892, the year of the Censor's publication, wheat prices "tumbled twenty cents per bushel" (Whitten p. 2), selling for less than in the 1870's. By 1889, the price of corn had dropped, too, down to "about half the estimated cost of production" (Whitten p. 2). To compensate, Midwestern farmers on average were mortgaged to about 45% of their farms' actual values. For Howe, the farmer's problems would be remedied by less accommodating policies to Wall Street: in his first issue of the Herald, Howe writes "Any reform advocated in our monetary system which does not destroy the root that supports this money trust and take from it the right to issue money is not a true reform" (Herald, 8/10/1893). The Populists wanted a return to fiat currency as well as the remonetization of silver.

Farming and finance were integrally linked, as Howe observed in November 1893: "The average yield of corn around here is twenty five bushels per acre. The price is twenty cents a bushel and going down all the time. How many farmers think these figures show any profit? And yet when election day comes they will all turn out and vote for a gold standard and lower prices" (Herald 11/23/93 p. 1). Howe seemed resigned to the fact that his rural neighbors would vote against their own economic interest.

In addition to economic policy, labor issues were important to Howe; when he became president of the Farmers Union, he continued to champion workers' rights. The Censor devoted considerable ink to the strike at Homestead, Pennsylvania.

News of the tragic conflict between Carnegie and the steel workers, which began in June of 1892, dominated almost half of the newspaper. The strike is alluded to in the preamble of the Omaha Platform, the manifesto of the Populist Party. In the third paragraph it states: "urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection." Furthermore, "a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down." This "standing army" was the Pinkertons, frequently employed by businessmen such as Carnegie to "settle" strikes.

The Censor published the Omaha Platform in its entirety. The Omaha Platform, written by Ignatius Donnelly in 1892, spells out the proposed policy and economic demands of the Populist Party. Donnelly is sometimes referred to as America's "Foremost Crank;" he founded a failed Utopian community. The Herald references the Omaha Platform repeatedly; in the February 2, 1894 issue, Howe maintained that the Platform actually predicted the Depression of 1893: "It is just what the populists said would be the result if there was not different financial legislation. The Omaha platform was plain on the matter."

The 1892 Censor, published the same year as the Omaha Platform, also printed the Nebraska People's Party Platform, a short document which affirms the state's support for the Omaha Platform. This "Nebraska People's Party Platform" was adopted by Nebraskans on August 3, 1892, at Kearney. The 1893-1894 Herald frequently featured what it simply calls "The Platform" on the paper's front page. "The Platform" is neither the Omaha Platform nor the "Nebraska People's Party Platform." "The Platform" condemns "the leaders of both Republican and Democratic parties who are attempting to demonize silver." (Spelling is occasionally irregular in Howe's newspapers, especially when space is limited. It's possible Howe should have printed "demonetize," a reference to the Sherman Act.)

The differences between the Censor's "Nebraska People's Party Platform" and the Herald's "Platform" show an evolving movement which was capable of emphasizing different issues. Howe, not expressly Christian, must have been uncomfortable with the unapologetic Christianity of most Populists. In a speech on page two of the Censor, General Weaver, the 1892 presidential candidate, proclaimed that the party had a "golden rule platform." Weaver maintained the Populists would put "the religion of Jesus Christ in motion among men, the brotherhood of man."

Howe was a spiritualist, like his father and grandfather. Howe's sister, Myrta, held séances at Orchard Grove Farm, and wrote meditations for metaphysical publications. Howe must have been relieved, then, when the "Platform" of 1893 stated "We are opposed to the union of church and state in any form or under any pretext whatever" (Herald 10/5/93 p. 1). In Howe's first newspaper, the Censor, he doesn't list Table Rock churches or times of worship: in the Herald, though, he continued the practice of Elmer Layman, the previous editor, placing a column "Church and Society" on the front page.

There were no ads for churches in the Censor, and the only article with a religious theme was written by Alice Thacher (she eventually married Louis F. Post, and is remembered as Alice Thacher Post). Thacher Post was a Swedenborgian. The Herald also featured alternative spirituality and women's roles in religious expression. In the February 16, 1894 edition, Howe wrote: "Omaha has the only woman doctor of divinity in the world in the person of Miss Augusta L. Chapin. Miss Chapin, or Rev. Chapin, as she is entitled to be called, has been called to the pulpit of the First Universalist church" (p. 4).

