



Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame: Louis H. Coleman

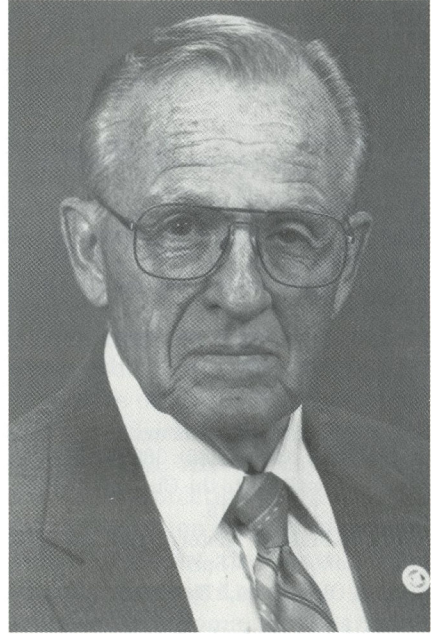
By Connie G. Armstrong

Louis H. Coleman's fascination with and devotion to history began at an early age when two Gray High School teachers introduced him to the subject that would continue to permeate his life, resulting in years of dedicated service at the local and state level.

Following his retirement from an illustrious twenty-seven-year military career, Coleman rejected employment offers outside the state, returned to his roots, and purchased his parents' farm located east of Idabel. Coleman became a charter member of the McCurtain County Historical Society in 1972, serving as president from 1974 to 1981 and again from 1985 to 1989. Through his leadership, several historic properties have achieved National Register status. He has worked tirelessly to promote the preservation of Wheelock Academy, the historic 1842 Presbyterian mission to the Choctaw Nation. He also led the society's efforts in the successful purchase and restoration of Idabel's Barnes-Stevenson House. Moreover, numerous historical markers have been erected at properties and sites to ensure the public would be educated regarding the history of the McCurtain County area.

Coleman served on the Oklahoma Historical Records Advisory Committee from 1980 to 1995, where he worked primarily with local government records programs. He was instrumental in organizing and chairing a governor-sponsored conference to address the problems of local governments in records administration and preservation.

Coleman began his tenure with the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1981, when he was elected to the OHS Board of Directors. Late that same year, he was chosen as the Society's deputy executive director, serving in that capacity from 1982 to 1985. As deputy executive director, Coleman conducted assessments of OHS museums



Louis H. Coleman, inductee to the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame (Courtesy Louis H. Coleman).

and sites, administered the statewide Diamond Jubilee celebrations, assisted in the Oklahoma Folklife Festival held at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C., and developed a policy and procedures manual for the Board of Directors. Moreover, in 1986 Governor George Nigh appointed him to chair the Archives and Records Commission, a statutory body charged with the control of the state records program. He served on the commission for almost ten years, having been reappointed by two consecutive gubernatorial administrations.

Coleman's historical research has resulted in articles published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, more than forty full-length newspaper articles regarding local history, and a series of newspaper columns pertaining to McCurtain County history makers. In addition, he has authored *Cyrus Byington: Missionary and Choctaw Linguist* and two volumes of *McCurtain County: A Pictorial History*.

Coleman's leadership is evidenced through his service to the community, state, and country. His love of history has resulted in the preservation, recording, and writing of both local and state history. For his unflinching dedication to the field of history, the Okla-

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homa Historical Society names Louis H. Coleman to the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame.

The following represents the principal published works of Louis H. Coleman:

Thesis

"Cyrus Byington and the Choctaw Mission," University of Central Oklahoma, 1985.

Books

McCurtain County: A Pictorial History. Vol. 1. Idabel, Oklahoma: Broken Bow News, 1982.

Cyrus Byington: Missionary and Choctaw Linguist. Kearney, Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 1996.

McCurtain County: A Pictorial History. Vol. 2. Fort Worth: Landmark Publishing Company, 1999.

Articles

"Cyrus Byington, Missionary to the Choctaws," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 62 (Winter, 1984–1985): 360–387.

"Twenty-five Days to the Choctaw Nation," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 64 (Winter, 1986–1987): 4–15.

"We Are Making History: The Execution of William Going," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 76 (Spring, 1998): 38–47.

"Joseph Oklahombi," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* (forthcoming).

Other Contributions

McCurtain Daily Gazette

Southeast Times

Twin Territories

“His Most Prized Possession”: The Garrison Quilt in the State Museum of History

By *Jean A. Winchester**

The young Union soldier joined Ohio infantry units during the Civil War, fought and suffered wounds during the Battle of Franklin, and was left for dead on the field. As a captive of Confederate soldiers, he and several other fallen comrades were forcibly marched toward the dreaded Andersonville prison in Georgia. After escaping from his captors, Lewis received shelter and protection from a slave woman, who then accompanied him to the Union line. While recovering from his wounds in Louisville, Kentucky, the brave young man found distraction and occupation by making a quilt.

Stephen A. Lewis eventually settled in Oklahoma, and thanks to a generous donation by his great-grandson—Oklahoma Historical Society Board of Directors member Denzil D. Garrison of Bartlesville, that quilt, and its story, is now a significant part of the State Museum of History’s quilt collection.

Stephen A. Lewis was born on April 5, 1838, at Edinburg, Beaver County, Pennsylvania. During the Civil War he served with two units, Company E of the Nineteenth Ohio Voluntary Infantry and later Company C of the 104th Ohio Voluntary Infantry. He eventually attained the rank of sergeant. Lewis was engaged at the Battle of Franklin in Tennessee on November 30, 1864, during which he suffered a severe mouth wound. A musket ball entered one side of his face and



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passed out through the other cheek, a wound that knocked him unconscious. Thinking him dead, his company left him behind. When Lewis regained consciousness, he saw Confederate soldiers covering the battlefield looking for the wounded. Lewis and the other Union soldiers who fell at the Battle of Franklin began a forced march under guard to Andersonville.

