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The Political History of Kalamazoo from 1880 to 1900

by

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But in politics the nation was slow to emerge from the Civil War and reconstruction....Neither party was ready to face up to the new issues; both looked over their shoulders at the past. As a result American political life for a quarter of a century after the war was bleak indeed.

John D. Hicks¹.

Within the decade following the Civil War, politics in America followed a new path. The turbulent issues of war, slavery and reconstruction receded as new political questions became important. During the period of the 1870's, the matter of finances raised new problems of civil administration before the public.

In the era following the war the Republican party maintained a strong hold on the reins of government. Its political domination in Michigan, the state which was host to the first Republican state convention, continued for the two decades before the turn of the century. From 1880 to 1900 the state did not give its electoral vote to a Democrat in a single presidential election. Neither was there a Democrat sent to the United States Senate.²

The panic of 1873 and the hard times which followed brought out new demands for inflationary measures. This new economic issue forced the political parties to choose their position on the money problem. The dissatisfied elements within the major parties united to defend their own position.³

Most of the reform groups developed within the Republican ranks, placing the party in a difficult position. "Minor parties,

1. John D. Hicks, The American Nation, Cambridge, Mass., 1955, p.2.

2. Willis Frederick Dunbar, Michigan Through the Centuries, New York, 1955, Vol. I, p. 332.

3. Henry M. Utley, Byron M. Cutcheon, Clarence M. Burton, Michigan As a Province, Territory and State, (hereafter referred to as Utley), New York, 1906, vol. IV, 149.

splits, and schisms were a greater threat to Republican control during the three quarters of a century after 1854 than was the Democratic party."⁴.

Kalamazoo, as we shall see on the following pages, remained strongly Republican during the period 1880 to 1890. As Dr. Willis Dunbar has said, "In many rural communities in Michigan during the post Civil war days it was almost a social error to be a Democrat."⁵.

4. Dunbar, op.cit., p.334.

5. Ibid.

The elections in the spring of 1880 passed quietly in the village of Kalamazoo, the vote lacking about 500 of being all out.⁶ The leading advocate of the Democratic party in Kalamazoo, the Kalamazoo Gazette, declared that its party was decidedly in the minority in the elections for village offices. The Gazette carried this headline: "The Entire Democratic Ticket Defeated," and said that the Republicans had left no stone unturned to win the elections.⁷ The vote cast for village president gave a small majority of 53 to the Republican candidate, Ranney. The trustees elected were also from the Republican ranks.⁸

However, in the township elections, the Democrats took the top honors. The highest majority received by a Democratic candidate was 183, in the case of the clerk.⁹

As to the rest of the state election results, the village's Republican newspaper, the Kalamazoo Telegraph, proudly announced, "Michigan...is decidedly, emphatically republican. It has never been more so..."¹⁰

In April of that year, the Telegraph predicted that the Michigan delegation to the Republican National Convention would agree to support Senator Blain for president.¹¹

6. Kalamazoo Telegraph, April 7, 1880.

7. Kalamazoo Gazette, April 9, 1880.

8. Ibid., April 16, 1880.

9. Ibid., April 9, 1880.

10. Kalamazoo Telegraph, April 21, 1880.

11. Ibid., April 28, 1880.

Kalamazoo Republicans fondly hoped for Blaine's nomination by the Chicago convention in June, but they were disappointed. The city Democrats just as fondly hoped for the nomination of Grant, feeling that any popular Democratic candidate would be successful against him.^{12.}

The news that a "dark horse" candidate, James A. Garfield of Ohio, had been nominated by the Republicans was announced in a typically partisan fashion by the Democratic Gazette:

The sixth and last day of the convention that was called to nominate the great chief of the whiskey thieves, came to a sudden end without accomplishing its object. Grant was thrown overboard without a tear, except from his three hundred hirelings.^{13.}

The Gazette also called the nomination of Garfield depressing news for the city's Republicans. The paper saw Garfield's record as full of bribery, fraud and corruption.^{14.}

However, no hint of this disappointment was evident in the Telegraph, which praised the party's choice as one who would cement every Republican interest and bring it victory in November.^{15.}

With the nomination of Hancock by the Democratic Convention, also in June, Kalamazoo Democrats seemed satisfied. Throughout the campaign the Gazette carried advertisements for "Hancock and Victory."

