



## HENRY VINCENT: KANSAS POPULIST AND RADICAL-REFORM JOURNALIST

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MUCH HAS already been written about the Populist movement of the 1890's, one of the briefest but most turbulent political upheavals in Kansas history. Its development, its causes and effects have been studied and analyzed extensively. Yet there is one leading proponent of the People's party whose biography has never been written nor his role fully assessed: Henry Vincent, the controversial reform editor of *The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator* of Winfield, from 1886 to 1891.<sup>1</sup>

Title-page photo: Henry Vincent came from an ardent Abolitionist family background. His father, James Vincent, Sr., had been a Congregational minister who risked his life to free slaves before the Civil War. In this family portrait, Henry is in the top row at left, with his brothers, Leopold, Maurice, and Cuthbert. A fourth brother, James, Jr., is at right in the bottom row. James Vincent, Sr., and his wife, Mary Sheldon, hold Frank, the son of James, Jr., and his wife, Sadie, at left. Leopold and Cuthbert were associated with Henry in the publication of *The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator* at Winfield, which in 1891 claimed to have nearly 20,000 subscribers, "the largest circulation of any political paper in Kansas." Photograph courtesy Merrily Cummings Ford, Glendora, Cal.

1. Brief mention is made of the Vincents by such well-known authors as John D. Hicks and Walter T. K. Nugent. The most thorough studies of Vincent and the *Nonconformist* are Seymour Lutzky, "The Reform Editors and Their Press" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1951); Charles Richard Denton, "The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial

There are several reasons why the full story of Vincent and the *Nonconformist* has never been told. Chief among these is the fact that Vincent came to Kansas in 1886 and remained scarcely five years before leaving for Indiana, taking his newspaper with him. Second, Vincent never ran for public office during this time nor would he accept any appointment when the Populists were briefly in power in the state. Thus he left a less permanent record and less lasting impression than Peffer, Simpson, Lewelling, Doster, and other Populists who remained in Kansas. Third, until recently Vincent's personal documents, letters, and memoirs had been lost or forgotten.<sup>2</sup>

*Liberator*: A Kansas Union-Labor-Populist Newspaper, 1886-1891" (unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State College of Pittsburg, 1961), and Harold Richard Piehler, "Henry Vincent: A Case Study in Political Deviancy" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1975).

2. Mrs. Mary Vincent Cummings (daughter of Henry Vincent) and Mrs. A. P. Ford (granddaughter of Henry Vincent), Glendora, Cal., graciously made their ancestor's memoirs, correspondence, and notes available for my use in preparing my doctoral dissertation. Many of Vincent's letters, which had been donated to the Labadie Collection of the University of Michigan library, Ann Arbor, have unfortunately been lost, apparently discarded by someone who thought they were not important. In 1978 Mrs. A. P. Ford privately published some of the family history in "The Invincible Vincents, Part I."

Yet of all the colorful Populist leaders, no man was more active, more controversial, or more influential in organizing and promoting Populism and the People's party in Kansas than Henry Vincent. Nor was any man more quickly labeled and abused as a "crank," an "anarchist," and a dangerous "agitator" by the Republican opposition. From where did this radical-reform editor come, and what did he do to deserve such obloquy and opposition, only now to be almost forgotten?

**H**ENRY VINCENT, who was born January 1, 1862, at Tabor, Iowa, came from an ardent Abolitionist family background. His mother was a graduate of Oberlin College, and his father had been a Congregational minister who had risked his life to free slaves before the Civil War. In 1879 the elder Vincent, with the help of two of his sons, Henry and Leopold, had established *The Nonconformist*, a weekly newspaper dedicated to "Emancipation from Slavery to Bond-holders and Railroad Corporations."<sup>3</sup> The small liberal paper was considered an advocate of Greenback party principles.

Henry Vincent's editorial career began when his father retired and he and his brother Leopold moved to Winfield, late in 1886, renaming the newspaper, *The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator* (*Nonconformist*, for short). A third brother, Cuthbert, joined them about a year later. Henry directed and conducted the editorial policy, Leopold was business manager, and Cuthbert was a public speaker and field representative. In 1891 the paper claimed to have nearly 20,000 subscribers, "the largest circulation of any political paper in Kansas."<sup>4</sup> Strictly political, the *Nonconformist* often ignored local events, aiming at a national audience, many of whom remained loyal supporters when Vincent later moved to other parts of the United States.