A curious difference between the Nebraska People's Party Platform of 1892 and the "Platform" of 1893 is the omission of women's rights. The Nebraska People's Party Platform said: "We favor equal pay for equal work for men and women" (Censor p. 3) while the latter document says nothing of the kind. Howe was the son and brother of suffragists, and his future wife supported women's rights to vote. The Howe women were politically engaged in the Populist movement: Mary Pepoon Howe was keenly interested in Populist politics. In 1892, Mary Pepoon Howe noted in her column from the Sept. 20th Argus: "I was fortunate in hearing the debate at Pawnee City between Bryan and Field." (This fragment comes from a family scrapbook, the Argus 1892 archives were destroyed by fire). William Jennings Bryan spoke at Table Rock in 1896, after Howe's newspaper was out of business.

Though the Platform doesn't mention equal pay, the Herald frequently covered women's issues. The August 1893 papers often covered activities of the

Prohibitionist Party. In Nebraska, as elsewhere, suffragists supported Prohibition: "A woman in Lincoln has sued some saloon keepers for \$5,000 damages for selling her husband liquor until he had become a habitual drunkard" (Herald 11/23/93 p. 1).

The September 14, 1893 Herald lauded the "Inventions of Women," and observed that "There are many women registered at the patent office in Washington as inventors." In November 9, 1893, the front page covers a suffragist event: "about twenty members of the Table Rock women's suffrage club marched around the streets election day bearing two banners, on one of which was inscribed 'Equality before the law' on the other 'Taxation without representation.'" Howe added: "We hope they will keep up the agitation till every woman has the right to vote that wants to." Howe didn't name the participants; his mother and sister were no doubt among the marchers. Between Mrs. Howe, her daughter Myrta, and the various female Boones and Ppoons, the march in Table Rock might well have been a family affair.

The most celebrated woman of the Populist movement was covered innumerable times in the Herald. Mary Lease frequently spoke at Pawnee City, usually on the courthouse grounds. Mrs. Lease was lauded in the October 19, October 26, and November 9, 1893 papers; the May 11, 1894 paper features a half-page biography of the great orator. Howe rarely quoted her directly, rather, he reported on her appearances and the enthusiasm of the crowds that gathered around her.

The only Populist leaders mentioned more frequently in the Herald than Mary Lease were Jacob Coxey and Charles Kelly. The 1893 financial meltdown caused mass unemployment; jobless, homeless men wandered from place to place looking for work and food. Jacob Coxey and Charles Kelly decided to take these unemployed to Washington, D.C., so politicians could see what their monetary policy had wrought. Coxey organized in Ohio; Kelly brought men from California. Kelly's men rode in boxcars from the West to the Midwest; in April of 1894, they were stranded in Council Bluffs. The Union Pacific Railroad, based in Omaha, refused to transport them any farther for free.

The April 27, 1894 headline of the Herald was "Council Bluffs and Omaha Labor Men Aroused to Help out Kelly's Army." Howe reported that "Governor Jackson of Iowa, Judge Hubbard and Sheriff Hazen were denounced by the speakers for their treatment of the Kelly 'Industrials.'" One of Kelly's "Industrials" was the young journalist Jack London, who wrote that the "good people of Omaha and Council Bluffs were bestirring themselves. Preparations were making to form a mob, capture a train in Council Bluffs, run it down to us" ("Kelly's Army" p. 2).

Ultimately, the unemployed arrived in small groups in the capital. Howe recorded what happened to Coxey's men: "The Government at Washington has steeped itself in disgrace by the prosecution and conviction of Coxey... for walking on the grass" (Herald, 5/18/94, p.1). Coxey and his men were cited for trespass.

The Censor and Herald present the worst aspect of Populism, something Howe apparently took for granted: racism. Even a cursory glance through the pages of the Censor reveals that anything "foreign" is always bad. The deep seated nativism of the period is impossible to ignore. While several ethnicities are denounced, Chinese and Jews are the most reviled.

In the Censor, Chinese "illegal aliens" are referred to as "Washees," a slur apparently derived from their association with laundries. One article described "eighteen Chinese who entered the United States at various points along the Rio Grande border from Mexico in violation of the United States exclusion act" (Censor p. 3). The Chinese were the first immigrants to be expressly discriminated against: they were not allowed to become American citizens or even purchase land. Brought in the country to construct the railroads, Populists (and others) despised the Chinese workers themselves rather than the captains of industry who exploited them. In 1892, the year of the Censor's publication, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed, and not revoked till the mid 20th century.

