

**PROGRESSIVISM IN A FRONTIER TOWN:  
BOWMAN, NORTH DAKOTA, 1911-1917**

by  
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In the nation's oscillations over the years between reform and retrenchment, the Progressive Era is one of the renewal periods that has attracted exceptional interest. Lasting from the beginning of the present century until the United States entrance into World War I, the sheer multiplicity of its ingredients has especially intrigued historians. As a result, progressivism has been the subject of an unusually varied series of analyses. The most influential have tended to find in a particular facet the defining characteristic of the movement.<sup>1</sup> In the crowded landscape that so much creative effort has produced, the place in it of the rural village is almost indiscernible. Conversely, in studies that have the small town as the primary focus, progressivism receives relatively little attention.<sup>2</sup>

There are several reasons why this should be so. For one, the village newspaper, often just a weekly, had little space for news other than local social and farming activities. For another, with the passage of the years, the decline of the small town has made its ancient internal history harder to unearth. For a third, the older citizens, with their memories, have passed on, and the time frame within which a cause may have waxed and waned has been lost.

As it happens, the small town of Bowman, North Dakota lends itself to a study of the movement in a village setting because the time frame within which the progressive interlude unfolded has survived. A definitive end-date exists as the result of a speech that happened to be delivered at that site, that attracted national attention, and that had the effect of serving as the *coup de grâce* to the movement there.<sup>3</sup> With this in hand, it is possible to backtrack to its origins, examine its characteristics, and account for its decline. What emerges is a sense of surprise at its appearance in so small a setting, and second, what the reasons for its failure suggest with respect to progressivism more generally.

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Bowman's development was typical of settlements on the northernmost Great Plains in late frontier days. In southwestern North Dakota, the construction of the Milwaukee Road in 1906-07 had a major effect on settlement. Improved transportation and the usual inflated advertisements of the land companies attracted people, largely farmers. Bowman County, which had existed since territorial days, needed a seat, and the eponymous town, with its rail connections became it. To serve Bowman, schools and public offices were built and dirt roads were improved. In just a few years, the town had two banks, two weekly newspapers, a hotel, a number of retail businesses, several churches, a small theater, and a residential district. A decade after incorporation, Bowman had about 800 inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

In the period of Bowman's growth, North Dakota passed through a reform phase comparable to the interlude of progressive reform that took place in many parts of the country. The most spectacular event of the "revolution of 1906" was the overthrow of Alexander McKenzie, long the state's Republican political boss, though never—because he chose to remain behind the scenes—its governor. For a change, the one elected in 1906 proved worthy of his office, unlike his immediate predecessors, who were largely irrelevant. The new official was John Burke, a Democrat, who was widely respected as legislator and judge. So impressed with his leadership was the electorate that he served three terms in the governor's chair. Helped by this executive continuity, the legislature enacted a series of reforms very similar to ones realized in other states. These included the presidential primary, initiative and referendum, curtailment of child labor, and, on the agricultural side, pure seed regulation. However, such reforms, geared primarily toward the urban dimensions of progressivism, were in this very rural state, less relevant to North Dakota's farmers than strict regulation of railroad freight rates and the establishment of a state-operated grain elevator would have been.<sup>5</sup>

During these days, there resided in Bowman the very type of person whose actions ignited progressives' zeal for reform. This was Bowman's richest citizen, James E. Phelan, a banker, land dealer, and grain elevator operator. Phelan epitomized the nineteenth century's self-made man. Born in Michigan in 1857, he moved westward with the railroads. In his early years he worked in the dangerous occupations of fireman and engineer. Later he advanced to division superintendent. Familiar with the open frontier of the then northern Dakota Territory from the 1880s on, Phelan pounced on opportunities *à la* Carnegie, turning them into financial breakthroughs. Aggressive, intelligent,

energetic, Phelan had a tycoon's willingness to use the business-loving law to his advantage, and sufficient good luck to keep risky commitments from ruining him. Doubtless, his becoming one of boss Alexander McKenzie's associates helped clear his pathway to wealth. A lifelong Republican, he served one term on the State Railroad Commission as well as one term in the legislature. From railroading Phelan moved into ranching, land sales, and finally banking, all with uniform success.<sup>6</sup>

Phelan was interested in the development of the southwestern tier. Since he had close ties to the Milwaukee Road, they, together, were instrumental in its settlement. Phelan, more than any other individual, was responsible for Bowman's rise. He provided the funds for the first school house, the first court house, and for the public library building. Phelan headed Bowman's First National Bank. Moreover, he controlled the Western Lumber and Grain Company with its numerous grain elevators, a matter of immediate interest to the county's farmers.<sup>7</sup>