12. Gazette, January 11, 1880.

13. Ibid., June 9, 1880.

14. Ibid., June 13, 1880.

15. Telegraph, June 16, 1880.

16. Gazette, June 25, 1880.

The Telegraph, in similarly biting and partisan words, reported that:

The essential work of the national democratic convention will be a bitter disappointment to the best laid schemes inside the convention and hardly less a surprise to the indifferent public which receives the news of the democratic choice....Gen. Hancock is objectionable to the most stable and permanent following of the party traditions and policy.¹⁷

The work of the Greenbackers' convention received far less attention in Kalamazoo. The Gazette carried one small mention of the nomination of James B. Weaver by that party.¹⁸

The final outcome in the November, 1880, elections showed the county Republican. The official canvass of the county for the presidential election was: Garfield, Republican, 1638; Hancock, Democrat, 1193; and Weaver, Greenbacker, 71.¹⁹

In the election for governor, Kalamazoo gave Jerome, Republican, a majority of 294. Here again the Greenback candidate was distinctly a minority choice, receiving only 58 votes in the county.²⁰

17. Telegraph, September 20, 1880.

18. Gazette, June 12, 1880.

19. Ibid., November 5, 1880.

20. Ibid., November 5, 1880.

The spring elections of 1882 saw the Democrats in Kalamazoo making a slight gain over previous years. A gain of the two Democratic supervisors was made over the last election, but the Republicans were successful in electing their candidates for the other township offices.²¹ As had happened two years before, the only Democratic strength lay in the township.

In the gubernatorial election of that year, the Democratic and Greenback elements in the state succeeded in setting up a fusion ticket, with Josiah W. Begole as their candidate. Governor Jerome was nominated by the Republicans for a second term. The results showed that the "Fusionist" party was more than a threat to the Republicans. It succeeded in putting Begole in office, giving the Republican party their first defeat in the state since the party's founding in 1854.

The success of the Fusionists did not extend beyond the election of governor, for the rest of the Republican ticket was elected in Michigan.²²

21. Gazette, April 7, 1882.

22. M.M. Quaife, Sidney Glazer, Michigan From Primitive Wilderness to Industrial Commonwealth, New York, 1948, p.274.

The year 1884 saw Kalamazoo emerge from its standing as the "Biggest Village in the Nation," as it became incorporated as a city.²³ In the spring elections, of the 3,156 voters registered in Kalamazoo, only about 2,700 were actually polled.

For their first mayor, the citizens elected Allen Potter, a Republican, with a total of 1395 votes. The Democratic candidate for mayor, De Yoe, polled 1244 votes and the Prohibitionists' Ramsy received 75 votes. The Democrats elected their candidates for treasurer and recorder. On the board of aldermen there were seven Republicans and three Democrats.²⁴ It is not altogether clear why the Democrats were able to make this gain in the city elections. The Telegraph said that the causes in both cases were incidental, but did not go on to explain why.

On the township level, the Democrats were not so fortunate. Kalamazoo elected the entire Republican slate for the township offices. The Gazette attributed this victory to the better organization of the Republican party, and its greater resources.²⁵ The Gazette's Republican opponents said of the election: "The people of Kalamazoo evidently intend to start right under their new municipal organization."²⁶

23. Ford F. Rowe, Kalamazoo 1823 to 1939, Kalamazoo, 1939, p.122.

24. Gazette, April 11, 1884.

25. Ibid.

26. Telegraph, April 8, 1884.

Early in 1884 there were predictions that the tariff issue would be important in the coming presidential election. Said one local farmer: "there will be some hot talk in Michigan granges before the coming political campaign is over. The work politics means the tariff issue, and in the country you will hear nothing else discussed."²⁷

The local Democratic press took the traditional stand against the protective tariff:

The republican party, it is almost needless to state, cannot forsake the "protection" theory any more than it can purify itself of its other corruptions from within. Monopoly and "protected industries" are the cornerstones on which the vast structure known as the republican party rests.²⁸

Kalamazoo Democrats hoped that the Greenbackers would take a similar stand against the tariff. This, they believed, would solidify opposition to the Republican party.²⁹

In June, Kalamazoo Republicans saw their favorite candidate for the presidency, James G. Blaine, nominated by their party in convention. The Telegraph reported a crowd of 3,000 local residents gathered to celebrate the nomination of Blaine with speeches and songs. Said the paper: "It was the most satisfying and gratifying exhibition

27. Gazette, January 25, 1884.

28. Ibid., January 4, 1884.

29. Ibid., May 9, 1884.

of interest and enthusisam for the Republican ticket." 30.