Lewis was determined that he could not and would not go to Andersonville. Along the trail the Union soldiers were forced to walk, Lewis found an old axe handle. He quietly and quickly picked it up and continued on. That night after the guard dozed off, Lewis quietly circled the guard and brought the axe handle down on his head. Lewis then proceeded to run for his life.



As Lewis ran to freedom he could hear the guards and their dogs looking for him. He happened upon a slave woman's cabin. At her door Lewis explained who he was and what was happening, and the stranger welcomed him into her home. She had him lay down on her bed and then covered him with a cornhusk mattress. She then climbed onto the mattress to disguise Lewis's scent with her own. Fortunately the ruse worked; when the Confederate soldiers searched the home they did not discover Lewis. At dawn the woman walked Lewis to the Union line.

After his ordeal, Lewis was taken to the Union army in Louisville, Kentucky. Despite medical attention, his wound did not heal properly and continued to drain throughout his life. From that point on Lewis always sported a beard to help disguise his wound. To occupy his time during convalescence, Lewis made a quilt from old blankets, Confederate uniforms, Union uniforms, and any other scraps of fabric he could find, a quilt that became "his most prized possession."

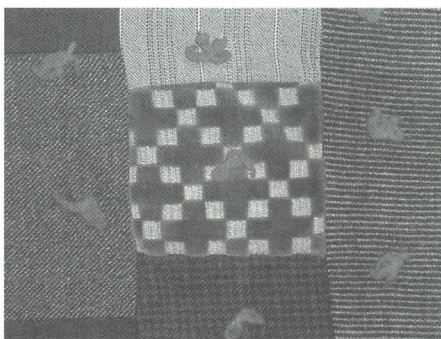
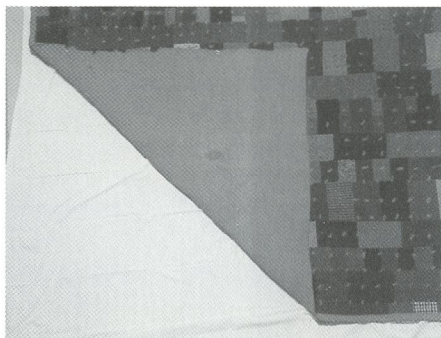
The quilt, which remains in good condition, measures eighty-six-by-eighty-four inches and has a red cotton backing. The batting is cotton. The quilt top is pieced with squares and rectangles of blue,

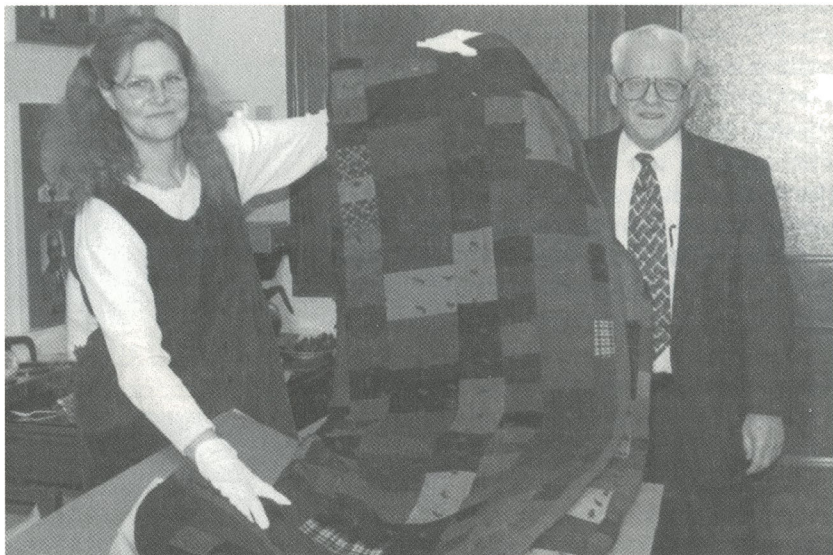
green, black, gray, and tan wool. The majority of the quilt pieces are solid colors. The print pieces are tweeds, checks, stripes, and flocked. The quilt is not quilted in the traditional sense, but tied with red wool yarn. The red backing was overlaid onto the quilt top and a two-inch border was stitched down over the edge. The overall tone or mood of the quilt is somber and dark, yet beautiful. It is a wonderful example of a handmade quilt from the Civil War era and is especially significant because a man made it.

After Lewis's discharge from the army, he returned to Ohio and met for the first time his three-and-one-half-year-old son. The family eventually relocated to Pryor, Oklahoma Territory, where Lewis farmed until his death on February 20, 1923. He was buried in the Municipal Cemetery at Alva, Oklahoma. Due to the gratitude Lewis felt for the slave woman who had saved him from a fate worse than death at Andersonville, he always opened his barn as a haven for any African-American citizen who needed protection during any of the racial situations that occurred in Pryor.

After Lewis lost his first wife, he eventually remarried. His second wife outlived him and passed down the quilt through her family, who carefully preserved it. In 1979 Denzil Garrison contacted the second wife's granddaughter, Gertrude Dunkelburger, who graciously gave the quilt to the direct descendants of the old soldier. Garrison has had possession of the Civil War quilt since then. In donating the quilt to the State Museum of History, Garrison wanted to ensure its continued preservation in a safe, controlled environment.

Denzil D. Garrison was an Oklahoma state senator from 1961 through 1972 and minority leader from 1964 to 1972. He also





Denzil D. Garrison presented his great-grandfather's handmade quilt to State Museum curator Jean Winchester during a meeting of the OHS Board of Directors (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society).

served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1964 and as vice-president of the Oklahoma delegation. He was chief legislative aide to Governor David L. Boren in 1976, 1977, and 1978. Garrison also served as president of the OHS Board of Directors from 1984 through 1987 and currently serves as vice-president.

Along with his great-grandfather's quilt, Garrison provided a photograph of Stephen Lewis in his Union uniform and one taken in 1921, two years before his death. The Garrison quilt will be displayed in the Oklahoma Historical Society's new history center at its opening in 2004. One man's and one family's "most prized possession" is truly a worthy addition to the State Museum of History's already significant quilt collection.

