

Liberty University

“The Third Power”

James A. Everitt and the American Society of Equity

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty to the Department of History  
in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts in History

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## Introduction

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a golden age for farmers' movements in the United States. Crushing debt, deflation, increased urbanization, and industrial acceleration generated much discontent in America's agricultural communities, and unleashed "a Populist moment" of farmer protest and organization.<sup>1</sup> While the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed significant economic improvement, farm organizations continued to operate and, in some cases, even thrived. One such organization was the American Society of Equity (ASE or "the Equity"). Established in 1902 by seed merchant and newspaper editor James A. Everitt of Indiana, the Equity advanced trends in agricultural cooperation while introducing new ideas into the atmosphere that would shape the organizations that came after it. Indeed, the chief goal of the Equity was to obtain profitable prices for all farm products through a system of holding efforts and organized cooperative marketing. The ASE, then, kept "the Populist faith" and carried it into the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> By 1906, the Equity reported almost three thousand local unions including "unions in almost every state" as well as nearly two hundred county unions and thirteen state unions.<sup>3</sup> Internal division and outside pressures, however, contributed to the organization's decline in the 1910s. By the 1920s, the Equity—while continuing to exist in some regions—faded as a national force. Finally, in 1934, its last sizable remnant was absorbed into a rival organization, the Farmers' Union, which endured into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Despite its brief history (1902-1934), the Equity represented a new era in American farm movements. In both leadership and focus, it marked a sharp break with the past. Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*, 2nd edition. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 149.

<sup>3</sup> Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development* (New York, NY: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 135; "Former Seedsman Leads Tobacco Growers to War," *Albuquerque Evening Citizen* (Albuquerque, NM, December 19, 1906).

American economy, Everitt insisted, rested on three powers: “money power (industry), organized labor, and the farmer.”<sup>4</sup> Like most Populists, Everitt believed that farming reigned supreme. However, unlike the other two powers, farmers had failed to adequately adapt to the new economic realities and advance their own interests. Advancement, then, did not stem from direct connection to politics. Instead, Everitt concluded, “The Third Power” must come “alive to their interests.”<sup>5</sup> Only by organizing to promote its economic interests in a way that fit in with the new market system would this Third Power reach its full potential.

Compared to other organizations of the time such as the Farmer’s Union and the Grange, the American Society of Equity suffers from a lack of dedicated historical scholarship. In fact, only a few scholarly works deal specifically with it. One is a 1940 article by Robert Bahmer that provides a full overview of the Equity from its inception to its eventual demise.<sup>6</sup> While dated, Bahmer’s work remains the definitive account of the Equity. The only other scholarly consideration of the Equity comes from a series of articles published between 1939 and 1947 by historian Theodore Saloutos.<sup>7</sup> While Bahmer gives a broad account of the Equity as a national movement, Saloutos used his articles to explore the development and course of the Equity in specific states, namely Montana, Kentucky, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.<sup>8</sup> Saloutos also included elements from his Equity articles in his 1951 collaboration with John Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939*. No scholarly monograph exists dedicated to the Equity as a whole.

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<sup>4</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, First Edition. (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1903), 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Bahmer, “The American Society of Equity,” *Agricultural History* 14, no. 1 (1940): 33–63.

<sup>7</sup> Saloutos’s works include “The American Society of Equity in Kentucky: A Recent Attempt in Agrarian Reform” (1939), “The Wisconsin Society of Equity” (1940), “The Decline of the Wisconsin Society of Equity” (1941), “The Montana Society of Equity” (1945), “The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange” (1945), “The Decline of the Equity Cooperative Exchange” (1947).

The Equity, however, often warrants mention in those works dedicated to social, economic, and political history in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (1999) by historian Elizabeth Sanders explores the interaction among farm labor, industrial labor, and the American government. Sanders even briefly mentions the Equity and its attempts to advance legislation—specifically a 1910 vocational bill that would provide for vocational education in rural high school and land grant colleges.<sup>9</sup> Another important work is Daniel Rodgers’ *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (1998). In this intellectual history of transatlantic reform, Rodgers placed the Equity amidst the broader transatlantic cooperative farming movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>10</sup> An older work, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (1955) by Richard Hofstadter, examined themes of reform and progress that characterized the period from 1890 to 1940. According to Hofstadter, the Farmers’ Union and the Equity served as models of production control and surplus management that were “suggestive” of later New Deal policies.<sup>11</sup> While the Equity only appears briefly in major works such as these, the history of the Equity cannot be divorced from the Populists and other agrarian movements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Two classic studies on agriculture and reform in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century are Lawrence Goodwyn’s *The Populist Moment: A Short History of Agrarian Revolt in America* (1978) and Robert McMath’s *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (1993). In *The Populist Moment*, Goodwyn examined the “democratic promise” of the Populist movement that

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 329.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 318; *Ibid.*, 30-331.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 112.

represented an uprising of millions of Americans in a time of economic and social uncertainty. Meanwhile in *American Populism*, McMath insisted that the foundations of Populism were in the growth of home-grown organizations in a time of economic and social turmoil, organizations that found comfort in an “agrarian myth” of a simpler time.<sup>12</sup> Finally, McMath explored the Populist movement in the context of the rural social and economic cultures in three areas where Populism was a “major force:” the South, the Great Plains, and the Mountain West.<sup>13</sup>

Numerous regional and state histories also exist which explore agricultural themes. Clifton J. Phillips’ *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth 1880-1920* (1968), part four of a five part history of Indiana, detailed the transition of Indiana from a rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial society and frames the Equity as part of the growth of scientific and organized agriculture. In the same vein, John D. Buenker’s *The History of Wisconsin, Volume IV: The Progressive Era* (1998) examined a state in transition while during a time of economic change and Progressive reforms. Buenker integrated the Equity into the changes in the agricultural economy occurring in Wisconsin during the period. Then there is Elwyn Robinson’s *History of North Dakota* (1966)—still the definitive state history—that explored the whole history of the state through six themes: remoteness, dependence, economic disadvantage, agrarian radicalism, the “Too Much Mistake,” and adaptation to environment.<sup>14</sup> Robinson gives quite a bit of attention to the Equity and its role in the appearance of the Nonpartisan League. Robinson viewed the Equity as group which took up the long-standing and difficult fight for “success in the terminal markets” in North Dakota and

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<sup>12</sup> Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1992), 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), vii.

served as a building block for the later Equity Cooperative Exchange and Nonpartisan League.<sup>15</sup> Many other region-, topic-, or state-specific works also provide information or context for the era.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship among farming, farm movements, and race is the subject of a substantial literature. At the turn of the century nearly eight hundred thousand African Americans operated farms and millions more worked as farm laborers and as such represent a vital part of the history of American agriculture.<sup>17</sup> Although the Equity was not outwardly racial in its publications and Everitt was not a racial demagogue by any means, both were products of their times. No existing literature examines the relationship the Equity had with race specifically, but some scholarly works do exist that consider the two generally. The state of Kentucky and the Night Riders, for example, provide a place of overlap between the Equity and a region or series of event that is inextricably tied to race. The Night Riders were hooded bands of armed men who intimidated tobacco growers into holding their tobacco during price raising efforts. Their appearance and tactics often resembled the Ku Klux Klan. Three modern works which examine the Night Riders are *Night Riders: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (1993) by Christopher Waldrep, *The Politics of Despair: Power and Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (1993) by Tracy

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>16</sup> Some other such works which contribute to the context of the Equity include *History of Indiana from 1850 to the Present* (1970) by Logan Esarey, *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (1990) by Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940* (1997) by Robert Gough, *A New History of Kentucky* (1997) by Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (2006) by David B. Danbom, *Up from the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870-1915* (2006) by Connie L. Lester, and *American Georgics* (2011) edited by Edwin C. Hagenstein, Sara M. Gregg, and Brian Donahue (especially the sections entitled "Agriculture in an Industrializing Nation, 1860-1910" and "Agrarians in an Industrial Nation, 1900-1945").

<sup>17</sup> David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames, IA: The Iowa University Press, 1979), 3.

Campbell, and *Violence in the Black Patch of Kentucky and Tennessee* (1994) by Suzanne Marshall.

Unfortunately, no biography exists on James A. Everitt, the founder of the American Society of Equity. Everitt himself never wrote a memoir, but his 1903 treatise on farm organization, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, detailed his philosophy on issues facing farmers as well as the details of the Equity.<sup>18</sup> Everitt's personal and business papers do not exist in a single collection. Indeed, Equity papers from the period are scattered across various state and local archives. The original organ of the Equity, Everitt's *Up-to-Date Farming*, represents the primary resource for the early activities and policy of the Equity. Original copies of the paper are available at several libraries and collections, most notably the Indiana State Historical Society and Indiana State Library in Indianapolis, the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, and the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland. Other later Equity publications such as *Wisconsin Equity News* and *The Equity News* can be found, usually in microfilm, in many archives and libraries as well, including the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, the University of Wisconsin-Madison library system, and the Newman Library at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia.

In general, the story of the American farmer at the turn of the century was one of change and upheaval. Despite the similarities facing the masses of labor and agriculture, the farmers' outlook was less complicated than that of labor. For the farmer, political action was "a natural outgrowth of organization," the need for which was rarely called into question.<sup>19</sup> The farmers of the late 19th century sought a return to the security and autonomy of the past in the midst of the

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<sup>18</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, First Edition. (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1903).

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 101.

rising giant of industrialization that was reshaping the economy. Unlike the urban worker for whom local organization and action might be effective in alleviating grievances, farmers were spread far and wide. The enemy of the farmer was “not an employer, but a *system* – a system of credit, supply, transportation, and marketing.”<sup>20</sup> Farmers were caught in the flow of commerce both nationally and internationally, beholden to far greater outside influence than previous decades may have wrought. Their position was undermined from the 1870s onward by decreasing commodity prices, high freight rates, and exorbitant farm mortgage loans with interest rates as high as 9-11% in some parts of the country.<sup>21</sup>

The late 19th century witnessed a great shift in American agriculture. Traditionally, agriculture was an industry that was slow to change. However, as America continued to industrialize and settlers continued to spread west and establish new farms, farm life generally shifted toward a more commercialized and commodity-focused existence. As production of many commodities used on the farm shifted away from homemade items and into urban factories, farming generally became less self-sufficient than the pioneer agriculture of decades past and more dependent on commercial goods.<sup>22</sup> When the farmer “ate the flour ground from his own wheat price was not so important,” but when the farmer relied more on outside commodities and sold his grain, “price was of the utmost importance.”<sup>23</sup> In the words of one scholar, the American farmer was entering the new industrial America “with one foot in the world of Jeffersonian yeomanry and the other in the complex economy of J.P. Morgan.”<sup>24</sup> Another trend

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 103; and Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, vol. 5, *The Economic History of the United States* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1945), 418.

<sup>22</sup> Gilbert C. Fite and Jim E. Reese, *An Economic History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 415.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 102.

in agriculture that went hand in hand with the commercialization of the farmer as a consumer was the commercialization of the farmer as a producer. Specialization became more common as farmers sought to tailor their livestock and grains to the desires to the market. In doing so, farmers were increasingly sensitive and vulnerable to the movements of the market; a bad year for the market in a crop could ruin single-crop farmers.

This period also witnessed the rise of farm organizations. After the Civil War, farm organizations began to emerge, evolving from local social, horticultural, and husbandry clubs into large, structured organizations that advocated for agriculture and rural life on a regional and even national scale. The oldest of these organization was the National Grange of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, founded in 1867 by Oliver Kelley. Overall, the Grange was a fraternal order (at least initially) that sought emphasized the general wellbeing of the farmer. Among other things, this cooperative purchasing arrangements for equipment and other farm necessities.<sup>25</sup> By the 1880s, the Farmers' Alliance, a coalition of various and smaller regional organizations, emerged. The Alliance, among other pursuits, spread the idea of cooperative warehouses for crops across the country to help cut down on storage and shipping rates.<sup>26</sup> In the end, these organizations—whether the Grange or others—cared about setting prices for the things farmers needed to buy.

The decades leading up to the turn of the twentieth century were marked with hardship for farmers from the Dakotas down to Texas and across the South and the West. The influx of Russian wheat and Egyptian cotton, for example, hurt the price of American farm products on the international markets; the result of the “great and hitherto unknown price fluctuations” brought on by increased international participation in those markets was “devastating” for

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<sup>25</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 330.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

American growers.<sup>27</sup> Farmers in the Midwest were also “battered by blizzards, bankers, and brokers.”<sup>28</sup> Rural people from the Midwest and the South shared a mistrust of the “town clique,” the bankers, merchants, and other interests that profited off their production.<sup>29</sup> Farmers, already at the mercy of a market economy over which they exercised minimal control, faced falling farm prices, increasing freight costs, and steep credit rates.<sup>30</sup> With railroads serving as the middleman between farmers and the far off grain markets and banks offering farmers little choice but to accept their harsh loan terms to get through the bad years, farmers felt increasingly victimized.<sup>31</sup>

The West was especially unfortunate, as it was stricken by drought through the mid-1880s.<sup>32</sup> The high freight rates also shaved profit margins down to almost nothing. Even if they were lucky enough to have a bumper crop, farm prices dropped. Finally, deflation was also a problem as farm prices declined. The farmers of the Midwest, then, “lived on the edge in good times and in bad.”<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, these problems sparked the Populist revolt of the 1890s. In much of the country at this time, the far-off marketing, transportation, and credit institutions worked against farmers, spurring many to join the “revolt.”<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the 1890s witnessed more of the same “crushing disappointment” for farmers.<sup>35</sup> Good weather lead to bumper crops and low prices, while bad weather lead to low yield and even lower profit.<sup>36</sup> The Panic of 1893, the worst economic depression in American history up to that

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<sup>27</sup> Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper, 2009), 158.

Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 103.

<sup>28</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 143.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>30</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 149.

<sup>32</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 262.

<sup>36</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 169.

time, unleashed further despair on American farmers. Although they already endured hard times, it became more serious as the rest of the country became involved.<sup>37</sup> Crop failures in 1893 and 1894 exacerbated the situation further.<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Senator William Allen of Nebraska, one correspondent wrote that there had never been such “anxiety made manifest in the minds of the whole people...running hither and thither to catch onto a ray of hope.”<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the 1890s, American agriculture was in a state of flux. While farmers traditionally faced hard times, the Panic of 1893 and the general trend towards urbanization and industrialization exacerbated the situation. Farm populations, size, and aggregate wealth were bigger than ever, they lagged behind relative to growing urban centers.<sup>40</sup> Agricultural laborers fell to less than 40 percent of the workforce by 1900 and by that same year farm products made up only 16 percent of the country’s wealth compared to 40 percent before the Civil War.<sup>41</sup> The climb in farm prices towards the end of the 1890s did little to alleviate the imbalance. In 1900 the average farm worker made an average of \$260 annually while nonfarm workers earned around \$622, more than double the farm average.<sup>42</sup> One article in *Atlantic Monthly* published during the 1896 presidential campaign season pointed out that farmers had not only lost a great deal of what economic stability they had, but they had also lost “dignity and social standing.”<sup>43</sup> The anonymous author credited a “politics of envy” with the farmers’ motivations as they moved from “sturdy yeoman to hayseed” in the public eye.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 309.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 30.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 190.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Recovery from the Panic of 1893 began in 1897 and by 1900 economic prosperity returned to most of the United States. Farmers, however, still faced challenges. Many farm activists, including the future organizer of the American Society of Equity, insisted that despite this economic recovery, farmers must continue to advance the cooperative spirit. Only by keeping up the fight could the farmer and producer secure their rightful status among the organized masses of labor and industry. Left unchecked, the forces of capital and labor would continue to “beat down” the price for farm products until the farmer was the “poorest paid of an class of laborers.”<sup>45</sup> Only by devising a method to put pressure on the market and the “gamblers and speculators” would farmers be able to determine their own success and destiny.<sup>46</sup> Farmers, then, had to remain vigilant, organize, and unite for their common interests.

The American Society of Equity was the brainchild of James A. Everitt, an Indianapolis seed merchant and newspaper publisher. Everitt was a well-known figure in the Indianapolis business and agricultural community, working in and then running a seed business in central Indianapolis after moving there in 1884.<sup>47</sup> He was a seed merchant first and foremost, but his interests included amateur philosophy and economics.<sup>48</sup> In both interests he was frequently “at odds with the prevailing opinion.”<sup>49</sup> He frequently utilized elements of doubt and discontent in his thinking, especially in relation to the business interests and various trusts that he saw in his line of work. Amidst these trusts Everitt believed that the farmers were being exploited. Despite a seeming lack of participation in the farm movements of the late nineteenth century, Everitt

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<sup>45</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

*Ibid.*, 254-255.

<sup>47</sup> “James A. Everitt,” *The Indianapolis Star* (Indianapolis, IN, September 30, 1930).

<sup>48</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 34-35.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

certainly must have witnessed the attempts at rectifying the position of the farmer in relation to the railroads, banks, and grain trusts that dominated the Midwest and the West.