On the other side of the political fence the Gazette had a diffenert view of the proceedings. It said:

"(Judge) Buck was loaded with and evidently prepared speech, for shutting his eyes to the size of the crowd, he addressed them as "a vast concourse." The most telling point in his speech was when he said the republican party would "carry everything but the gates of hell," when one of the patriots whom a subcommittee of arrangements had filled with beer, and distributed through the crowd to cry out at proper intervals for cheers, shouted "three cheers for hell." He closed his speech with as much applause as any one received..."31.

Of the Democrats' nominee, Grover Cleveland, the Telegraph let it be known that it saw his record as a complete bland. 32.

This campaign of 1884 was a campaign of mud-slinging. Local Republicans formed parades and mæched through the streets shouting "Ma! Ma! 'Where is Pa? He's in the White House. Ha! Ha! Ha! ", in reference to the story being circulated that Cleveland had an illegitimate child. 33.

Not to be outdone, the Democrats answered with, "Blaine. Blaine, James G. Blaine. Continental liar from the state of Maine!" In July the Democrats rented the Academy of Music, and ratified Cleveland's nomination. 34.

30. Telegraph, June 9, 1884.

31. Gazette, June 13, 1884.

32. Telegraph, July 12, 1884.

33. Harold Sharpsteen, The Life of John Henry Burke, Kalamazoo, 1948, p.84.

34. Ibid.

In the November elections, the country put Democrat Grover Cleveland into the White House. But once again, Kalamazoo voted Republican, as did the state. The Republican vote in Michigan had less than a one per-cent majority.^{35.} The official returns from the Kalamazoo county canvas showed Blaine with an electoral ticket of 4515, Cleveland had 3748, and St. John, the Prohibition candidate, had 455.^{36.}

In the gubernatorial contest, the voters gave the Republican, Alger, a plurality of 643.^{37.}

Following the election, anticipating the tariff reform, one local drug firm printed an advertisement in the Telegraph announcing that since Cleveland was president, the tariff would be reduced, drugs' prices would come down, so they urged their customers to take advantage of this.^{38.}

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35. George N. Fuller, ed., Michigan, A Centennial History of the State and Its Peoples, vol. I, Chicago, 1939, p. 395.
36. Telegraph, November 18, 1884.
37. Ibid.
38. Gazette, November 18, 1884

In the spring biennial election of 1886, the Democrats of Kalamazoo again showed the lack of good organization. The Gazette announced the opposition's victory in these words: "A bright Republican sun rose Monday morning and was not obscured by the dull, grey, and seasonably Michigan clouds during the entire day."^{39.}

The totals for the position of Kalamazoo mayor were: Ranney, Republican, 1600; De Visser, Democrat, 1262; Williams, Prohibitionist, 117. The office of city treasurer went to the Republican candidate by a majority of 250 votes.^{40.}

In the rest of the state, the Democrats were much stronger. The Gazette commented: "Fusion was shown to be entirely successful-the most it has ever been. When fusion was refused, the Democracy went in on a straight ticket and gloriously won."^{41.}

39. Gazette, April 9, 1886.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., April 9, 1886.

In April of 1888, the Gazette in an editorial note described the election as one of the most peaceful and orderly ever held in the city. Neither side displayed much political enthusiasm.^{42.}

As usual, the Republicans were throughly organized. This would appear obvious when we review the results, for the party make a clean sweep of the city ticket, with the exception of one Democratic constable. The new mayor, Otto Ihling, received 1,808 votes, as opposed to Democrat Waterbury, 1,389 votes, and the Prohibitionist, Carpenter, with 100.^{43.}

