



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: The Anti-Saloon League in Nebraska Politics, 1898-1910

Full Citation: Robert E Wenger, "The Anti-Saloon League in Nebraska Politics, 1898-1910," *Nebraska History* 52 (1971): 267-292

URL of article: http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1971Anti_Saloon.pdf

Date: 3/16/2011

Article Summary: Was the Nebraska temperance crusade a symbol of status conflict? The article examines the interpretation of the temperance movement as a clash between a dominant rural, middle-class, Protestant life style and an industrial, immigrant, and Catholic culture pattern.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Joseph R Gusfield, Howard H Russell, John B Carns, H O Rowlands, Andrew G Wolfenbarger, Harry Grainger, John Collins Jackson, James C Cahlman, Marna S Poulson, J J Loughran, S K Warrick, G L Loomis, Manoah B Reese, Willard E Stewart, Andrew J Sawyer, B F Good, George F Corcoran, William A Poynter, Charles H Dietrich, Thomas Darnall, S D Fitchie, George L Sheldon, Ashton C Shallenberger, Chester H Aldrich, Elmer E Thomas, William Jennings Bryan, James Dahlman, John J Donahue, Purley A Baker, Frank A Harrison; John Wittorff, John Rosenstock

Keywords: Anti-Saloon League; temperance crusade; Prohibition Party; Slocumb Law; Progressivism; Populism; Roman Catholic Church; Protestant; German Socialists; Hungarian Baptists; *Omaha Daily Bee*; *Nebraska State Journal*; *The New Republic*; *The Nebraska Beacon*; *The Nebraska Issue*; *Omaha Anti-Saloon League*; Nebraska Temperance Union; Women's Christian Temperance Union; Douglas County Anti-Saloon League; *Nebraska State Capital*

Photographs / Images: "The Two Johns" saloon in 1902, Lincoln, Nebraska; The Rev Marna S Poulson; Chester H Aldrich; Post card 1909



*"The Two Johns" saloon in 1901 was located at 915 O Street in Lincoln. Proprietors were John Wittorff and John Rosenstock, both natives of Germany. A promotional booklet published under the title **Nebraska's Resources and Industries, Lincoln**, described the interior as "handsomely fitted up with bar fixtures in solid oak, and the shelving behind it resplendent with fine large mirrors and cut glass."*

THE ANTI-SALOON LEAGUE IN NEBRASKA POLITICS, 1898-1910

By ROBERT E. WENGER

I N A RECENT sociological study Joseph R. Gusfield has portrayed the American temperance movement in a new light.¹ Unlike the Progressive historians, who subordinated moral crusades to economic conflicts, Gusfield regards them as important social and political phenomena which demand explanation. He interprets the temperance crusade as a status conflict between a dominant native, rural, middle-class, Protestant life style and an increasingly powerful urban, industrial, immigrant, Catholic culture pattern. According to Gusfield, as long as the value system of temperance reformers dominated American society they used an *assimilative* approach, attempting to convert the pitied outsider to their way of life. But when the outsider persisted in defying this norm and threatened it with his own value system, temperance crusaders turned to *coercive* political action which culminated in national prohibition and reasserted the supremacy of the older set of values. Gusfield sees the 1890's as the turning point from assimilative to coercive reform and views the Anti-Saloon League as the final embodiment of coercive methods, both in its single-mindedness and in its "anti" character.²

Gusfield's interpretation invites questions for the student of prohibition in Nebraska. Was the Nebraska temperance crusade a symbol of status conflict? Did Nebraska Anti-Saloon League

leaders fit his cultural description? What political methods of coercion did the League employ, and was it single-minded in its purpose? Was the League an influential political force in Nebraska during its early years? By examining the origins, leadership, and early political activity of the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League this study seeks answers to these questions.

Temperance forces had been present in Nebraska from its earliest years but had achieved only limited success. A prohibition law had been enacted in 1855 only to be repealed three years later. Temperance agitation arose again in the late 1870's and produced the Slocumb high license liquor law, a measure initially hailed as a step toward state prohibition but later denounced as ineffective by its former supporters.³

Dissatisfaction with the Slocumb law produced a new temperance wave during the 1880's, promoted by societies, churches and the new Prohibition Party formed in 1884. The wave crested in 1890 with the submission of a state prohibition amendment to popular vote, but it failed by a sizeable margin and temperance agitation temporarily subsided.⁴ The Populist ferment of the next decade subordinated the liquor question to more pressing agrarian demands for economic reform.⁵

A glance at the Prohibition Party's record in Nebraska politics (Table 1) reveals that the partisan approach never gained the support of most prohibition advocates. The party's poor showing during the Populist era may be attributed to the greater appeal of other interests, but even in years when temperance was a live political issue it received no more than 3.4 per cent of the votes cast for any state office.⁶

Thus when temperance reform emerged again as a vital issue in the decade from 1900 to 1910, its supporters were inclined to reject the partisan approach and to work through non-partisan pressure groups to mobilize temperance strength within all political parties. The Anti-Saloon League was to become the outstanding organization of this type.

The idea of a political pressure group against the liquor interests had originated with an Ohio Congregational minister, the Rev. Howard H. Russell. Spreading rapidly to other states, this approach produced an interstate anti-saloon convention in

TABLE I
 HIGHEST NUMBER OF VOTES CAST FOR A
 PROHIBITION PARTY CANDIDATE
 IN STATE ELECTIONS, 1890-1908

	Votes Cast	% of Total Votes Cast
1890	4586	2.2
1892	6756	3.4
1894	5819	2.9
1896	2969	1.4
1898	1805	1.0
1900	4315	1.9
1902	4394	2.3
1904	7140	3.2
1906	6344	3.4
1908	5966	2.3

Sources: *Nebraska Blue Book for 1901 and 1902*, 204-67; *Senate Journals of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, 1903-1909*, Abstracts of Votes Cast.

Washington, D. C., in 1895, out of which the Anti-Saloon League of America emerged.⁷ Proclaiming itself "the Church in action against the saloon" and adopting the slogan, "The Saloon Must Go," the new organization put into practice the "Ohio idea," which Odegard sums up concisely:

(1) paid professional officers and workers giving their entire time to League activity; (2) a financial system based upon monthly subscriptions; (3) political agitation directed toward the defeat of wet and the election of dry candidates; (4) concentration upon the liquor question—refusal to be sidetracked by other issues.⁸

State leagues generally adopted the national policies, for the League's organizational structure lent itself to highly centralized control. A board of directors, an executive committee, and a general superintendent headed the national organization. State superintendents, although elected annually

by a state board of trustees chosen from cooperating churches and assisted by a headquarters committee chosen biennially by that same body, were nominated by the general superintendent and submitted monthly reports to him. Thus, while theoretically free to develop organization and methods best suited to state and local needs, the state superintendent found it advantageous to adhere closely to the will of the national organization.