In the Herald, Chinese are associated with drug use. The February 23, 1894 edition has a lurid account of "An Omaha Opium Joint:" "Detectives got a tip that all was not right at a Chinese bazar [sic] run by Q Man Lee." At 1325 Capital Avenue, police found "a man and a woman smoking opium pipes. They were almost stupefied and could not intelligibly reply to the questions asked them" (p. 4).

In "Fattening a Foreigner" (p.5), the Censor lambasted Lombard Street, the 19th century's British equivalent to Wall Street in London. It is populated by "Lombard

Street Jews." "Lombard Street Jews" are "skulking" and "disloyal." The September 28, 1893 issue of the Herald is more explicit; the article "What Are We Coming To?" by George Washborn, railed against "Jew bankers." "I have spoken in former communications of the great Jew conspiracy to suck the life blood of modern commerce... into their own veins. These vampires are never satisfied." Washborn continued, "the conspiracy of the great Jew bankers [is] to plunder the people of all nations," and singled out Isadore Rayner of Maryland as "a Jew politician of a tribe that needs no describing." Rayner was an unremarkable Democratic congressman from Maryland who became the state's attorney general and later one of its senators. Washborn ended his rant with the disclaimer: "Let no man think, because I denounce the great international Jew conspiracy to demonetize silver, that I hate the Jewish people."

Howe's publication of this article is uncomfortable for his descendants: his three sons all married women of Jewish descent. Either Howe changed, or he kept racist views to himself; no anti-Semitism was ever reported by my grandmother.

Howe was editor of the Table Rock Herald from August 18, 1893 through July 20, 1894. Though the relatives of north Table Rock were like-minded, Howe's political views were not shared by town folks. He was curiously out of step with other Nebraskans; in the Thanksgiving edition of the Herald, he even denounced football: "It is too brutal" (11/30/1893, p. 4).

Howe's newspaper publishing ended abruptly in July of 1894. On July 4, Howe wore a "Coxey for Congress" pin on his lapel at the town's celebration. This fashion accessory resulted in a boycott of advertisers against Howe, forcing him out of business. At least a dozen Table Rock merchants stopped advertizing in the Herald, making it impossible for the paper to be financially viable. In the July 6, 1894 Herald, Howe reported "The editor of the HERALD has been guilty of a grave crime, it consists in taking the Declaration of Independence too literally" (p. 1).

In the July 16 edition, there is an absence of commercial announcements on the front page; in lieu of ads, Howe printed in large type: "Coxey's platform... is the platform that a few would be business men of Table Rock are trying to boycott." The next blank space proclaimed "Keep off the Grass!" in reference to Coxey's arrest for trespassing. On the final page, Howe published a poem, the "Twelve Wise Men of Table Rock." It began: "There were twelve men of Table Rock,/And they were wondrous wise,/ they looked upon an Editor—/ And said, 'Why, bless our eyes,/' There something pinned upon his coat,/ Which fills our hearts with fear,/
For truly there the dreadful name/
Of Coxey doth appear...." Though Howe does not credit the author, it was in fact his mother, Mary Pepoon Howe. The boycott was successful: the July 20 edition was the last Howe published.

Fortunately for him, Howe had farming and engineering to fall back on. When the Herald ceased publication, Howe withdrew from journalism. Howe's political ideas continued to evolve; like many Populists, Howe increasingly turned to socialism. In the mid 1890's, Howe used the term "nationalism" for what would be called "socialism" in less than five years. "Nationalism is coming," Howe wrote; "Our public schools, mail service, public highways and streets involve the principles of nationalism (Herald, October 19, 1893, p.1). "Municipalization" Howe explained, was "a step towards nationalism." "In every instance where cities have taken control of the water supply and lighting of the city, it has been a great saving to consumers, a better service is rendered, and been a source of revenue to the city." In one of the most politically naïve sentence ever written, Howe proclaimed: "Government ownership of railways, telegraph and telephones is by no means a partisan issue, but one that the good sense of men in all parties endorse, and to which the great common people are rapidly coming."