In the presidential election of that year, the harmony of the Republican party again appeared, as its candidate, Harrison, won by a comfortable margin. In Kalamazoo, the county vote gave Harrison 5,397, Cleveland, 3939 and the Prohibitionist, Fiske, had 524. For the gubernatorial race, Luce, the Republican, was favored by a similarly secure lead.^{44.}

42. Gazette, April 6, 1888.

43. Ibid.

44. Telegraph, November 14, 1888.

"In 1890 American politics lost their steady beat, and began to flutter in an effort to maintain equilibrium among strange currents of thought that issued from the caverns of discontent."^{45.}

The Republican party, first organized as a radical party urging reform, was becoming conservative in its politics. This party's control was firmly established, while the Democratic party was considered the opposition party. In both state and local politics, the Democrats were unsuccessful in getting control of the government. Loyalty to the Republican party was, to many, almost synonymous with devotion to the country.

The year 1890 was a year when abnormal conditions prevailed in politics. The various elements of discontent, centered around the farmers and workers, began to demand answers to the economic and social questions. This political upheaval swept through the entire country.

In Michigan, the 1890's marked a period of political uncertainty. For the first time since the Civil War, the rule of the Republicans in the state was challenged. The rise of third parties in politics threatened to make serious inroads on the G.O.P. vote. The Democratic party was not without its problems, as it faced the difficult question of how to hold together the diverse elements which made up the party. For the most part, its strength was in the Conservative parts of the South and in the East. The party found it too dangerous to take up any controversial issues.

45. Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic, N.Y., 1956, Vol.II, p.236.

The minority parties made their appearances in Kalamazoo politics during the 1890's.

One of these minor parties which appeared in Kalamazoo was the Patrons of Industry. The organization was begun in Port Huron in 1887 and made its first appearance in the campaign of 1890.^{46.} The Patrons declared their position as being against trusts and monopolies, in favor of liberal laws about public lands, protection against foreign products and labor, and lastly, in favor of bimetallism.^{47.}

The Patrons of Industry was composed of the old populist and labor agitators, and strengthened by the Farmers' Alliance. The greatest strength of the organization was in the rural districts, where it appealed to the discontented farmers.^{48.} The Patrons refused any sort of affiliation with the other minor parties. The Patrons further refused to enter state politics as a separate party. The party did, however, enter its candidates in county elections, where it had its greatest membership.^{49.}

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46. Quaife, op. cit., p.277.
47. Telegraph, March 5, 1890.
48. Utley, op. cit., p. 180.
49. Quaife, Op. cit., p. 277

In the state election of 1890, the Patrons polled 13,000 votes for Eugene A. Beldon, their candidate for governor. The party was also successful in electing six members to the state House of Representatives and four members to the state Senate. In the latter house, they later voted with the Rep-^{50.}ublicans, taking away control from the Democrats.

In Kalamazoo, the Republicans cried out against the efforts of the Democrats to "make political captial" out of the Patrons of the Industry by mutually denouncing the Republican party. The Telegraph criticized this policy early in 1890, saying:

Democratic demagogues are trying to make political capital out of the Patrons of Industry by crying out that all their enemies are republicans. Now an alliance between the democrats and the P. of I. would undoubtedly be a nice thing for the former... when they had helped the democrats out of a hole they would be called "foolish farmers" and be dropped. 51.

Commenting further on the Patrons' organization, the Telegraph expressed its approval of many of the party's planks, but added: "it is difficult to see how they can accomplish more in these particular directions by forming a separate political organization than by adhering to the republican party."⁵²

In Kalamazoo, the Patrons were not strong enough to affect the election results, as the Republicans, as usual, carried the elections of 1890. By 1892, the Patrons lost their following, and remains of the group transferred their allegiance to the Populist party.^{53.}

50. Utley, op. cit., p. 180

51. Telegraph, February 19, 1890.

52. Ibid., March 5, 1890.

53. Quaife, op. cit., p.278.

In the spring of 1890, the Telegraph announced the birth of another political party, as a meeting of the People's party executive committee was held in the city of St. Louis.^{54.} Formally organized the following year, the People's or Populist party united the elements of the economically underprivileged.

The formation of this party or revolt arose from the discontent of the agrarian element. The farmer's troubles, especially in the West, multiplied as deflation followed the land boom, drought destroyed the crops, and finally, the farmers lost their mortgaged lands. The time was right for the impoverished farmer to voice his discontent politically.