A number of Bowman's businessmen supported Phelan—some because they were dependent on him, others because they too adhered to *laissez faire*. Typical of these people was William B. Workman, in his politics an anti-reformist "Stalwart" or conservative Republican. From 1908 on he edited the *Pioneer*, a paper mostly expressive of the local business interests' point of view. Workman seems to have favored Phelan because he shared the residing potentate's outlook rather than out of obligation to him. Nevertheless, it should be added that Phelan's First National Bank held the mortgage on the paper. According to Phelan, this did not mean that he oversaw the *Pioneer's* policies.<sup>8</sup> Until 1912 the paper dwelt mostly on small-town business and social life as well as county farm news. In that year, the strife between Phelan and the progressives intensified, causing the *Pioneer* to turn into a much more political organ. As such, except for a short-lived flirtation with quondam Dakotan Theodore Roosevelt's unsuccessful 1912 progressive Republican presidential candidacy, the *Pioneer* usually propounded standard "Stalwart" views.<sup>9</sup>

A progressive wavelet, reflective of the state's wave, lapped Bowman in reaction to domination of the town by Phelan and his friends. The driving force behind this effort consisted mainly of the Totten family: Edward P.; his wife, Lillian; his brother, the Rev. George Sr.; the latter's namesake son; and the brothers' maiden sister, Henrietta. The brothers exemplified several of the characteristics often associated with progressive leadership. They were middle class, educated professionals. Edward P. Totten was a lawyer from Fargo,

remarkable as a liberal Democrat in a heavily Republican state and county. Closely associated with John Burke, E.P. Totten had served as State's Attorney, first by the governor's appointment, then by election, and later won a term as County Judge. George, Sr., his close collaborator, pastored Bowman's Congregational Church.<sup>10</sup>

The brothers ardently desired the liberalization of southwestern North Dakota. Unfortunately for them, such progressive strength as there was in the state lay largely in the middle-sized towns of the east.<sup>11</sup> Further, the Tottens' "clean-government" mentality made them less attuned to the mortgage and dependency worries of their rural followers than reformers from a country background might have been. Consequently, their chief supporters, the farmers, tended to be passive in their backing.

To proselytize effectively, the reformers needed a firm base in the county seat. The town's demographics, however, were hardly conducive to the realization of that objective. In addition to Phelan and his associates, the business class comprised largely grain middlemen, dry good operators and druggists, implement dealers, hotel and restaurant keepers, and Milwaukee Road agents.<sup>12</sup> Such people were usually not susceptible to liberal propaganda. What in-town support that the Tottens enjoyed came chiefly from the minority of professionals and small shopkeepers.<sup>13</sup>

Early in 1911 Edward P. Totten acquired the town's second newspaper, the *Bowman County News*. He renamed it the *Citizen* and served as its editor. Thereafter it echoed familiar progressive themes and programs.<sup>14</sup>

The *Citizen* conspicuously reflected the moralism characteristic of progressivism.<sup>15</sup> Christianity's duty was to be a "living religion," while its devotees should practice unostentatious charity. As for the nation, it stood in need of "clean government." The editor believed that, if the major parties were to retain their influence, they would have to adopt progressive principles. The initiative and referendum was much vaunted for ensuring direct democracy. Encomiums were extended to New Jersey's Governor Woodrow Wilson, while even more praise was showered on Wisconsin's Senator Robert M. LaFollette. Also, readers were warned against the "Mania of Militarism."<sup>16</sup>

To highlight the paper's ethical imperative, George B. Totten's sermon was printed every week. No other local cleric's homilies appeared. Totten's sermons exemplified the combination of Biblical criticism, faith in Christian immediacy, and social reform characteristic of many of the moralistic progressives. Hence, the Bible was not "true from cover to cover," but a

"history of the evolution of religion." Back in Jesus' time, the people, "of culture and education" dismissed him as a "dangerous fanatic," but the "poor and illiterate" admired him. Similarly, in the existing era, "the people are poor; the powers are rich." However, "a new day" had lit up the horizon: "...the Sun of Truth, so long obscured by bigotry, ignorance and priestcraft is again bursting forth. Men are refusing to be longer bound by moss-grown outworn creeds."<sup>17</sup>

Under E.P. Totten's leadership three pronounced characteristics distinguished the *Citizen*. First, for an organ with a predominantly rural readership, there was no special stress on the farmers' inequities. Second, the editor chose several times to extol Henry George's single tax ideas, including references to the contemporary experimental colony at Fairhope, Alabama.<sup>18</sup> Third, the editor did not attack Phelan directly in print. However, a discerning reader could easily gather that the Totten brothers' creed and Phelan's were such opposites as to leave hardly enough room for coexistence.