Furthermore, the grass-roots membership of the League made no policy decisions. While hundreds of delegates attended biennial national conventions, they were never allowed to vote on anything, for to introduce democracy would be to invite dissent and destroy the efficiency and unity necessary for success.⁹

Yet, the Anti-Saloon League needed the financial and political support of the churches and unashamedly solicited their aid. "The last, greatest and best temperance fighting machine is a church movement—a product of evangelical Christianity," said *The Nebraska Issue*, organ of the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League.¹⁰ While the churches provided money, volunteer workers, and votes on election day, the League provided leadership and method, "the machinery through which the best sentiment . . . can be coined into results." Its leaders emphasized that it was not just another temperance society but "the working unit of a federation that embraces every agency opposed to the liquor traffic."¹¹ All Christian temperance people were thus invited to cooperate with the centralized organization in order to share the benefits of its political victories.

Such was the philosophy that underlay the formation of the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League in 1898.¹² Of the circumstances surrounding its inauguration nothing is known except the names of its first officers. Dr. John B. Carns, Methodist pastor from Grand Island, became State Superintendent; Dr. H. O. Rowlands, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln, was named President of the board of trustees; Andrew G. Wolfenbarger, a Lincoln attorney and a prominent member of the Prohibition party, became the League's attorney; and Harry Grainger, a Lincoln businessman, was chosen treasurer.

Apparently further organizational work followed in January, 1899, when Dr. John Collins Jackson, a national League official, visited both Omaha and Lincoln. The Omaha League soon expired, and not until late in 1907 was an organization revived in Douglas County. The work in Lincoln continued, however, and the capital city became the state headquarters.¹³

The Nebraska Anti-Saloon League was thus organized at a time when latent temperance zeal existed but lacked the means for united expression. As an arm of a centralized national organization devoted to a single goal, it attempted to weld the fragmented anti-liquor forces into an organized political bloc.

If, as Gusfield maintains, the Anti-Saloon League attempted to retain native, rural, middle-class Protestant culture, one can expect to find this life style in its leaders. Therefore, to test the validity of Gusfield's cultural composite, a collective portrait of all known Anti-Saloon League officers and trustees in Nebraska from 1898 to 1910 has been compiled. A partial summary of their characteristics appears in Table 2.

The residence statistics may be somewhat misleading because ministers tended to move frequently. Yet even allowing for a considerable margin of error one finds these figures instructive, for the preponderance of Anti-Saloon League leadership came from the two largest urban centers of the state, not the rural areas with which Gusfield so strongly identifies the movement.¹⁴

A glance at the occupational statistics reveals the same urban influence. Of the 101 persons whose occupations are known, none was employed in exclusively rural work, and most of the occupations listed are strongly associated with urban life. Of nine known lawyers, for example, five lived in Omaha and four in Lincoln. Of twenty known businessmen, ten were from Omaha, five from Lincoln, and only five from other localities. Even among the clergy the urban areas predominated; of fifty-two clergymen fifteen held pastorates in Lincoln and thirteen in Omaha.

It is somewhat dangerous, of course, to generalize on the basis of data which omits the rank and file of the movement, but it may be assumed that city pastors willing to identify

TABLE 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF 114 ANTI-SALOON LEADERS IN
NEBRASKA, 1898-1910

	No.	% of Those Known
Place of Residence		
Lincoln and suburbs	33	32.0
Omaha and suburbs	32	31.1
Hastings	3	2.9
Alliance	3	2.9
Grand Island	2	1.9
Fremont	2	1.9
Minden	2	1.9
Others (each with 1)	26	25.2
Not known	11	
Occupation		
Clergy	52	51.5
Business	20	19.8
Law and government	12	11.9
Education	8	7.9
Social work	3	3.0
Clerical work	2	2.0
Medicine	4	4.0
Not known	13	
Church Affiliation		
Methodist	27	37.5
Presbyterian	16	22.2
Baptist	8	11.1
Lutheran	6	8.3
Congregational	5	6.9
Disciples of Christ	4	5.6
Other bodies	6	8.3
Not known	42	
Political Party Identification		
Republican	9	56.3
Democratic	4	25.0
Prohibition	3	18.8
Not known	98	

with a politically-oriented temperance organization had the support of a majority of their urban church members. It is noteworthy that even in Omaha, which steadfastly resisted prohibition efforts, the Ministerial Union took a public stand against the gubernatorial candidacy of their wet mayor, James C. Dahlman, in 1910.¹⁵ As for temperance sentiment in Lincoln, the simple fact that its people adopted a no-license policy in 1909 evidences the existence of a large number of prohibitionists there.¹⁶

Gusfield finds Populism and prohibitionism psychologically linked in a common distrust of urban industrial capitalism and a sense of alienation from positions of political and cultural prestige. The liquor industry was a "trust" and the saloon was an urban institution which to the small-town nativist Protestant epitomized the habits of Catholic immigrants who threatened his cultural dominance. He discovers a correlation between the degree of "dryness" and the degree of rurality in certain states and implies that the rural element constituted the most important force in the drive for prohibition.¹⁷

While this picture contains elements of truth, it is too simplistic for Nebraska, which, although a predominantly agrarian state, drew its temperance leadership largely from the cities. These men did not distrust urban capitalism for many were businessmen themselves. A major selling point of prohibition was that dry cities allegedly became more prosperous.¹⁸ Furthermore, if agrarians hated the saloon partially because it represented the urban immigrant, urban nativists had more reason to detest it, for they lived closer to it. It is sometimes forgotten that thousands of city-dwellers in the early twentieth century shared the same ideals and prejudices as the rural populace and that cultural conflict was therefore potentially more severe in the cities than elsewhere. Nebraska League leaders opposed the saloon not because it represented the city but because it threatened to make the city socially undesirable. *The Omaha Issue* asserted:

We believe in all legitimate methods of boosting the city . . . We are proud of Omaha and when we censure some of its excrescences, it is not to defame, but to purify and elevate.¹⁹