Among other things, the Populist platform included free and unlimited coinage of silver, a graduated income tax, postal savings banks, and government ownership of the railroads.^{55.} Representing the agrarian elements in the country, the party put forth its strongest demands for money inflation ameliorate the position of the farmers.

The People's party received strength from the various farm organizations. In Michigan, the Farmer's Alliance had combined with the Grangers in voting for a farmer's ticket.^{56.} Now they gave their support to the Populist cause. The Industrialist party in the state also decided to support the cause, of Populism. Since by 1892 the Patrons of Industry were

54. Telegraph, March 2, 1890.

55. Ibid.

56. Fuller, op.cit., p. 400.

discredited, its remainder endorsed the new Populist party. 57.

In February of 1892, a permanent organization of the People's party was formed in Kalamazoo. A mass meeting of local farmers met to work out a platform for the spring elections of 1892.^{58.} The state organization of the party decided against any sort of fusion with the Democratic party. Therefore the local Democrats could expect no support from the Populists in overpowering the Republicans. In fact, the Granger element in the local Populist group was still closely affiliated with the Republicans,^{59.} probably so much so that it still voted the Republican ticket.

57. Quaife, op. cit., p.278.
58. Gazette, February 19, 1892.
59. Fuller, op. cit., p.393.

Another third party in the state and in Kalamazoo was that of the Prohibitionists. The party was not a new one, for it had been founded as early as 1869.^{60.} But it was during the 1890's that the prohibition movement made serious inroads on the Republican vote.

The temperance element was formed in the Republican party itself. The Republicans had been unsuccessful in their attempts to win the temperance party's support. While the Prohibitionist's wanted more definite action, all the Republicans could offer them was the passage of the local option law in 1889.^{61.} This allowed a town to decide on the temperance issue itself. The result was that the Prohibitionists selected their own slate of candidates. Among the liberal-agrarian factions, the party had its largest following.

In Kalamazoo, there were many with favorable views toward prohibition. The Gazette printed this rather humorous item about the local abstainers: "Kalamazoo was always a strictly a temperance town. New Years's day several men refused to partake of the strong coffee furnished by the ladies who were receiving calls, and ordered milk instead."^{62.}

Of the new minor parties, the Prohibitionists were least desirous of affiliation with the other parties. They nominated a

60. Hicks, op. cit., p. 118.

61. George N. Fuller, ed., Historic Michigan, vol.II, p.821, (hereafter cited as Historic Michigan.)

62. Gazette, January 3, 1880.

complete slate of candidates in each biennial election of the period before the 1900's.^{63.}

Kalamazoo Prohibitionists entered a full county ticket in 1884. In the presidential election, the county electoral vote for the two majority parties' candidates totaled over 8,000 votes, while the vote for the Prohibitionist was 455.^{64.} Had the latter party combined its strength with the Democrats, the result would have been a narrow majority indeed for the Republicans.

In 1886, the Prohibitionists in Kalamazoo met to choose a city ticket. In the race for the position of mayor, their candidate polled only 117 votes.^{65.}

County delegates were sent to the state Prohibition convention in March of 1890.^{66.} The following fall, about 200 local prohibitionists gathered at the Opera House in a mass meeting for political purposes.^{67.}

Commenting on the results in the state of the 1890 fall election, the Telegraph said: "Our prohibitory party friends, aided by the Patrons of Industry, have succeeded in throwing the state legislature into the hands of the democrats."^{68.} The high point in the party's history was in 1892 when the Prohibitionists received 264,000 votes for their candidate for the presidency.^{69.} After the early 1890's the influence of the Prohibitionists was negligible.^{70.}

63. Fuller, op. cit., p.396.

64. Telegraph, November 14, 1884.

65. Gazette, April 9, 1886.

66. Telegraph, October 29, 1890.

67. Ibid., February 19, 1890.

68. Ibid., November 26, 1890.

69. A.E. Millspaugh, Party Organization and Machinery in Michigan Since 1890., Baltimore, 1917

70. Historic Michigan, p. 820..

Although the minority parties were unable to elect their candidates to local offices, it would appear that they did have an effect on the size of the Republican vote in Kalamazoo. The Telegraph printed this comparison of the size of the Republican pluralities in the city and township vote for the following four election years:^{71.}