The growing conflict first came to a head publicly on its religious side, when George B. Totten, Sr., after less than two years in his pulpit, began to have trouble with his congregation. As might readily be imagined, his more conservative congregants were anything but pleased to hear their beliefs dismissed as "outworn" and "moss-grown," especially since they paid the minister's salary. Late in 1911 the internal strains brought his ministry to near-collapse. However, a group of forty-two members, including a number of businessmen, intervened on his behalf. Their statement that his loss "would be an irreparable one to the whole community" temporarily saved his position. In February 1912, nevertheless, Totten saw fit to resign. He attributed his downfall to mudslinging. It is probable that his persistent preaching of the Social Gospel had as much or more to do with it.<sup>19</sup>

This setback led to a job switch for the minister. With 1912 an election year, E.P. Totten, while continuing as State's Attorney, resigned as *Citizen* editor in order to run for County Judge. George Totten, Sr. succeeded him as the paper's majordomo. Emulating his brother, the inactive minister also entered the electoral lists, seeking the post of County Treasurer. Both brothers lost.<sup>20</sup> Of greater immediate impact, George Totten, Sr. decided to attack Phelan directly, in the still popular anti-McKenzie vogue, as the local boss, even though such an appellation had a somewhat urban odor. He probably would have done better had he pegged Phelan as the agricultural overlord. In any case, in his effort to topple the Bowman banker, George Totten, Sr. threw

restraint to the winds.

"Phelanism" was Bowman's "curse." The town amounted to nothing more than Phelan's "pocket borough." "Gangster Jim" headed up a "desperate gang" representing the "dregs of McKenzieism." Among other charges, the gang "threatened to put us out of business." In the county, a "crime trust" ran riot. The *Citizen's* rival, the *Pioneer*, served merely as a "mouthpiece of the gang." These and similar accusations were standard fare.<sup>21</sup>

In making so sweeping an indictment, George, Sr. did not view Bowman's circumstances in relation to other localities. Phelan himself did not match the ideal type of the robber baron. Obviously, he exerted too much influence. Still, somehow, Bowman's residents succeeded in maintaining some semblance of autonomy. Though dependent on Phelan's bank and grain elevators, the farmers nevertheless managed to keep up their homesteads.<sup>22</sup> As for the county seat, Bowman had a number of small businesses and did not resemble a company town, such as a Western mining camp or George Pullman's domain for workers south of Chicago. With regard to the realm of politics, no "gang" prevented citizens from voting, stuffed ballot boxes, or resorted to similar forms of chicanery, as was notoriously the case at the time in similar rural Adams County, Ohio.<sup>23</sup> Nor did Bowman resemble an old-time English rotten borough, wherein an absentee landlord determined the ballot of the handful of eligible voters. The major parties regularly presented their candidates in the county. Electors numbered up to five or six hundred, and especially after 1914, a majority of them often voted against the banker's interests.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Phelan was not dishonest by the standards of Big Business, or perhaps his wealth obviated his need for deviousness. At any rate, nothing surfaced then, nor since, indicating that he relied on deception or corruption. On the other hand, on two occasions when local events aroused high feelings, hints of intimidation of unpopular views emanated from his camp.<sup>25</sup>

Editor George Totten's scatter shots invited retaliation. It was swift in coming. By October four suits had been filed, two civil, two for criminal libel. One in the latter category was instigated by the culprit himself, James E. Phelan.<sup>26</sup> It drifted through the courts to eventual dismissal: George Totten's expressions fell within the purview of free speech rather than criminal libel. A further counter-blow, apparently from the enemy camp, hit on election night when some identified, but presumably Phelanite rowdies burned the brothers in effigy on the main street of Bowman.<sup>27</sup> As for the paper itself, loss of advertising briefly brought it close to collapse.<sup>28</sup>

Meantime, the *Citizen's* attacks turned *Pioneer* editor Workman into as severe a critic of the Tottens as his editorial competitor was of Phelan. Workman pointed out that if his paper was mortgaged to Phelan's bank, so too was the Tottens' paper to the State Bank of Bowman, the town's alternative monetary institution.<sup>29</sup> Taking aim at E.P. Totten, he charged him with being a failure as State's Attorney, just as in Workman's opinion, he had been as editor of his "Republican-Democrat-Populist Socialist newspaper."<sup>30</sup> With regard to George Totten, Workman blistered his foe as "Preacher Totten" who published a "weekly libel sheet," authored "double-columned slush," "issued unwarranted attacks on respectable businessmen...and set a new low each week in vituperousness."<sup>31</sup>

Matters drifted along until a year later when George Totten's penchant for overreaching brought about his own downfall. Workman had been appointed Bowman's postmaster. As such, his editorial opposite accused Workman in print of holding up the *Citizen's* issues until after the public had had access to the *Pioneer*.<sup>32</sup> To so specific a charge, Workman responded with the by then familiar criminal libel suit, with a good chance of winning. Rather than defending against the charge or offering a retraction, George Totten fled Bowman for exile in Tennessee.<sup>33</sup> Overconfident, Workman chortled that the "career of the preacher in Bowman seems to be closed."<sup>34</sup>

It took only one year for George Totten to resurface, albeit in a diminished capacity. Upon return to the state he took care at first to settle in Wahpeton, the entire state's length removed from Bowman. Hearing of this, Workman reinstated his libel suit.<sup>35</sup> In view of the seeming solidity of Workman's case, possibly a private out-of-court settlement was arranged. However, publicly at least, the snit came to nought, for by 1916 the ex-editor has reestablished himself in Bowman. Significantly, he did not try to regain his editorship, but was content to serve as advisor to his successor.