Many American socialists were influenced in their political thought by a novel published in 1887: Looking Backward 2000-1887, by Edward Bellamy. Looking Backward is a Utopian vision where the main character wakes up in a nearly perfect world; it was one of Howe's favorite books, frequently discussed in the Herald. In the October 19, 1893 Herald, Howe wrote: "No man in American history has ever witnessed such great results in so short a time by the suggestion of an idea, as have followed the publishing of the book entitled 'Looking Backward' by Edward Bellamy" (p. 1).

One of the passages Howe underlined in his personal copy of Looking Backward is especially idealistic: "No man any more has any care for the morrow, either for himself or his children, for the nation guarantees the nurture, education, and comfortable maintenance of every citizen from the cradle to the grave" (Bellamy p.

90). This was an expansion of the Populist position, which had called for nationalizing railroads and communication networks. For a struggling farmer, the “comfortable maintenance” of everyone “cradle to grave” must have held enormous appeal.

American socialists, like Eugene Debs, also a former Populist, believed the socialist ideal would come through non-violent reform. Howe was aware of Eugene Debs and his activities; Debs was president of the American Railroad Union. Howe reported on “President Debs” frequently in the Herald: Debs is mentioned in the May 4, July 6 and July 13 editions. Debs organized a “wildcat” strike in support of Pullman workers beginning in May of 1894; Howe’s paper was boycotted out of business during the deciding days of the Pullman strike; he covered the early days in his May and June newspapers. Debs was sent to prison on dubious grounds; there, he read Marx and became a socialist.

In the late 1890’s, what would become the Socialist Party of America (S.P.A.) was formed, holding its first convention in 1897. Eugene Debs was its leader and presidential candidate from 1900 to 1920. Socialism thrived in the Midwest. While some historians, notably Lawrence Goodwyn, claim that Nebraska’s Populist Party was always weak, that cannot be said of socialism. The Socialist Party of America held its national convention in Omaha in 1903 and 1904. Omaha was proposed as the site of the national headquarters; it lost to Chicago because of a shortage of printing and mail facilities (see “Socialist Party of America” p. 9).

From its inception, the S.P.A. had two branches: those who sought political reform, and “colonialists” who wanted to establish socialist communities. Interest in communal life didn’t begin with socialists; Populists like Ignatius Donnelly, author of the Omaha Platform, formed Utopian communities. In the April 27, 1894 Herald, Howe featured an article on Gibsonville, Michigan. He wrote: “In Michigan, the small town of Gibsonville has become a Utopian community, making baskets and brooms; there ‘neither poverty nor want may cross the threshold.’” Howe made the connection with Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward explicit: the Gibsonville residents lived “the dreams of Bellamy.”

George Howard Gibson, the Populist newspaper editor of Wealth Makers, formed a short-lived Utopian colony near Lincoln. (Gibsonville, Michigan, was named for a general in the Union army, and should not be confused with G. H. Gibson.) In 1896, Gibson left Nebraska for Georgia to form a Christian socialist community, Commonwealth. Howe frequently referenced Gibson and Wealth Makers in the Herald. Gibson’s songbook, Armageddon: The Songs of the World’s Workers Who Go Forth to Battle with the Kings and Captains and Mighty Men (Lincoln, Wealth Makers Publishing, 1894), was part of Howe’s personal library, and used so frequently by the Howes that the cover is worn off.

Despite the songbook’s religiously apocalyptic title, Armageddon, the songs are secular and decidedly Populist. For Gibson, like Howe, the evolution from Populist to socialist was gradual. The song, “Mr. Timothy Hayseed,” for instance, is specifically Populist, closing with the couplet “The Farmer’s Alliance and Labor have won/ And on Nov. 8th we will shoot the first gun” (Armageddon p.51).

The 67 songs in Armageddon are stern, lampooning businessmen and usurers. Several songs have anti-Semitic subtexts, referring to financiers as “Shylock’s brood” (“Toil Shall Sovereign Be” p. 81), and comparing bankers to “Barabbas of old” (“The Money Power Arraigned” p.103). When, in 1913, former Populist vice-presidential candidate, Tom Watson, inflamed southern anti-Semitism in his newspapers, he was drawing from an established tradition. In the Populist mind, Jews were linked to the banking industry. While Tom Watson is perhaps the most notorious anti-Semite of the movement, Mary Lease, the Populist orator, shared those beliefs. In 1895, Lease wrote The Problem of Civilization Solved, where she denounced Grover Cleveland as “the agent of Jewish bankers” (Lease p. 200).