* Jean Winchester is Curator of Textiles in the State Museum of History, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

The Green Corn Rebellion, Oklahoma, August, 1917: A Descriptive Bibliography of Secondary Sources

By Daniel Hanne*

He was full of stories about the Green Corn Rebellion, of which I had never even heard (Kenneth Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel*).¹

... the last armed insurrection against the United States of America by a body of its citizens (Nicholas Von Hoffman, *Make-Believe Presidents*).²

The Green Corn Rebellion was an armed revolt by tenant farmers in Seminole, Pontotoc, and Hughes counties, Oklahoma, against military service for World War I. The precursor to the events of August 2–5, 1917, was the draft act the United States government passed in May of that year. Starting in April organizers for the Working Class Union (WCU) became more active in the eastern counties of Oklahoma. Up to one-third of voters in that region had been supporting the Socialist Party, but impending conscription caused an increasing number to change their support over the summer to the inflammatory and virulently antiwar WCU. The final provocation was the federal and state governments' determination to enforce draft registration that was supposed to have taken place on June 5. On August 2 some 400 tenant farmers, ranging in age from sixteen to sixty-six, with most under age thirty-one, assembled to resist and to march on Washington, D.C. They would take wagonloads of "green corn" to roast and "requisition" the occasional cow to survive the march; they would be a part of the "three armies of Oklahoma," and 3 million other American farmers and workers would join them along the way. When they all reached Washington they would confront "Big Slick," as they called President Woodrow Wilson, and force repeal of the draft law.

The main body of insurrectionists met at Spear's Bluff, also called Roasting Ear Ridge, near the South Canadian River in Seminole County; later a smaller body regrouped at Lone Dove near

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Konawa. The local sheriff and a force of some seventy men moved to challenge the rebels. Had the farmers enjoyed effective military discipline, the Green Corn Rebellion might well be remembered as a sickening blood bath. Faced with a gun battle with the sheriff and their neighbors, not the federal government, the tenant farmers chose to quit their position and disperse over the three counties.³ There were some quick exchanges of gunfire, one small "fire fight," and a total of three deaths. By Monday an increasing number of locals formed into armed posses brought hundreds of increasingly peaceable tenant farmers into custody. The federal government charged 146 of the men and by August 17 the United States commissioner started arraignments and preliminary hearings at the state penitentiary in McAlester. After a series of trials later in 1917 a total of 86 men were sentenced to terms, some in federal and others in state prisons. While a few received sentences of up to ten years in the federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas, most judgments were between ninety days and two years.

This bibliography provides principal secondary writings about the Green Corn Rebellion in one list and a detailed summary of their contents. The bibliographies and notes in each of the works identify primary documents and other secondary sources.⁴ Though some titles are primarily about the economic, political, or social circumstances of that time and place, they contain notable passages or sections about the rebellion. Illustrative words and phrases from the original texts have been placed in quotation marks.

Secondary Source Bibliography

Articles

Meredit, H. L. "Agrarian Socialism and the Negro in Oklahoma, 1900–1918," *Labor History*, 11 (1970): 277–284.

The active, vital Socialist movement in Oklahoma during the first decades of the twentieth century was primarily agrarian, drawing from a constituency that in earlier years had given strong support to the Populist Party and Farmers' Alliance. The black population in Oklahoma before World War I, concentrated in the eastern part of the state, was unique because a large number were free-holding farmers; by treaty former slaves had the same right to Indian Territory land as did Indian tribes. The Socialist Party program advocated that the state produce commodities and supply services at cost. The party also sought state socialism to solve the farmers' problems in credit, marketing, and tenancy. The Socialist Party national leadership had always advocated the vote for blacks and, after the Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory combined to form the state in 1907, state leaders actively recruited blacks to the Socialist Party. Some local urban Socialists, however, resisted full black equality for familiar

reasons; the following passage from the *Industrial Democrat*, a Socialist journal in Oklahoma City, serves to illustrate: "Should the time come when they are brought into full competition with white labor, they would undoubtedly go to the wall and be forced out of all lines of employment." Statewide, numbers of rank and file white Socialists and their local leaders held similar, as well as other, racist and separatist views. Consequently, Socialists could not effectively unite to fight the state's grandfather clause in 1910 that reduced the black vote by two-thirds. After 1910 some disfranchised blacks supported the "radical" Agricultural Workers Organization, a "syndicalist movement sponsored by the International Workers of the World" (IWW). The Socialist Party leadership still sought the remaining black vote and received the state's black leaders' endorsement for the election in 1914 that helped the party elect members to the state legislature for the first time. Socialists increased their portion of the vote again in the election of 1916; however, their popularity was past its height especially because of the party's anti-WWI stance. Though Socialists had no control over the Green Corn Rebellion, in which some blacks participated, one of the effects of the popular reaction to the insurrection was to help destroy the Socialist Party in Oklahoma. It no longer existed after 1918.

Morton, Michael. "No Time to Quibble: The Jones Family Conspiracy Trial of 1917," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 59 (Summer, 1981): 224-236.

The first phrase in the title is from a quote by the dean of the University of Minnesota Law School: "wartime was no time to quibble about constitutional rights." During the several years leading up to April, 1917, the majority of Oklahomans, concurrently with their countrymen, came to support the entry of the United States into the European war. The Oklahoma State Council of Defense, the state branch of the National Council of Defense, formed to promote the war effort. Each county had an executive committee usually including a leading banker, editor, and attorney, and the county agent. The "war effort" in Oklahoma, as it was nationwide, was aided by mob, "vigilante," and thug violence against "slackers," apparent German culture, and antiwar conviction and political organization. Not everyone in Oklahoma, though, including tenant farmers who "lived . . . in ignorance," were "cognizant" of the national war effort. Moreover, "radical agitators had preyed upon the tenant farmers' feelings of economic and political impotence." In late July, 1917, just before the Green Corn Rebellion in August, seven men from Cleveland and Pottawatomie counties, and an eighth who tried to post bail for them, were arrested and charged with "conspiracy to obstruct the draft law and inciting men of draft age to insurrection." The press and prosecutors called the eight men, who were not part of the rebellion, the "Jones Family." The arraignment on August 4 coincided with newspaper reports of a large anti-draft "mob" in Ada (Pontotoc County), and the trial began on September 19 after the Green Corn Rebellion. The United States district attorney threatened also to indict the defendants' attorneys. The government specifically charged a total of eleven defendants with three counts: to "conspire . . . to hinder" the draft act, to "con-