The new editor happened to be his son, George Jr. Like his uncle and like Robert M. LaFollette, young Totten had great faith in the voters, referring to them as "that great lumbering giant, ...the people."<sup>36</sup> The son showed some skill in emulating his father's style of hard-hitting journalism, while taking care not to be so reckless in attacking individuals. On the other hand, in his continued emphasis on McKenzie-like "bossism" as the major problem rather than a concentration on the homestead farmers' woes, he constituted no advance over his parent.

There was another issue in Bowman that almost equaled the question of

Phelan's power and integrity as a source of disunity. This was the matter of who properly should serve as postmaster. In small towns, the postal executive occupied an ideal observation and listening post. As a result, the major parties coveted the fourth-class postmasterships. When in 1913 the Wilson administration succeeded the Taft one, the newcomers were expected to broaden the civil service, considering merit as part of their reformist program. Yet, in typical spoils fashion, Postmaster, Editor, and Republican Workman was dismissed. No adequate explanation of his shortcomings ever came forth. The local Stalwarts complained bitterly about this. Responding to charges that had they just come into office, they would have behaved exactly the same way, the local Stalwarts said that they were not hypocrites who promised reform only to deliver standard party favoritism.<sup>37</sup>

The near-boiling point was reached when, in late 1915, Martie Nelson, Workman's immediate Democrat successor, resigned. Considering the number of people in the vicinity from whose ranks the new postmaster or mistress might have been picked, the emergence of Edward P. Totten's wife, Lillian, as the nominee for the post, certainly qualified as a most remarkable coincidence.<sup>38</sup> The appointment confirmed the Phelanite suspicion that progressivism and nepotistic Tottenism were two sides of the same coin. The division among townspeople deepened, and, even more, a fissure formed between village and rural Bowmanites.

Despite distrust, the progressives made occasional electoral imprints. Between 1913 and 1916, various new officials were installed in different town and county posts. While they were not progressives, neither were they any longer Phelanite Republicans. The progressives deserved at least some credit for the loosening of the electorate. More specifically, Theo B. Torkelson, a Totten associate—but at least not a consanguineous Totten—landed the State Attorney's office for the 1913-15 term. Moreover, on his third try, and by a landslide, Edward P. Totten gained the County Judge position in 1916.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, the fall of 1916 witnessed a revolution in North Dakota politics much greater than the one of a decade earlier. This embodied the electoral sweep of the farmers' new-born organization, the famous Nonpartisan League. Though the rurals' rise might have been expected to energize every reformist vehicle in the state, for Bowman's progressives the opposite was true.

In 1917 the *Citizen*, due to a severe loss of advertising, fell into a precipitous decline. In a setting of increasing tensions between Bowman's businessmen and the county's farmers over their contrasting economic visions,

the Nonpartisan League's emergence antagonized the former and galvanized the latter. The League alienated the business leaders through its initial secrecy, its restriction of membership to farmers, and its practice of running candidates as Republicans when for all practical purposes they were third party competitors.<sup>40</sup>

George Totten, Jr.'s response to this touchy situation lay at the root of the paper's downturn. Rather than use the *Citizen's* pages to try to soothe both sides' feelings, he came out foursquare for Nonpartisanism. For only one person, his father, did this lead to a happy outcome. Soon after the election, Governor-elect Lynn Frazier selected him to serve on the soon-to-be-created state Board of Regents.<sup>41</sup> This raises the possibility that George, Jr.'s complete enthralment with Nonpartisanism may have been in part the result of his father's urgings. Otherwise, the *Citizen's* outlook vexed the business people. The paper offered annoying remarks such as "the towns of the state depend on the county districts" and "Bowman businessmen lived off the farmers." Angered, the merchants and lawyers withdrew their advertising.<sup>42</sup>

The progressives' *bête noire*, "Boss" Phelan, seems to have played only a minor role at this stage in the progressives' story. To the Nonpartisan's rise, he responded quite calmly. In July, in a speech acknowledging the importance of the large electoral victory they had won, he even conceded that they deserved a chance to enact their program.<sup>43</sup> For this surprising response, he earned a compliment from the Nonpartisan statewide paper, the *Leader*.<sup>44</sup> All in all, the *Citizen's* downturn seems to have had more to do with the progressives' deterioration than with actions of Phelan. Obviously, he must have viewed the advertising decimation with satisfaction, but not even the Tottens charged that he instigated it.