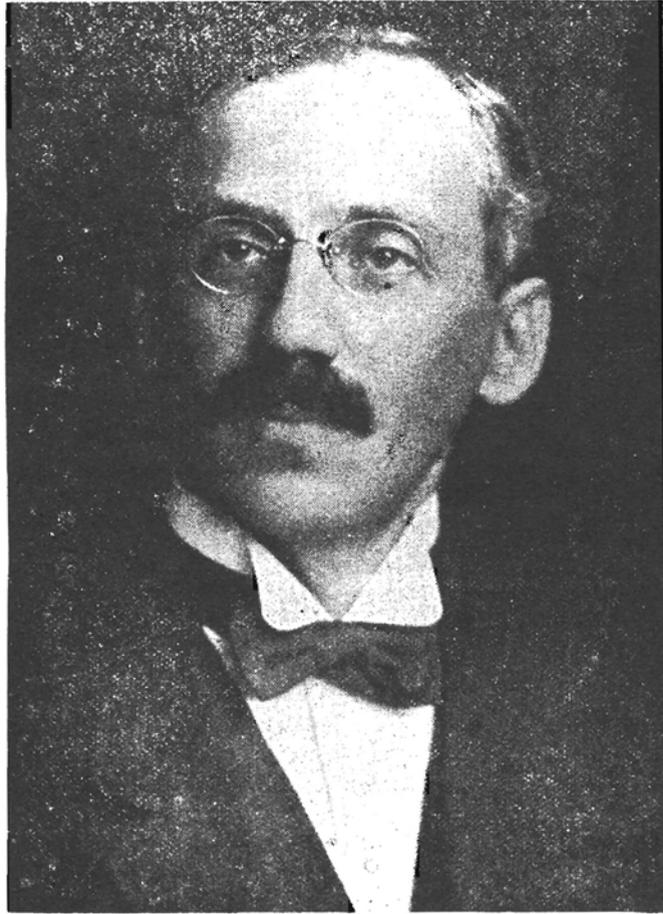
The outlook of the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League thus appears closer to that of Progressivism than to that of Populism.²⁰

The occupations of League leaders also reveal a relatively high level of education. Of ten individuals whose biographies are available seven had a college education, and the nature of the work of many others (medicine, law, education, pastoral ministry) makes higher education extremely likely. Four college presidents served on the Board of Trustees during the period under study.²¹ Though cordially hated by their enemies, League officers were never despised for lack of talent or knowledge.

Each occupational group made its own contributions. Businessmen provided financial support and knowledge of business methods, while lawyers investigated alleged violations of liquor laws and assisted in drafting new legislation. The clergy, the most numerous group, fulfilled both leadership and public relations functions. They acted as a liaison between headquarters and the temperance constituency, enabling the League to live up to its name, "the Church in action against the saloon." Judging from occupational representation, then, the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League conformed to the national middle-class pattern.²²

Middle-class values are evident in almost every piece of League literature, where democracy, sanctity of the home, law and order, thrift, and community prosperity are recurrent themes. "To be free the people must be sober. Democracy and intemperance cannot live together," proclaimed *The Nebraska Issue*. The baneful influence of liquor on the home was vividly illustrated in the story of a bride who left her drinking husband on their honeymoon. The law-and-order theme was evident in such titles as "The Source of Municipal Corruption" and "Another Whiskey Murder." Personal and community prosperity were themes that recurred with monotonous regularity. Especially popular were "before and after" statistics from dry communities.²³

League officers whose religious connections are known represented eleven Protestant groups and the Roman Catholic Church. The vast majority came from non-liturgical churches of evangelical background. One important exception to this rule was a Unitarian minister, and the six Lutherans may also be considered exceptional. Three of them, however, were



*The Rev. Marna S. Poulson
of Maryland was assigned
to the State of Nebraska
as superintendent of the
Anti-Saloon League in 1909.*

Swedish Lutherans, whose pietistic traditions inclined them toward prohibition.²⁴

Perhaps the most extraordinary member was the sole Catholic representative, the Rev. J. J. Loughran of Minden. It is well known that most Catholics opposed prohibition, although notable exceptions existed.²⁵ A reading of League literature also reveals that Catholic testimonials against the saloon were regarded as an effective means of converting other Catholics to temperance.²⁶ Yet, a mysterious silence enshrouds the one Catholic clergyman on the Nebraska League's Board. Would not a local priest's testimonial be valuable in convincing Nebraska Catholics? The logical explanation is that he gave only passive support to the League, which in turn used his name for window dressing in its publications. In spite of John B. Carns' statement that "we . . .

have some Catholic influence among us," the Nebraska League generally fit the usual description as a Protestant organization of evangelical and pietistic background.²⁷

Little is known of the Anti-Saloon leaders' national origins, but their literature reveals a nativist viewpoint. The League's attitude toward foreigners was not innately hostile, for the immigrant, if "properly instructed," could become as strong a temperance supporter as the native American. Superintendent Marna S. Poulson expressed this philosophy well:

It is true that a part of the foreign-born population can be relied upon to vote for the saloon, but it is also true that the saloon is being rapidly voted out of communities that are largely composed of foreign-born. It does not take long for the best element that comes to our shores to catch the spirit of our free institutions, and they soon find that the greatest foe to honest effort for success is the un-American saloon. . . . I know that our greatest difficulty is not with the foreign-born but rather with the unprincipled demagogue.²⁸

Poulson revealed more than he intended, for in speaking of the "un-American saloon" he implied that it was a foreign invention contaminating a morally superior culture. The "best element" among immigrants were those who quickly lost their national identity and adopted the "superior" culture as their own.

Yet, it was painfully clear that few representatives of Nebraska's large German population²⁹ and other less numerous ethnic groups were changing their minds. They, like Catholics, were bombarded with persuasive arguments. They were reminded, for example, that German Socialists had banned beer during working hours or that Hungarian Baptists had advocated prohibition. In the last *Nebraska Issue* before the 1910 election they could find a temperance appeal printed in Czech, Swedish, or German. In these ways the Nebraska League invited immigrants to experience the blessings of American culture as prohibitionists defined it.³⁰ Gusfield's "assimilative reform" had not been abandoned, even though few foreigners were being converted.³¹

Only fragmentary information exists on the political identification of League officers, as indicated in Table 2. If a political bias existed within the organization it was probably Republican. A circular letter used during the 1900 campaign disclaimed opposition to a candidate on partisan grounds but

added, "We believe the majority of [the League's] officers in Nebraska acts with the Republican party on national issues."³² Nine years later J. B. Carns stated that he had recently been criticized as a "narrow Republican" who had "swung the League as a Republican adjunct." To counteract the charges, however, he had "dug up S. K. Warrick, a religious, intelligent, wealthy democrat" to become the League's president.³³

Whatever their personal party preferences, Anti-Saloon officers took care to keep the organization true to its nonpartisan claims. To cross party lines, of course, was incomprehensible to many voters, but the League never tired of explaining its position. First, it was political in its methods. Since the state regulated the liquor trade, the League had to deal with political authorities. But it did not become a political party because that would necessitate constructing a platform and educating statesmen on issues much broader than prohibition. Restricting itself, rather, to one issue and unembarrassed by partisan affiliation, the League could challenge men of every party.³⁴