When the Vincent brothers first moved to Winfield, they were generally welcomed by the citizens and their leaders. Editorially, Vincent announced that the guiding political principles of the paper were "the most ultra reform, the Greenback some would call them, but we do

not want to stop with them. The air," he declared, "is fairly magnetic with reform."<sup>5</sup>

Vincent also spoke enthusiastically about "the revolution which is going on, . . . destined to overthrow despotism the world over."<sup>6</sup> Organized labor, he claimed, would be the means by which this revolution should occur. By June 2, 1887, Vincent was already referring to the *Nonconformist* as a "people's paper," and neither Republican nor Democratic. No hope was to be had from either of the two major parties, whose leaders, Vincent declared, "arn't [sic] worth drowning."<sup>7</sup>

The *Nonconformist's* defense of seven men condemned to die for their part in the Haymarket riot in Chicago was the first major issue which caused the Vincents to be regarded as dangerously radical. The attack was led by Edwin P. Greer, owner and publisher of the *Winfield Courier* (daily and weekly) and a former state legislator, who was now one of the most influential Republican leaders in Winfield and Cowley county. At first Greer was content to dismiss the Vincent brothers as "professional agitators," but as the *Nonconformist* continued its defense of the men arrested in the Haymarket riot, he became convinced that "infamous doctrine" and theories "smacking of anarchism" were dangerous to a decent, law-abiding community such as Winfield. "It is the duty of every citizen," Greer stated, "to at once and emphatically stamp out this treason in our midst."<sup>8</sup>

Undaunted, Vincent declared that if the people really wanted to vote against anarchy, they would do it by striking at the very roots of anarchism: "corporate greed, that breeds anarchism and everything else that is hideous, in the proportion that it deepens its grip upon the industrial masses."<sup>9</sup> When four of the condemned men were actually hanged, Vincent charged that they "were choked to death with all the coolness of a packing house sticker." "The monopolists," he said, "mean to hush every breath that speaks out for effectual reform. A demand was made for blood, and like the savage Apache, the courts connive to hang

5. *Ibid.*, October 7, 1886.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, June 2, 1887.

3. *The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator*, Winfield, July 25, 1889. A facsimile of the original was reprinted in this issue. All other copies prior to 1886 are lost.

4. *Ibid.*, January 1, 1891.

8. *The Courier* (weekly), Winfield, November 17, 1887. The weekly *Courier*, was founded in 1871 by R. S. Waddell & Co., and discontinued in 1891. *The Daily Courier* was founded in 1884 and has continued to the present.

9. *Nonconformist*, October 27, 1887.

the first persons they could lay their hands upon."<sup>10</sup>

Vincent's *Nonconformist* continued to crusade against monopolies "who rule this most corrupt government with a rod of iron."<sup>11</sup> The paper also opposed Chinese immigration, championed the rights of the colored man, and condemned British trade policies as murderous and confiscatory.<sup>12</sup> Closer to home, the *Nonconformist* strongly defended woman's rights and suffrage,<sup>13</sup> criticized prohibition,<sup>14</sup> and dared to rebuke the Southern Methodist Conference for expecting to be guests of the city, with the understanding that "every household that has a spare bed and a few chickens in the back yard, are expected to entertain accordingly."<sup>15</sup> Although his father had been a minister, Henry never professed to belong to any religious group, nor did he join any church until later in the 20th century. As editor, Vincent continued to attack the church claiming that if the church poses as the "guardian of morality" but shields sin and corruption, the cloak must be removed.<sup>16</sup>

**I**N THE YEAR following establishment of the *Nonconformist* in Winfield, Henry Vincent and his brothers were extremely active within the Knights of Labor and in establishing the Union Labor party in Kansas. As a measure of its success, the Union Labor party candidate for sheriff in Cowley county was elected in 1887 over the Republican candidate by a majority of about 100 votes. Vincent rejoiced editorially, forecasting a clean sweep of the state by the Union Labor party in the 1888 election.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Greer and his Republican cohorts had found an opportunity to pin the odious label of anarchy directly upon the Vincents with the help of a printer, George W. Poorman, who had been fired from the *Nonconformist*. Seeking revenge and money for his efforts, Poorman supplied Greer with some papers of a mysterious, oath-bound organiza-

tion—papers that he had helped to print for the Vincents while in their employ.<sup>18</sup>