Too late, George Totten, Jr. appealed to the businessmen "to quit your boycott of the *Citizen* because it supported the farmers program." At the end of April, the paper folded. Recognizing that "we have become cordially hated by some of the merchants and businessmen of Bowman," the Tottens sold the paper and the plant to the *Pioneer's* interests for \$5,000, a forty percent markdown from the estimated value.<sup>45</sup>

At this moment, a far-reaching event, extraneous to Bowman's past concerns, had an immense local impact—the United States' entry into World War I. The declaration of war on top of the Nonpartisan battle greatly increased local tensions. As soon as the United States entered the war, Bowman's businessmen and public officials, by the nature of their circumstances, became strong supporters of President Wilson's Great Cause.<sup>46</sup> This was especially true

of Phelan, the frontiersman. Arch-Republican though he was, in a patriotic address he characterized the President's declaration of war speech as sure to "immortalize Woodrow Wilson in the history of our country."<sup>47</sup>

By contrast, the Tottens, who adhered to the LaFollette mode, and the county's farmers, who were immersed in their own concerns, took a more critical, even unfavorable, view of the war. Almost from its inception, the *Citizen* had warned against the plague of warfare. After the European conflict ignited, George Totten, Jr. repeatedly had decried its ramifications. At all cost, "Militarism" needed to be avoided. "War destroyed freedom." It would be a "calamity" for the United States to participate.<sup>48</sup> In the case of several other expressions, Phelan, if he read them, may easily have interpreted them as veiled swipes at himself. Financiers needed to be conscripted because "men who own the money also control the governments." The public should be on guard against "predatory Patriotism." Likewise, it should be watchful lest the "interests" turn the people into a "wild beast."<sup>49</sup>

As if strains were not already sufficiently great, at this stage the handful of Bowman's Socialists brought in their famed feminist and anti-war activist Kate Richards O'Hare to speak.<sup>50</sup> On the night of July 17, 1917 she delivered a vitriolic anti-war speech at the village theater.<sup>51</sup> Though Phelan was not present, some of his associates were. They recounted to him O'Hare's most incendiary thunderbolts. Enraged, Phelan wrote to his friend Senator Porter McCumber denouncing Kate Richards O'Hare, and Lillian Totten as well. Hints in the letter indicated that unless the anti-war faction curbed its activities, the pro-war activists might revive frontier law. McCumber read Phelan's letter on the Senate floor, thereby elevating O'Hare's lecture into the national realm.<sup>52</sup> In an unwelcome way, little Bowman had achieved a place in the sun.

Phelan followed up his letter by seeking a grand jury indictment of the two women as violators of the then only month-old Espionage Act. That law limited speech excess as inhibitory of recruitment in wartime.<sup>53</sup> In Lillian Totten's case, there were several reasons for Phelan's wrath. No doubt, a private one was his resentment of her position as postmistress. Further, she and her husband had attended O'Hare's speech and afterward had entertained her for tea. Phelan reacted very unfavorably to these seemingly innocuous functions because he felt that the postmistress, as the only important federal official in the vicinity, ought not to have associated so openly with so conspicuous an opponent of the war. He also charged that she had permitted posters advertising O'Hare's speech to hang in the post office. Nothing came

of this charge. Since her actions were simply an expression of her personal preferences, not even the wartime grand jury would indict her.<sup>54</sup> With respect to O'Hare, however, he won out. The grand jury charged her with violation of the Espionage Act.<sup>55</sup>

The trial of Kate Richards O'Hare took place in Bismarck in December. Because leading personalities from opposite sides testified, it had local importance for Bowmanites. Emotions ran so high that the defendant, long accustomed to ill feelings engendered by social and political strife, mentioned that never before had she seen such "bitterness, hatred and venom."<sup>56</sup>

Three Tottens, Lillian, her husband, and George, Sr. testified in the defendant's favor. They did not support her socialism, nor, except by implication did they defend her opposition to the war. They maintained that in her remarks she had not violated free speech or the language of the law. However, the judge's broad interpretation contributed to the elements that caused the jury to find her guilty.<sup>57</sup> This, as well as other events nationwide, intensified the surge toward patriotism and conformity so characteristic of World War I. In Bowman it buried whatever progressivism remained.

How did the principals in the Totten progressives versus Phelan struggle subsequently fare? In 1920 Edward and Lillian Totten migrated to the Fairhope, Alabama Single Tax colony. George Totten, Sr., after strife-ridden service on the State Board of Regents, returned to Bowman and to a second coming as Congregational minister. His son settled in neighboring Hettinger County, where he was elected Treasurer. In Phelan's case, he and his supporters, after their rather unheroic triumph over the progressives, stayed on in Bowman, with the businessman continuing as the town's preeminent figure until his death in 1937. As for Kate Richards O'Hare, on a return visit in 1921 she was enthusiastically received by the rurals. She lived on for many more years, long after the heyday of socialism had passed.<sup>58</sup>

Why is it that in this small community, progressive reformism failed to enjoy a better fate and greater longevity? The obvious answer would be that the war and post-war reaction killed it. However, since Bowman's progressive movement was already in decline, the war actually only hastened the end of a process that was well under way.