This policy is well illustrated in the organization's stance toward candidates for judgeships in 1907. In the race for the supreme judgeship the League endorsed Republican Manoah B. Reese over his Democratic opponent, G. L. Loomis, on the ground that Loomis, though an honorable man, had been supported by the "saloon interest." But the Republican district judge candidate in Lancaster County, Willard E. Stewart, was denounced as unfit, and his Democratic opponent, Andrew J. Sawyer, was supported as "a man of tried and proved integrity . . . of standing and ability." Other candidates for district judgeships endorsed by the League were Democrats B. F. Good of Wahoo and George F. Corcoran of York (an Irish Catholic). Thus, while individual League officers may have leaned toward the Republican Party, their official advice to voters was usually determined by the temperance issue alone.³⁵

The picture of the Anti-Saloon League in Nebraska which emerges from the foregoing collective portrait and other evidence resembles in many respects that painted by

Gusfield—native American, Protestant, middle-class, upholding the value system appropriate to this cultural composite. These men also appear to have leaned toward Republicanism as individuals but remained nonpartisan as an organization. But they differed from Gusfield's picture in their predominantly urban orientation, suggesting that the base of temperance support was broader and more complex than he would concede. The motivation for prohibition in Nebraska resembled more strongly that described by James H. Timberlake—"a middle-class faith with its historic source in a fusion of free enterprise capitalism, evangelical Protestantism, and political democracy."³⁶

The political strategy of the Anti-Saloon League was simple: find out how candidates stood on the liquor question, report this information to the voters, and urge them to vote only for those sympathetic to temperance. While literature and public speakers were employed to arouse sentiment throughout the state, the organizing of votes was generally left to churches and temperance societies. In addition to informing the voters the League provided legal counsel and prosecuted cases involving the enforcement of liquor laws.³⁷ A survey of its participation in Nebraska politics provides an opportunity to observe the operation and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

The earliest efforts of the League were directed toward local prohibition within the framework of the Slocumb Law.³⁸ In this they apparently enjoyed some success, for seventy-five towns voted dry in 1900.³⁹ Efforts to influence votes in the 1900 gubernatorial election produced less auspicious results, however. Fusionist Governor William A. Poynter was being opposed in his bid for re-election by Republican Charles H. Dietrich of Hastings. Early in the campaign Superintendent Carns revealed his opposition to Dietrich on the ground that he was a member of the brewers' association. Dietrich replied that although he drank occasionally and did not favor prohibition he had never been associated with any phase of the liquor trade.⁴⁰

Such reassurances apparently did not convince Carns, for later a circular letter appeared under the names of the state

League officers condemning Dietrich as the choice of the Liquor Dealers' Convention, a patron of the saloons and the planner of a prize fight in Hastings whose candidacy was opposed by every minister in his home city. Accompanying this letter was another signed by League Attorney Thomas Darnall, which stated: "The election of Mr. Dietrich is the death of the temperance cause."⁴¹ Still later another letter appeared to defend the earlier ones and to quote six Hastings ministers who opposed Dietrich.⁴²

The source of these letters was at first a mystery, for three Anti-Saloon officers repudiated them and denied any knowledge of their origin. The *Omaha Daily Bee* attributed the attack to "a fusionist source." But the mystery cleared up when Darnall informed the *Nebraska State Journal* that five of the seven-member headquarters committee had issued the circulars on their own initiative. Observing that the League had twenty-two officers, the *Journal* commented, "It isn't surprising that some hair pulling is going on among the brethren." Meanwhile, the *Bee* labeled the charges as "cruel slander" and asserted that Poynter, not Dietrich, was supported by the Omaha brewers.⁴³

The "hair pulling" was not confined to dissension within the League. Members of the state Prohibition Party used the occasion to denounce the new organization's nonpartisan methods. The editor of the party paper, *The New Republic*, posed the question: "What is the difference between Poynter and Dietrich?" and challenged the Anti-Saloon League to answer.⁴⁴ State Chairman S. D. Fitchie complained bitterly:

We protest against Mr. Carnes [*sic*] and his ilk persuading temperance voters to support Mr. Poynter when it is well known that he belongs to a party that makes no pretensions to prohibition . . . Let no man trust it [the League], but let it henceforth be called by its proper cognomen, "Into-Saloon League."⁴⁵

The Nebraska League's first major political battle thus ended in disaster. Not only was Dietrich elected, but the organization's methods became suspect even in the eyes of friends. The "hair pulling" of 1900 was a preview of greater discord that was to plague temperance forces in 1908 and 1910.

The years between 1900 and 1907 brought broader acceptance and increased influence to the League. The animosity of the Prohibition Party gradually cooled into a policy of limited cooperation as some Prohibitionists came to recognize the League as "an advance guard to the Prohibition army."⁴⁶ By 1905 *The Nebraska Beacon*, a temperance weekly supporting the state Prohibition party, listed two League officers as contributing editors.⁴⁷

By 1903 Superintendent Carns could report that the League was organized in about 375 Nebraska towns and that its workers had received assistance from both Protestant and Catholic churches. In the broader picture he observed that a number of newspapers were taking a stronger temperance stand; that the Nebraska Supreme Court was requiring more caution in the granting of liquor licenses; that women and music had been debarred from Omaha saloons, a law that was exacting a frightful toll from their business; and that South Omaha was "our worst city." He praised Anti-Saloon League methods and predicted success as they were consistently applied.⁴⁸

The liquor question lay dormant in Nebraska politics until 1905, when the legislature passed an act providing that in damage cases a saloon could give a surety bond instead of a personal bond. Its effect was to place more saloons under brewery control, centralizing capital interest in saloons. By another 1905 act saloons were forbidden within five miles of a labor camp where twenty-five or more persons were employed.⁴⁹