Everitt began publishing ideas about the proposed organization in late 1901 in his journal, *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening*.<sup>50</sup> He described himself as a “strictly practical man” who only cared for the farmer’s profits at heart when he proposed the organization.<sup>51</sup> Everitt’s primary goal was the organization of farmers. He published multiple works to explain his idea that in an economy where “Labor and Industry had organized... so must Agriculture,” a concept he called the “Third Power.”<sup>52</sup> Everitt’s hope, expressed in 1903 with the publication of *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, was that “agriculture in America...will soon occupy the high position to which it is entitled, when it will stand first of all in importance and power.”<sup>53</sup> Farmers, according to Everitt, had the potential to become more powerful than either labor or industry because “they fed the world and by the same token they could starve the world.”<sup>54</sup> If the level of organization became great enough to set farmers on par with the other two “powers,” Everitt claimed the Equity “could not only secure relief from the ill effects of monopoly; they could...become the greatest of all monopolies.”<sup>55</sup>

The farm organizations of previous decades informed the makeup and goals of Everitt’s Equity. Answering the question of how the Grange or Alliance might have succeeded, Everitt claimed that if they had “made their first object to secure profitable prices for their own goods” rather than try to corral prices the “other party” sought for their goods, “rural America would be a paradise” and cooperation would be thriving among farmers.<sup>56</sup> Crucial to Everitt’s

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>51</sup> Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 113.

<sup>52</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 35.

<sup>53</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, viii.

<sup>54</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 35

<sup>55</sup> Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 114.

<sup>56</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 264.

organizational plan was the availability of information. As the Equity developed over the first few years, Everitt drove it to take on a character akin to a central clearinghouse for agriculture information. Cooperation without good crop and price information and “thoroughly informed” farmers was “impossible.”<sup>57</sup> The Equity was distinct in that its broader plan was more focused on providing the farmers with the information and unity needed to sell on their own terms.

One primary difference between the Equity and previous organizations was the lack of cooperative purchasing and co-op stores, two ventures “not deemed necessary” by Everitt.<sup>58</sup> In one of the first major newspaper reports on the Equity, the *New York Times* differentiated it from the Grange by making the same distinction. The article noted that the Grange tried to “control the prices of everything the farmer has to buy” but the “Society of Equity” tries to “control the prices of the products farmers have to sell;” if the farmer could receive a good price for his product, they could “stand the prices of the articles the purchase.”<sup>59</sup> Most certainly the article oversimplified the goals of both organizations, but the distinction was nevertheless made showing the Equity’s program and its focus on what the farmer sells, not what he buys.

In the end, the Equity represented a significant chapter in the history of American agricultural organization and reform. First, it continued the legacy of farming organizations after the general decline in farming interest after 1896. Second, the Equity helped to shift the focus of agricultural cooperation by implementing a marketing plan that attempted to bring the farmer into the modern economy through a focused plan that sought to “to obtain profitable prices for all products of the farm, garden, and orchard;” the plan sought to “beat monopolists at their own game” and place farmers in a position to challenge the typical economic powerhouses in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>58</sup> Bahmer, “America Society of Equity,” 40.

<sup>59</sup> 200,000 Farmers to Strike,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1906.

agriculture.<sup>60</sup> Finally, many of the cooperatives and organizations which grew out of Everitt's original Equity established the ideas of farmer cooperation and worked as catalysts for later cooperative endeavors. Ultimately, Everitt—through a society he called “not a farmers’ society only, but an American society”—sought to create a structure for farmers that treated agriculture like the business that it was.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, vol. 5 no 12, page 4; Michael Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy: The Nonpartisan League in North American Politics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>61</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 70.

## Chapter 1 Origins/Founding

The story of the founding of the American Society of Equity is in many ways the story of one man, James A. Everitt. Born in August 1857, Everitt was raised near Delaware, Pennsylvania, a small community in central Pennsylvania, north of Harrisburg. He was one of at least eight children born to Ephraim and Caroline Everitt.<sup>1</sup> His father was a farmer in Northumberland County and James Everitt worked for his father and on area farms throughout his youth. He registered for the census in McEwensville and Northumberland over the course of his early life.<sup>2</sup> Rural Pennsylvania was the starting point of Everitt's journey, but he would have to go west to make his own fortune. Everitt, his wife Laura, and their young son Sibley arrived in Marion County, Indiana in 1884 from Watsonstown, Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> Soon after their arrival Laura gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Everitt.<sup>4</sup>

The Everitt family had called East-central Pennsylvania home for generations. It is unclear why Everitt decided to move his young family five hundred miles away to Indiana. His later writings however allude to a "personal crisis."<sup>5</sup> In a 1902 *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening* article about the power of thinking and self-reflection, Everitt wrote that his crisis came from "dissatisfaction with my current condition" and that this dissatisfaction was the "more than ordinary" event that made him change his life. His thinking and struggling over this issue consumed "years of time" before he resolved to finally make a change; from that day forth,

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<sup>1</sup> "James Everitt in Household of Ephraim Everitt, 'United States Census, 1870'" (United States Census Bureau, August 1, 1870), FamilySearch.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Former Seedsman Leads Tobacco Growers to War," *Albuquerque Evening Citizen* (Albuquerque, NM, December 19, 1906).

<sup>4</sup> "James A Everitt, 'United States Census, 1910'" (United States Census Bureau, April 22, 1910), FamilySearch.

<sup>5</sup> Bahmer, "American Society of Equity," 34.

Everitt wrote that “there was not a moment when waking that I am not originating ideas and revolving plans in my brain.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Everitt was unhappy with his circumstances in Pennsylvania and sought to make his own name for himself. It seems that the end of this internal conflict provided the impetus for Everitt to take his family to Indiana to make a new life or, at the least, move their life to new surroundings.

Despite his apparent desire for a new life, Everitt did not stray far from his agricultural upbringing. Indeed, he began his tenure in the retail and wholesale seed business shortly after arriving in Indianapolis in 1884.<sup>7</sup> By all accounts, the seed store was a successful business. Along with the seed business Everitt also published a paper, *The Agricultural Epitomist*, for several years before selling it in 1892.<sup>8</sup> After selling the *Agricultural Epitomist*, Everitt focused on his seed business as it expanded not just in Indianapolis, but into Indiana and the neighboring states; Everitt’s free seed giveaways ultimately spread his name across the country.<sup>9</sup> In an 1898 “assessment of corporations” by the County Board of Review, “James A. Everitt, Seedsman” was valued at \$39,660.<sup>10</sup> Although he sold his paper and focused on his growing seed store it was not long before he returned to the newspaper business.<sup>11</sup> In 1898 Everitt began publishing a new paper, *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening*, devoted to aiding farmers and horticulturists of all kinds exchange new ideas and learn improved farming and gardening techniques.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, March 15, 1902, page 6.

<sup>7</sup> Obituary

<sup>8</sup> “Indiana Paper Edited and Published on a Beautiful Farm Which Is Used as an Experiment Station,” *The Indianapolis Journal* (Indianapolis, IN, January 31, 1904).

<sup>9</sup> “Everitt’s Man-Weight Farm and Garden Tools,” *The Columbia Herald* (Columbia, TN, March 24, 1893); “Our Wonderful Grand Seed Distribution,” *Fort Worth Gazette* (Fort Worth, TX, January 11, 1895).

<sup>10</sup> “Corporation Values: Grist of the County Board of Review Yesterday,” *The Indianapolis Journal* (Indianapolis, IN, June 24, 1898).

<sup>11</sup> “Everitt’s Seed Store Moves to Illinois St.,” *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, August 16, 1928).

<sup>12</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening* vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1898).

While Everitt grew his businesses and established himself in Indianapolis, the farmers movement was making a move towards a national political revolt. The Alliances and other farmers' organizations became more politically oriented as the 1880s proceeded and by 1890 were making progress on a national scale. In the election of 1890, "two senators and at least fifteen representatives" had the Alliance to thank for their victories.<sup>13</sup> The December 1890 Alliance convention in Ocala, FL reemphasized the political principles of the group, including the free coinage of silver and the reduction of tariffs; the platform also included more "egalitarian" planks such as the direct election of senators.<sup>14</sup> Adherence to the "Ocala Platform" became a prerequisite for Alliance support with the Indianapolis resolution the next month.<sup>15</sup> The political framework of the Populist Party was quickly taking form.

Just over a year later the burgeoning Populist Party met in St. Louis where the new Populist platform, a restatement of the Ocala Platform, was "whooped through" and later endorsed at its presidential nominating convention in Omaha, NE on July 4, 1892.<sup>16</sup> The National People's Party Platform, or the Omaha Platform as it also known, called for a restoration of the Republic through a "union of labor forces" representing the people and the expansion of the government "of the people" to bring about the cessation of "oppression, injustice, and poverty."<sup>17</sup> The platform included calls for the coinage of silver at a sixteen-to-one ratio, a graduated income tax, and a system of "postal savings banks," among other aims; the "Expression of Sentiments" also lent support to the free ballot, pensions for Union soldiers, the abolition of "the Pinkerton system," the direct election of senators, and an opposition to "any

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<sup>13</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 163.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166.

<sup>17</sup> "National People's Party Platform," in *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders*, George B. Tindall, ed., (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1976), 90-92.

subsidy or national aid to any private corporation for any purpose.”<sup>18</sup> The platform sought unity between rural and urban laborers because their interests were the same and their “enemies are identical.”<sup>19</sup> Under the auspices of the Omaha Platform, James Weaver, the Populist nominee for president, received over one million votes and twenty-two electoral votes and the Populist gained twelve seats in Congress.<sup>20</sup> The 1894 election saw even greater results which sent six Senators and seven Representatives to Washington.<sup>21</sup>

The peak of the Populist Party came in 1896 with the candidacy of William Jennings Bryan. Elected to Congress in 1890 as Democrat who decried the “tariffs, trusts, and gold standard,” Bryan soon became a rising leader of the free silver movement in the early 1890s and an opponent of the gold standard in congress, all the while “consorting with Nebraska Populists.”<sup>22</sup> Bryan took the 1896 Democratic convention by storm. Popular convention holds that Bryan’s famous “Cross of Gold” speech won him support, but in reality the combination of months of preparation, years of building support across Populist and Democratic lines, and the enthusiasm garnered from the famous speech all contributed to his nomination in 1896, first by the Democrats and shortly after by the Populists.<sup>23</sup> His nomination by both parties, while opposed by some Populists, was applauded by others. One Populist leader, “Sockless” Jerry Simpson declared that he “cared not for party names. It was substance we are after, and we have it in William J. Bryan.”<sup>24</sup> James Weaver, the 1892 nominee for the Populists, said in his speech before the convention that year that Populists must heed the “bugle call for union” and that “no

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 166.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 42.

<sup>22</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 177.

<sup>23</sup> Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 178.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 214.

other course” but to align against “confederated gold power” behind “that matchless champion of the people, that intrepid foe of corporate greed, that splendid young statesman—William J. Bryan of Nebraska.”<sup>25</sup> Although unsuccessful in his presidential bid, Bryan became a transformational figure in the Democratic Party; by borrowing ideas from the Populists, Bryan reformed the Democratic Party. Bryan was “heart and soul, a populist” for whom the “periphery farmers” formed an electoral base.<sup>26</sup>

One problem faced by the ailing Populist Party, both nationally and on the state level, was the assimilation of some of their platform by the Democratic Party. In the years after the 1894 election, the Populists became increasingly focused on free silver issue, despite the broad planks of the Omaha platform.<sup>27</sup> As the platform narrowed, the chance of a major party overtaking their issues grew and by the time of the 1896 election the Democratic Party did just that. Democratic endorsement of free silver and the nomination of William Jennings Bryan in 1896 “virtually preempted the Populists’ chances of playing a significant role in the presidential election.”<sup>28</sup> The Populists faced a difficult situation. They could either continue independently and face “crushing defeat” and the possibility that blame would fall to them for the defeat of Bryan or they could support the “unattractive” Democratic platform and lose their status as “an independent political entity.”<sup>29</sup> The Populists opted for the second option and in doing so initiated the rapid decline of the party as a political force.

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<sup>25</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *The First Battle: A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago, IL: W.B. Conkey Company, 1896), 278-279.

<sup>26</sup> Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 154-155.

<sup>27</sup> Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 148.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 203.

<sup>29</sup> Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 149.

The decline of the Populists after 1896, “mortally stricken by the events of 1896,” was quick.<sup>30</sup> Although it did not “give up the ghost” until 1912, the election of 1896 “destroyed the People’s Party for all intents and purposes.”<sup>31</sup> However, “the disintegration of the alliances could not stay the farmers’ movement” and although the progress of farmers’ movements appeared to be on the decline, the farmer was “destined to rise again.”<sup>32</sup> Jerome C. Kearby, a longtime reformer and gubernatorial candidate in Texas, said that in the aftermath of the election, “the opportunity (for reform) was lost” and that he trusted that it may return but feared that it never would.”<sup>33</sup> While the “unprecedented prosperity, especially among the farmers, which began with the closing years of the nineteenth century” had quelled many of the issues that had driven late-nineteenth century farm movements and “agrarian discontent,” “some of the old evils are left, and fresh grievances have come to the front.”<sup>34</sup> The failures of the Populists, though discouraging for many in the movement, informed a generation of “agricultural leaders” who were “spurred by its achievements and educated by its failures.”<sup>35</sup>

Former Kansas Senator John James Ingalls, interviewed in the summer of 1897 and quoted in the *Kansas Agitator*, said that in his travels he saw that “times have never been harder nor money scarcer than now.”<sup>36</sup> Though he acknowledges that “every branch of industry languishes,” Ingalls saw that “prices of land, farm products and general commodities have sunk

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<sup>30</sup> Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1920), 194-195.

<sup>31</sup> Hild, *Farmer-Labor Insurgency*, 201; Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1920), 194-195.

<sup>32</sup> Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade*, 194-195

<sup>33</sup> Worth Robert Miller, “Building a Progressive Coalition in Texas: The Populist-Reform Democrat Rapprochement, 1900-1907,” *The Journal of Southern History* 52, no. 2 (1986): 164.

<sup>34</sup> Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade*, 194-195.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 95-96.

<sup>36</sup> “Farmers Problems: Interesting Reading from the ‘Farm Journal,’” *Kansas Agitator* (Gernet, KS, July 9, 1897), 1.

lower and lower” until even the best farms in the richest regions became “absolutely unsalable.”<sup>37</sup> Though the rains were timely, the crop prospects were “never better,” and both labor and machinery were “unrivalled,” the malaise still lingered. The “condition of good times” were all present, but Ingalls feared that although the good times may be around the corner, “they are not here...many will not be able to wait much longer.”<sup>38</sup> The *Farm Journal* indicated that the way out of the slump is the restoration of prices for farm products. The decline in these prices had been substantial in the past two decades and there were “few farmers so thoughtless” that they did not know restoring prices was the way out.<sup>39</sup> The core of the economic uncertainty was, according to the *Agitator*, that “nothing would thrive unless agriculture does.”<sup>40</sup>

The education of the farmer was also of rising interest in the late nineteenth century. “The man who believes in signs and dark and light of the moon” was being replaced by “the man who knows;” advocates for extension offices and rural agricultural education saw that the educated farmer was a farmer who could better look out for his own interests in a changing world.<sup>41</sup> The Midwest and the Great Plains were being populated with agricultural colleges. The rise of rural mail delivery gave rise to a burgeoning farm press. Papers like *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening* supplied farmers with information mostly unavailable to them up until this point.

The first issue of *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening* came out in January 1898 with Everitt as publisher and contributor. The paper followed the format of many farm-oriented publications before it. Its pages were replete with articles about new techniques and tips for improving the farms and gardens of the paper’s subscribers. Advertisements for all manner of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “New Race of Farmers in the West,” *The Courier* (Lincoln, NE), August 23, 1902.

farm implement and seed varieties adorned the edges and bottoms of each page, both for Everitt's own business and others. The paper soon included pages dedicated to women's interests as well, mostly focusing on domestic advice and some fashion news. The magazine was likely a means for Everitt to increase name recognition and grow his business both locally and regionally, while also providing his readers and clients with new ideas to implement in their gardens, ranches, and farms; increased revenue through subscriptions and advertising may have also made the prospect of publishing a paper an appealing one to the enterprising Everitt.

Although the first announcement and leanings toward the start of the equity were still a few years away, Everitt's paper did not neglect the organization of farmers. The January 1900 edition of *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening* featured an article announcing the creation of the International Farmers' Union in Binghamton, NY. The new Farmers' Union was "of a different character than any of the organizations heretofore started among farmers" and "one of a kind."<sup>42</sup> The power of this new body rested the hand of "individual farmers who belong" and the members were free to adopt as many policies as they deemed suitable.<sup>43</sup> But one of the unique aspects of the new IFU was found in something that set it apart from organizations of the past. Whereas the organizations of the past were created "for the purpose of buying cheap," the IFU would work to address "the matter of getting a market for their produce at fair prices." By cooperating with mechanical workers, the IFU sought to bring about fair prices to both parties by encouraging the mutual purchase of goods bearing the IFU label of approval. Farmers were given preference to goods made by IFU-affiliated workmen while the workmen would give preference to produce from IFU-affiliated farmers. Stores and sales houses were to be established

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<sup>42</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, January 1900, page 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

“as soon as practicable” to provide a place of sale for IFU goods in “the large market centers.”<sup>44</sup>

The basic idea espoused in the article, that the farmers should focus on a fair price for their goods, undergird the Equity platform in years to come.