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spire to oppose with force” the draft, and to conspire to “incite an insurrection.” The prosecution fostered an atmosphere of fear and ridicule; one witness cut his own throat (he survived) rather than testify against “friends and neighbors”; another defendant had a breakdown in jail and was declared “insane.” The presiding judge was “particularly sensitive to opposition to the war.” The government used two witnesses who had joined with the defendants just for the purpose of gathering evidence against them. They testified that the Jones Family conspired with the WCU, and that the WCU was started by the IWW. The “family” planned to have young men join the home guard to get the arms provided by the government, then changed plans to have the men drafted so that they would desert with their arms. They would then resist with arms until granted immunity from the draft. The government claimed German agents financed the IWW. The government also said the defendants planned to petition Congress to stop the war. There was testimony that the IWW was intimidating others into joining in antiwar violence. On October 6, eight men were found guilty of the first count; the other two counts were dropped. Three were found not guilty. The eight were sentenced to the federal penitentiary for six years and fined \$100. The evidence against the Jones Family was suspect. The government agents had themselves called the meeting to resist the draft; at the meeting some of the defendants had opposed resistance. The defendants had suspected that spies were in their group and had feared violence from pro-war groups. Therefore, they had armed themselves, but as individuals for self-defense. The prosecution never found that the “family” as a group had acquired arms and explosives. The court allowed government testimony, without support, that the defendants were associated with the rebellion and other violent acts. Some defendants who were convicted had attorneys who were well-known Socialists. Several of the other defendants were successful farmers, one ran a cotton gin for the benefit of farmers, another had been a sheriff in Texas, and one had a son who went to Mexico to avoid the draft. They were among the three who were acquitted. The successful (non-tenant) farmers had been represented by competent attorneys and had influential citizens as witnesses.

Sellers, Nigel Anthony. “With Folded Arms? or With Squirrel Guns?: The IWW and the Green Corn Rebellion,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 77 (Summer, 1999): 150–169.

This article clarifies the connections, or lack of connections, between the Socialists, the IWW, and the WCU. While some writers indicate that the WCU was “affiliated” with the IWW, Sellers’ work shows that the two were not. The IWW saw the tenant farmers as just another form of capitalist, one whose complaint was not against the fundamental class structure but only that they were not getting their fair share. The WCU actually emerged as a result of the IWW’s lack of interest in the problems of the tenant farmers. An early action of the WCU was the destruction of dipping tanks the state established to fight Texas fever, a disease that infected cattle. Small farmers thought the dip was actually killing their cattle and that

the purpose of the whole program was to help the large herd owners. The violent acts of dynamiting the dipping vats and burning the barns of county commissioners led observers to conclude that the IWW was the guiding force, since Wobblies, incorrectly, were thought to use such violence routinely. As the WCU moved more to resisting the war, the press and government officials continued to tie them to the IWW. Government prosecutors also incorrectly affiliated the Universal Union, an antiwar organization even more radical than the WCU, with the IWW. The government, then, could arrest and prosecute anyone who spoke against the war, whether they were IWW, Socialist, or WCU, on the pretext that they were causing violence.

Warrick, Sherry. "Radical Labor in Oklahoma: The Working Class Union," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 52 (Summer, 1974): 180–195.

The Green Corn Rebellion was "instigated by the Working Class Union to avoid compulsory military service and to force the United States to withdraw from World War I." In 1915 L. C. McNabb resigned from office as a county attorney to file usury suits on behalf of the WCU, gaining the "backing" of a banker from Fort Smith, Arkansas, who agreed to charge no more than the legal 10 percent interest. In response, local bankers brought disbarment proceedings against McNabb, causing the WCU, according to some reports, to "threaten trouble." While McNabb successfully fought the proceedings, he lost WCU support because he could not spend as much time fighting usury. The WCU decided to take the more direct, active course set by the IWW. "State organizer" H. H. "Rube" Munson "guided" the WCU to take a "radical turn" starting in early 1916. Munson made speeches in which witnesses reported he said things such as, "[We] had to protect ourselves and our families. . . . [O]ur wives [are] harnessed to cotton sacks, our babies [are] lying on the ground in the shade and their eyes [are] being eaten out by ants. . . . [W]e ought not to stand it any longer. We voted to oppose the draft law and fight, if necessary, to prevent going to Germany." Federal authorities arrested Munson in June, 1917, for "conspiracy." Although he was in jail during the "disturbance," he was still "instrumental in projecting radical ideology" into the WCU. Beginning in 1916 the WCU "instigated a series of night-riding flogging sprees" and "ordered" that tenant farmers work no farm that belonged to a lender charging usurious rates. There was violence and burning. Members of the new Muskogee local posted "Ku Klux Klan" letters to farmers who were not WCU members, telling them "to come in and join . . . in . . . 30 days. If not we got a way to make you join, take warning." Violence continued to spread. Organizers came from other places, particularly Kansas, and continued to "agitate" and form locals, linking the farmers' "woes" with entry into the European war. "Secret" night meetings increased, where at members recited the "creed," which included phrases such as "war [was] brought on by Wall Street, and we poor devils got to fight it. Therefore, . . . organize under . . . WCU," and "War is hell and we are not going to hell." Members believed their numbers were 3 million nationwide. The "agitators" initially planned