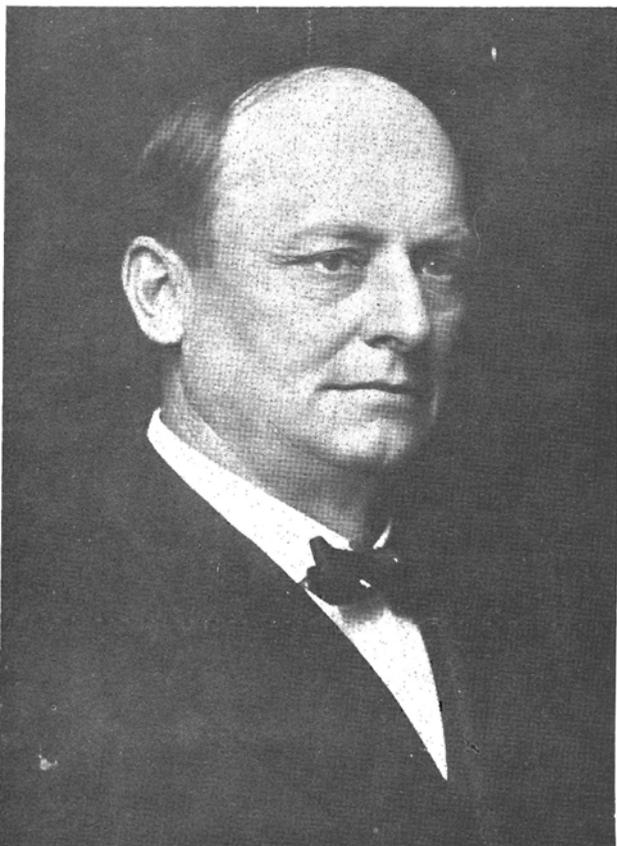
With the election of Republican Governor George L. Sheldon in 1906 the temperance pulse quickened. Building a reputation as a reform politician, Sheldon was a particularly strong temperance advocate and drew high praise from the Anti-Saloon League. The 1907 Legislature also proved favorable to anti-liquor measures, and out of its reform-studded session came several significant acts: the requirement that packages of intoxicants be conspicuously labeled; the prohibition of liquor licenses within two and one-half miles of a military post; and a law forbidding brewers to hold an interest in saloons.⁵⁰

The changed atmosphere was evident not only in the statehouse but in the counsels of temperance supporters everywhere throughout Nebraska. The Nebraska Temperance Union, an alliance of the major temperance bodies, was formed in April, 1907. Citizens of Lincoln organized in November to exterminate the saloon there. The Anti-Saloon League had so many speaking invitations that two full-time men were placed in the field. And the defunct Omaha Anti-Saloon League was revived in December as the Douglas County Anti-Saloon League. Heartened by the new optimism and spirit of cooperation, *The Nebraska Issue* announced that "The temperance victories are so continuous that one cannot keep count of them," and the Board of Trustees met early in 1908 in "the most enthusiastic annual meeting in its entire history" to press the advantage still further.⁵¹

The League's major project in 1908 was the election of legislators favorable to a county option law. Such a law would forbid the granting of saloon licenses in a county unit where a majority of the voters favored prohibition. While statewide prohibition was the ultimate goal, the League argued that to introduce a prohibition amendment at present would be premature, and such a measure would be defeated as in 1890. County option, however, would register temperance opinion as it was formed, would raise fewer problems of law enforcement, and would not introduce statewide prohibition until the people were ready for it.⁵²

But the friends of the saloon had also been aroused. As early as May, 1907 the *Nebraska State Journal* had observed, "Every saloon man and every bartender is a political worker. . . . The saloon political machine is the most formidable obstacle to better government." The Personal Liberty League, which had campaigned against the 1890 amendment, re-entered politics on the side of Democratic gubernatorial candidate Ashton C. Shallenberger, who promised to veto county option if elected. Republican incumbent Sheldon, on the other hand, favored the measure.⁵³

Actually, both parties were split on the issue, with the Republicans leaning somewhat toward county option and the Democrats somewhat against it. In the vote-trading that



*Chester H. Aldrich,
who supported county option,
was elected governor
of Nebraska in 1910.*

resulted the Democrats gained majorities in the Legislature.⁵⁴ Surveying the election results Superintendent Carns remained cautiously hopeful: "We have seventeen of thirty-two in the senate . . . forty-nine of a hundred in the House."

Governor Sheldon, meanwhile, had been defeated, being opposed not only by liquor interests but by temperance men who had become his political enemies. One of these was Elmer E. Thomas, Omaha attorney and president of the Douglas County Anti-Saloon League, who sent out a letter in Anti-Saloon League envelopes claiming that Sheldon had made a deal with the brewers two years before. Carns repudiated the letter and the use of the League's envelopes, but to many this episode must have been reminiscent of 1900.⁵⁶ Thus the League, confident at the beginning of 1908, was forced to a defensive position by the end of the year, cautiously awaiting the legislative results of 1909.

The conflict between "aggressive, earnest, brainy temperance workers" in the legislature and a strong liquor lobby was reflected in the results of the session. On one hand, the county option measure failed to pass, but on the other, "the most notable enactment of the session," which "broke like a thunderbolt upon the saloon interests," was a law requiring saloons to close from 8:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. and all day on election days and Sundays. Other legislation prohibited the sale of liquor to habitual drunkards, dope addicts, insane persons, and Indians, and banned drinking on trains. The League thus did not win all it had fought for, but, as Carns observed, "the liquor men gained nothing." Encouragement came also from the progress of local prohibition, for by April, 1909 twenty-six counties were dry and thirteen had only one saloon left.⁵⁷

Other limited victories occurred later in the year. Among these was the conversion of William Jennings Bryan to the drive for temperance legislation. His position was ambiguous at the outset of 1908, but a year later he asserted that "the corrupt liquor interests must be driven out of the Democratic Party and out of power."⁵⁸ Other partial successes lay in the legal actions taken against establishments and officials in Omaha. Anti-Saloon League lawyers brought charges against several alleged violators of the eight o'clock closing law, and League officials helped to uncover a gambling establishment at the Windsor Hotel. The most widely publicized legal action was the League's request that Governor Shallenberger initiate ouster proceedings against Omaha Mayor James Dahlman, Chief of Police John J. Donahue, and several other officials for failure to enforce the laws. While the governor did not remove them from office, he issued a stern warning to enforce the closing law.⁵⁹

But these qualified successes could not conceal widening rifts within the temperance camp. Strained relations had developed between the League and the Nebraska Temperance Union, probably because each aspired to ultimate state leadership and tried to assimilate the other. The Union charged the League with unsatisfactory results and misuse of funds. Divisions also existed in the League itself. The Douglas County League, dissatisfied with Carns' leadership and with

the state organization in general, had followed an independent course. Disaffection had also permeated the state League to the point where some officers no longer attended their own meetings. Faced with this situation, Carns resigned in July, 1909.⁶⁰

A major reorganization followed which was designed to win the support of the Nebraska Temperance union, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Prohibition Party, and the Douglas County Anti-Saloon League. The new superintendent, Marna S. Poulson of Washington, D. C., arrived in Nebraska in the company of Dr. Purley A. Baker, general superintendent of the national organization. These men met with other state temperance leaders early in August to arrange for united action in the 1910 campaign.⁶¹ Though this conference was reported with guarded optimism, later reports of the various organizations' divergent plans reveal that unanimity was not achieved.⁶²