On October 4, 1888, the contents of this stolen material, containing the constitution, the oaths of office, and the ritual of the National Order of Videttes were published in the *Courier* with lurid headlines claiming that the headquarters of a secret band of anarchist conspirators had been discovered in Winfield, whose ringleaders were the publishers of the *Nonconformist*, Henry, Leopold, and Cuthbert Vincent. But the part that aroused the greatest apprehension, according to Editor Greer, was the oath by which the members of the secret band would pledge to "sacrifice their bodies to the just vengeance of their comrades should they fail to obey the commands or keep the secrets of the order."<sup>19</sup> Greer was convinced that this passage indicated a military order "founded for the purpose of 'Social Reform' and 'Industrial Liberation' even to the extent of sacrifices of life and property." Despite his grave apprehensions, however, Greer did admit that the leaders in the conspiracy, "outside of their revolutionary teachings and peculiar extreme theories, were respectable citizens, industrious and energetic young men."<sup>20</sup>

**B**ESIDES the *Courier*, other papers in Kansas later published the exposé.<sup>21</sup> Learning further information concerning the Videttes, Greer went to Topeka and prepared a second exposé with the help of Capt. Henry Booth, the chairman of the Republican state committee, and Bion Hutchins, the secretary of the state committee. They were assisted by Charles A. Henrie, who was a printer, a former newspaper editor, a member of the Knights of Labor, and one who had already had brief associations with the Vincents. As an employee of the Republican party in Kansas, he had attempted to split the labor party movement. Later it was charged and corroborated that Henrie had known Albert Parsons, one of the four anarchists who had been hanged following the Haymarket riot. Henrie may have been an anarchist himself, but all he would later admit

10. *Ibid.*, November 17, 1887.

11. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1887.

12. *Ibid.*, April 7, May 5, June 2, July 14, August 18, 1887, January 19, September 20, 1888, May 1, 1890.

13. *Ibid.*, February 3, April 7, April 21, June 16, 1887, February 27, September 25, 1890.

14. *Ibid.*, November 3, 1887. See, also, February 7, 1887, and June 12, 1890.

15. *Ibid.*, March 10, 1887.

16. *Ibid.*, February 10, 1887. See, also, June 23, 30, July 28, 1887.

17. *Ibid.*, November 17, 1887.

18. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1888; *Joint Committee of the Legislature of the State of Kansas. Investigation of Coffeyville Explosion* (Topeka, Kansas Publishing House, 1891), pp. 69, 120, 123-124.

19. *Courier*, October 4, 1888.

20. *Ibid.*

21. The *Wichita Morning Eagle*, October 6, 1888. Editorially, the *Eagle* declared, "We doubt if a more terrible oath ever bound together any band of political conspirators, not excepting the nihilists of Russia."—October 23, 1888.

was that he had attended a meeting with Parsons where the subject of the manufacture of dynamite may have been discussed, but he could not say for certain.<sup>22</sup>

The Topeka meeting indicated a concerted effort on the part of the entire Republican leadership in Kansas to stigmatize and, if possible, to destroy the Union Labor party in the crucial national and state elections of 1888. The exposé that was finally concocted by Greer, Booth, Hutchins, and Henrie was published in the *Courier* on the evening of October 18 and in the *Kansas City (Mo.) Journal*, *Topeka Commonwealth*, *Topeka Capital*, *Wichita Eagle*, *Hutchinson News*, and the *Atchison Champion* on October 19.<sup>23</sup> The added revelations made the Vidette organization appear in the worst possible light and attempted to link it with the Chicago anarchists. The *Topeka Daily Capital*, for example, urged its readers to go to the polls and "wipe from the fair name of Kansas this stain of anarchy by rebuking the political organization through which it seeks to spread its deadly poison. Kill the viper!"<sup>24</sup>

At first the Vincents simply belittled and scoffed at the charges, admitting no more than that they had printed secret work for a "St. Louis man," and had sworn not to divulge the work. "We never smelled very much anarchism about it, only so far as the Declaration of Independence appears to echo that sentiment," they argued.<sup>25</sup>