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the revolt for July 17, 1917, then later changed it to August 2, with a subsequent march on Washington. When officials arrested the "Jones Family," they learned of some of the plans. On August 2 two lawmen were ambushed and wounded; citizens organized "home guards" to protect lives and property. One band of "radicals" burned a railroad trestle. Some 400 rebels camped on "Roasting Ear Hill" were surrounded by a sheriff's posse of some 1,000 men, including twenty-five National Guardsmen; the rebels disbursed into ineffective small groups and some 100 were captured and jailed. Officials also arrested local "radical" leaders. After a few other incidents the "revolution" was over by August 5, 1917. Jailed resisters faced serious charges and some showed "remorse." Thereafter, "officials realized that the ragged rebels were to be pitied rather than strongly prosecuted. As a result, no radical was given more than a ten-year sentence, with the average . . . sentenced to little, if any time." Afterwards "many" landlords would not rent to the former tenant farmers; some of the landless left for California or Mexico. There were similar incidents of revolt in Texas and Arkansas. The author concludes, "This was armed draft resistance encouraged by ignorance and poverty, and coupled at times with a stubborn pacifist patriotism."

Books

Ameringer, Oscar. *If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1940.

Oscar Ameringer (1870–1943) was a German immigrant to the United States who was, among other things, an effective entrepreneur. He was successful at various times in his life as a music director, artist, life insurance salesman, prolific writer, and editor of labor newspapers. He also was a Socialist who had marked success as an organizer throughout the United States. Ameringer first came to Oklahoma in 1907 and Oklahoma City remained his "home base" thereafter. He established a Socialist newspaper, the *Oklahoma Leader*, and came close to winning the office of mayor on the Socialist ticket in 1914. Ameringer believed that "Mankind seems to march forward only by marching left." His writings reveal magnanimity and a good sense of humor, and good sense. In *If You Don't Weaken* he wrote about the Green Corn Rebellion (p. 347–356) and his narrative shows that he was the model for the organizer Fred Viek in William G. Cunningham's novel *The Green Corn Rebellion* because the cautionary advice is practically word for word. Ameringer noted that the tenant farmers lived in shacks "no European peasant would keep his cows in." He further describes them as "Illiterate, poorly schooled, doped with the mental poison their 'betters' could pour into them, yes; but ignorant, no," adding further that perhaps their illiteracy even protected them from war propaganda. He wondered, "Why should they get excited over . . . Belgian children . . . while their own . . . shivered in the cotton field." Just as the price of cotton "had risen . . . the crowd in Washington demanded that their grown sons be shipped over there." As for the notion that resistance to United States policies was always "foreign," he wrote, "I am dead certain that many of these people's

family names are emblazoned on the regimental lists of George Washington." Ameringer counseled against violent resistance, instead urging the tenant farmers to "work for a speedy peace through . . . legal and constitutional . . . means." His re-creations of the conversations in the meetings give some idea of the assumptions under which the tenant farmers were acting. And he warned the rebels that if they were "only one thousand . . . at least a hundred . . . would be informers." A schoolteacher who invited Ameringer to the three rebel armies' "general staff" meeting turned out to be a government witness in the trials that followed the Green Corn Rebellion. Though the Socialist Party was "yellow" instead of "red" in speaking against armed revolt, a "veritable white terror swept Oklahoma" after the rebellion.

Burbank, Garin. *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976.

The various sorts of thievery and corruption inherent in the land rushes in Oklahoma during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in a concentration of land ownership in the agricultural areas. A large percentage of farmers became tenants or "renters"; landholders and bankers were "farmers who 'farmed the farmers.'" The rural areas were therefore receptive to the Socialist Party programs on land. (Socialist actions in urban areas forced the Democratic Party to work more for labor interests.). The "local Socialists," in spite of admonitions from statewide leaders to avoid religious issues, reconciled their program with the "religiosity" of the traditional southern Protestant Christian population of the rural areas by adopting the common idiom and social attitudes: Socialist means could achieve Christian ends. Socialists campaigned to diversify crops, not just exploit the land for "cash crops," to use new machinery to the benefit of farmers, not replace them, and to give the "producers" control of the land. Socialist leaders nationally, although some thought black Americans were inferior, advocated equal civic and political rights. Oklahomans feared voting rights would invite more blacks from nearby segregated southern states. Though leaders of the Oklahoma Socialist Party wanted to include blacks as equals in the struggle, local Socialists could not or would not resist popular anti-black hostility. They could only overcome the contradiction by hoping that economic justice would end the conditions that caused racial hatred. White southerners who had moved into the state gave the Democratic Party hegemony. The entrepreneurs and landowners in rural area towns were Democrats who were in conflict with national "progressive" reforms and who thought themselves "respectable" in contrast to the "white trash" tenant farmers. Poverty and antiwar sentiment gave the Socialists their highest statewide percentage of the vote in 1914, 21 percent. During the following years there was an increase both in prosperity and support for the war that lowered the Socialist vote to 15 percent in 1916 and, following pro-war repression, to 4 percent by 1918. The Green Corn Rebellion (p. 133-156) was preceded by occasional violent acts in

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previous years against symbols of outside intrusion such as “dipping vats” for disinfecting cattle. After the “war prosperity” declined, a new “farmer-labor” coalition formed in the countryside; the “radical” “white trash” was the focus of the Oklahoma Ku Klux Klan’s “moral crusade.” Most of the remaining tenant farmer population finally, and reluctantly, joined the migration to California.

Cunningham, William G. *The Green Corn Rebellion: A Novel*. New York: The Vanguard Press, 1935.