The League's strategy for unity was to assimilate the various groups by appointing their officers to the headquarters committee and the board of trustees, then converting them to its methods and goals. By the end of October it appeared to have been successful. Even the recalcitrant Douglas County League, impressed by Poulson's performance and a more representative organization, allowed itself to be absorbed into the state League.⁶³ No wonder Poulson could write, "It begins to look as though the millenium /sic/ were coming."⁶⁴

With the arrival of the new superintendent, the preparations for the 1910 elections took a militant turn. He announced that every election district in the state would be organized, that a card indexing system was keeping a record of every potential candidate, that a mailing list was being compiled from church membership lists, and that the *Issue* would be published weekly instead of monthly. By May, 1910, the *World-Herald* grudgingly noted that this plan was in operation, with a mailing list of 80,000 voters and a file on every candidate complete enough to ruin him if he opposed county option.⁶⁵

The planned method of attack was the usual one of gathering and dispensing information about candidates, but

with one important refinement: the candidate was to be questioned about his stand on a *specific* county option bill drawn up by the League. Political parties would not be asked to write county option into their platforms, for the main goal was to garner individual votes for a specific bill.⁶⁶

But in planning this attack Poulson was spawning a revolt within the League itself. When he boasted that the organization's simplicity puzzled its enemies,⁶⁷ he could have added that it also perplexed many of its friends. One writer observed that the only practical part of its plans was to replenish its funds to pay its own salaries. Its appeal to churches seemed to be, "You send us money and we will teach your members the things they already know." There was apparently no local organization and money contributed was not used in the localities from which it came.⁶⁸ Such criticism was echoed many times in the following months and was most virulently expressed by Frank A. Harrison, editor of the *Nebraska State Capital* and secretary of the newly-formed Nebraska County Option League. Labeling Anti-Saloon officials "professional salary-grabbers," he charged that they had left local areas unorganized in order to keep their own jobs, that they could not cooperate even with their headquarters committee, and that even the treasurer did not know how the funds were used.⁶⁹

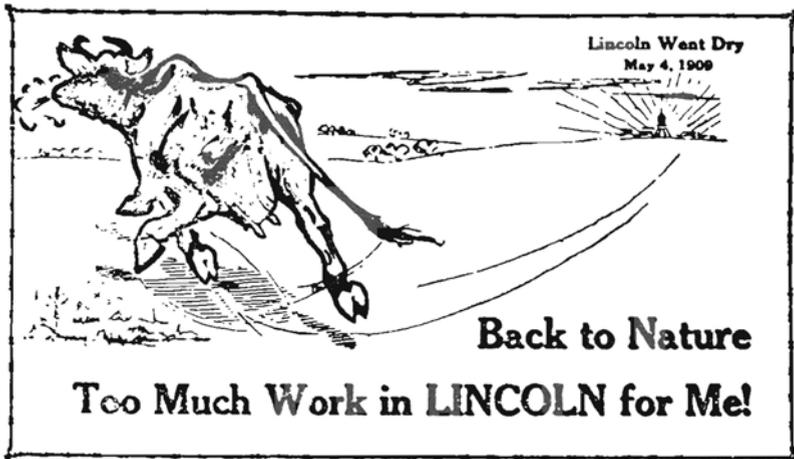
The last two charges had some substance, for the hybrid headquarters committee constantly threatened to split, and one of the major complaints was that only Poulson knew the League's financial status.⁷⁰ But other problems were involved: the desire of some to organize along partisan lines; dislike of Poulson's version of the county option bill; the question of assuming the debts of the Douglas County League; criticism of League Attorney Darnall; and the inability to remove Poulson without the consent of General Superintendent Baker. The Board of Trustees attempted to heal the schism through compromise in March, but disunity continued and climaxed late in June with the resignation of six members of the Headquarters Committee.⁷¹ Thus in a key election campaign the League was again troubled by divisions that were exploited by its enemies and caused suspicions among its friends.⁷²

The League, meanwhile, had not left the main field of battle. When a special legislative session became a possibility, Poulson proposed that county option be considered at that time, threatening to make it a campaign issue if it were not. The session, however, was not convened. Poulson also warned that if neither gubernatorial candidate would declare for county option the temperance people would sponsor an independent candidate who was "one of the strongest men in the state." This may have been an empty threat, however, for it was never mentioned again. Furthermore, the demand that candidates support the "official" county option bill was softened by the provision that the League would be satisfied if the Legislature could produce a better one.⁷³

As in 1908 both parties were divided on county option, but the Republicans eventually adopted a county option plank.⁷⁴ While this development was not surprising, the result of the primary elections in August was, for Governor Shallenberger was narrowly defeated by James C. Dahlman, Omaha's controversial mayor. Shallenberger's defeat was due to (1) the hostility of the liquor interests because he signed the eight o'clock closing law, and (2) the open primary, which allowed thousands of wet Republicans to vote for the Democratic Dahlman.⁷⁵

The Anti-Saloon League now became alarmed. Forgetting his nonpartisan philosophy Poulson lamented, "It is humiliating to confess that there are twenty thousand men who belonged to the party of moral ideals, who loved the saloon more than they loved their party."⁷⁶ He apparently had never realized that voters could be nonpartisan in support of the saloon as well as against it. In any case the issue in the governor's race was now clear, for Chester H. Aldrich, the Republican nominee, fully supported county option while Dahlman frankly opposed it. The League thus launched a two-pronged attack. First, it spared no effort to defeat Dahlman. Every *Nebraska Issue* was filled with denunciations of him. Second, it promoted the election of county option legislators, publishing complete lists of approved candidates.⁷⁷

Aldrich defeated Dahlman in the gubernatorial contest by a wide margin, which would seem to indicate a decisive victory



The Anti-Saloon League issued a variety of postcards, most of them sloganeering and in serious vein, but occasionally they took a humorous tack.

for temperance forces.⁷⁸ Yet this is doubtful, for at least two reasons. First, county option candidates for the legislature did not fare so well. Of ninety-eight representatives elected, only forty-one were on the League's approved list; and of thirty-three senators, only seventeen were League-approved.⁷⁹ Thus county optionists were badly outnumbered in the House and had only a bare majority in the Senate, an indication that temperance forces *lost* influence between 1908 and 1910. It is not surprising that county option failed again in 1911. Second, the fact that Aldrich was not re-elected in 1912 arouses the suspicion that, had Shallenberger been his opponent instead of Dahlman, he might never have been governor at all. Perhaps the most decisive factor in Dahlman's defeat was not the frantic activity of the Anti-Saloon League but Bryan's refusal to support him.⁸⁰

Thus, scanning the League's political activity from 1900 to 1910, one finds a curious blend of success and failure. Though single-minded in purpose and at times brilliant in tactics, it suffered from blunders and dissension at the most crucial times of opportunity. One could easily conclude that, rather than leading the temperance movement, it merely rode

a wave that would have risen just as high without it. Rival organizations consistently refused to submit to its hegemony,⁸¹ and their existence may indicate that temperance sentiment could have found adequate expression without the League.