The IFU was not the only organization that *Up-to-Date* covered or interacted with. The March 1900 issue gave an account of recent speeches by Master Aaron Jones before the Patrons of Husbandry and the Civic Federation. The speeches decried the “aggressiveness of trusts and combinations” as they tried to “arbitrarily control prices and monopolize trade.”<sup>45</sup> The author, possibly Everitt himself, noted that *Up-to-Date Farming* “paralleled the general topics” of the Grange, which had deemed cooperation between farmers in buying supplies and organizing association to that effect was a good venture. After “deep study,” however, the author declared that such a venture is “simply a rank, crushing trust by farmers, unfair, mean, and one of the best things to help commercial trusts to live.”<sup>46</sup> By combining to purchase, farmers could inadvertently kill off smaller local merchants and dealers and thereby giving more power to the trusts. The remarks signify a substantial break from previous articles from *Up-to-Date Farming*. “The only kind of cooperative association...beneficial to the farmer” is one that is focused not on buying goods cooperatively, but in working together to create the best crop possible for market.<sup>47</sup> Rather than purchase goods from some “foreign market,” farmers are encouraged to purchase from local merchants; doing ensured that money was “kept at home” and built up local business while “throttling the trusts.”<sup>48</sup> The article concluded that organizing in the manner prescribed was “the farmers’ chance to kill the trusts.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* January 1900, page 6

<sup>45</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 1900 page 10

<sup>46</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 1900 page 10

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 1900 page 10

<sup>49</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 1900 page 10

Amidst talk of record setting beef sales in Bloomington, IL and “macaroni wheat” in Texas, the January 1900 issue also shows that the publisher was aware of the object of previous farm organizations. In the “Publisher’s Department,” a section dedicated to notes about the publication and the subscribers by Everitt himself, one of the segments solicited contributions from the listeners. Everitt asked his subscribers to give their “opinion of the ‘trusts’ and how do they affect farmers in your community.”<sup>50</sup> While the focus on trusts and how they related to the farmer seems to have died down nationally at the turn of the century, the relationship was still in the minds of many.

The problem of low farm prices was one that Everitt found himself dwelling on frequently in the early years of *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening*. The problem arose from the surplus production that came with good crop yields across the country. Oversupply after a good year brought the price of farm products so low that farmers often barely broke even. In an article Everitt authored and printed in an August 1901 issue of *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening*, he wrote that a drought may, paradoxically, be good for farmers because it “wiped out the surpluses.”<sup>51</sup> He went on to muse that prices might be controlled “if it was possible to limit and control production...within the action of the farmers themselves.”<sup>52</sup> The idea Everitt introduced in this editorial became central to the future Equity organization. He later turned his focus more towards holding schemes rather than trying to limit production. Of course, limiting production on a wide scale could bring down the supply and, in theory, raise the price of farm goods. Everitt reasoned, however, that surplus production was not a major issue because food consumption in

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<sup>50</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* January 1900, page 6.

<sup>51</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 35.

<sup>52</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* Vol 4 No 8 page 4 August 15, 1901.

the United States was increasing and soon “the domestic market would absorb all the American farmer could produce.”<sup>53</sup>

The economic circumstances in which the American Society of Equity was founded differed from those of previous farm organizations. Unlike the Grange or the Farmers’ Alliances, the Equity came into being during a period of relatively good economic conditions for farmers. By 1897, the national economy had made its way out of the depths the Panic of 1893. By 1900 the economy was expanding, even for farmers. Although the average farm wage languished at nearly one third that of the average urban laborer, the prices of farm products were gradually rising year to year. For example, the average price per bushel of wheat reached \$0.62 by 1900, up from an average of \$0.49 in 1894.<sup>54</sup> One scholar, Theodore Saloutos, argued that metrics such as “purchasing power, [and] the production, acreage and value of farm goods” demonstrated this “upward climb” of agriculture.<sup>55</sup> It was in the midst of this upward march that the organizers of the Equity introduced what was later called “one of the most radical and ambitious farmer platforms ever conceived.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite the seemingly improved condition of the farmer at the turn of the twentieth century, Everitt was not so quick to abandon the idea that the farmer was still not on level ground. He criticized other authors for giving the farmer a “pat on the back” and calling him “good fellow,” “king,” or “prosperous” when economic conditions did not warrant “such fulsome praise.”<sup>57</sup> Contrary to what the “farm press” writes, the condition of the farmer was far

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<sup>53</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 5 no 2 page 8 February 15, 1902.

Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 36.

<sup>54</sup> United States Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1910), 125-126.

<sup>55</sup> Theodore Saloutos, “The American Society of Equity” (Master’s Thesis, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin, 1938), 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 15, 1902, page 7

from ideal.<sup>58</sup> Everitt wrote that the supposed prosperity should be seen in the farmer's surroundings and the trappings of his daily life but that these were not found in Indiana.<sup>59</sup> "The blacksmith who shoes the farmers' horses to the banker who cashes his checks," those people whom "the farmer feeds," probably have "a hundred conveniences that reduce labor and help to make life comfortable;" this was also true "to a greater or lesser extent in every State in the Union."<sup>60</sup>

While the Equity ideas had been integrated into articles off and on from the start of the year, it was not until December of 1901 that Everitt published a major article both announcing and expositing the new organization. Everitt leads by comparing the farmer to the steam that drives a machine; without steam an engine will not run and, according to Everitt, the nation will not run without the farmer. The products he produces are "like life blood" the flows through "the whole body" and "all the arteries of trade."<sup>61</sup> Despite being the most vital of occupations and the being the one who "makes all wealth possible," the farmer has been "the most helpless and dependent of all."<sup>62</sup> Whereas the manufacturer and the merchant progressed to new means and methods, the farmer, as Everitt and his paper saw it, were largely still doing things because they had been "the custom in the past."<sup>63</sup> Why was it then that the farmer had not progressed and benefitted from new innovations to the degree that other sectors had? Everitt pointed to the year-to-year uncertainty in what profit the farmer might make as the culprit.

The lack of certainty in profit was the crucial obstacle to farm improvement. The farm owner was reluctant to take on the cost of an improvement if he could not recoup his investment

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<sup>58</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 15, 1902, page 7

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* March 15, 1902, Page 7

<sup>61</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 2, December 15, 1901.

<sup>62</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 2, December 15, 1901.

<sup>63</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 2, December 15, 1901.

in a reasonable period of time without the certainty that he could incur the cost for however many years it might take to pay it off. However, if the farmer were to receive a profitable price for his goods, the farmer could make improvements and be secure in that decision. The manufacturer did not endure this uncertainty, but the farmer did. Everitt did not want the farmers to give in to the “false feeling of security” brought on by the high farm prices of recent years.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, farm products, which saw a general decline in price from 1876 to 1896, were now in the midst of an upward climb that continued until the “postwar crash” of 1920.<sup>65</sup> Despite the seemingly upward trajectory of farm prices, Everitt warned that conditions “may easily work around to 15-cent oats, 20-cent corn and 50-cent wheat.”<sup>66</sup> A “guessing match” of selling farm goods was “good enough if it hits” but a certainty is “several thousand percent better.”<sup>67</sup> Everitt proposed a solution to the problem.

He argued that a new organization needed to be formed to help the American farmer. The “element of uncertainty” in a business was “very deplorable” and the uncertainty surrounding American agriculture represented the “one source of great danger to the prosperity of the country.”<sup>68</sup> Everitt called the organization “The American Society of Equity,” though he invited readers to suggest alternate names. He proposed that the officers of the organization should be of “undoubted integrity and ability” to inspire the confidence of the membership and the headquarters should be centrally located.<sup>69</sup> The membership would include the “farmer, gardener, stockman, dairyman, poultryman, fruitman....in fact, every person in any way

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<sup>64</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 2, December 15, 1901.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph G. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise, 1620-1920* (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1969), 100.

<sup>66</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 2, December 15, 1901.

<sup>67</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 3, December 15, 1901.

<sup>68</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 2, December 15, 1901.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

connected with agricultural pursuits, or a friend of agriculture.”<sup>70</sup> Everitt backs up his choice of the word “Equity” by reprinting what appears to be the full Webster’s dictionary definition of equity, complete with example sentences. The whole of the society was “contained in the word EQUITY itself.”

The next crucial portion of the Equity was the crop reporting apparatus. The officers of the society, using reliable yield and demand information collected by Equity agents or sent in by local organizers, would determine the fair price of goods and recommend that the membership align with the recommendations of the officers. If this simple setup were put into practice, it would “stop all speculation in agricultural products” and “increase the value of all farms from 25 to 100 percent.”<sup>71</sup> The resulting prosperity would “make of the farmer a spender...for improvements on the farm for necessaries, luxuries, and education.”<sup>72</sup> The success of the plan would put an end to the speculation and gambling that sapped the livelihood of the farmer. Indeed, Everitt believed that the farmer “may be the greatest monopolist of them all.”<sup>73</sup> Everitt even went to far as to say that the success of the plan and the removal of uncertainty would improve the mental and physical wellbeing of the citizens, empty the saloons, and fill the churches.<sup>74</sup>

The news of the creation of the American Society of Equity was widespread. Newspapers and journals across the state and across the country carried bulletins and recruitment calls. Many of the first appearances of the Equity and the ideas it advocated came in the form of reprinted articles from *Up-to-Date Farming*.<sup>75</sup> The August 29, 1902 issue of *The Jasper Weekly*

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* vol 4 no 12 page 3, December 15, 1901.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>75</sup> “The Third Power,” *Southern Farm Gazette*, July 15, 1903.

*Courier* in Jasper, Indiana dedicated a full half page to a slightly altered version of the proposal from the December 15, 1901 issue of *Up-to-Date Farming*.<sup>76</sup> One Mississippi paper reprinted a section of an article on “The Third Power” that appeared in the May 1, 1903 issue of *Up-to-Date* and asked its readers to “study and reflect on it” because “the truth is teaches is so great.”

The seed business, interestingly, provided the first hard evidence of the intersection between James A. Everitt and William Jennings Bryan, the Great Commoner, came in the form of a type of advertisement. In late August 1902, Everitt wrote a letter to the editor of *The Commoner* asking that the paper inform its readers of a new variety of winter wheat. The new variety, Fultzo-Mediterranean, was a cross between two existing strains and was touted as “surpassing all other varieties in yield,” “extremely early,” and “adapted by test to the wheat belt from Kansas to Pennsylvania.”<sup>77</sup> Everitt informs the reader that “full particulars” would be sent to anyone who contacted him and mentioned *The Commoner*. The strain of wheat even won a medal at the Paris World’s Fair, where Everitt contributed to the cereal exhibit for the United States.<sup>78</sup> Though written as a letter to the editor to educate the reader about better strains of crop to implement, the letter also served as an advertisement for seed that Everitt’s business could provide.

After a year of Everitt and others espousing the virtues of the coming organization, the American Society of Equity was incorporated on December 24, 1902. Newspapers from Kentucky to Washington carried the announcement and many printed variations of the same statement issued by the Equity.<sup>79</sup> The announcement was even translated into other languages

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<sup>76</sup> “Co-Operation for Farmers: Some Arguments Why Farmers Should Co-Operate - How They Can Co-Operate and the Effect of Co-Operation,” *The Jasper Weekly Courier*, August 29, 1902.

<sup>77</sup> James A. Everitt, “Editor of the Commoner,” *The Commoner*, August 29, 1902, sec. The News of the Week.

<sup>78</sup> “Fultzo-Mediterranean,” *The Jasper Weekly Courier* (Jasper, IN, August 29, 1902).

<sup>79</sup> “Farmers Will Organize,” *The Teton Peak*, January 8, 1903; “National Society of Equity,” *Washington Standard*, December 26, 1902; “Society of Equity,” *The Bourbon News*, December 26, 1902; “To Combine All the

such as German and Czech.<sup>80</sup> The articles included a list of the objects of the Equity, a list of the incorporators and officers, and a brief statement from Everitt. Everitt's statement included calls for the organization of "millions engaged in agriculture," a mandate for an orderly crop reporting system, and the promise of an "equitable minimum price" to be set by the national organizers to then report to the public.<sup>81</sup> The crop reporting structure was paramount to arriving at the "equitable minimum price" by combining the amount of crops produced and the consumption from past experiences."<sup>82</sup> Once set, the board would not change the price because doing so would make them "the same class as board of trade, as disturbers of business."<sup>83</sup>

Everitt would later write that while choosing the day before Christmas was not intentional, it held "a distinct significance...that the two greatest and best movements the world ever knew have their anniversaries on consecutive days." He was certain that the Equity would be celebrated for years to come with "joy and thanksgiving, like unto...the birth of Christianity" because it would bring a "glorious era of Equity, Right, and Justice on Earth."<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Everitt held high hopes for the future of the Equity.

With its lavish promises, many looked upon the Equity program with apprehension or distrust. *The Sun* (New York) was critical of the Equity from its inception. The paper labeled the Equity a "farmers' trust" which will "make much of 'cooperation,' a word of more amiable connotation in the present political and economic vocabulary than 'combination'" but "a combination...all the same;" the farmers were "planning trusts of their own" like the "sensible

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Farmers," *The Butte Inter Mountain*, December 24, 1902; "Farmers Form Combine," *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 24, 1902; "Association of Farmers: 'National Society of Equity of North America' to Be Incorporated," *The Saint Paul Globe*, December 24, 1902.

<sup>80</sup> "Nový spolek k ochraně farmerských zájmů," *Pokrok Západu*, December 31, 1902; "American Society of Equity of North America," *Indiana Tribune*, December 24, 1902.

<sup>81</sup> "Society of Equity," *The Bourbon News*, December 26, 1902.

<sup>82</sup> "Farmers Form Combine," *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE, December 24, 1902).

<sup>83</sup> "One Price for the Crop," *Up-to-Date Farming* (Indianapolis, January 1, 1906).

<sup>84</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 214.

men they are” rather than hating the other trusts.<sup>85</sup> The Equity “appeals to the imagination as well as to the bank account” because “Society for Higher Prices” would be too “candid and harsh.”<sup>86</sup> Another *Sun* article called the “equitable minimum price” the Equity sought for its members’ crop “a term intended to relieve the consumer” when the “highest attainable maximum price will be demanded.”<sup>87</sup> Despite the growing criticism from *The Sun* and other sources, Everitt and *Up-to-Date Farming* continued to advocate the Equity plan and spread the word about the newly incorporated society.

One of the major differences between the Equity and the other large organizations that came before it was its lack of direct political action. “The Equity was a group of producers’ and consumers’ cooperatives,” writes one scholar alter wrote, “like the Grange and the Alliance, it had declared against direct political activity, and, unlike them, had stuck to its decision.”<sup>88</sup> The Grange and the Alliances “showed in their course the poverty and political inexperience of most of their supporters”<sup>89</sup> The Equity expressed support at various times for state and national legislation “favorable to the farmer” but did not run its own candidates.<sup>90</sup> While the Equity did not place a high priority on politics, Everitt wrote that the problem with farmers was that politicians knew the farmers could often be ignored but the simple existence of a “great organization acting as a unit” would force them to pay attention.<sup>91</sup> Another distinguishing feature of the Equity was the initial focus on the control of prices by farmers. The price controls were the focal point of Everitt’s writings and superseded the Equity’s other aims. Although the Equity

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<sup>85</sup> “A Farmers’ Trust and Its Poets,” *The Sun* (New York), January 25, 1903.

<sup>86</sup> “A Farmers’ Trust and Its Poets,” *The Sun* (New York), January 25, 1903.

<sup>87</sup> “Thrashers and Farmers,” *The Sun* (New York), January 2, 1903.

<sup>88</sup> Dale Kramer, *The Wild Jackasses: The American Farmer in Revolt* (New York: Hastings House, 1956), 148.

<sup>89</sup> Frederic L. Paxson, *Recent History of the United States, 1865-1927* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), 205.

<sup>90</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 61.

<sup>91</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 144.

was formed the same year as the Farmer's Educational and Cooperative Union, which had a similar plan for holding crops, the Equity plan was "built more definitely around farmer control of prices than that of any other group."<sup>92</sup>

One of the early historians to examine the Equity, James Malin, commented in 1932 on the differences between both the Equity and the Farmers' Union and the Alliances and the Grange. The Grange and the Alliances stressed "social and educational aims...the sociological approach to the rural problem, and later the developed the economic and still later the political approach."<sup>93</sup> However, the Equity and the Farmers' Union, unlike the previous organizations, stressed "marketing from the first."<sup>94</sup> The Equity plan for controlling farm prices was based on controlling production and holding surpluses from the market rather than through money and credit.<sup>95</sup> The comprehensive Equity plan was "a significant departure from the earlier agricultural price theory which had stressed money so conspicuously."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Grant McConnell, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1969), 42.