1884-	Republican plurality	399
1886-	" "	157
1888-	" "	543
1890-	" "	153

From this comparison, it can be seen that the plurality of the Republicans in 1890 dropped suddenly, probably due to the influence of the minority parties. It can also be seen that there was more of a tendency to favor the Republican candidates in the years of the presidential elections, while the minority parties in Kalamazoo were the strongest in the "off" years. It appears that in national politics the third party votes reverted to the Republican party rather than to the new Populist Party.

In the period of the 1890's the minority party members often gave their support to their new party. But by far the greatest number of the voters stood steadfastly by their old Republican party affiliations regardless of their interest in these new parties.

71. Telegraph, June 1, 1890.

The April, 1890 election in Kalamazoo was, as usual, a Republican victory. But the race was much closer than that of 1888. While Republican candidates were successful in seeking offices, their pluralities were much smaller than was the usual case. In the city, the Republican plurality for mayor was 254. but the plurality for the Republican treasurer was only half that amount.^{72.} A Democratic-Prohibitionist fusion in this race would have defeated the Republican candidate for treasurer.

While the city had remained Republican, the same was not true for the rest of the state. The Democratic candidate for governor, Edwin B. Winans, who had been friendly toward the Patrons of Industry, was elected by a larger margin of 11,520. Defeated was Republican, James Turner, an anti-temperance man.^{73.} With the aid of Patron support, the Democrats held control of the state legislature. In Michigan, it was truly a Democratic triumph, the first time in 40 years.

Hinting at future political developments, the Democrat Gazette reported that the state Grange attributed all of the farmers' ills to the financial management of the county.^{74.}

Kalamazoo Republicans opened their 1892 campaign with an address by William Mc Kinley of Ohio. There was a large audience present to hear the foremost advocate of the protective tariff.^{75.} The voters were apparently favorably impressed. They showed it in November as they again voted Republican.^{76.}

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72. Gazette, April 11, 1890.
73. Quaife, op.cit., p. 278.
74. Gazette, January 3, 1890.
75. Telegraph, October 15, 1890.
76. Ibid., November 19, 1890.

The Gazette, disappointed in the turnout for the city elections of April, 1892, said: "A portion of the voters of this city exercised the right of franchise at the polls... The result was not very flattering to the democracy." ^{77.}

The vote in the city for mayor was: Hill, Republican, 1788; De Yoe, Democrat, 1433; and the Prohibitionist candidate received 193 votes, a high point for that party in the city. ^{78.} Had the Democratic and Prohibitionist votes been combined, the outcome would have been a much narrower victory for Hill. The city Democrats had the satisfaction of electing the city treasurer. ^{79.} In the township, the Democrats made some gains. Of the total 293 votes cast, 113 were marked straight Democratic. ^{80.}

Since 1892 was also a presidential election year, the overall strength of the Republican party was good. But there was a feeling of discontent and dissatisfaction making its appearance. The Telegraph blamed this on methods employed by certain political leaders. The newspaper criticized the police department as being subservient to the mayor and council, ^{81.} and urged better government and law enforcement.

Whether this situation was straightened out, or whether it was not realized by the voters, was not further discussed by the Telegraph. However, the voters did not appear dissatisfied,

77. Gazette, April 8, 1892.

78. Ibid.

79. Telegraph, April 4, 1892.

80. Gazette, April 8, 1892.

81. Telegraph, April 9, 1892.

since the Republicans scored a big victory in November, electing their entire county ticket. The vote cast for the governor was also heavily Republican. These results were: Rich, Republican, 4973; Morse, Democrat, 2088; Russell, Prohibitionist, 442; and the People's Party candidate had 82.
381.

The vote in Kalamazoo did not reflect the sentiment of the nation, since the country elected Grover Cleveland for a second term in the White House.

82. Gazette, November 18, 1892.

In the biennial election of 1894, the Gazette sadly announced, "A Big Vote Polled- And the Republicans Cast Them." 83:
There was a total of 4,000 votes cast in Kalamazoo.