Yet its recognition by contemporaries as the major anti-liquor force, the attention it commanded from rivals and enemies, and the sheer volume of its work to keep temperance before the public do not permit one to dismiss it lightly. In spite of its weaknesses the Anti-Saloon League probably did more than any other group in Nebraska to translate temperance conviction into political action. The measure of success it enjoyed was due to several factors: (1) the religious convictions generated by evangelical Protestantism; (2) the patriotic impulse of native Americans to rid the nation of unacceptable foreign innovations and to "educate" the foreign-born to a "higher" way of life; (3) the desire of middle-class individuals—both rural and urban⁸²—to purify their communities and restore the value system they cherished; and (4) the League's ability to focus on a single issue and to set realistic political goals.

What Timberlake observes about the national League also applies to the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League, that its success depended "not only on its own wisdom and efforts but also on its good fortune to appear at a time when middle-class Americans were in a reforming mood."⁸³ However a later generation may judge their accomplishments, Nebraska Anti-Saloon Leaguers regarded themselves not as the last defenders of a besieged culture but as the vanguard of progress, leading the way to a more moral, stable, efficient, prosperous, and equitable society.

NOTES

1. Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

2. *Ibid.*, 1-12, 99.

3. *Laws of Nebraska, 1855*, 158-159; *Laws of Nebraska, 1858*, 256-260; *Laws of Nebraska, 1881*, 270-280. The Slocumb law requires a minimum fee of \$500

per saloon in towns of less than 10,000; in larger towns and cities the fee was \$1,000. Temperance reaction to this law is reported by Ernest Hurst Cherrington (ed.), *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem* (6 vols.; Westerville, Ohio: American Issue Publishing Company, 1925), IV, 1870-1871.

4. The vote was 111,728 to 82,292. *Nebraska Blue Book for 1901 and 1902* (Lincoln: State Journal Co., 1901), 299.

5. This conforms to the pattern observed by Richard Hofstadter, who states that, whereas during depressions people vote for what they think their economic interests are, in prosperous times they address themselves to larger moral questions. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 92.

6. See observations on the Prohibition Party's weakness in the *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), October 17, 1904, and November 24, 1909.

7. Cherrington (ed.), *Alcohol Problem*, I, 175-178.

8. Peter H. Odegard, *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 9-10.

9. For more complete details on organization see Odegard, *Pressure Politics*, 8-17.

10. *The Nebraska Issue*, IV (December 3, 1909), 4.

11. *Ibid.*, IV (August, 1909), 4.

12. The time of its founding is uncertain. Addison E. Sheldon's *Nebraska: The Land and the People* (3 vols.; Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), I, 842, places it in April, 1897, as does Cherrington in *The Anti-Saloon League Year Book, 1910* (Westerville, Ohio: American Issue Publishing Company, 1910), 18. But Cherrington contradicts this in *Alcohol Problem*, IV, 1877, when he gives April, 1898, as the founding date. Likewise J. B. Carns in July, 1909, refers to events of the eleven preceding years (*Nebraska State Journal*, July 29, 1909), again placing the beginning in 1898. With no additional evidence available I have chosen to trust Carns' memory.

13. Cherrington (ed.), *Alcohol Problem*, IV, 1877; *Nebraska Issue*, IV (July, 1909), 1; *Nebraska State Journal*, July 29, 1909, 4; *Omaha Issue*, III (October 29, 1909), 3.

14. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*, 100-104.

15. *Nebraska Issue*, V (October 21, 1910), 8. The signers of the statement included 38 pastors from 9 denominations.

16. Cherrington (ed.), *Anti-Saloon League Yearbook, 1910*, 73.

17. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade*, 94-110, *passim*.

18. See, e.g., the report of Lincoln Mayor Don L. Love, *Nebraska Issue*, IV (March 18, 1910), 1-2, as one of many testimonials to improved business conditions.

19. *Omaha Issue*, III (October 22, 1909), 5.

20. Prohibition-Progressive affinities are ably expounded by James H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963). See esp. 2, 29-30.

21. The four were William P. Aylesworth (Cotner University), William J. Davidson (Nebraska Wesleyan University), Daniel W. Hayes (Peru State Teachers College), and George Sutherland (Grand Island College).

22. *Nebraska Issue*, III (December, 1908), 5; IV (March 11, 1910), 1; IV (September, 1909), 2-3.

23. *Ibid.*, II (July, 1910), 2, 4; II (May, 1907), 5-6; III (March, 1909), 2-3; IV (March, 1910), 1-2.

24. Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 6, 115; Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 335.

25. Archbishop John Ireland, St. Paul, Minn., was one of the founders of the Anti-Saloon League of America. Odegard, *Pressure Politics*, 5; Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Experience* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 151-158.

26. See, e.g., quotations from prominent Catholics around the world in *Nebraska Issue*, IV (July, 1909), 2-3.

27. *Ibid.*, III (April, 1909), 8; cf. Odegard, *Pressure Politics*, 18.

28. *Nebraska Issue*, IV (August, 1909), 8.

29. The largest single ethnic group in Nebraska, Germans comprised 20 per cent of the state's population in 1910. Frederick C. Luebke, "The German-American Alliance in Nebraska, 1910-1917," *Nebraska History*, XLIX (Summer, 1968), 165.

30. *Nebraska Issue*, II (October, 1907), 6; *Omaha Issue*, III (September 3, 1909), 2; *Nebraska Issue*, V (November 4, 1910), 3, 5.

31. Gusfield maintains that by this time coercion was viewed as the only solution. *Symbolic Crusade*, 96.

32. Circular letter, Nebraska Anti-Saloon League [n.d.], Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Charles H. Dietrich MSS. The League probably made this admission to emphasize the nonpartisan nature of its opposition to Dietrich, the Republican gubernatorial candidate.

33. *Nebraska Issue*, IV (July, 1909), 1.

34. *Ibid.*, II (March, 1909), 2.

35. *Ibid.*, II (October, 1907), 2, 5; II (November, 1907), 6; *Nebraska State Journal*, October 19, 1907; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 381-382, 826-828; II, 259.

36. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*, 30.