Cunningham’s *Green Corn Rebellion* would probably, by definition, be a “proletariat” or a “social realism” novel. However, it is plain spoken, telling its story primarily through what the characters say to one another. There are no long passages about economic conditions and class relationships, and there is no “class” rhetoric or jargon except in some dialogue. Most of the characters in the novel are tenant farmers, with several Socialist organizers, and the local sheriff who believes there are two kinds of people, “bad characters and good citizens.” Of the bad, he says, “In the early days it was the horse thieves, the Republicans, and the loose women . . . now it was the bootleggers, the Republicans, and the niggers.” But the worst were the Socialists, mostly renters, because they could pull enough votes from the Democrats to bring the Republicans in the banks to power. The novel tells of the daily lives of the tenant farmers during the summer of 1917. A father tells his daughter that the value of education is that it will make her “parlor broke.” A woman far along in her pregnancy tells her husband that she can not shorten her sixteen-hour work days or they will never “get ahead.” After a birth, an attending woman tells the new mother “if your hemrage [*sic*] ain’t stopping like it ought to we’ll burn chicken feathers under the bed.” An unmarried young pregnant woman commits suicide. One character recalls a brutal lynching done by town “loafers.” A sadistic employer goads a black farm hand facing a winter without money into eating a mouse for a wagonload of wheat, then cheats him out of the wheat. In the meantime, visitors to Oklahoma City see patriotic moving pictures at the vaudeville shows. The novel then moves toward the coming entry into the war. The WCU talks of resistance: “They said they would order ammunition from Montgomery Ward, and the first son-of-a-bitch that tried to make them go to war, well, we might as well have the war right here close to home.” The German-born Socialist organizer Fred Viek reveals himself to be a “yellow” Socialist because he talks against violent resistance to the war and warns of government power and spies. The “red” Socialists and the WCU, though, tell of the coming march on Washington by the “three armies” in Oklahoma: “On a certain day all three armies would meet and would join up with other armies from other states, and the whole crowd would march to Washington. When the American working class heard about what was happening, they would join by the millions, and there would be no stopping them.” At a meeting, a character recalls, “Most of them were the poorest farmers in the neighborhood, tenant farmers who could not borrow money at the bank because they had voted the

Socialist ticket. Some of them were Negroes, and a few were half-breed Indians, half white or freemen." On the way to assemble for the march on August 2 several farmers stop at the Indian camp because some Indians who were farmers were to join them. At the camp the Indians were doing the Green Corn Dance for the coming crop, dancing in eight or ten concentric circles around a forty-foot pole topped with a horse's skull. At the rebel gathering, some were preparing "tomfuller," green corn stripped from the cob and boiled in water. However, no one leads; no other armies appear; some marchers stand guard; some burn a railroad bridge. When the sheriff arrives with a small posse, the farmers leave rather than fire upon them. On the next day there were some 900 armed locals quite available to help arrest the dispersed farmers; no doctor will help an injured rebel. In the end one former rebel joins the United States Army to support his family and on the train going away reads in a discarded newspaper about the "bloody reign in Russia" that is suppressing democracy there.

Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie*. New York: Verso, 1997.

In her autobiography Professor Dunbar-Ortiz includes a discussion of the Green Corn Rebellion because her father told her about it (her grandfather had been a Socialist and a member of the IWW). She also spoke directly to several older people, Muskogee Indians, who remembered the rebellion as young children. They remembered the uprising as being inspired by Indians and the Green Corn Ceremony that occurs in late June or early August when the green corn first appears, a time of new beginnings. The Indians also remembered that blacks were prominent in the rebellion and struck first. The specter of poor white people joining in a common effort with blacks and Indians caused a fierce and long-lasting repression in Oklahoma. Future work on the Green Corn Rebellion will have to investigate more thoroughly the role, perhaps prominent, of blacks and Indians. Dunbar-Ortiz also makes the point that her father thought the rebels were betrayed by the "electric-light city" Socialists, another result of the belief that the rebellion was to be a part of larger events.

Green, James R. *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

For the period covered, the Southwest is Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, where the federal government helped to place a vast, promising frontier of farm and timberlands under the control of land barons, speculators, and the railroads. Landless white Americans, most from the Old South, populated this "New South" region. White families, unlike their black counterparts who were hopelessly trapped as sharecroppers, could hope for, and fight for, a better future no matter how desperate their economic situation. Did the "agricultural ladder" not reward hard work, thrift, and crop diversification? But something was wrong; several things were wrong. Interest rates were high and land values inflated; lenders demanded farmers plant only cotton, not several crops; and there was the

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“crop lien” system. This book is an essential record of the “grassroots socialist” response to these and other obstacles faced by farmers and workers in the Southwest, a movement that worked to include women and blacks. Socialists built upon the earlier work of groups such as the Knights of Labor, the Populist movement, and the Farmers’ Alliance. The movement was an educational force with countless dedicated local organizers. As one leader, Kate Richards O’Hare, remembered, “We took light into dark places; we became the nation’s conscience and prodded lawmakers into tardy action.” Socialists, along with other organizations on the left, struggled against the entire established economic, social, and political structure. Interracial cooperation in unions alone was enough to provoke mob violence. The frustration that resulted from facing overwhelming odds, including economic blacklisting, would cause union members or leftist party members to commit acts of violence. Any provocation by anyone from a group on the left brought the full force of retaliation, including lynching, from local mobs upon all. Most chapters in this book divide the era by periods. Others discuss topics such as women and race and the Socialist organization and press. The Green Corn Rebellion and similar actions are included in chapter 9, “War and Repression” (p. 345–395), which is about the use of patriotism as a pretext to destroy the political left. There is a quote from a Federal Writers’ Project interview with one of the rebels, Walter Strong, that emphasizes the fundamental dilemma of the confrontation at Spears’ Bluff: “The papers said we were cowards, but we weren’t. Some of the men in the posse were neighbors of ours and we couldn’t shoot them down in cold blood. That’s the way we felt ’bout the Germans too. . . . We didn’t have no quarrel with them at all.”

Marcy, Sam. *The Bolsheviks and War: Lessons for Today’s Anti-War Movement*. New York: World View Publishers, 1985.