<sup>93</sup> James C. Malin, "The Background of the First Bills to Establish a Bureau of Markets, 1911-12," *Agricultural History* 6, no. 3 (1932): 113.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Two: Success Followed by Schism

The growth of the Equity began in earnest after its incorporation in December 1902. The Equity charter included a comprehensive list of seventeen objectives—a list designed to encompass every possible item and area of interest for the farmer.<sup>1</sup> First and foremost was the Equity’s main goal “to obtain profitable prices for all products of the farm, garden, and orchard.”<sup>2</sup> The main goal for the organization was to gain a monopoly to control the price of crops, but the list of objectives included everything from a highway improvement plan to the exchange of seeds from other countries to form more robust crop strains. The “Objects of the Society of Equity” also called for equitable transportation costs, securing legislation in the interest of agriculture, and to “build and maintain elevators, warehouses, and cold storage houses in principal market cities;” the storage facilities would serve as holding points for produce to keep it out of the market and away from the “middlemen or trusts” until the price was right.”<sup>3</sup> One of the more unusual objects was No. 13, “to settle disputes without recourse to law,” meaning that ideally members would not bring suit against one another before first trying to work things out within the local Equity union.<sup>4</sup> A scholar later summarized the overall goals that dominated the Equity as “the object, profitable prices; and the method, controlled and orderly marketing.”<sup>5</sup> The broad objectives left the Equity open to pursuing almost any agricultural region or market.

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<sup>1</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, vol. 5 no 12, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, vol 5 no 12, page 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, vol 5 no 12, page 4

<sup>5</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 37.

The initial leadership and membership structures for the Equity were also established at the time it was chartered. The “National Union,” the Equity’s leading council, was to be made up of a seven-man board of directors, each member an expert in a different sector of agriculture, “to be in constant session” and elected on an annual basis.<sup>6</sup> At the start, local organizations had little bearing on the management of the National Union outside of crop reporting and correspondence; indeed, the first two national conventions of the Society of Equity had almost nothing in the way of local representation at all. Local branches could be organized if ten or more members of “good moral character” sought to create a local union;<sup>7</sup> branches began appearing in farming areas all across the country.<sup>8</sup> The dues began at one dollar annually but dropped as low as twenty-five cents as recruiting drives ramped up into the early 1910s.<sup>9</sup>

The emblem of the Equity adorned its publications and members wore pins to display it. The emblem shows a farmer with a sheaf of wheat and a sickle in one hand and holding aloft a balance scale in the other. The two sides read “Production” and “Consumption” with the horizontal beam between them reading “Price.” The symbol was meant to represent “PRICE being on an equality with PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION.”<sup>10</sup> The seal is encircled by a band with the words “The American Society of Equity” and “to Secure Profitable Prices for Farm Products,” mirroring the chief object of the Equity plan.<sup>11</sup> Like many other organizations, symbolic imagery and language was a hallmark of Equity publications and advertisements.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, First Edition. (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1903), 239.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 116.

<sup>10</sup> Capitalization found in source material. Everitt, *The Third Power*, 211

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

*Up-to-Date Farming*, vol. 5, no. 12, page 4.

Equity advertising used many forms of imagery and messaging to spread news of the society and its plan. Songs and poetry made frequent appearances in Equity publications and members were encouraged to sing them or recite them at meetings or “Equity Day” gatherings.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Equity had “its own corps of poets” who composed “ditties” not unlike the “songs and choruses” not unlike those “howled lustily in the days of the Farmers’ Alliance.”<sup>13</sup> Songs like “Equity,” “The Farmer’s Rally Song,” “The Farmers’ Future,” and “Equity is King” evoked themes of camaraderie, cooperation, and hope for a better and more equitable future for farmers.<sup>14</sup> The first verse of “The Farmer’s Rally Song,” for example, “we rally ‘round our banner of Equity, unfurled / Shouting out battle cry: ‘The Farmer!’ / O we represent the marrow, bone, and sinew of the world / Shouting our battle cry: ‘The Farmer!’”<sup>15</sup>

Beyond *Up-to-Date Farming* and press releases, the Equity also issued pamphlets which espoused the virtues of society and its ideas. These pamphlets were usually written by Everitt but sometimes included writings from other well-known Equity figures like C.P. Gerber.<sup>16</sup> In his pamphlet *The American Society of Equity: Analogous to Christianity*, Gerber used especially strong imagery, comparing the Equity to Christianity. He described the Equity as “the grandest, sublimest idea for the betterment of economic conditions of mankind ever conceived by mortal

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<sup>12</sup> “Friday Is Equity Day,” *Daily Public Ledger* (Maysville, KY, August 8, 1907).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The tunes for the songs listed: “Equity” - [Tune: “Marching Through Georgia”], “The Farmer’s Rally Song” - [Tune: The Battle-Cry of Freedom], “The Farmers’ Future” - [Tune: “Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, The Boys are Marching”], and “Equity is King” - [Tune: Blue and Gray]. James A. Everitt, *Plan of the American Society of Equity of North America with Constitution and By-Laws and How Farmers Can Co-Operate to Obtain Profitable Prices* (Indianapolis, IN: American Society of Equity, 1904), 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> The pamphlets were later reprinted with instances of “American Society of Equity” replaced with “Farmers’ Society of Equity,” but the content is otherwise identical to the original pamphlets. Some available reprints include the following: James A. Everitt, *The Farmers Society of Equity: A Friend for All*, Farmers’ Problems no. 16 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1910); C.P. Gerber, *The Farmers Society of Equity: Analogous to Christianity*, Farmers’ Problems no. 15 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1910); James A. Everitt, *The Railroads and The Farmers: They Can Help Each Other Solve Their Problems*, Farmers Problems no. 12 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1911).

mind—it is the application of the essence of true Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> The work chastised the opponents of the “plain and practical” Equity plan as those “led by the false dogmas of former (now dead) organizations.”<sup>18</sup> “No matter how much it may be decried, misrepresented and miscomprehended,” the Equity, much like Christianity, “will stand forth in its pristine vigor as burnished gold that has been tried by fire.”<sup>19</sup> Amidst the wide array of vivid imagery and language offered by Equity publications, the most important work for the movement came James A. Everitt himself.

Everitt’s *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, first published in 1903, presented a detailed account of the aims and methods of the new society as well as background for the Equity plan. The farmers of the modern day could produce grain “far in advance of their fathers and grandfathers” but had not yet fully learned “the power of combination.”<sup>20</sup> The laborer had learned this lesson; by the use of his unions, he can “command a wage such as his brethren from other days could not” because he can “make his importance felt” and even “dictate terms to his employer.”<sup>21</sup> The “combinations, co-operatives, and trusts” are found in every other industry, but “the farmer has yet to learn this lesson.” While others have a say in the price they receive for their commodities, the farmer is the only one who does not. Unlike the laborer or the manufacturer, the farmer has “no method of bringing pressure to bear” on those who buy the fruit of his labor. The imbalance found here was, in Everitt’s eyes, the crucial problem facing farmers in the United States.

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<sup>17</sup> C.P. Gerber, *The Farmers Society of Equity: Analogous to Christianity*, Farmers’ Problems no 15 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1910), 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Everitt compared the farmer to “the Irish people” because, like the Irish, “they have fought successfully in all battles except their own.”<sup>22</sup> Farmers had “labored, and struggled and paid taxes for other” while “the factory, the railroad, and the mine all live off the farm.”<sup>23</sup> The welfare of the nation depended on their “intelligence, industry and thrift,” so they should be able to benefit from their position as “men on the firing line of our American civilization.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than being “the most independent men in the world” the farmer is “dependent on the captains of industry, the promoter, the underwriter, the labor leader, and the grain gambler;” the American Society of Equity and the awakening of the “Third Power” was a chance “to end this dependence.”<sup>25</sup> The American farmer was a businessman like any other and Everitt believed it was time for them to start acting like it; Everitt’s call echoed, in part, ideas from Populism and Bryanism that “the farmer who goes forth...and toils all day...is as much a businessman as the man who goes upon the board of trade and bets upon the price of grain.”<sup>26</sup>

Everitt provided a simple image of the farmer. The farmer worked long hours the whole year round, tending to his crops, livestock, and land. All he was “supposed to know under the present system” was how to work long hours and how to find his way to the market. Once harvest was underway or it was time to sell his various commodities, the farmer made his way to the market. Upon arrival, he asked the man how much they were paying for his goods; because the market was probably the only one in the area that was buying, he sold at that price. While he could go to the next town over or the next county, the buyers were likely to give the same price; so, the travel would just be more trouble than it was worth. Before making his way home the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 44-46.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>26</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *The Second Battle, or The New Declaration of Independence, 1776-1900* (Chicago, IL: W.B. Conkey Company, 1900), 305.

farmer might visit a supply store and again ask what price the goods are being sold for, buying some, and going on his way. Not only did the farmer not dictate the price of the commodities he sold in this scenario, but he also did not dictate to the store owner the price he wished to pay for his purchases.<sup>27</sup> With no recompense for the powerless situation in which the farmer finds himself, Everitt concluded, “the greatest class in the production of wealth, on which all others depend, is at the mercy of a few.”<sup>28</sup> The prices dictated to the farmer in the above scenario made all the difference. If the farmers could organize, they could dictate a more equitable price for their goods.

The “few” to whom Everitt referred were the “speculators and gamblers on boards of trade,” “great aggregations of corporate capital ruled by unscrupulous human agencies,” and “speculators who set prices arbitrarily without any reference to supply demand or equity.”<sup>29</sup> The injustice of “arbitrary price fixing” was “more tyrannical than were the taxes imposed by George III.”<sup>30</sup> The illustration accompanying this description of the farmer’s situation depicted a farmer arriving in town find a grain buyer, his cart loaded with sacks of grain. Near him on the street hung a sign reading “A. Crook, Grain Broker” under which two men, presumably grain buyers, stood with eyes narrowed. Both men wore fashionable suits complete with sharp leather shoes and bowler hats, a sharp contrast with the farmer, who appears in boots with a whip in hand.<sup>31</sup>

Credit for the growth also belonged to the Equity recruiters. Recruitment followed a similar pattern to previous organizations and many of the organizers were veterans of the Grange, the Farmer’s Alliance, or other movements.<sup>32</sup> Oftentimes an organizer would tour the

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<sup>27</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 15-17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, First Edition. (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1903), 16.

<sup>32</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 43.

countryside, stopping in towns or even visiting individual farms and delivering a pitch for the organization. One report on recruiting stops from Bismarck, North Dakota in June 1905 indicated that the meetings were often met with enthusiastic responses. The meetings were “like county fairs” that might include events like “the local band...volunteering its services,” “business men decorate their stores,” or the mayor writing a speech for the occasion.<sup>33</sup> The main speaker for each event was “the organizer, who says the same thing he has been saying to all other farmers in all other parts of the United States for two or three years.”<sup>34</sup> For all the literature circulation and speaking tours, perhaps the most valuable tool was word of mouth. The organizers relied on the idea that “one convert means many – for when one farmer is imbued with the idea that, with proper cooperation, he and his kind can fix the prices of their products, he cannot rest content until he has enlisted every farmer he knows.”<sup>35</sup> The organizers and the farmers were “pushing the A.S. of E. into every corner where a farmer can be reached and brought in.”<sup>36</sup>

As the word spread of the incorporation of the Equity, many farmers began to join and enact Equity plans. The national office announced the first major holding action on May 25, 1903. The “Hold Your Wheat” campaign called for farmers to hold their wheat until the price per bushel reached the one dollar mark and made the case that the “higher range of values” for almost every good produced in the United States dictated that wheat was “equitably” worth one dollar a bushel.<sup>37</sup> “Who dare say...considering the present higher range of values for nearly

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<sup>33</sup> “Booming the Farmers’ Trust,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 1905.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> “Mr. Meacham Pleads for a National Business Organization of Farmers,” *The Progressive Farmer* (Winston, NC, November 24, 1903).

<sup>37</sup> “Urges Farmers to Fix Price of Wheat,” *The St. Louis Republic* (St. Louis, MO, May 25, 1903); “\$1.00 Wheat Demanded,” *Middletown Transcript* (Middletown, DE, May 30, 1903); “DEMANDS DOLLAR WHEAT: American Society of Equity, with Headquarters at Indianapolis, Urges Farmers Not to Sell for Less.,” *New York Times* (New York, May 25, 1903).

every other commodity produced in the country,” the bulletin stated, “that wheat at this time and for the next crop is not equitably worth \$1 per bushel...and that other farm crops should be on corresponding basis?”<sup>38</sup> The bulletins were also sure to implore farmers to “not be fools...when you get the equitable price, let it go.”<sup>39</sup> The announcement assured participants that they would receive one dollar wheat at Chicago “sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.”<sup>40</sup>

One Washington newspaper, *The Evening Statesman*, carried the announcement but urged caution on the part of “the wheat trust” for trying to use regional action to affect “a figure warranted by world-wide conditions.”<sup>41</sup> Another paper in Pennsylvania expressed similar reservations for the holding plan and argued even if the campaign achieved its goal “the farmer who holds it is simply speculating and like any other speculator his is going to get left half the time.”<sup>42</sup> Although the membership of the society was an estimated thirty thousand at the time of the campaign, Everitt and the Equity took credit for the climbing price of wheat in the summer of 1903; by early 1904 the price broke the one dollar mark.<sup>43</sup> The popularity and apparent success of the wheat holding campaigns helped to grow the Equity in its early years. Over the next few years, the Equity would call for similar campaigns with corn, oats, potatoes, tobacco, eggs, and other crops and farm products.<sup>44</sup>

The Equity paid attention to livestock as well as grains. The Equity established notable livestock shipping companies beginning in 1904. The first cooperative livestock shipping association was founded in Postville, Iowa that same year. Northeastern Iowa, southeastern

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<sup>38</sup> “Demands Dollar Wheat,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, May 25, 1903).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> “The Latest Trust,” *The Evening Statesman* (Walla Walla, WA, May 28, 1903).

<sup>42</sup> “Dollar Wheat,” *The Fulton County News* (McConnellsburg, PA, July 22, 1903).

<sup>43</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 43; “Claims Credit for Increase,” *The Indianapolis Journal* (Indianapolis, IN, June 30, 1903).

<sup>44</sup> “Potato Growers’ Pledge,” *Up-to-Date Farming* (Indianapolis, May 8, 1907).

Minnesota, and southern Wisconsin represented a central hub of livestock shipping ventures organized by the Equity.<sup>45</sup> Although other livestock cooperatives were formed outside of this hub in succeeding years, this area remained on of “chief growth” for the cooperative livestock movement until the mid-1910s when the movement began to expand more fully.<sup>46</sup>

It was not until 1917 that livestock shipping began to spread in earnest with not insignificant credit given to the Equity associations. By 1920, Nourse and Hammans reported that over six hundred associations had been established in Iowa alone and that only two counties in the state did not have an association of some kind.<sup>47</sup> In the same report, Nourse wrote that the Equity organizations were “some of the strongest shipping associations in the state,” with 57 active across the state in 1919.<sup>48</sup> The Equity joined with the Farmer’s Union and the Farm Bureau Federation in endorsing the Federation of Cooperative Livestock Shippers to aid livestock marketing on a state level.<sup>49</sup> Nourse also reports that the American Society Equity filed lawsuits in court on behalf of the livestock shippers; they sought to counteract increases in commission fees on cars carrying livestock from more than one owner, but the lawsuits had not succeeded at the time of publication.<sup>50</sup>

Another opportunity for the Equity came from Kentucky, especially its tobacco-growing regions, an area which provided the most fertile ground for Equity ideas. The most complete and successful holding schemes undertaken by the Equity and its local organizations took place in the tobacco counties of southwest Kentucky and northeastern Tennessee known as the “Black

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<sup>45</sup> Herman Steen, *Cooperative Marketing: The Golden Rule in Agriculture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923), 93.

<sup>46</sup> E. G. Nourse and C. W. Hammans, “Cooperative Livestock Shipping in Iowa in 1920,” *Bulletin* 16, no. 200 (1919): 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

Patch.” At the turn of the century, tobacco growers in the region suffered from a combination of low prices and high labor costs which made it difficult to turn a profit on tobacco. While the growers already suffered at the hands of the American Tobacco Company for the better part of the last decade, the downturn in prices created feelings of “poverty and distress.”<sup>51</sup> By 1904, the average price for tobacco in Kentucky sat at just over six cent a pound.<sup>52</sup> While most planters could cultivate tobacco for roughly six cent a pound, already a slim margin given the prices, producers of strains like Burley tobacco and “Hopkinsville leaf” sold for as little as four cents per pound.<sup>53</sup> Amidst the struggle of the tobacco producers, the five year period beginning in 1903 was “the combination’s most fruitful years” and the producers sought relief in the form of the Equity.<sup>54</sup>

The Equity had a limited presence in Kentucky and Tennessee in 1903 and its expansion into Kentucky did not begin in earnest until 1905. Over the course of the next three years (until 1908) the society witnessed some “the most spectacular and tragic developments in the history of cooperative marketing.”<sup>55</sup> The tobaccos growers favored the cooperative action of the Equity plan and the holding plan for higher prices. The first Equity unions were formed in 1904 and by 1905 Kentucky membership numbers “topped the list” and eventually reached a peak membership of over 27,000 members.<sup>56</sup> The Equity mainly organized amongst Burley tobacco growers while the Planters Protective Association focused on dark tobacco growers; after the

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<sup>51</sup> Theodore Saloutos, “The American Society of Equity in Kentucky: A Recent Attempt in Agrarian Reform,” *The Journal of Southern History* 5, no. 3 (1939): 349.