Since Howe stopped his political writing abruptly in 1894, and no correspondence of his from that time remains, it’s impossible to know precisely when he identified as socialist. Unlike Gibson, Howe was never a colonialist. Living in Bunker Hill, he was surrounded by like-minded relatives, though many began to leave southeast Nebraska after the Depression of 1894. Howe’s cousin, Percy Pepoon, another newspaper editor, moved to the free land in Arkansas. Percy, unlike Howe, became a Democrat rather than a socialist. Since the Howes were northerners, and political affiliation at this time was still mostly sectional, with the North Republican and the South Democratic, becoming a Democrat may have been more startling for the family than being socialist.

In 1896, Howe married Mamie Viggers, 1866-1937. Viggers was born in England, but of Italian descent. She was living in Lincoln at the time of the wedding, which took place in Omaha. The couple may have eloped, as Viggers was possibly pregnant. They had three sons, Thomas, 1896-1977; Orville, 1901-1981; and Herbert, 1903-1989. From 1900 to 1930, Howe concentrated on teaching, farming, surveying, keeping meteorological records, and raising three sons.

Howe never left politics. In the years before World War I, he became president of the Pawnee County Farmer's Union, a progressive advocacy group that sought to further the interest of family farmers. In addition to lobbying, the Union was a farmers' cooperative. The organization was created in 1902 in Texas, filling the void left by the disintegrating Populist Party. Many of its goals were the same as those of the Farmer's Alliance. It came to Nebraska in 1913, and continues to this day.

Like others in the era, Howe was preoccupied with establishing pedigree. Race had always been a concern for Populists; Tom Watson maintained that he was of "pure" Anglo-Saxon descent. Howe, too, maintained he was of English heritage, though his mother was in fact French.

Mendel's experiments with genetics had been rediscovered in the early years of the 20th century, and this prompted scientists to propose careful "breeding" of the "desirable." The term "eugenics" was coined by Francis Galton, author of a racially "pure" Utopian vision in the novel *Kantsaywhere*, 1910. Eugenics was considered the logical corollary of Darwinism, with white Anglo-Saxons proclaiming themselves the fittest. It was mainstream science in the early twentieth century, and eugenics projects were funded by the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations.

The eugenics activities of America's East and West coasts are well-known; the center of racial record-keeping was Cold Springs Harbor on Long Island, and most involuntary sterilizations occurred in California. The more widely researched eugenics practices of the coasts obscure the prominence of the movement in America's heartland. The first eugenics sterilization law in the world was passed in Indiana in 1907, and the First National Conference on Race Betterment was held at Battle Creek, Michigan in 1914. This resulted in the construction of the largest eugenics center in the Midwest, funded by the Kellogg family.

During this period of unquestioned belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race," Howe began a careful examination of his own ancestry. Howe left voluminous ancestral charts and diagrams showing the British origin of the Howe name, something that had never been in question. He was able to trace ancestors back to specific villages in England as far back as 1578.

Howe was intent on proving that the Howes came across on the Mayflower. He knew his English ancestors were in Boston by 1640. By careful research, Howe discovered that his progenitor Charles Howe married Eunice Conant, whose father arrived on the ship *Ann* in 1623. The Conants built the first house in Salem, and a Howe relative by marriage, Elizabeth Howe, was executed as a witch.

Scientists at the Cold Springs Harbor established a "Eugenics Record Office" in 1911, and dreamed of compelling every American to complete extensive genealogical records. Howe complied voluntarily. In the early 1930's, principles of eugenics crossed the Atlantic and influenced German domestic policy. Every European within control of the Nazi regime was forced to account for his ancestry. American scientists considered euthanizing the "unfit," but had to be content with sterilizing them; totalitarian governments didn't have to choose.

Howe's charts and voluminous correspondence with British authorities are embarrassing today. The effort he poured into the project is noteworthy: it was done in the age before e-mail or the Internet. There was apparently no dissonance between Howe's socialism and concerns about his racial heritage. He did a lengthy genealogy on his first grandchild, my mother, on the back of minutes he kept for the U.S. Socialist Party. As Weizmann and others have observed, many socialists were supportive of eugenics, as were most conservatives. Eugenics was scientific orthodoxy in the early twentieth century, just as bloodletting had been in earlier times.