One reason for failure was that, despite the best of intentions, the Tottens were ineffective leaders. In a locality so small, the leadership pool necessarily was limited. Too much depended on the luck of who happened to emerge. In this instance, the leaders' abilities were inferior to the cause they espoused.

Most notably in George, Sr., but in variant degrees in all three, the Tottens seemed to illustrate what one scholar has described as a fundamental defect of progressives, i.e., the tendency "to believe that personal regeneration would achieve social regeneration."<sup>59</sup>

Bowman's circumstances as a frontier community represented a second barrier to success. How serious a threat this constituted is hard to assess. Unlike in many mining towns further west, it probably did not represent a major obstacle.<sup>60</sup> Yet at the least, the perturbing atmosphere may have made the reformists' task harder by discouraging potential supporters.

Finally, and most important, it looks as if progressivism in Bowman would have failed even if the leadership had been more skillful and formal law more firmly established. In the state at large, the progressive reforms had not made a deep impression, and Bowman's exposure to them only provided a specific instance of the larger experience.<sup>61</sup> When the Tottens, in Bowman's rural setting, did not succeed in toppling Phelan, their program, with its urban intimation, could not stir the farmers' enthusiasm. Neither did it appeal to a broad spectrum of the business community. On the other hand, had the leaders offered an alternative more expressive of the rural people's sentiments, it would have offended such business support as they had, as was demonstrated by the rise of Nonpartisanism. Perhaps the infrequent frontier town that arose as late as the first decade of the twentieth century harbored an ethos that by its nature resisted the progressive reform spirit.<sup>62</sup>

## NOTES

1. For the changing directions in interpretations of progressivism, see Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement'" *American Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1970): 20-32; William G. Anderson, "Progressivism: An Historiographical Essay," *History Teacher* 6 (May 1973): 427-452; David M. Kennedy, "Overview: The Progressive Movement," *The Historian* 37 (May 1975): 453-468, and John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden, *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1977), *passim*. Historians do not usually capitalize "progressive" and "progressivism" except where they have textbook title-like connotations, so that custom is followed herein.

2. Studies on the small town contain only passing references, if any, to progressivism. Examples include Page Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), and Jean B. Qwandt, *From the Small Town to the Great Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970). For strains between the small town and the surrounding rurality—one of them this study—, see Robert P. Dykstra, "Town-Country Conflict: A Hidden Dimension in American Social History," *Agricultural History* 38 (October 1964): 195-204.

3. *Congressional Record*, 65<sup>th</sup>. Congress, Senate 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sess., 55, pt.5, 5390-5391. (23 July 1917).
4. Robert L. Vexler and William F. Schwindler, eds., *Chronology and Documentary Handbook of the State of North Dakota* (Dobbs Fairy, NY: Occana Publications, 1978), 13-14; Elwyn B. Robinson, *A History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 238; Mary W. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 235-237; *Bowman Pioneer* and *Bowman Citizen*, 1911-1917, passim. "Transcript of Testimony, Charge to the Jury, and Proceedings on the Sentencing of Mrs. Kate Richards O'Hare," Federal Records Center, Kansas City, MO, 3. Hereafter referred to as *Transcript*.
5. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 256-259; Charles N. Glaab, "The Failure of North Dakota Progressivism," *Mid-America* 39 (October 1957): 195-209. For more information on Alexander McKenzie, an elusive figure, consult Charles N. Glaab, "The Revolution of 1906-ND vs. McKenzie," *The North Dakota Quarterly* 24 (Fall 1956): 101-109. For more on John Burke, see "John Burke" in *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1910), XIV, 449.
6. Lewis F. Crawford, *History of North Dakota* (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1931) III, 509-511; *Prairie Tales* (Bowman County, ND: Rural Area Development Committee, 1965), 271-272; obituaries in *Bismarck Tribune*, 10 July 1937 and *Bowman Pioneer*, 15 July 1937. In a speech in June 1916, Phelan expounded his personal success-free enterprise outlook, making favorable references to figures such as Alexander Hamilton and John Fiske. At least superficially his viewpoint resembled his own life story. See *Bowman Pioneer*, 29 June 1916.
7. Hargreaves. *Dry Farming*, 235-237; Enid Berne, ed., "Creating Hettinger County: The William Brown Company Correspondence of 1907," *North Dakota History* 48 (Summer 1981): 5-37, esp. 19, 29; Crawford, *History of North Dakota*, III, 509-510; *Bowman Pioneer*, 19 September 1912; *Bowman Citizen*, 4 April 1912, 30 June 1915.
8. *Bowman Citizen*, 28 March 1912; *Bowman Pioneer*, 4 April, 19 September 1912.
9. *Bowman Pioneer*, 1911-1912 passim.
10. *Prairie Tales*, 276; *Bowman Citizen*, 18 May, 19 December 1912, 18 February 1915, 7 January, 10 March, 22 June 1916. For the viewpoint that progressives were prosperous middle class professional people, see George E. Mowry, "The California Progressive and His Rationale: A Study in Middle Class Politics," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36 (September 1949): 239-250; and Alfred D. Chandler, "The Origins of Progressive Leadership," 1462-1465, in Elting Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), VIII, 1462-1465.
11. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 526; Michael P. Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 116-117.
12. *Bowman Pioneer*, *Bowman Citizen*, 1911-17, passim.
13. Thus, typical of the town progressives were Theo. B. Torkelson, attorney; J.A. Sather, banker, and A.A. Whittemore, doctor. *Bowman Citizen*, 30 November 1911, 18 February, 25 April, and 20 June 1912. The progressives' connections tended to be with the State Bank of Bowman, the town's "liberal" bank, and the Congregational Church.
14. *Bowman Citizen* 3, 10 January, 2 February, 20 July, 23 September 1911.
15. For moralism as perhaps the single all-eneompassing eharacteristie of the reform movements from Populism and before, to World War I, consult Jean B. Quandt, "Religion and Social Thought: The Secularization of Post-Millennialism," *American Quarterly* 25 (October 1973): 390-410; Clyde Griffin, "The Progressive Ethos," in Stanley Coben and Lormen Ramer, eds., *The*