The facts concerning the Vidette organization as they were finally brought out, however, would seem to implicate the Vincents far more deeply than they had cared to admit at that time. In a state congressional investigation in 1891, Henry admitted that he had been a member of the Videttes from the spring of 1887 and during the election of 1888. Cuthbert also admitted to having been a member. He insisted, however, that the organization was entirely civil in character, with absolutely no military characteristics except the titles.<sup>26</sup> The

22. *Joint Committee*, pp. 174-175. Two other men testified that Henrie probably did hear Parson's discussion, and they also stated that Henrie belonged either to the International Workingmen's Association (the "Red International") or the International Working People's Association (the "Black International").—*Ibid.*, pp. 179, 191, 193. Apparently Henrie's public association with Parsons was either unknown by the Republicans who hired him or considered a desirable qualification.

23. *Ibid.*, 543-544. The *Coffeyville Journal* also carried the story October 25, 1888, and the *Greenwood County Republican*, Eureka, October 26, 1888.

24. *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 19, 1888.

25. *Nonconformist*, October 4, 1888.

26. *Joint Committee*, pp. 266, 279.



Henry Vincent (1862-1935), controversial reform editor, was an organizer of the Populist movement in Kansas whose role has not been fully assessed by historians of the period. Though on the Kansas scene for only five years, he was one of the most influential of the promoters of the People's party in the state and one of the most criticized by his Republican opponents. Photograph courtesy Merrily Cummings Ford, Glendora, Cal.

National Order of Videttes was actually a secret auxiliary organization of the Union Labor party. Apparently it was formed to provide leadership and guidance for the new party and to prevent its members from fusing with either Democratic or Republican parties. The Videttes, a word meaning "sentinels," used military titles for their officers and swore an oath of secrecy.

**T**HE CHARGES and countercharges concerning the Order of Videttes took a more serious turn with an incident that occurred at Coffeyville, approximately 100 miles from Winfield. The facts indicate that H. M. Upham, the chief agent for the Pacific Express Agency of Coffeyville, received a package the morning of October 18 for shipment to a Mr. L. [or J.] Loudon at Winfield. The stranger who sent the box gave his name as P. Jason.<sup>27</sup>

27. *Ibid.*, p. 609.

Upham said he took the box home with him as he usually did packages that were to be shipped the next morning, since his house was between the express office and the railroad depot. About 4:00 p.m. that afternoon a sharp explosion demolished part of his house, seriously injuring his wife and daughter, although they both later recovered.

It was presumed that the contents of the stranger's box caused the blast, especially since both names, Jason and Loudon, were apparently fictitious. Although Upham could fully describe the appearance of the stranger, he was never able to identify positively anyone as the man who had given him the box.<sup>28</sup>

Ed Greer's *Courier* headlined the story with "Dynamite! A Terrible Explosion . . . What Does This Mean? . . . Evidences of Anarchism in Kansas are Increasing."<sup>29</sup> Despite the lack of any evidence to support his theory, Greer later implied that the Vincents had attempted to destroy the *Courier* building because of the exposé but had failed when the dynamite had exploded too soon. The *Coffeyville Journal*, edited by D. Stewart Elliott, was even more direct in charging the dynamite explosion to the Vincents and their associates, claiming that they wanted to destroy those who had exposed the order.<sup>30</sup> The *Topeka Capital* quoted an item from the *Emporia Gazette*, characterizing the Vincents as dangerous traitors, men like Guiteau who had assassinated President Garfield.<sup>31</sup>

The Vincents, on the other hand, attacked their Republican accusers with equal vigor. They believed that the dynamite had been sent at the connivance of the Republicans to be used against them and their newspaper. The dynamite, they reasoned, was to be sent to Winfield; it was to be planted, if not actually used, somewhere near the *Nonconformist* office; officials would "suspect" it, and the evidence would corroborate the charges that the Union Labor party was anarchist. Like Greer, the Vincents believed that the plot fell through when the dynamite exploded too soon.<sup>32</sup> Henry Vincent's response to the events of the campaign of 1888 was vividly recalled in his unpublished memoirs:

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Courier*, October 25, 1888.

30. The *Coffeyville Journal*, "Extra," October 18, 1888.

31. *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 31, 1888.

32. *Nonconformist*, October 25, November 1, 1888.