<sup>52</sup> *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture 1905* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1906), 717.

<sup>53</sup> Saloutos, “Equity in Kentucky,” 349-350.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>55</sup> Steen, *Cooperative Marketing*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 46; C.M. Barnett, “Equity Society’s Position Defined,” *The Hartford Republican* (Hartford, KY, April 3, 1908).

first few months, the two organizations had nearly seventy-five thousand members.<sup>57</sup> Although the idea of price fixing by the producer existed in the region before the Equity arrived under organizations like the Planters' Protective Association, tobacco pooling under the auspices of a national organization brought a new vigor to the organizing. As the first major Equity holding campaigns got underway in 1906, Everitt wrote that the Equity could "tame them (the trusts) and make use of their fine machinery to serve the people in fairness and equity."<sup>58</sup> By the beginning of 1907, Everitt claimed that "practically all of the tobacco grown in 1907" would be sold through Equity unions in areas where it organized.<sup>59</sup>

The spectacular successes seemed to fulfill the ambitions of the growers and the Equity. The holding efforts were influencing prices. In 1907 the *Country Gentleman* reported that the Imperial Tobacco Company purchased sixteen million pounds of tobacco pledged to the American Society of Equity in five Kentucky counties.<sup>60</sup> The company paid \$1,500,000 to the farmers, close to ten cents a pound, "the price being that demanded by them, the highest since war times."<sup>61</sup> By 1908, the average price of a pound of tobacco across Kentucky climbed to over ten cents.<sup>62</sup> Another article praised the "power of Everitt's organization" in raising the price of tobacco "from seven cents to eight cents to twelve and fifteen cents a pound."<sup>63</sup> The "low crop" of 1908 prompted the production of Burley tobacco to "skyrocket(ed) to new heights" in 1909,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>58</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, Fourth Edition. (Indianapolis, IN: J.A. Everitt Publisher, 1907), 241.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>60</sup> "Weather, Crops and Prices: Kentucky," *The Country Gentleman* (Albany, NY, November 14, 1907).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture 1907* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1908), 675; *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture 1908* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1909), 680.

<sup>63</sup> "Former Seedsman Leads Tobacco Growers to War," *Albuquerque Evening Citizen* (Albuquerque, NM, December 19, 1906).

but even with the increased production prices did not drop to the previous low levels.<sup>64</sup> The success in Kentucky was a useful marketing point for the Equity much like the wheat holding campaigns of previous years.<sup>65</sup> The Equity and its member organizations in Kentucky participated in what was called “the only successful agricultural strike in the nation’s history” during the broad holding campaigns that swept Kentucky from 1905 onwards.<sup>66</sup> However, the successes of the tobacco holding efforts came alongside a series of violent events which sullied the Equity name in the region and on a national stage.

Kentucky also witnessed one of the most unusual and tragic chapters in the story of the Equity, the Night Riders of Kentucky. The Night Riders were bands of masked figures who terrorized the Kentucky tobacco country between 1904 and 1908. Armed men wearing cloaks and hoods to hide their identities intimidated tobacco growers, buyers, and processors who did not support their tobacco holding plans. The Riders threatened them by leaving warnings signs, destroying the crops, and even beating or killing people. Night Rider raids ranged from small bands to groups of hundreds that laid siege to tobacco houses and raided towns. The most notorious raid, which may have contained a many as five hundred men, was in Hopkinsville, Kentucky in 1907, caused at least two deaths and \$200,000 in property damage.<sup>67</sup> The Night Riders drew comparisons to the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the Night Riders, along with intimidating tobacco growers, intimidated and forced black farmers out of Western Kentucky

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<sup>64</sup> Saloutos, “Equity in Kentucky,” 362.

<sup>65</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 281.

<sup>67</sup> Tracy A. Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power and Resistance in the Tobacco Wars*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 80-81; “Kentucky Tobacco War: Half a Million Dollars’ Worth of Property Destroyed Already,” *New York Tribune* (New York, December 22, 1907); “Night Riders Raid at Hopkinsville Early Saturday Morning,” *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, December 11, 1907).

<sup>68</sup> Charles V. Tevis, “A Ku-Klux Klan of Today,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Vol. LII (February 8, 1908), 14-16, quoted in Fred A. Shannon, *American Farmers’ Movements* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1957), 161-164.

during their active period.<sup>69</sup> The impetus for the Night Riders' violent crusade was removed when tobacco taxes were relaxed in 1909 and when the Supreme Court ruled against the American Tobacco Company in an antitrust suit in 1911.<sup>70</sup>

The Night Riders were a group of vigilantes not directly affiliated with the Equity. Instead it was a militant offshoot of the greater tobacco holding movement in Kentucky at the time. The association with the Equity, then, was only indirect in that their interest in promoting tobacco holding and price increases overlapped. Everitt himself disavowed the tactics and actions of the Night Riders, insisting "the America Society of Equity...was not organized to burn barns" and that if the Equity knew the identities of the riders that they would "as quickly turn them over to justice as we would any malefactor."<sup>71</sup> The Equity later offered a \$100 reward for information leading to the conviction of "night riding" members, reemphasizing that Equity did not support the methods and noting that most rioting occurred in counties with "the small number of members."<sup>72</sup> Statements from the national office objected to the Equity being held accountable for the "carnival of crime."<sup>73</sup> The same statement also asserted that the locales where the Equity was the strongest "no outrages have been committed and where lawlessness has been most rampant it has no membership at all."<sup>74</sup> The death of the Equity in Kentucky, it claimed, would return the farmer to the "helpless condition in which he found himself four or

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<sup>69</sup> Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 348.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> "Former Seedsman Leads Tobacco Growers to War," *Albuquerque Evening Citizen* (Albuquerque, NM, December 19, 1906).

<sup>72</sup> "Barnett to Rescue, Says Society of Equity Is Against Night Riding," *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* (Hopkinsville, KY, April 4, 1908).

<sup>73</sup> C.M. Barnett, "Equity Society's Position Defined," *The Hartford Republican* (Hartford, KY, April 3, 1908).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

five years ago...the farm deprecating in value...when the country was enjoying the greatest prosperity it had ever known.”<sup>75</sup>

The tragedy in Kentucky dramatically highlighted a larger dilemma for the Equity: there was a disconnect between the national leadership and local unions. The Equity, from the start, did not have a full hierarchical structure decentralized development despite the centralized leadership and reporting structure. For example, there were almost no local union representatives present at the first Equity national conventions in 1903 and 1904.<sup>76</sup> The 1904 convention only had “one delegate from a distance” in attendance.<sup>77</sup> The local unions were meant to be the functional cells of the Equity by working for their goals in their locales with direction from the national office. That relationship, however, was relatively one-sided as the local unions had no clear path to representation at the conventions. While Everitt encouraged members to participate through mail-in voting for national officers, the policy development was dominated by Everitt and his national committee. The Equity did not hold a national convention that could be referred to as truly national until 1905. Sensing the brewing unrest at this lack of representation, Everitt issued a new constitution that May that created a framework for organizing county unions and a path to representations at future national conventions, but the delegates at the convention later created a new constitution which provided for a full hierarchy of unions from the local up to the National Union.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the changes implemented in 1905, many problems continued to plague the Equity in the following years. One problem, as the state of North Dakota illustrated, was that the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 46.

<sup>77</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, November 8, 1907. Page 9.

<sup>78</sup> “Constitution and Laws American Society of Equity,” *Up-to-Date Farming*, vol. 8, no. 9, page 4 (May 1, 1905); Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 47.

national office was not equipped to enforce their program and maintain local holding contracts. Despite being one of the most homogenous wheat growing states, North Dakota did not receive targeted Equity attention until 1907. Its farmers, like many others, were recoiling from political and election involvement, and sought a new avenue for implementing change in their economic circumstances. When Equity organizers initiated a Hold Your Wheat campaign in 1907, more than ten thousand farmers signed up and pledged close to one million acres of wheat to Equity holding campaigns.<sup>79</sup> That same year, Theodore Nelson, a farmer from Mayville, North Dakota, became the President of the Equity's new Department of Grain Growers.<sup>80</sup>

The problems that arose in North Dakota were grounded in the uncertainty of the wheat pools. Even though farmers agreed to hold their wheat, there was little stopping farmers from selling below the equitable price set by the Equity. Unlike Kentucky where rogue vigilante bands enforced pledges to crop pools, North Dakota revealed the weakness of the Equity holding system, the pledges of which left little room for Equity enforcement. The 1906 and 1907 campaigns in North Dakota and neighboring states also illustrated the problems that credit shortages and financial issues presented the Equity. Without a financial safety net or guarantee during the holding campaigns, many farmers simply could not afford to hold their products off the market for the equitable price. Proposals made at the 1906 convention intended to move the Equity to a full crop holding system in which the organization would market all crops as well as true contracts which required farmers to pledge their crop in exchange for loans on the pooled crop.<sup>81</sup> Everitt's opposition to the Equity moving into its own business ventures muted the full adoption of the new proposals.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, Vol. X No. 42 November 8, 1907; Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Bahmer, "American Society of Equity," 48.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

Another problem the Equity faced was pushback from established agricultural experts and even fellow farm organizations. From the very beginning the Equity met with enthusiasm in some areas, but several other farmers' organizations objected to Equity's program and many journal editors and agricultural experts criticized the Equity in its early years. Indeed, one later scholar noted the Equity plan met with "immediate rejection" by most of the large farm journals across the country.<sup>83</sup> One scathing denunciation of the ASE came from P.V. Collins, editor of *Northwestern Agriculturalist*, in April 1904. "We consider the so-called Society of Equity a chimerical, unsafe and demagogic scheme of certain designing men to play upon the credulity of farmers," Collins wrote, "that is not cooperation, it is supine surrender to designing manipulators, and should stamp the scheme clearly as the 'Society of Inequity.'"<sup>84</sup> Many critics stated that the Equity plan was unrealistic because the membership needed to be massive in order to affect the market in a meaningful way. Another journal editor called the ASE a "jack-o'lantern of impracticability" which should not be followed in light of tried and true methods to "benefit both producer and customer."<sup>85</sup> One *New York Times* article from 1909 pointed out that the Equity was "as strictly businesslike as the regulators of railway rates" and that "there are at least a hundred considerations which the Society did not take into account at all."<sup>86</sup>

Finally, Everitt faced a growing dissent within Equity's ranks, led by National Secretary M. Wes Tubbs, who advocated new cooperative marketing initiatives (and who was ultimately responsible for unseating Everitt from leadership in the Equity). Tubbs, a New York native who was selected as Secretary in 1904, believed that the Equity should move toward cooperative marketing strategies rather than crop-holding or price-fixing. He criticized Everitt for his

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "The Price of Wheat," *New York Times*, February 16, 1909.

reluctance to deviate from his crop holding plans and into more organized forms of cooperative marketing, which he believed would secure “more substantial and practical results.”<sup>87</sup> Between the 1906 convention, when the reforms to the Equity marketing plan were stunted by Everitt, and the 1907 convention, Tubbs busied himself establishing exchanges for marketing for products in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and New Jersey.<sup>88</sup> Like many in the cooperative marketing movement, Tubbs sought to remove the middleman. To do so, he established joint-stock ventures in numerous cities as well as a number of holding companies that partnered with local exchanges.<sup>89</sup> The new direction went counter to Everitt’s original plan for the Equity to avoid joint-stock, and the divide between the Everitt faction and the Tubbs faction led to constant conflict in the national board of directors meetings from mid-1906 until the convention of 1907.

Everitt expressed deep concerns for Tubbs’ actions. Meetings of the Board of Directors in March and July 1906 were colored by the conflict between the two men. There, Everitt railed against both Tubbs and Charles A. Speer, the Director of Organization, for incompetence in not expanding Equity membership.<sup>90</sup> The Board listened to both parties for one day and a night and concluded that neither Tubbs nor Speer was incompetent. The Board, then, also admonished Everitt and the other two parties to “lay aside all bickering strife and contentions and devote their time to the fulfillment of the their duties as laid down in the constitution and by-laws so that when the society assembles in National Convention they may present a forcible example to the members, viz: A body of offices actuated by a spirit of Equity and brotherly love.”<sup>91</sup> While Everitt and Speer eventually shook hands at the conclusion of the July meeting, the whole affair

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<sup>87</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 53.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>89</sup> Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 119.

<sup>90</sup> “Everitt to Rule of Ruin,” *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, December 11, 1907).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

fueled the view of Everitt as a somewhat dictatorial leader and proved a catalyst for the coming revolt against him and the ultimate fracturing of the Equity itself.

For Everitt, rapprochement with the “Exchange element” inside the Equity was impossible.<sup>92</sup> Establishing business ventures, Everitt believed, came at the expense of the organizing the farmers and initiated a steep decline in membership.<sup>93</sup> Increased membership was a key to the success of the crop holding, and as such was his priority. He refused to promote the interests of the so-called “wild-cat-capital-stock-joint-ownship-schemes-of-Equity-Exchanges” of Tubbs and his allies.<sup>94</sup> These pursuits, he insisted, came at the Equity’s expense.

In addition to the Everitt-Tubbs dispute over the issue of cooperative marketing, there were two other disputes at the 1907 convention. The first was rooted in Everitt’s leadership style. Indeed, Everitt’s critics believed that he “sought to dominate the society” by dictating the action of the Equity, censoring articles in *Up-to-Date Farming* which were written by those he disagreed with, and not considering alteration to the Equity plan.<sup>95</sup> Everitt’s detractors believed that he was inclined to “exercise an arbitrary rule over other official and in fact the whole society.”<sup>96</sup> Critics also questioned Everitt’s status as the true founder of the Equity plan. According to *Wisconsin Equity News* editor Garret Walrod, Everitt “was no more the founder of Equity than that he wrote and published the first Bible.”<sup>97</sup> Walrod insisted that the Equity idea was not Everitt’s own creation, but one stolen from W.L. Hearron, a farmer from Carlinville, Illinois who first came up with a plan for “control marketing.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> “Mr. Everitt Speaks on Matter Affecting Himself and A.S. of E.,” *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, January 8, 1908).

<sup>93</sup> “Farmers Society of Equity,” *The Jackson Herald* (Jackson, MO, November 12, 1908).

<sup>94</sup> “Mr. Everitt Speaks on Matter Affecting Himself and A.S. of E.,” *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, January 8, 1908).

<sup>95</sup> *Wisconsin Equity News*, June 1, 1908.

<sup>96</sup> “Everitt to Rule of Ruin,” *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, December 11, 1907).

<sup>97</sup> *Wisconsin Equity News*, June 1, 1908.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

The Equity's affiliation with Everitt's paper was another significant point of conflict at the 1907 convention.<sup>99</sup> Critics claimed that Everitt's connection to *Up-to-Date Farming* was a conflict of interest that jeopardized the success of the Equity and gave rise to accusations of the mismanagement of funds. At the beginning of the Equity, the organization had entered a fifty-year contract with *Up-to-Date Farming*. Shortly after the convention an article in the *Country Gentleman*, a publication which "again and again" told its readers that the Equity was "nothing under heaven but an ingenious scheme to get subscribers for a periodical," quoted an official publication of the Society as saying that Everitt "enjoyed about as much advertising in the past year as almost any man outside the official family of the President of the United States."<sup>100</sup> They charged Everitt with undertaking the contract to "forestall and action which might be taken by the members in time to come" which might jeopardize the relationship between the American Society of Equity and his paper, both "power and profits" of which would be "something phenomenal" if his membership goals were realized.<sup>101</sup> The Equity signed at a time when the society had no members except Everitt and his appointed officials, so "Mr. Everitt, as president, and the secretary he had chosen, had made with Mr. Everitt, publisher."<sup>102</sup> The contract was later found to be invalid because "Everitt could not legally enter into a contract with himself."<sup>103</sup> One Equity scholar later wrote that Everitt must at least be credited with partial sincerity in his advocacy of the Equity and that his interests went far beyond increasing the circulation of his newspaper, even if he was "over-solicitous" to place his paper in the Equity scheme.

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<sup>99</sup> Bahmer, "America Society of Equity", 54.

<sup>100</sup> "Equity for Everitt," *The Country Gentleman*, November 14, 1907.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 119.

The conflict of interest complaint was a longstanding one that Everitt had frequently defended before. One defense in January 1905 explained that the seed business, the publishing business, and the American Society of Equity were all “separate and distinct concerns.”<sup>104</sup> The seed business had existed for twenty four years and incorporated for twelve years and the publishing company and *Up-to-Date Farming* since 1898. Everitt explained that “these enterprises require a great amount of publicity” and as such “the do sometimes help each other,” especially in promoting the Equity.<sup>105</sup> Everitt assured his readers that “the society has never been used to promote the seed business.”<sup>106</sup> Another article in the *Albuquerque Evening Citizen* in 1906 claimed that “there is nothing in the surroundings of the leader of the movement to indicate that he has grown in wealth out of the movement,” describing Everitt as a “man of quiet taste in dress and a quiet, decisive manner.”<sup>107</sup>

On Tuesday, October 22, 1907, the Equity convened for its annual national convention in Indianapolis. Unfortunately, the exact details on story of the convention—including the removal of Everitt as leader—remains somewhat murky. With 308 official delegates in attendance from twenty states—nearly half of which came from Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana—Everitt called the convention to order.<sup>108</sup> Overall, he faced three specific obstacles to his leadership at this meeting. First, the Tubbs faction held control of an organizing committee and moved the election of officers—an event which traditionally occurred near the close—to near the start of the convention. Second, the delegates in attendance were generally from states near the convention which generally embraced Tubbs’ vision for the Equity. Finally, Tubbs’ vision of cooperative

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<sup>104</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, January 15, 1905.