By the early 1930's, all three of Howe's sons had married women of Jewish ancestry. My grandmother said she never experienced anti-Semitism; she and her husband, Howe's middle son, Orville, lived in the same house with her father-in-law. "It wouldn't have mattered to him," she once told me, concerning her Jewish heritage. It's hard to reconcile such reported nonchalance with agonizingly detailed

family records. Perhaps what started out as eugenics became simply an interest in genealogy. My mother's family tree was the last Howe completed: on my grandmother's side, he could find records going back only to 1880 in Poland. My grandmother's grandmother altered documents to enter the country: perhaps that hindered Howe's research.

By the early twentieth century, immigration of Jews was curtailed, culminating in the restrictive 1924 Immigration Act.

Howe never left politics. In the early years of the twentieth century, Howe became president of the Pawnee County Farmers Union, a farmer's cooperative and political lobbying organization. Howe was county president of the incipient organization in 1914 and 1915. Still in existence, the Farmers Union creed is "the owner-operated family farm is the keystone of a free, progressive, democratic national society" ("Farmers Union" p. 1). Howe's cousin, Percy Pepon was president of an Arkansas chapter of the Union.

Howe returned to the rhetoric he espoused in the Populist Party. In an undated newspaper clipping from the Argus, it reports "Mr. Howe assured organized labor of the friendship and cooperation of organized farmers." This speech could have been lifted from the Populist Party, which was the union of the Farmer's Alliance and the Knights of Labor. Though his editorial writing was silenced, Howe himself was never muzzled, and remained faithful to his political ideals.

Support for the First World War represented an inconsistency in Howe's leftist politics. American socialism had an anti-war tendency: Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party of America's candidate from 1900 to 1920, was against the War, and sent to prison because of his opposition. (The Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 criminalized dissent.) Howe's oldest son was drafted, but the conflict ended before he was deployed overseas: Thomas Howe would have been the first Howe to enter in conflict since the War of 1812. Was Howe opposed to his son fighting? If so, he kept it to himself.

After the Russian Revolution, American socialists fragmented, and the Socialist Party of America splintered into factions. There were a number of regional and state socialist parties. In 1928, Norman Thomas attempted to reunite the party after Debs' death and the dispiriting Palmer Raids. Thomas was the Socialist Party of America's presidential candidate from 1928- 1948. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Thomas had his roots in the same Christian socialist tradition as George Howard Gibson. Howe voted socialist in the 1932 election, casting his vote for Norman Thomas. Howe's middle son voted for Thomas as well.

From 1933-1937 Howe lived in Lincoln, and kept the minutes for the United States Socialist Party, a little-known regional branch of the S.P.A. Howe voted for Thomas a second time in 1936. The "Socialist Party Election Platform for 1936" proclaimed: "Roosevelt Has Failed" but nonetheless called for the expansion of all New Deal programs. The Platform had a special appeal to farmers: the 1930's was a time of economic hardship for farmers due not only to the Depression but also the Dustbowl. The seventh demand of the Platform was "Relief for farmers and farm workers: moratorium on all farm mortgages; WPA and PWA for farmers; no restriction of their right to organize (Platform p. 3).

In 1937, after his wife Mamie died, Howe returned to Orchard Grove Farm. Howe and his wife had been living in Lincoln with his wife's sister, Nana Riggins; Howe spent the remainder of his years living with his son Orville on Orchard Grove Farm, where he'd grown up. My Jewish grandmother was at his bedside as he died.

Edmund Howe's life is emblematic of progressive socio-political movements from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Howe moved from Populism to socialism, dabbling in eugenics in the early years of the century. He found an outlet for activism in the Farmers Union, serving as county president. Like fellow Nebraskan, George Howard Gibson, Howe's newspaper was shunned by business leaders, and Howe was forced from journalism by a successful advertizing boycott.

No Howes, Boones or Pepoons live in Nebraska today. Perhaps the boycott of the Herald was an indication of the state's political direction: today, Nebraska is conservative. It's hard to imagine a Gibson or even a Bryan influencing discourse today. But

Nebraska Populism was resurrected last year, as Madeline Ostrander observed: "Farmers and ranchers in Nebraska, many of them longtime conservatives, got angry about corporate influence on a single issue that has since captivated the entire state and upset national politics: the Keystone XL pipeline" ("Transpartisan

Politics on the Plains," p. 18). The Nebraska Farmers Union played a role in the struggle. Whether coming from the left or the right, Howe would be pleased that once again Nebraskans were standing up to the power of corporations.

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