- Development of an American Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 120-149; and Robert M. Crunden. "George D. Herron in the 1890s: A New Frame of Reference for the Study of the Progressive Era," *Annals of Iowa* 42 (Spring 1973), 81-113.
16. *Bowman Citizen* 10, 26 January, 2, 23 March, 8, 29 June, 20 July, 23 September, 19 October, 14 December 1911.
17. *Bowman Citizen* 1, 22 February, 2, 20 March, 29 June, 19 October 1911.
18. *Ibid.*, 7 January, 9 February, 25 May 1911.
19. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1911, 15 February 1912; *Prairie Tales*, 276. In some ways Totten's troubles resembled those of the Rev. George D. Herron in Grinnell, Iowa in the 1890s—the Social Gospel, preached in a heavy voice of righteousness, increasingly exasperated some recipients—see Crunden, "George D. Herron in the 1890s," *Annals of Iowa* 42 (Spring 1973): 91, 93, 97, 102, 106.
20. *Bowman Citizen*, 15 February, 26 September, 7 November 1912; *Bowman Pioneer*, 21 March 1912.
21. *Bowman Citizen*, 28 March, 25 April, 9 May, 12 September, 24 October, 7 November 1912. See also 30 May, 11 July, 19 September 1912. Totten probably overrated the importance of Phelan's connection with McKenzie. Charles N. Glaab, "The Revolution of 1906-ND vs. McKenzie," *The North Dakota Quarterly* 24 (Fall 1956): 101-109 makes no reference to Phelan as an important McKenzie associate.
22. In the 1911-1917 years, neither Bowman paper dwell on farm foreclosures as a major problem. During that decade, agriculture presented a very mixed picture. On the one hand, farms expanded and land values increased. On the other, the percentage of mortgaged properties also increased and farmers borrowed too freely. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 369.
23. Genevieve B. Gist, "Progressive Reform in a Rural Community: The Adams County Fraud Case," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48 (June 1961-62): 60-78.
24. A typical county vote occurred in the spring 1912 primaries. In the Republican vote, LaFollette received 400, Theodore Roosevelt 153, and Taft 5--*Bowman Pioneer*, 21 March 1912. LaFollette was the opposite of what Phelan regarded as a sound Republican.
25. References to these strains are found in notes 27 and 52.
26. *Bowman Pioneer*, 23 May, 19 September 1912; *Bowman Citizen*, 25 April, 30 May, 11 July, 19 September, 24 October 1912.
27. *Bowman Citizen*, 7 November 1912; *Transcript*, 35.
28. *Ibid.*, 25 April, 24 October, 14 November 1912.
29. *Bowman Pioneer*, 4 April, 2, 16 May 1912, 25 December 1913.
30. *Ibid.*, 17 October 1912.
31. *Ibid.*, 21 March, 23 May, 12 September 1912.
32. *Bowman Citizen*, 26 September 1912.
33. *Ibid.*, 18 December 1913, 11 March 1915; *Bowman Pioneer*, 25 December 1913.
34. *Bowman Pioneer*, 8 January 1914.
35. *Bowman Citizen*, 4 February, 11 March 1915.
36. *Ibid.*, 14 September 1916.
37. *Congressional Record*, 64<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Senate Sess., 53 pt. 12, August 10, 1916, 12414-12424, Senate Sess. pt. 13, September 7, 1916, 14049-14051; *Bowman Citizen*, 26 September 1914, *Bowman Pioneer*, 17 December 1914.
38. *Bowman Pioneer*, 13 January 1916; *Bowman Citizen*, 6 January 1916. An earlier indication

of nepotism had appeared in Henrietta Totten's employment in the post office for a time, *Bowman Citizen*, 4 February, 18 March 1915.