<sup>105</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, January 15, 1905.

<sup>106</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming*, January 15, 1905.

<sup>107</sup> “Former Seedsman Leads Tobacco Growers to War,” *Albuquerque Evening Citizen* (Albuquerque, NM, December 19, 1906).

<sup>108</sup> “Everitt to Rule of Ruin,” *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, December 11, 1907); Theodore G. Nelson, *Scrapbook Memoirs* (Salem, OR: Your Town Press, 1957), 40.

business organizations was favored by the Board of Directors and most of the delegates. Shortly thereafter, an organizing “committee” determined that the elections for National officers, including the presidency, would be moved from the near the end of the convention to the second day.

After—as Everitt later recalled—a series of “arbitrary, revolutionary, and high-handed proceedings,” Everitt lost the presidency. The mechanics of his removal are unclear. However, the decision to move the election of National officers to near the start of the convention seemed determinative. Outmaneuvered by his critics, Everitt made a speech on the floor on October 23 announcing that he would not stand for reelection as President.<sup>109</sup> With Everitt sidelined, the leading candidate for his position was C.M. Barnett of Kentucky, an editor for the *Hartford Republican* who associated with the Tubbs faction.

The general feeling at the convention leaned in favor of a Kentucky man and the obvious choice was Barnett; he was a prominent figure in the successful Kentucky tobacco campaigns and a leading editorial figure.<sup>110</sup> The convention elected Barnett in a vote of 199 to 38 over Everitt ally H.E. Wilson of Oklahoma. After the vote in a move toward unity, Wilson called to make Barnett’s election unanimous.<sup>111</sup> Even Everitt pledged to work with the new officers and “bury all contention.”<sup>112</sup> The convention then extended Everitt “a vote of thanks” and he was “cheered to the echo.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> “American Society of Equity.” *Crittenden Record-Press*. Marion, KY, February 6, 1908.

<sup>110</sup> “Barnett Honored by Society of Equity.” *The Hartford Herald*. Hartford, KY, October 30, 1907. A

<sup>111</sup> “Kentucky Man Succeeds Everitt as Head of the American Society of Equity,” *Daily Public Ledger* (Maysville, KY, October 25, 1907); L.N. Statts of Illinois was elected Vice President and O.D. Pauley of North Dakota was elected Secretary (and was later appointed Treasurer).

<sup>112</sup> “A.S. of E. Convention Report.” *Charlevoix County Herald*. East Jordan, MI, April 11, 1908.

<sup>113</sup> “Barnett Honored by Society of Equity.” *The Hartford Herald*. Hartford, KY, October 30, 1907; “American Society of Equity,” *Crittenden Record-Press* (Marion, KY, February 6, 1908).

While the proceedings on the floor of the convention were seemingly civil, Everitt was not as supportive of the proceedings as it seemed. Shortly after Barnett took over as president, the talk in the convention turned to the contract which bound the Equity to Everitt's paper. A cadre of Indianapolis lawyers judged the contract to be voidable and the convention approved a resolution nullifying the contract with only fifteen votes in support of the contract.<sup>114</sup> Any new arrangements that could have been made between the Equity and its former organ were severed shortly after. On the evening of October 25, Everitt and half a dozen men met in Room 370 at the Denison Hotel and elected a "bolting set of national officers," starting what one Equity leader later called a "disruptive tirade" which continued for several years.<sup>115</sup>

Beginning with the election of a second set of officers, Everitt set about on a long campaign against the new administration of the Equity. In the November 8, 1907 issue of *Up-to-Date Farming*—published only weeks after the convention—Everitt devoted pages to laying out the summary of his grievances with the proceedings and the actions taken to save the Equity from "mischievous counsels, wrong purposes, and evil influences."<sup>116</sup> In a front page article, Everitt explained the events of the convention and gave a report on the hotel room meeting which he believed constituted the legitimate convention. He challenged the new Board of Directors actions as "revolutionary" and implied that the convention was "packed" against him.<sup>117</sup> The leaders of the revolutionary element—supporters of the "million dollar stock company"—forfeited the legality of the Equity, repudiated the official paper, and surrendered to institutions and influences entirely foreign to the founding principles of the Equity.<sup>118</sup> Later in

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<sup>114</sup> "American Society of Equity," *Crittenden Record-Press* (Marion, KY, February 6, 1908); "Everitt to Rule of Ruin," *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, KY, December 11, 1907).

<sup>115</sup> "American Society of Equity," *Crittenden Record-Press* (Marion, KY, February 6, 1908).

<sup>116</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* Vol. X, No. 42, Page 3. November 8, 1907.

<sup>117</sup> "American Society of Equity," *Crittenden Record-Press* (Marion, KY, February 6, 1908).

<sup>118</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* Vol. X, No. 42, Page 3. November 8, 1907.

the same issue, Everitt printed the full text of the address he intended to present at the convention. In his speech, he described the Equity in crisis. He went on to detail the history of the society and how he had faced pushback of every kind from the start; he was “worse abused man in the country” and he alone stood up for the principles of the Equity.<sup>119</sup> The Equity overcame the opposition in the early years and the successes built. The 1906 convention, however, brought with it a “trail of evils” that was to blame for the lack of progress in 1907.<sup>120</sup> For Everitt, the faction in favor of capital stock exchanges had forgone the organization of farmers, deceived the membership, and committed the Equity to “doubtful enterprises.”<sup>121</sup>

Everitt later published *A Brief Chronological History of the Equity Movement 1902 to 1911*, a short pamphlet which laid out timeline of the Equity focusing on the lead up to 1907 and the fate of the Equity after his removal. Everitt wrote that by 1907 “the Society was truly a giant...looked upon, and recognized, as one of the great, good and powerful institutions of the country” and poised to take its influence to greater heights.<sup>122</sup> “The motive of the secretary,” however, soon sullied the Equity with “strange new doctrines.”<sup>123</sup> While the new faction pursued Everitt went on to explain the disfunction of the Society under the new management, culminating in the “secret, malevolent fight” leading up to the 1907 convention, the delegates who were misled at the convention, and the “most vicious and relentless campaign of falsification, slanders and libels that any person was ever a victim of” directed at Everitt in weeks following the convention.<sup>124</sup> After 1907 Everitt characterized the Equity as plagued by three things:

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<sup>119</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* Vol. X, No. 42, Page 7. November 8, 1907.

<sup>120</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* Vol. X, No. 42, Page 9. November 8, 1907.

<sup>121</sup> *Up-to-Date Farming* Vol. X, No. 42, Page 12. November 8, 1907.

<sup>122</sup> James A. Everitt, *A Brief Chronological History of the Equity Movement, 1902 to 1911* (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1911), 3-4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

“incompetency, extravagance, (and) mismanagement.”<sup>125</sup> “The American Society of Equity blessed agriculture more from 1902 to 1907 than any other movement for farmers ever did,” Everitt concluded, “while from 1907 down to 1911 it was made to be the greatest curse that ever afflicted the industry.”<sup>126</sup>

The problems that plagued the Equity from the beginning eventually led to its fragmentation and decline. Indeed, by 1907 the organization reached its high-water mark of around 200,000 members.<sup>127</sup> The Equity never achieved its goal of one million active members articulated by Everitt. Moving out of the 1900s and into the 1910s, the national body declined in influence as the state unions increasingly went in independent directions.<sup>128</sup> After the 1907 convention, the Equity continued to exist under the leadership of the Tubbs faction. While Everitt formed a new organization, the Farmers’ Society of Equity, to carry on what he saw as a continuation original Equity and Equity plan, it was the Tubbs faction that actually controlled the organizational unit that maintained the name American Society of Equity. Tubbs was not the President of the Equity, but in his position as Secretary during this critical period, he was, without question, the ideological force behind the organization. Although the Equity endured until 1934 and held some influence in the states where it remained active, after 1907 it was no longer “The Third Power” nor would it become the national farming community that Everitt envisioned.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>127</sup> Estimates range from as low as thirty thousand to upwards of four hundred thousand, but most sources agree that the number was between one hundred and two hundred thousand. In the official secretary’s report in December of 1905, the total membership, including Canadian members, sat at 143,661, although it is unclear whether the reported number included *Up-to-Date Farming* subscribers.

Shannon, *Farmers Movements*, 76; “The Farmers’ Trust” *The Sun* (New York), 1903; *Up-to-Date Farming*, vol 8 no 23, page 11; Robert H. Bahmer, “The American Society of Equity,” *Agricultural History* 14, no. 1 (1940): 52.

<sup>128</sup> Shannon, *American Farmers’ Movements*, 76.

### Chapter Three: Decline, Fate, and Impact of the Equity

The schism of 1907 left many Equity members (those in the American Society of Equity proper) disillusioned and accelerated the fracturing of the organization into regional units over the course of the next decade. Indeed, in states like Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota, hundreds of local organizations that bore the Equity name came into being over the next decade; by 1917, Wisconsin alone had over four hundred groups that carried the Equity name.<sup>1</sup> Overall, these organizations were characterized by increasing regional specific activities and interest, declining influence from the national office, and reengagement in local and state politics. Ultimately this shift undermined Everitt's original economic and social goals and weakened the Equity's position as a unified national entity. The last years of Everitt's life were marked by controversy and decline, including his loss of *Up-to-Date Farming* and his conviction for mail fraud in 1916.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he remained prominent in Indianapolis and relatively successful in his business dealings until his death in 1930.

A few months after the contentious convention of 1907, the *Princeton Union*, a local newspaper from east-central Minnesota, published an article on the state of the American Society of Equity and offered reactions from Equity members in nearby local Equity union, Green Lake Local Union #4243.<sup>3</sup> One unidentified member of the local union insisted that Recounting the Union's recent meeting at Wyanett shortly after the national convention, the article noted that the convention left the Equity "badly demoralized" and warned that "if the present condition of

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<sup>1</sup> Saloutos, "Wisconsin Society," 81.

<sup>2</sup> In January 1909, control of *Up-to-Date Farming* was given over to an incorporated company with Everitt as "chief owner" rather than sole proprietor. He later sold *Up-to-Date Farming* in 1916. Jacob P. Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis: The History, The Industries, The Institutions, and The People of a City of Homes*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 398.

<sup>3</sup> "A. S. of E. Matters," *The Princeton Union* (Princeton, MN, January 2, 1908).

affairs continues there can be only one outcome – the disruption of the society as a national organization. A house divided against itself cannot stand.”<sup>4</sup> To be successful, the paper insisted, “this discord must be deplored by every man who has the true welfare of the farmers at heart” and only “the A. S. of E., acting as a homogenous whole could accomplish much good” and bring about “beneficial results on a large scale.”<sup>5</sup> Although the article focuses on the situation in Minnesota, the themes presented just four months after the 1907 convention would come to characterize the Equity moving forward. While some Equity members remained optimistic and insisted that “the society is still alive,” the Equity never again became the “homogenous whole” that the *Princeton Union* called for and instead found itself divided into even more regional organizations.<sup>6</sup> One state that epitomized the emergence of regionally supreme organizations in the post-Everitt era was Wisconsin

Of all the states in which the Equity existed, its presence in Wisconsin became the most pronounced of any of the state branches. Indeed, one scholar called the Equity presence in Wisconsin “the greatest farmer organization that the State had ever known.”<sup>7</sup> The Wisconsin representatives had been an integral part of Everitt’s removal and assumed a greater role after the 1907 convention.<sup>8</sup> Early Equity support was concentrated in the “western and northwestern portions of the state,” areas where wheat was still a major crop and the idea of dollar wheat was appealing.<sup>9</sup> The state had a long history of progressive movements and Equity was, in a way, a continuation of those principles; for example, strong lines existed between progressive leader Robert La Follette, the Society of Equity, and the history of Granger movements in Wisconsin.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “A. S. of E. Matters,” *The Princeton Union* (Princeton, MN, January 2, 1908).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Saloutos, “The Wisconsin Society of Equity,” *Agricultural History* 14, no 2 (April 1940): 78.

<sup>8</sup> Balmer, “American Society of Equity,” 56.

<sup>9</sup> Saloutos, “Wisconsin Society,” 81.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Senator La Follette's objections to "monopoly and graft" and its influence on government were mirrored by the Equity stance that "middlemen, boards of trade, bankers, and railroad interests" were responsible for unsatisfactory grain prices. Wisconsin's extensive history with the Progressive movement made the state a prime place for Equity ideas to take hold and grow.<sup>11</sup> The influence of Equity permeated many different crops and their markets. The state organization eventually came to oversee almost four hundred groups with the name "Equity."<sup>12</sup> After the 1907 convention, however, the national organization had become so disrupted that membership—even in Equity strongholds like Wisconsin—severely dwindled or were significantly altered.<sup>13</sup>

In Wisconsin, as in other Equity states, the national organization and agenda now yielded to individual state priorities and needs. Increasingly, state organizations superseded the national organization. Those states where large numbers of Equity members resided benefitted from this change because state organizations were better equipped to adapt to the changing and specific needs of farmers in those areas. For example, in both Wisconsin and North Dakota institutions like creameries, cheese factories, and grain elevators—key means by which farmers could produce and market their products—now began to integrate into local Equity programs. While Everitt had not been strictly opposed to these kinds of farmers' cooperative ventures, he did not believe that the Equity should be the one to establish them. Instead, he believed that the national organization should merely partner with such institutions to forward the farmers cause. The new post-1907 leadership supported this new local emphasis. However, this came at a high price—

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 95; Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 164.

<sup>13</sup> Wisconsin reported six thousand members by 1918. Orville M. Kile, *The Farm Bureau Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), 39.

loss in confidence in the national organization. Other farm organizations, such as the Grange, had experienced similar growing pains but nonetheless emerged unified at the national level through flexibility in adapting to changing membership and embracing regional diversity.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this was because their flexibility. Ironically, it was the Equity's fight over this very flexibility that contributed to the fractious 1907 convention and the subsequent loss of confidence in the national organization.

In the post-Everitt era, then, the Equity in Wisconsin took on the mission of establishing marketing and producers cooperatives and enjoyed some success. Indeed, by 1920, Wisconsin was home to almost two thousand "cooperative producers societies," which included 150 livestock shipping societies, 380 creameries, and 718 cheese factories.<sup>15</sup> Many of these institutions were either Equity institutions or institutions initially established by the Equity in the state. By the early 1910s, Tubbs—now the editor of the *Wisconsin Equity News*—began advocating cooperation with organized labor in the state. In a 1912 article for his paper, Tubbs called for "direct exchange between farmers' and laborers' organizations," a system by which, he insisted, "all farm products and 'union made' labor goods can pass directly in the respective consumer's hands without paying one cent of tribute to an intermediary except necessary transportation charges." Ultimately, Tubbs concluded, "these two classes and the organizations they compose will be at once interested in this new movement and as women will be accepted on the same terms as men, the possibility of a very large membership is at once apparent."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Harold F. Breimyer et al., *The Agrarian Tradition in American Society: A Focus on the People and the Land in an Era of Changing Values* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, 1976), 106.

<sup>15</sup> Clemens, *The People's Lobby*, 163-164.

<sup>16</sup> M. Wes Tubbs, "The American Society of Equity Should Lead in Organization for Industrial Co-Operation," *Wisconsin Equity News*, July 10, 1912 in Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 163.

The First World War unleashed a boon in American farming. Prices for many farm products reached all-time highs between 1914 and 1919 with the prices of many farm products like wheat, corn, cotton, and potatoes doubling and some almost tripling in price and outpacing the rising prices of retail commodities farmers needed to buy.<sup>17</sup> The postwar era, however, brought on some of the worst years for American farmers. From 1920 to 1921, prices for many farm products fell to prewar levels while retail prices remained significantly higher than prewar levels. In an index accounting for thirty “Farm Products”, the Department of Agriculture reported that by 1922, the average relative price for all farm products sat at 125% of prewar levels while the “Retail Prices of Commodities Farmers Buy” settled at 150% of prewar levels.<sup>18</sup> One later scholar credited the “agricultural depression” as well as “intrigues of self-interested leaders” and “the appearance of rival organizations” for the “precipitous decline” of the Wisconsin Society of Equity in the post-war period.<sup>19</sup>

Under new management that took advantage of farm issues arising during World War I, the Equity in Wisconsin experienced a resurgence to a peak membership of around forty thousand members by 1920.<sup>20</sup> Dr. J. Weller Long, the secretary-treasurer of the Equity and Wisconsin native, issued a statement in May 1919 highlighting the contributions made by farmers during the war. After explaining how farmers “put their shoulders to the war chariot and never took them away for a second, day nor night, until we had won this war,” Long likened how the farmers had “enlisted in the war just won,” the farmers of the Equity would fight in the “war against special privilege...and monopoly;” the war against privilege and those who worked

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<sup>17</sup> *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture 1930* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 574-583.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore Saloutos, “The Decline of the Wisconsin Society of Equity,” *Agricultural History* 15, no. 3 (1941): 150.