During the years before WWI the European Socialist parties resolved in various international conventions to oppose working class people of one country participating in a war against their brother workers in another. As the war started, however, Socialist opposition collapsed, leaving Lenin’s Bolsheviks as the primary party on the left still opposed to war. The point of *Bolsheviks and War*, written at the time of the United States military buildup of the early 1980s, is that only an opposition based upon radical working class struggle can stop continuing wars because “liberal” forces (socialists, social democrats, Democrats, etc.) will, in the end, accommodate “imperialism.” Chapter 6 is entitled, “The Green Corn Rebellion and The Struggle for Socialism” (p. 93–119). The author quotes extensively from, and presents criticism about, several of the titles in this bibliography. Marcy is especially critical of Oscar Ameringer, who he associates with the Socialist Party in Oklahoma “dissolving” in the face of the war hysteria. As for Ameringer’s counsel against armed resistance: “Evidently . . . [he] had been sent by the right wing [*sic*] of the party to frighten the organizers.” Socialists abandoned the tenant farmers just as they had the workers in Europe. Only the most radical parties continued to resist war, the Bolsheviks

and the WCU in Oklahoma. Marcy concludes that the Green Corn Rebellion was a “genuine revolutionary coalition of the most downtrodden,” and that “the forces for such a struggle are being generated here [in the United States].”

Sellars, Nigel Anthony. *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905–1930*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

The Industrial Workers of the World, known popularly as “Wobblies,” was a radical, uniquely American, labor organization, not Socialist (or Communist) and not American Federation of Labor (AFL). The “incorporation” process where the United States was moving from an agrarian to an industrial economy needed fewer free-holders and artisans and more migratory and low-skilled workers. The IWW worked to better the wages and working conditions of those people by organizing immediate “job actions” to force wages up, rather than negotiating for long-term contracts. The Wobblies’ chief tactic was sabotage, not violent or destructive, but sabotage in the original meaning of the word, passive resistance and temporary stupidity that would slow down production. When wages went up, Wobblies became much smarter. Oklahoma’s large agricultural and extractive industries required large labor forces. The IWW enjoyed some success in organizing agricultural workers and less success with oil field workers and miners, but nonetheless was a force until the war fever and “Red Scare” and repression of the immediate postwar era destroyed them along with the Socialists. The IWW had a brief success again in the 1920s until increased automation such as harvesting combines, welded oil lines (rather than threaded), and ditch-digging equipment required fewer numbers of laborers. Much of the material in the author’s article “With Folded Arms? or With Squirrel Guns?” is also in chapter 4 of this book.

Thompson, John. *Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma, 1899–1923*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986.

The frontier was different in southern and eastern Oklahoma than it was in the western part of the state, and so was its closing. Some of the differences depended upon whether it was in the northern “Jayhawker country” settled by Midwesterners or in the southern “Little Dixie” where more than 85 percent of settlers were from the Old South. Though there are only a few pages (p. 182–186) directly discussing the Green Corn Rebellion, these are useful for their analysis of other writers. Moreover, the text is essential background for the political culture and society of the time. There are chapters on populism, socialism, prosperity and poverty, and on class conflict. The chapter “Socialism: The Ideology of the Shrinking Frontier” (p. 127–164) is a good first place to look toward an understanding of that ideology in that time and place. There is a large amount of numerical data in the book as well as illustrations and maps. There are also long quotations throughout. These include chilling descriptions of the violent treat-

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ment of the Green Corn Rebellion participants while in prison and after: "They went off laughin' and singin', but they came back old men."

Womack, John. *Oklahoma's Green Corn Rebellion: The Importance of Fools*. Womack, 1961.

The author "self-published" this book, which began as his senior thesis for the History Department of Harvard University.⁵ Womack explains the Green Corn Rebellion through the history of American agriculture, the singular history of the Indian Territory, and the particular Anglo-Saxon immigrants from the hill country of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Alabama who became tenant farmers in Oklahoma. American agriculture from the beginning was a commercial enterprise to the extent that the farm itself was a property investment rather than a place where farmers put down permanent roots. The purpose of farming was to produce cash. The changes in the Indian lands resulted in five out of six farms worked by tenants, who often lived in "remodeled chicken houses." The white immigrant tenants had farmed for quick turnover of crops into cash in their former states. Womack maintains that, while up to one-third of the population in the counties under discussion voted for the Socialist Party, the party never improved their lot. The tenants shifted their allegiance to the agricultural unions (Farmers' Alliance, Farmers' Union, and the like), which he calls "essentially frauds," but those unions did give their adherents enough "will to tide them over." The tenant farmers joined the radical WCU. The text tells of the events in July leading to the rebellion and describes it and the trials afterwards. Womack also discusses the sociology of the tenant farmers, for whom, curiously, clan and locale were of utmost importance, although a particular farm in the area might not be. And he notes that "the historian concerned only with who wins is not a historian but a propagandist." Appended sections give "The Demands of the Oklahoma Renters' Union," "The Demands of the Working Class Union," and a list of "Men Arrested in the Green Corn Rebellion," based upon the list compiled by Charles Bush. Womack also included hand-drawn maps giving locations of events in the rebellion. This source includes a wide-ranging bibliography.

Unpublished Material

Bush, Charles C. "The Green Corn Rebellion." Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1932.

Bush's Master of Arts thesis, both in the narrative and in the notes, offers the most detail of any of these sources on the events that made up the Green Corn Rebellion (a "tragic farce") and especially of the actions between August 2 and the trials. This is the work to examine for names, places, and who did and said what, where. Bush's thesis holds that the hopelessly uneducated tenant farmers were duped, though not so much by Socialists, because, by adhering to pacifist Socialist beliefs, they "fell into the category of resisting obstructionists":

Clever agitators, posing as Socialists—and sometimes believing themselves really to represent the party—began the insid-

ious dissemination of syndicalist theories, and the introduction of lodges, societies, and other associations in furtherance of their plans. These groups ostensibly were formed as farmers' co-operative unions, but membership was supposedly secret and accepted under various dramatic and awe-inspiring oaths (p. 8).