37. *Nebraska Issue*, II (July, 1907), 4-5; IV (November 19, 1909), 1; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 842.

38. This amounted to a local option law, since local authorities controlled the license fee. The election of prohibitionist local officials could result in a local no-license policy. See *The New Republic*, XVII (January 16, 1902), 1.

39. Cherrington (ed.), *Alcohol Problem*, IV, 1874.

40. Personal letters, J. W. Seabrooke to C. H. Dietrich, July 31, 1900, and C. H. Dietrich to J. W. Seabrooke, August 5, 1900. Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Charles H. Dietrich MSS.

41. Circular letters, Nebraska Anti-Saloon League, October 16, 1900, Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Charles H. Dietrich MS.

42. Circular letter, Nebraska Anti-Saloon League [n.d.], Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Charles H. Dietrich MSS. See also an open letter by H. G. Wilkinson, October 29, 1900, in the same collection, and the *Morning World-Herald* (Omaha), October 28, 1900, 1-2.

43. *Nebraska State Journal*, October 31, 1900; November 1, 1900; November 2, 1900; *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 2, 1900; November 3, 1900.

44. *The New Republic*, XVI (November 1, 1900), 1, 4.

45. *Nebraska State Journal*, November 1, 1900.

46. *The New Patriot* (formerly *The New Republic*), XVIII (May 8, 1902), 4; XVIII (May 22, 1902), 4.

47. The two were Samuel Zane Batten and Thomas Darnall. *The Nebraska Beacon*, I (November 1, 1905), 4.
48. Anti-Saloon League of America. *Proceedings of the Eighth National Anti-Saloon Convention* (Harrisburg, Pa.: 1904), 64-66.
49. *Laws of Nebraska, 1905*, 446-468; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 811.
50. *Nebraska Issue*, III (January, 1909), 4; *Laws of Nebraska, 1907*, 297-300; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 824-825. Note the close connection between "progressive" legislation and liquor restriction.
51. *Nebraska Issue*, II (May, 1907), 2, 3; II (November, 1907), 2, 4; *Omaha Issue*, III (October 29, 1909), 3; *Evening World-Herald* (Omaha), December 9, 1907; *Nebraska State Journal*, February 2, 1908.
52. *Nebraska State Journal*, February 2, 1908; *Nebraska Issue*, II (October, 1907).
53. *Nebraska State Journal*, May 12, 1907; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 833.
54. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 833, 844.
55. *Nebraska Issue*, III (December, 1908), 5.
56. *Nebraska State Journal*, November 1, 1908; *Nebraska Issue*, III (December, 1908), 5. For Thomas' connection with the Douglas County League see *Omaha Issue*, III (October 29, 1909), 3.
57. *Nebraska Issue*, III (January, 1909), 4; III (April, 1909), 4; *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, Thirty-first Regular Session, 1909, 358; *Laws of Nebraska, 1909*, 324-325, 345-347. The reaction to the 8:00 closing law is reported by J. Sterling Morton, Albert Watkins, and George L. Miller, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, III (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1913), 279.
58. *Nebraska Issue*, III (January, 1909), 4; IV (January 21, 1910), 3.
59. *Ibid.*, IV (November 19, 1909), 1; *Evening World-Herald*, November 12, 1909; *Nebraska State Journal*, November 13, 1909; December 20, 1909. Whether any of lawsuits resulted in conviction is not known. At least one case was dismissed, according to *The Nebraska State Journal*, November 27, 1909.
60. *Nebraska State Journal*, August 4, 1909; *Omaha Issue*, III (September 10, 1909), 4; III (October 22, 1909), 4.
61. *Nebraska State Journal*, August 4, 1909; *Omaha Issue* (August 13, 1909), 2.
62. *Nebraska State Journal*, August 7, 1909; August 8, 1909; October 19, 1909; October 21, 1909. The N.T.U. apparently differed with the League in *method*, while the W.C.T.U. disagreed in *immediate objective* (i.e., state prohibition vs. county option).
63. *Omaha Issue*, III (October 22, 1909), 2, 4.
64. *Nebraska Issue*, IV (November 5, 1909), 4.
65. *Ibid.*, IV (August, 1909), 2, 5; *Morning World-Herald*, May 2, 1910.
66. *Nebraska State Journal*, January 9, 1910; *Morning World-Herald*, May 2, 1910.
67. *Nebraska Issue*, IV (August, 1909), 4.
68. *Nebraska State Journal*, October 25, 1909.
69. *Evening World-Herald*, June 3, 1910.
70. Treasurer Judson M. Guile admitted this state of affairs. *Nebraska State Journal*, March 9, 1910.
71. *Nebraska Issue*, IV (March 11, 1910), 1; IV (July 1, 1910), 4; *Nebraska State Journal*, March 10, 1910; *Evening World-Herald*, June 27, 1910.

72. See, e.g., *Evening World-Herald*, August 1, 1910; *Nebraska Issue*, IV (January 21, 1910), 3; IV (June 3, 1910), 3.

73. *Morning World-Herald*, May 6, 1910; May 7, 1910; *Evening World-Herald*, June 8, 1910; July 29, 1910.

74. Morton, *et al.*, *Nebraska*, III, 281.

75. *Ibid.*, III, 278-280; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 848. The hastily but efficiently organized German-American Alliance strongly supported Dahlman, and its intensive campaigning may have been decisive in the primary results. Luebke, "The German-American Alliance," 170-172.

76. *Nebraska Issue*, V (September 2, 1910), 4.

77. See, e.g., *Ibid.*, V (September 30, 1910), 7; V (October 21, 1910), 8; V (October 28, 1910), 8.

78. The vote was 123,070 to 107,760. Dahlman carried only 19 counties. One of these was Douglas County, and 13 others had large German populations. *House Journal*, Thirty-second Regular Session, 1911, Abstract of Votes Cast. Cf. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 22.

79. *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, Thirty-second Regular Session, 1911, 4-8

80. See Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 849.

81. The plurality of organizations continued even into the prohibition campaign of 1915-1916. The Nebraska Dry Federation, which successfully conducted that campaign, embraced all temperance organizations. The Anti-Saloon League was in charge of publicity, but did not dictate policy. Nebraska Dry Federation, *Campaign Text Book* (Lincoln, 1916), 2-3 2-3.

82. Only if "rural" and "agrarian" are defined loosely as "traditional" can prohibition be said to have a predominantly rural base. Gusfield, e.g., finds "agrarian morals" in the big city among the sons and daughters of farmers and small-town professionals. *Symbolic Crusade*, 106. But such usage reduces the terms to a mere cultural description and leaves them geographically meaningless.

83. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*, 148.