<sup>20</sup> Orville M. Kile, *The Farm Bureau Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), 39.

against the farmers would have “no armistice.”<sup>21</sup> His statement in the *Washington Post* concluded with a call that the political party that made the farmers’ program its own before the next election would be a fortunate one.

The political indications demonstrated by Long demonstrated the increased political ambitions that the Wisconsin Equity movement embraced after the separation from Everitt. According to Everitt, it was never “the object of the society to become a political party,” but to organize for the betterment of farmers and only after to advocate for “laws in the interest of agriculture.”<sup>22</sup> The new political direction in the state included promoting certain government policies supporting candidates for office, moves which proved detrimental to the Equity in Wisconsin. For example, the president of the state union of the American Society of Equity in Wisconsin, who had “heretofore been mainly interested in cooperative buying and selling,” was “put forward” as candidate for the gubernatorial nomination on the Republican ticket by a “Farmers and Laborers Conference” in 1920; the run had the support of the official organ of the Equity.<sup>23</sup>

North Dakota was a state where the new politics of the Equity movement was especially prevalent in the post-Everitt era. Like many other states and regions, North Dakota farmers shied away from politics at the turn of the century. When Equity organizers entered the state the farmers there were receptive to the holding plans. Indeed, by 1907 more than 10,000 farmers joined the wheat holding campaign hoping to “beat the commodity monopolists at their own game” by pledging to hold over one million acres.<sup>24</sup> The state was “the last great wheat state in

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<sup>21</sup> “Farmers’ Political Program,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C., May 25, 1919).

<sup>22</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1920), 197.

<sup>24</sup> Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy*, 8.

the union” to organize under the Equity plan.<sup>25</sup> The Equity was “the most prominent farmer organization in the Dakotas in the Granger days.” North Dakota native Theodore Nelson became head of the Grain Growers Department for the Equity, directing national efforts to improve the price of grain. The state was the site of many major Equity endeavors before the state Equity was diverted into the political arena.

A joint effort between the North Dakota and Minnesota Society of Equity branches, along with cooperation from the Equity’s Grain Growers Department, was undertaken to bypass the commission houses of Minneapolis. After the failure of a previous commission house in handling Equity farmers’ grain, the Equity Cooperative Exchange was founded in Minneapolis in 1908 and incorporated in North Dakota in 1911.<sup>26</sup> The Exchange was, in essence, “a farmer-owned cooperative commission firm” that allowed farmers to sell grain in an “organized terminal market.”<sup>27</sup> The “mighty grain trade of Minneapolis” as well as the “banks, newspapers, and railroads” were allied against the Equity; the Exchange “endured persecutions that more properly belonged to the Spanish Inquisition than to the twentieth century.”<sup>28</sup> One writer recounted tales of mysterious raids on Equity files, operators breaking into grain cars, and multiple cases of espionage targeting the Exchange.<sup>29</sup> By 1922, the Exchange, centered at a three hundred thousand bushel elevator in St. Paul, maintained a system of eighty elevators across Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota and partnered with many more

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<sup>25</sup> “Dollar Wheat Is the Slogan of New Society,” *Fargo Forum* (Fargo, ND, February 21, 1907).

<sup>26</sup> Steen, *Cooperative Marketing*, 212; Theodore Saloutos, “The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 32, no. 1 (1945): 31.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *American Cooperative Enterprise*, 190; R.H. Elsworth, *Statistics of Farmers’ Selling and Buying Associations: United States, 1863-1931* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Farm Board, 1932), 44.

<sup>28</sup> Steen, *Cooperative Marketing*, 213.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

The ECE met with “indifferent and varied success.”<sup>30</sup> After more than a decade of holding out against competing interests, the Equity Cooperative Exchange finally ceased to exist in 1927. The Minnesota branch of the Farmers’ Educational and Cooperative Union was organized in 1926.<sup>31</sup> In 1927, the Farmers’ Union Terminal Association, under the management of M.W. Thatcher, acquired the assets and business of the Equity Cooperative Exchange and established a new headquarters in St. Paul; the new association took over as a grain marketing agency for farmers in Minnesota as well as Montana, North Dakota, and Wisconsin.<sup>32</sup> Both M.W. Thatcher and Emil A. Syftestad, who became general manager of the Terminal association in 1932, were both former Equity men, having worked in the accounting department of the Equity Cooperative Exchange together.<sup>33</sup> The Exchange was a stock company, owned by farmers in the states that it served, and operated in a way congruent with other stock companies.

In North Dakota, the Equity came into conflict with the Better Farming Association, which was dedicated to “improved farming practices through an extension program.”<sup>34</sup> The organization was funded by railroads and banks to promote the idea that “the interests of the corporations and the farmers were complimentary not contradictory;” one of its biggest sponsors was the owner of the Great Northern Railroad, James J. Hill.<sup>35</sup> The Equity and its base in the state objected to the relationship between the corporate-sponsored Association and the North

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<sup>30</sup> Benjamin H. Hibbard, “The Extent of Co-Operative Marketing among Farmers Today and the Results Secured by Co-Operative Associations,” *The Agricultural Situation in the United States* 117, *The Annals* (January 1925): 204.

<sup>31</sup> Organized by A.W. Ricker, later editor of the *Farmers’ Union Herald*, Charles C. Talbot, the future head of the North Dakota Farmers’ Union, and M.W. Thatcher, future general manager of the Farmers’ Union Grain Terminal Association.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard C. Kercher, Vant W. Kebker, and Wilfred C. Leland, *Consumers’ Cooperatives in the North Central States*, ed. Roland S. Vaile (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1941), 406.

<sup>33</sup> Leonard C. Kercher, *Consumers’ Cooperatives*, 423.

<sup>34</sup> Claire M. Strom, “Unattainable Edens: James J Hill, the Great Northern Railway and Changing Notions of Agricultural Expertise” (Dissertation, Iowa State University, 1998), 147.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Dakota Agricultural College, a land grant institution “ostensibly founded for their benefit.”<sup>36</sup> The Equity’s opposition to the agricultural research and education seems out of character for an organization that valued the informed farmer, but the connection with corporate interests combined with the “especially extreme” views held by the farmers of North Dakota.<sup>37</sup>

One point of political interest to Equity members in the state was the terminal elevator issue. The terminal elevator plan was one which had circulated in North Dakota since the Populist takeover in 1892. The planned state-owned terminal elevator would bypass the commercial elevators in Minneapolis and provide unbiased grading and pricing for crops, especially wheat.<sup>38</sup> An amendment to the state constitution authorizing a terminal elevator passed in 1911 and 1913 and voted for by the public in 1914 by a margin of more than three to one.<sup>39</sup> The resolution to approve the financing of the elevator was set for a vote during the next legislative session in early February 1915.

The afternoon before the vote on the resolution, Equity leaders and around four hundred farmers converged on Bismarck, North Dakota for convention and a march on the capitol.<sup>40</sup> The night before the legislature was set to vote, the Equity gathering witnessed a speech by George Lofthus, the “pugnacious” sales manager of the Equity Cooperative Exchange.<sup>41</sup> In his speech, Lofthus used “vicious and abusive language” to denounce the legislators in attendance that he believed would vote against the elevator bill; the speech likely swaying legislators into voting against the bill.<sup>42</sup> The following day the elevator bill was defeated on the floor of the legislature.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 274.

<sup>39</sup> Erling N. Rolfsrud, *The Story of North Dakota* (Alexandria, MN: Lantern Books, 1963), 256.

<sup>40</sup> William Langer, *The Nonpartisan League: Its Birth, Activities and Leaders* (Mandan, ND: Morton County Farmers Press, 1920), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Theodore Saloutos, “The Rise of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, 1915-1917,” *Agricultural History* 20, no. 1 (1946): 45.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

In the aftermath, some Equity leaders believed that they would need to wait another two years to introduce a new bill, while others were incensed by the comments of Treadwell Twitchell, a legislator who opposed the elevator and supposedly told the gathered farmers to “go home and slop the hogs.”<sup>43</sup> The sentiment became a rallying cry for a new movement in North Dakota, the Nonpartisan League.

The true foundering of Equity influence in North Dakota began with the creation of the Nonpartisan League in 1915. Founded by Arthur C. Townley (who attended the Equity convention Bismarck in February 1915), the NPL sought to elevate farmers to control the government and implement the state elevator as well as other farm related measures such as state hail insurance.<sup>44</sup> Riding the wave of discontent after the unsatisfactory outcome of the elevator bill, the Nonpartisan League had 26,000 members by the spring of 1916.<sup>45</sup> Despite the fact that the North Dakota Union of the Equity was a driving force behind the push for a terminal elevator in the state, Arthur C. Townley, the man whose movement would bring about the decline of the Equity, was not even a member.<sup>46</sup> William Langer, a former Equity member and early NPL leader who later became Governor of North Dakota, reported that Townley never assisted in all the years “the Equity men and myself worked to establish the Equity Cooperative Exchange in St. Paul.”<sup>47</sup> Despite Townley not being an Equity man—he had been an organizer for the Socialist Party prior to his NPL work—the “League helped decimate the ranks of the Equity” and drew away many capable leaders and further weakened the Equity presence in the state.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Go Slop Your Hogs,” *The Bottineau Courant* (Bottineau, ND, December 21, 1916).

<sup>44</sup> Saloutos, “Nonpartisan League,” 52.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 334.

<sup>46</sup> William B. Bizzell, *The Green Rising: An Historical Survey of Agrarianism, with Special Reference to the Organized Efforts of the Farmers of the United States to Improve Their Economic and Social Status* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1926), 181; William Langer, *The Nonpartisan League: Its Birth, Activities and Leaders* (Mandan, ND: Morton County Farmers Press, 1920), 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 115.

Interestingly, it was Theodore Nelson, one of the founders of the Equity movement in North Dakota, who led the opposition to the NPL in the late 1910s as a major figure in the Independent Voters Association (IVA).<sup>49</sup> Nelson took five years to recover from an illness in “a less rigorous climate,” stepping down from involvement in the Equity in 1911. Upon his return in 1916, Nelson suspected that “the Nonpartisan League was not designed primarily to take up the farmers problems where the American Society of Equity had left off.”<sup>50</sup> Equity leaders became divided over the NPL with many who did not join the NPL becoming leaders in the IVA. The political explosion in North Dakota sapped the strength as Equity leaders joined the political fray.

In the end, the political prairie fire in North Dakota took the wind out of the sails of the Equity movement in the state. As more Equity leaders and unions in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Montana entered the League fight and became more involved in politics, support for the Equity movement languished. Despite the sizable impact the Equity had on the cooperative fabric of North Dakota, the NPL overshadows the contributions of the Equity. Histories of the Nonpartisan League examine the role of the American Society of Equity “from time to time,” but devote only a brief amount of time to it.<sup>51</sup> The status of the Equity in North Dakota mirrored the status of the national organizations through the 1910s.

In the aftermath of the polarizing convention of 1907, the national structure of the American Society of Equity was in a critical position. Structurally, the Equity was split in two. The Everitt faction, now operating as Farmers’ Society of Equity, carried on with his crop

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<sup>49</sup> Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy*, 135-137; Edward C. Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 94.

<sup>50</sup> Nelson, *Scrapbook Memoirs*, 99.

<sup>51</sup> William C. Pratt, “Radicals, Farmers, and Historians: Some Recent Scholarship About Agrarian Radicalism in the Upper Midwest,” *North Dakota History* 52, no. 4 (1984): 18.

holding plans, while the new leadership of the American Society of Equity continued to champion marketing and producers' cooperatives. Administratively, the two factions were still generally compatible in that they were both arrayed at the local, county, and state levels. While the two organizations were rivals and personality difference reigned at the highest levels, there appears to have been little violence or antagonism between local members of either organization.

While the American Society of Equity and the Farmers' Society of Equity vied for position in the Upper Midwest, the Farmer's Union slowly began to supplant the Equity in states where the state Equity organizations were in decline. The Farmer's Union encroached on the ASE's old territory. Over time, the Farmers' Union encroached on old Equity territory and took over many former Equity-founded institutions as the Equity declined and faded. The Farmers' Union and the Equity were very similar organizations in the beginning; the Union was founded within months of the Equity in 1902 and advocated a very similar crop-holding program. Everitt even believed that the Farmers' Union had borrowed some ideas from the Equity and "found some gratification in that fact."<sup>52</sup> At one point the two organizations even considered consolidating, but to no avail.

Representatives from the Farmer's Union and the American Society of Equity met at a farmers' convention in Omaha from May 2-8, 1910.<sup>53</sup> The executive committees of both organizations held conferences to explore the possibility of a consolidation of the two organizations, but the consolidation never came to pass.<sup>54</sup> In the aftermath of this meeting the Farmers' Equity Union was formed with C.O. Drayton, former President of the American Society of Equity, as its leader. The new movement was most active in Colorado, Kansas,

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<sup>52</sup> Bahmer, "American Society of Equity," 41.

<sup>53</sup> Robert H. Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the Nonpartisan League" (Doctoral diss, University of Minnesota, 1941), 212.

<sup>54</sup> "The News of the Week," *The Commoner*, May 13, 1910.

Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, and southwestern North Dakota. The new organization moved away from the “centrally controlled pooling and price setting” of the ASE toward a “more limited and gradual approach” with an emphasis on local organizations and local action in cooperative marketing. The Farmers’ Equity Union and its platform was more agreeable to mainstream grain dealers because it focused on local cooperatives, much like the cooperatives that the grain dealers already had in their associations or those for which they held memberships.<sup>55</sup> One scholar wrote that the Farmers’ Equity Union “in its quiet fashion... became the most successful of the various branches of the Equity movement.”<sup>56</sup> By 1923, the Farmers’ Equity Union reported a membership of around 65,000 and the Equity was in clear decline.<sup>57</sup>

For Everitt then, these organizations and activities were illegitimate and did not represent the true Equity as he had envisioned it. After the 1907 convention he sued for control of the American Society of Equity. Everitt filed for a receiver for the American Society of Equity, alleging that “the society was being badly managed by its officers, that is was indebted to him and others for large amounts, and that feuds and dissensions were threatening to disrupt it.”<sup>58</sup> The judge, Lawson Harvey, decided against the request for receiver, having come to the conclusion that the leaders of the society were “conducting its business economically” and steadily paying off debts. The judge also believed that placing the society in receivership would cause the society to lose subscriptions, its only source of income.<sup>59</sup>

For Everitt, the fight over control of the Equity moved into the legal realm in early 1908. On January 9, President Barnett and Secretary Pauley were arrested and charged with “criminal

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<sup>55</sup> Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 139.

<sup>56</sup> Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 139.

<sup>57</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 59.

<sup>58</sup> “Everitt Beaten: Judge Harvey Passes on American Society of Equity Case,” *Crittenden Record-Press*, October 8, 1908.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

libel” with the complaint coming from “deposed president” Everitt.<sup>60</sup> Everitt accused both parties of circulating a letter falsely alleging that he was monitored by postal authorities, had been arrested for “using the mails to defraud” in Pennsylvania, and had bought and reshipped wheat to pass it off as “Columbus seed wheat.”<sup>61</sup> The punishment for the Barnett case was not disclosed, but judging by the results of later libel cases launched by Everitt the results may not have been severe. Another case in December 1908 saw newspaper editor Charles A. Spear convicted of criminal libel and subjected to a five dollar fine; Spear was a director for the American Society of Equity and was involved in the opposition in 1907.<sup>62</sup> The convictions came as indictment of the actions of the opposition more so than strict legal punishment for crimes committed.

In April, other members of the opposition to Everitt faced criminal libel charges in Chicago. Theodore Nelson, Charles W. Browne, and John Gentner were convicted on April 18 of “having made false charges against Everett of fraudulent practices in business and of misconduct in the administration...of the American Society of Equity” while he was president.<sup>63</sup> One Missouri newspaper in support of Everitt stated that “Mr. Everitt...after the most searching investigation of nearly every act of his life for thirty years, stands an exonerated and vindicated man” and that there were “songs of thanksgiving among the angels in heaven when the jury returned the verdict.”<sup>64</sup>

After the legal battles, editorials, and feuds, Everitt was no closer to wresting control of the American Society of Equity away from the opposition that had taken over in 1907. On October 30, 1908, the Farmers Society of Equity was incorporated with Everitt as president after

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<sup>60</sup> “Equity Society Men Held,” *Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, IL, January 9, 1908).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> “Editor Pleads Guilty,” *The Lake County Times* (Hammond, IN, December 16, 1908).