The county Democrats showed losses, as all the Republicans were elected. With the exception of two aldermen and one supervisor, the Republicans took all the other positions by majorities ranging from 347 to 603. In the city elections, Osborn, Republican, was elected mayor with a total of 2,085 votes. His opponents, the Democratic and Prohibition candidates, 84:
received 1,652 and 192 votes respectively.

Other Michigan cities duplicated the landslide victory for the G.O.P., as the Democrats were turned down.

83. Gazette, April 3, 1894.

84. Ibid.

"Quiet As Usual- No great interest taken in the municipal election," reported the Gazette after the 1896 April elections. The newspaper was especially concerned over the poor showing of the area Democrats in this election. It urged more thorough organization of the party for the coming presidential election. The Republicans carried every office but alderman and one supervisor. The Republican pluralities for mayor and treasurer were 566 and 728.⁸⁵ By this time the third-parties had lost their influence.

In this year of 1896, the free silver campaign created a furor throughout the nation. Those who favored silver insisted that it would bring a rise in prices and combat the effects of the depression which had occurred in 1893. Bimetallism had a large following among the Democrats. However, Cleveland and his group favored the gold standard. The issue cut right across party lines. This party strife was seen in the state as Michigan sent two sets of delegates to the National Democratic Convention, the one pledged to silver and the other to gold. The silverites in the state were supported by the People's Party. With these, the so-called Silver Republicans joined, the resulting union being called the Democratic-People's Union Silver Party. The Populist or People's Party never retained its separate identity after its fusion with

85. Gazette, April 10, 1896.

the Democrats in this campaign. The Democratic convention nominated William Jennings Bryan on a free silver platform. 86.

The Telegraph took its position against the silver basis and called the cheap money a delusion full of dangerous consequences. 87. The Democratic Gazette stood firmly for free silver. The county Democratic convention endorsed free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the ratio of 16:1. 88.

The Republican party and their candidate William Mc Kinley were committed to the gold standard. In Michigan the fear that the silver movement might be dangerous to the party led the Republicans to nominate a liberal, Hazen S. Pingree, for governor.

In November the Republicans won an overwhelming victory as they elected Mc Kinley to the presidency and Pingree to the governor's office. The pluralities in Kalamazoo county were 429 for Mc Kinley and 359 for Pingree. 89. The doctrine of free silver was accordingly defeated.

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86. Quaipe, op. cit., 280.
87. Telegraph, February 19, 1890.
88. Gazette, April 17, 1886.
89. Ibid., November 18, 1896.

The political history of Kalamazoo for the period of the 1880's and 1890's might rather be called the "Republican" history of Kalamazoo. For throughout this period, the Republicans were easily the dominant party. In election after election, that party continued to return Republicans to local, state, and National offices.

While elsewhere in the country, the Republicans began to feel some opposition after 1880, in Kalamazoo this was not seen until 1890. In the '90's the rise of the third parties was not strong enough to topple the Republican powers. By the mid 1890's the minority party votes were returned to the G.O.P., i.e., Republican fold. The ties to the old party affiliations proved too strong to break.

Probably one of the most important factors in this story of party strength of the Republicans is that of tradition. Kalamazoo had voted Republican ever since the formation of that party. The town had been staunch defenders of the Union, and very probably, it still held some bitterness toward the "traitorous" Democrats from the war days.

Composed of New England stock, the Kalamazoo area had a strong tradition in voting Republican, even as did New England herself. This New England stock, wherever it was distributed, represented the strongest pro-North element. It was never patient towards the South or policies which the South favored. This Northern element was usually affiliated with the dominant financial and industrial groups, therefore the Republican party.

As in other rural areas in Michigan, Kalamazoo farmers were strongly Republican. These traditions they cherished dearly.

This background of political tradition in Kalamazoo hurt the non-Republican groups. They did not have enough in common to bring them together, and so they had to work separately. They never had the thorough organization of the Republican group. The Democrats also claimed that neither did they have that G.O.P. party's greater financial resources.

All these factors helped support the Republican party in Kalamazoo. As I have previously mentioned, Dr. Willis Dunbar called it almost a social error to be a Democrat. Let us go one step farther and say it was a mistake not to be a Republican in Kalamazoo from 1880 to 1900.

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