The oath for the WCU involved a "six-shooter and a Bible." Most of the narrative is based entirely on contemporaneous newspaper accounts and the trial transcripts. Perhaps the unique portion of this work is the first chapter, "The People Involved," because the author, who was an officer in a bank in the area for six years, had personal knowledge of the people and the economic and social conditions and financial restraints they faced. Illiteracy was common and a person who could write a little and read the newspaper was "locally considered well educated." Because the tenants were less literate than the urban population, they were less influenced by the "rising tide of war propaganda in the press." Bush also was a sort of amateur sociologist in that he attended the farmers' "Holy Roller" religious camp meetings, which he said some observers found to be "a free circus." At the meetings, "Every human emotion was shown, except possibly sympathy." Bush, however, had sympathy for the rebels, but he believes them to have been "ignorant and misguided," and he had contempt for their leaders. One, he said, was "never burdened with excessive courage." Bush also writes that after the rebellion government officials treated the rebels personally with "kindness and marked consideration." The paper concludes with an appendix listing the names of the rebels.

Pope, Virginia Carrollton. "The Green Corn Rebellion: A Case Study in Newspaper Self-censorship." Master's thesis, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1940.

Pope's Master of Arts thesis presents one of the most thorough critical analyses of any of the work done on an aspect of the Green Corn Rebellion to date. Though this project is about the Oklahoma newspaper coverage of the rebellion, it includes social and economic background. Pope has direct knowledge of the area and notes:

There was a distinct class consciousness here; the persons of the urban districts did not mix socially with the tenant farmer. The Indians and whites were social equals, and the educated Indian . . . was admitted, by the banker and merchant, to the circles which met for parties and to discuss the government. These circles were closed to the farmers (p. 9).

The "best people" in town joined the Ku Klux Klan and an established Protestant church. The farmers had a different, primitive, Christian religion, and illiteracy, defined here as the inability to write, was twice as high in the rural areas. Moreover, the "literacy" of the farmers was of a very low quality. The rural population was isolated and the printed word did not persuade nearly as much as the spoken. This was enough, though, for the farmers to understand their economic condition and they joined together

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over the years to make it better. The economy was the one crop of cotton, and war demand almost doubled its price over the year leading to July, 1917, and then the government asked the cotton farmers to leave for the war. They could quite well understand what WCU spokesmen told them. The newspapers that reported the rebellion did not want government censorship nor did any editor want his paper to appear "disloyal" to the government. They solved the dilemma by censoring themselves through adopting the spirit of the "news" disseminated by the Committee of Public Information (CPI), an agency established by presidential executive order as a "news service" to carry the government's message nationally. Oklahoma newspapers treated the rebellion as "a revolt against the established law and order and against the government which at that moment needed the support of every individual for the preservation of those ideals upon which the nation was founded" (p. 34).

The newspapers wrote of the insurrectionists with contempt and pity and of the townspeople as heroes. Pope supports her thesis with examples from a wide range of local newspapers. This thesis includes an excellent bibliography.

ENDNOTES

*Daniel Hanne is Business/General Reference Librarian with the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. He holds an A.B. in History from the University of California, Los Angeles, an M.S. in Library Science from the University of Southern California, and an M.A. in History from Occidental College. He has published some fifteen articles, most in the field of library science and a few in history. This bibliography is a result of his hearing of the Green Corn Rebellion as a young child, discovering it later by chance in reading, and determining to learn all he could about it. Hanne wishes to thank M. Rita Costello of the Rosenfeld Library, Anderson School, at the University of California, Los Angeles, who employed her skill and success as an editor of professional publications to read and suggest changes to drafts of this article.

¹ Kenneth Rexroth, *An Autobiographical Novel* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), 297.

² Nicholas Von Hoffman, *Make-Believe Presidents: Illusions of Power from McKinley to Carter* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 11.

³ Green, James R. *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 360.

⁴ The United States government archives hold important primary sources:

National Archives-Southwest Region
501 West Felix Street
Building 1, Dock 1
P. O. Box 6216
Fort Worth, TX 76115-0216
(817) 334-5525; (817) 334-5621 Fax
Internet: <http://clio.nara.gov/nara/regional/07nsgil.html>
E-Mail: archives@ftworth.nara.gov
Barbara Rust, Archivist
E-Mail: barbara.rust@ftworth.nara.gov
(817) 334-5525, Ext. 242

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

The National Archives-Southwest Region has an Oklahoma City criminal case 1553, *U.S. v. Isenhour, et. al*, which they identify as the “Green Corn Rebellion” case. (This is likely instead the “Jones Family” trial. Nigel Sellars, in *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies*, identifies the Isenhour brothers, Clure and Obe, as being Jones Family defendants, p. 91.) Criminal case 1553 consists of ten inches of case papers filed in the proceedings. The convictions were appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit, in case 5170. For information about the appeals case, contact:

National Archives-Central Plains Region
2312 East Bannister Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64131
E-Mail: archives@kansascity.nara.gov

John Shirley, also a Jones Family defendant (Sellars, 91), received a presidential pardon in 1936. Pardon case files for the period of 1853–1963 (Record Group 204, Records of the Office of the Pardon Attorney, Department of Justice), which are arranged by case number, are found in:

National Archives (NNR2)
8601 Adelphi Rd.
College Park, MD 20740.

Record Group 204 also contains two other series of records about Socialists who were protesting World War I. Entry 3 of Preliminary 87 identifies four feet of records entitled “Political Prisoners” Case Files, ca. 1919–23, and entry 4 describes two feet of the General Records Relating to Political Prisoners, ca. 1918–33. Barbara Rust, Southwest Region Archivist, investigated both entries and found more interesting materials in entry 4, but entry 3 also will contain information about the defendants in the Green Corn Rebellion. A foot of records is approximately 2,000 pages of materials.

Research can be initiated in person, by telephone, mail, fax, or electronic mail. Individuals who wish to use original records on-site should schedule their visits in advance. A descriptive *Guide to Records in the National Archives-Southwest Region* is available upon request.

⁵ John Womack says in the preface that his book is published. The copy I used is typewritten, corrected in handwritten comments and marked as if it were a draft, and bound like a thesis or a dissertation. However, bibliographies do not cite Womack’s book as an unpublished thesis. The bibliographic record on the electronic database WorldCat, produced by OCLC, Inc., indicates Womack as the publisher and 1961 as the year of publication.