<sup>63</sup> “Convicted of Criminal Libel,” *The Cairo Bulletin* (Cairo, IL, April 19, 1908).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

a three-day convention in Indianapolis.<sup>65</sup> The objectives of the organization were nearly congruent to the objectives of the American Society of Equity in its original form including the pursuit of “profitable prices,” the construction of elevators, and the maintenance of a crop reporting system.<sup>66</sup> Everitt wrote that the reason he started the FSE was to recreate the “original, unadulterated principles” that had been lost at the 1907 convention: “to enable farmers to sell at profitable prices and direct the marketing of crops.”<sup>67</sup> Everitt later reprinted many of the original American Society of Equity pamphlets under the Farmers Society of Equity name.<sup>68</sup>

The “Exchange element,” as Everitt called them, represented a majority of the officers after the 1906 election had built their support leading up to the 1907 convention; the element had “cast aside all the influences that had built the society up” in favor of the capital stock exchanges and cooperation with the American Federation of Labor.<sup>69</sup> The promotion of the exchange plan by this element, Everitt claimed, contributed to suffering membership throughout 1907. After the 1907 convention, the new leadership of the “old society” was responsible for a major decline in Everitt’s estimation. Everitt wrote that the new leadership had incurred huge debts and badly mismanaged the society. The new Farmers Society of Equity “retains all the good features of the old society” and “safeguards the society against a repetition of the old trouble;” the new society would provide for the vote of the membership to decide national officers and other important decisions. Everitt hoped that the new society would give the old membership a chance to “unite again on the original plan” and become “stronger numerically and have a greater power for good

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<sup>65</sup> “Farmers Society of Equity,” *The Jackson Herald* (Jackson, MO, November 12, 1908).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Farmers Society of Equity: A Friend for All*, Farmers’ Problems No. 16 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity: A Friend for All, 1910); C.P. Gerber, *The Farmers Society of Equity: Analogous to Christianity*, Farmers’ Problems No. 15 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1910); James A. Everitt, *The Railroads and The Farmers: They Can Help Each Other Solve Their Problems*, Farmers Problems No. 12 (Indianapolis, IN: Farmers Society of Equity, 1911).

<sup>69</sup> “Farmers Society of Equity,” *The Jackson Herald* (Jackson, MO, November 12, 1908).

to all people than ever before.”<sup>70</sup> The aims of two organizations, the one in 1902 and the one in 1908, were so similar that in his revised edition of *The Third Power*, published in 1908, Everitt instructed the reader to substitute “Farmers” for “American” wherever it was used in reference to the Society of Equity and to address all letters to the Farmers Society of Equity.<sup>71</sup>

Even as his national influence declined after the end of the Equity, Everitt continued to operate his seed business. In 1911, he even proposed a plan for an association of housewives to implement cooperative buying to bring down grocery prices.<sup>72</sup> In 1912, Everitt joined the Economic Club of Indianapolis, a local affiliate of the National Economic League, which was dedicated itself to “the discussion of economic, social, and industrial problems” and to holding dinners and hosting speeches from leaders of industry and economics.<sup>73</sup>

Everitt, ultimately, could not escape legal problems. In 1916, he still ran afoul of the law with respect to the mail. In 1916, James A. Everitt and his son Sibley F. Everitt were both found guilty by a federal jury in Indianapolis of “using the mails in a scheme to defraud” and sentenced to eighteen months in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, GA.<sup>74</sup> The charged echoed those of the convention nine years earlier where Everitt was accused of “running afoul of the postal authorities.”<sup>75</sup> The charges were based on the fact that in early 1916, Everitt’s firm announced a “free seed distribution;” in exchange, farmers would “do a little thing when shown how.”<sup>76</sup> Thousands wrote in for their free seeds and many received “twenty-two packages of seeds said to

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> James A. Everitt, *The Third Power: Farmers to the Front*, Fourth Edition. (Indianapolis, IN: J.A. Everitt Publisher, 1907), II.

<sup>72</sup> “Housewives Have A Stunt That May Pay,” *The Lake County Times* (Hammond, IN, December 9, 1911).

<sup>73</sup> *The Economic Club of Indianapolis, 1912-13* (Indianapolis: The Economic Club of Indianapolis, 1913), 2, 7.

<sup>74</sup> “Equity Man Convicted: Prison Sentence for Former President of the A. S. of E.,” *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* (Hopkinsville, KY, January 4, 1917).

<sup>75</sup> Bahmer, *American Society of Equity*, 55.

<sup>76</sup> “Equity Man Convicted: Prison Sentence for Former President of the A. S. of E.,” *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* (Hopkinsville, KY, January 4, 1917).

be worth one dollar.”<sup>77</sup> A letter soon followed that told the recipients that the “little thing” they needed to do to keep the seed was either subscribe to *Up-to-Date Farming* or get a friend to subscribe; the court ruled that the farmers were not aware of this “string attached” when the seeds were ordered.<sup>78</sup> Sibley tried unsuccessfully to argue that he was solely responsible for the scheme.<sup>79</sup> Newspapers reported that Everitt was “known widely among farmers of the United States” as the former leader of the American Society of Equity and the Farmers’ Society of Equity and noted that “activities in the interest of the farmer” continued up until his indictment.<sup>80</sup> Sometime in late 1916, prior to his conviction, Everitt sold *Up-to-Date Farming*, the paper that had given him the platform to build the Equity movement; by 1919, the paper maintained an active circulation of around 191,000.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, the conviction was not the first time Everitt had gone to court over the mail. On April 1, 1889, Everitt was found not guilty of violating postal laws; the court noted that the only cause for complaint was Everitt’s use of federal mail sacks to haul his mail around Indianapolis.<sup>82</sup> Everitt said at the time that his legal trouble may have been done as “spite work” by postal workers to whom Everitt had “given too much work.”<sup>83</sup>

Although there is no account of his time in prison, Everitt returned to Indianapolis and resumed his seed business after completing his sentence. His name was a common sight in the newspapers of Indianapolis, almost exclusively in the form of advertisements, all the way up

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> “Father and Son Guilty: Court Sentences J.A. and S.F. Everitt to Pen for Fraud,” *Webster City Freeman* (Webster City, IA, December 5, 1916).

<sup>80</sup> “Used Mails to Defraud,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer* (Wheeling, WV, December 5, 1916); “Equity Man Convicted: Prison Sentence for Former President of the A. S. of E.,” *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* (Hopkinsville, KY, January 4, 1917).

<sup>81</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 56; James E. Boyle, *Agricultural Economics* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1921), 284.

<sup>82</sup> “In the Case of J.A. Everitt,” *American Florist* (Chicago, IL, April 2, 1889).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

until the end of the 1920s. The ads showcased extensive wares available at Everitt's Seed Stores. In addition to the many varieties of seeds that Everitt was known for, his offerings included everything from fungicides and zinnias to baby chicks and dog food.<sup>84</sup> After over thirty-six years at its location on West Washington Street, Everitt's Seed Store moved in 1928 to a newer and larger building at 26-32 South Illinois Street to accommodate "increased business and greatly enlarged stocks."<sup>85</sup> Everitt said that in the past the seed business was "confined to seeds" but that it now must include "nursery stock, poultry feeds, baby chicks in season, fertilizers, insecticides, birds, bird cages, and goldfish."<sup>86</sup>

Near the end of Everitt's life scholars examining the Equity did so with an almost reminiscent attitude, looking at the optimism of the members as fuel for later cooperative successes. Between 1920 and his death in 1930, many works discussed the Equity and Everitt's ideas. Orville M. Kile's *The Farm Bureau Movement (1921)* commented on the usefulness of studying farm movements. He wrote of the Equity and other organizations:

The story of the rise and decline of the Grange, the Farmers' Alliance, the Agricultural Wheel, the Brothers of Freedom, the Northwestern Alliance, the Farmers' Union, the Farmers' and Laborers' Union, the Equity, and the Gleaners, together with the story of the farmers' attempt at independent politics as exemplified by Greenbackism, populism, and bimetalism, form a most interesting chapter in the development of our economic and political life and contain vivid lessons which our agricultural no less than our political leaders of today may well stop and ponder.<sup>87</sup>

Kile believed that the Equity was part of the "long years of struggle –sometimes subdued, sometimes active—that preceded the advent of the American Farm Bureau Federation."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> "Everitt's Specials For Mother's Day And All Next Week," *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, May 9, 1930); "Another Great One-Week Sale," *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, May 17, 1929); "Boys and Girls," *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, December 10, 1923); "Everything For Birds," *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, August 18, 1925).

<sup>85</sup> "Everitt's Seed Store Moves to Illinois St.," *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, August 16, 1928).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Orville M. Kile, *The Farm Bureau Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), 3-4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

H.E. Erdman, a professor at the University of California, wrote that farmers presently “are inclined to think in glittering generalities of things a long ways off” despite “the most potent fields for fruitful activity on the part of their marketing associations are close at hand.”<sup>89</sup> Some of the “things a long ways off” were familiar claims to both the Equity and other movements.<sup>90</sup> The “elimination of middlemen,” “price fixing,” and “orderly marketing” were among those mentioned by Erdman.<sup>91</sup> Qualms with middlemen, the setting of fair prices, and perhaps most importantly of all, the “controlled and orderly marketing” of farm products were all, of course, issues at the core of the Equity.<sup>92</sup>

That same year Benjamin Hibbard, in his article “The Agricultural Situation in the United States” (1925), examined the development of farmers’ cooperatives in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. For the thirty year period ending in 1901, “cooperation was strictly in the experimental phase” where almost all organizations formed in this period having little uniformity and a strictly local focus.<sup>93</sup> The value of farm products marketed through cooperative organizations witnessed an almost five-fold increase between 1912 and 1922 to a total of over one billion dollars.<sup>94</sup> In what Hibbard calls “the third period” of agricultural cooperation between 1912 and 1921, “co-operation grew by leaps and bounds.”<sup>95</sup> It was just prior to this period that the American Society of Equity in its original form peaked, during the “second period” during which “co-operation made a distinct growth” but not nearly as much as in the “third period.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 59-60; Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 37.

<sup>91</sup> Erdman, “Possibilities and Limitations,” 217.

<sup>92</sup> Bahmer, “American Society of Equity,” 37.

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin H. Hibbard, “The Extent of Co-Operative Marketing among Farmers Today and the Results Secured by Co-Operative Associations,” *American Academy of Political and Social Science* 117, *The Annals* (January 1925): 201.

<sup>94</sup> Steen, *Cooperative Marketing*, v.

<sup>95</sup> Hibbard, “Co-Operative Marketing among Farmers,” 202.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Although the Equity made some progress in the 1910s in the realm of cooperative marketing, after the schisms and infighting of 1907 the movement never again gained the national clout that it sought to attain.

James A. Everitt died on September 28, 1930 of an undisclosed “illness of one week.”<sup>97</sup> The funeral service was held in his home on the next Wednesday, October 1, followed by a burial at Memorial Park Cemetery in Indianapolis. Obituaries at the time spoke of his forty-four years in the “wholesale and retail seed business” and his membership in the Free and Accepted Masons, Centre Lodge.<sup>98</sup> Overall the obituaries were brief and provided only basic information Everitt was survived by his wife and both of his children. None of the obituaries mentioned that he had created and served as the president of the American Society of Equity, supported “The Third Power” or “Farmers to the Front,” or explained his impact of as a farm organizer.

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<sup>97</sup> “James A. Everitt,” *The Indianapolis Star* (Indianapolis, Indiana, September 30, 1930); “Rites Wednesday for James A. Everitt,” *The Indianapolis Times* (Indianapolis, IN, September 30, 1930).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

The most sizable remnant of the American Society of Equity after 1907 was the Wisconsin Society of Equity. The state union there held out until 1934 when the organizers there decided to merge with the Farmers' Union. Just a year before the merger, B.J. Gehrmann, the last president of the American Society of Equity, published *A Little History of the American Society of Equity* (1933). The work, only twenty pages in length, mostly served to highlight the principles of the society and its work in Wisconsin (where increasingly the organization there was the Equity itself). According to Gehrmann, the Equity had accomplished a great deal in Wisconsin such as pure seed legislation, a binder twine plant, livestock shipping associations, and many cooperative creameries.<sup>1</sup> Reminiscent of Everitt more than three decades prior, Gehrmann insisted that "the name of the American Society of Equity suggest the purpose, character and principles of the organization. As equity is the basis of all righteousness, and Americanism, the creed of every patriotic citizen of this republic, the organization is bound to appeal to all thinkers and lovers of liberty."<sup>2</sup> The spirit of the Equity, Gehrmann added, was simply "Equity granted, and demanded."<sup>3</sup> He also explained that the farmer was the most important part of the prosperity of a nation and that he was not obligated to feed the world without a reward for his labor. Gehrmann concluded by insisting that the Equity "hasn't a thing to be ashamed of," had stood on the same principles for three decades, and remained farmer-owned for the duration. It "always led the

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<sup>1</sup> B.J. Gehrmann, *A Little History of the American Society of Equity* (Madison, WI: American Society of Equity, 1933), 13-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

procession” but was “too far ahead of the times, and farmers couldn’t see the necessity of such a move.”<sup>4</sup>

Although often overshadowed by contemporary farm organizations such as the Farmers’ Union, the Farm Bureau, and the Grange, the influence and actions of the American Society of Equity held greater impact than its brief tenure would indicate. Founded in 1902, the Equity aimed to help all farmers obtain profitable prices for their products. Originally the Equity shied away from political involvement and focused on reporting crop information. Indeed, the organization’s founder, James Everitt, believed farmers, if organized, had the capacity to dictate the price of their goods. Should those prices be met, farmers could attain prosperity and bring themselves on par with industry and labor as “The Third Power.”

Like other farm organizations, the Equity was riddled with problems of its own making including factionalism (both regional and personal), politics, and organizational rigidity. Indeed, the Equity, as a national body, was inflexible and unable to maintain cohesion and adapt to the changing needs and conditions of its membership. In the end, the organization lacked the unity, the adaptability, and the robust organizational strength to endure after an event which shook the foundations of the Equity.

A key aspect of any successful farm organization, especially one like the Equity, was the possession of flexibility. The willingness and capability of farm organizations to adapt its objectives, organizational structure, and area of membership to meet new demands allowed them to survive.<sup>5</sup> For example, the Grange survived into the twentieth century by shifting into a fraternal organization. Meanwhile, the Farmers’ Union enjoyed success because it was able to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Harold F. Breimyer et al., *The Agrarian Tradition in American Society: A Focus on the People and the Land in an Era of Changing Values* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, 1976), 106.

expand its membership region out of the South and into the Prairie states.<sup>6</sup> As a nationally unified body, the American Society of Equity was one organization that was unable to survive the shifts in membership and objectives that it faced in the first two decades of the twentieth century. While the membership of the Equity shifted “from the eastern to the western part of the Midwest,” regional differences in objectives were “never resolved.”<sup>7</sup>

The Equity endured for twenty-seven years after the 1907 split but was not able to overcome the events that disrupted the society. Ultimately, in the years between 1907 and the consolidation of the last major pocket of Equity strength in 1934, the Equity found its strength and legacy in the realm of local and state unions and their descendants. It never again attained the national scope that it was close to achieving during the Everitt period (1902-1907). The Equity always faced serious challenges in trying to maintain a unified agrarian front. For one, farmers were not monolithic. Despite the similarities in their interests, the specific needs of farmers varied from place to place and time to time. Cultural differences between old farmers and new farmers also provided points of conflict. In addition, especially in the case of the Equity, the personality conflicts and divisions between leaders of the movement were major hindrances to unity. If those problems were not enough, there were the financial burdens on farm organizations, which were difficult to overcome. Ultimately, the maintenance of a national organization like the Equity required a great deal of organizational skill. Unfortunately, due to the challenges farm organizations faced that skill was hard to cultivate.

Farmers did not stop participating in farm organizations after the demise of the Equity. Many Equity members became respected leaders of later movements or attained government positions advocating for farmers. While there are no direct connections between the Equity and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 106-107.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 107.

New Deal personalities like Franklin D. Roosevelt or Henry Wallace, the Equity nevertheless served as a bridge between the old ways of farm organizations and late nineteenth century agrarian politics and the new ways that came to characterize twentieth century farming and agricultural politics. According to historian Richard Hofstadter, the Equity and its marketing plan were “suggestive of later New Deal efforts” but differed in that it hoped to use “voluntary association rather than government sponsorship” to accomplish their goals.<sup>8</sup>

Despite its failure as an enduring organization that unleashed “The Third Power,” the Equity provided a legacy in twentieth century farming and farm organizing. Many of the local organizations became lasting symbols of the value and success of farm cooperation and many Equity establishments and their offspring had long and profitable histories like the exchanges in Minneapolis or the state Equity in Wisconsin. Everitt had insisted that “the cause is worth; the weapon is at hand and effective...the Third Power will be a real power; the grand American Society of Equity will be a triumphant success, and agriculture will be lifted to the plane where it rightfully belongs.”<sup>9</sup> In the end, the Equity failed to live up to Everitt’s dream, but his vision was one that had an impact on farm organizations well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In an instance of the poetry of history, the record of one of the final Farmers’ Society of Equity chapters—perhaps the last surviving chapter—appeared in 1947. Farmers’ Society of Equity No. 7824, perhaps the last local union, existed in Dornsife, Pennsylvania. Dornsife is in Northumberland County, James A. Everitt’s home county, no more than thirty miles from his birthplace.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 112.

<sup>9</sup> Everitt, *The Third Power*, 196.

<sup>10</sup> United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Directory of Consumers’ Cooperatives in the United States*, vol. No. 750, *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 73.

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