39. *Bowman Citizen*, 20 June 1912, 9 November 1916, *Bowman Pioneer*, 25 December 1913, 2 November 1916.

40. *Bowman Pioneer*, 20 April, 11, 25 May 1916; *Bowman Citizen*, 27 January, 13 April, 13 July 1916. In the town itself, support for Nonpartisanism ran so low that in the Republican primary Lynn Frazier, the Nonpartisans' eventually victorious gubernatorial candidate, obtained only twelve votes--*Bowman Citizen*, 16 July 1916. In Robert P. Dykstra's article, "Town-Country Conflict," *Agricultural History* 38 (October 1964): 195, the author notes that, relatively speaking, small town-rural strains constitute a relatively unexplored area. An illustration of such conflict seems to be found in the Bowman town-county situation. As for the history of the Nonpartisan League, consult Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire the Nonpartisan League 1915-1922* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).

41. *Bowman Citizen*, 11 January 1917, *Transcript*, 123.

42. *Bowman Citizen*, 18 May 1916, 15 March 1917. Many other pro-Nonpartisan views were expressed in it during 1916 and early 1917. The first signs of advertising trouble surfaced, *Ibid.*, 24 August 1916. Once George Totten, Jr. tried unsuccessfully to appease the businessmen by conceding that not all who voted against the farmers had bad intentions--*Ibid.*, 13 July 1916. More generally, the differences between the town businessmen and the county farmers seem to exemplify another of Dykstra's contentions--"Town-Country Conflict," *Agricultural History* 38 (October 1964): 204--that in pioneer circumstances different perspectives as between town and countryside made conflict almost inevitable.

43. *Bismarck Tribune*, 27 July 1917.

44. *Nonpartisan Leader* (Cass County, Fargo, ND), 19 July 1917.

45. *Bowman Citizen*, 30 April 1917. In compensation for the *Citizen* expiring, Workman announced in the *Pioneer* that thenceforth the paper would forego political commentary--*Bowman Pioneer*, 10 May 1917. He did not fully live up to his promise in the soon-to-follow O'Hare case, but thenceforth for the most part the *Pioneer* returned to its local non-political coverage.

46. *Bowman Pioneer*, 19 April, 3, 17, 24 May 1917.

47. *Ibid.*, 21 June 1917.

48. *Bowman Citizen*, 30 December 1915, 6, 20 January 1916, 8 February 1917

49. *Ibid.*, 6 March, 26 April 1917. It should be added that, with the *Citizen* teetering on the brink of extinction, Totten mentioned that as long as war had come, it ought to be "prosecuted with vigor." *Ibid.*, 13 April 1917.

50. *Transcript*, 69, 73; *Fargo Forum*, 6 December 1917.

51. Complete speech printed in Philip S. Foner and Sally M. Miller, eds., *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1982), 259-263. For Kate Richards O'Hare's life, consult Sally M. Miller, *From Prairie to Prison: The Life of Social Activist Kate Richards O'Hare* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993), *passim*.

52. *Congressional Record*, 65<sup>th</sup>, Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 55, pt. 5 (23 July 1917), 5390-5291; *Bismarck Tribune*, 24 July 1917. Phelan and McCumber were close enough so that the senator stayed at the tycoon's home when in 1915 he arrived to lay the groundwork for his 1916 election campaign--*Bowman Citizen*, 22 July 1915.

53. *Congressional Record*, 65<sup>th</sup>, Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 55, pt. 4 (7, 12 June 1917), 3307, 3498;

*Bismarck Tribune*, 24-27 July 1917.

54. *Congressional Record*, 65<sup>th</sup>. Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 55, pt. 5 (23 July 1917), 5390-5391; *Bismarck Tribune*, 26, 27, 30 July 1917.

55. *Fargo Forum*, 30, 31 July 1917. In addition to Phelan, four others testified before the grand jury.

56. *Transcript*, 154.

57. *Ibid.*, 65-81, 103-106, 121-123.

58. *Prairie Tales*, 276; Morlan, *Political Fire* 252-253, 286, 318-319, 324; *Bismarck Tribune*, 10 July 1937. Earling N. Sannes, "Queen of the Lecture Platform, Kate Richards O'Hare and North Dakota Politics, 1917-1921," *North Dakota History* 54 (Fall 1991): 2-19.

59. Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982), 51.

60. The *Citizen* referred more often to what the editors were convinced was the corrupting of the county law—25 April, 12 September 1912, 17 February 1916—than to the danger of intimidation.

61. Charles N. Glaab, "The Failure of North Dakota Progressivism," *Mid-America* 39 (October 1957), 196, 200, 205-207.

62. Apparently in neighboring Minnesota, for example, the small towns gave expression to the farmers' attitudes to a much greater degree than in Bowman, but they were also longer established. Carl H. Chrislock, *The Progressive Era in Minnesota, 1899-1918* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1971), 22-23.