Things looked not so good to the opposition. Something must be done. So a pretty and very melodramatic plot was cooked up, which afterwards became history. . . . We were "anarchists," so-called. Anarchists and bombs were occasionally associated. What better than to find an infernal machine on our premises! But it didn't get as far as Winfield. A Labor skate left it in an Express office in Coffeyville, Kansas.<sup>33</sup>

Henry Vincent's brother Cuthbert similarly recalled the incident, blaming it upon the efforts of the Republican state central committee. Only the accidental premature explosion of the "machine," he felt, saved the lives of the Vincents and prevented the destruction of the paper.<sup>34</sup>

How great an effect the explosion may have had upon the November election is impossible to determine. Certainly the Republican leadership of Kansas was jubilant when the election results became known. Benjamin Harrison had defeated Grover Cleveland in a close national race; his margin of 80,000 in Kansas, however, was the largest of any of the states. Moreover, Republicans had captured all of the state offices in Kansas, easily retaining control of the legislature. "Cowley County Republicans Sweep the Platter Clean, Driving the Mongrels to the Brush!" the *Courier* exulted. "The law-abiding, country-loving people of Kansas have annihilated the Videttes [*sic*] and their benighted and deceived off-spring, the union labor party. They are killed for good."<sup>35</sup>

**A**FTER THE 1888 election, Vincent and his Union Labor friends began to look for some new political party that could receive broader support. As a consequence, the old Union Labor party and the National Order of Videttes disappeared. In 1889 the State Reform Association, to which the Vincent brothers belonged, apparently investigated and recommended the Farmers' Alliance of the South. There is no evidence, however, to substantiate W. F. Rightmire's claim that Cuthbert Vincent and others went to Texas, were initiated into the Southern Farmers' Alliance, and brought it back to Kansas in 1888.<sup>36</sup> Rather, the facts indicate that the Farmers' Alliance was en-

33. Henry Vincent, "Unpublished Memoirs," biographical notes, X, *courtesy* of Mrs. A. P. Ford, Glendora, Cal.

34. *The American Nonconformist*, Omaha, March 24, 1888; also unpublished notes of Cuthbert Vincent, *courtesy* of Mrs. A. P. Ford.

35. *Courier*, November 8, 15, 1888.

36. W. F. Rightmire, "The Alliance Movement in Kansas—Origin of the People's Party," *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 9 (1905-1906), p. 3. For a further discussion of the issue, see Robert C. McMath, Jr., "Preface to Populism: The Origin and Economic

couraged to promote a new party, called the People's party, in 1889 and 1890; and Alliance support proved to be a vital factor in Populist victories.

Although the People's party had numerous beginnings, there is much evidence to indicate that in Kansas, at least, its origin can best be traced to Winfield, the county seat of Cowley county. There in 1889 a group of Democrats, dissident Republicans, and Union Labor backers, with the very influential help of the Farmers' Alliance organized a new political union called the People's party.<sup>37</sup>

The county Republican leadership greatly aided the new party movement by precipitating a walkout in its party convention in Winfield in August, 1889. Edwin P. Greer and state Sen. William F. Hackney, the two most powerful Republicans of Winfield, had attempted to dictate the Republican party's nominations; and a number of rebellious Republicans, led by M. H. Markham, S. W. Chase, and Samuel Strong, had walked out of the meeting. They suggested to prominent members of the Democratic and Union Labor parties that if they could unite and put "a people's ticket" in the field, the Republican farmers would support and elect it. Henry Vincent later vividly recalled the incident in his memoirs and his role as secretary for the meeting.<sup>38</sup>

A subcommittee of the Union Labor party's central committee and the Democratic central committee was subsequently formed to draft some plan of procedure. The committee, including Henry Vincent, issued the call for a "People's Convention" to be at Winfield, September 21. At this convention a People's ticket of local county offices was named. Only the treasurer, sheriff, register of deeds, clerk, coroner, surveyor, and commissioner were named since there were no state or national elections that year.<sup>39</sup>

Development of the "Southern" Farmers' Alliance in Kansas," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 42 (Spring, 1976), pp. 55-65. Neither do the unpublished records and memoirs of the Vincent brothers substantiate Rightmire's recollections.

37. *Nonconformist*, August 22, September 5, 12, 26, October 3, 10, 24, 31, November 7, 14, 21, 1889, July 30, 1891; *Courier*, October 3, 10, 17, 31, 1889, November 13, 1890; Rightmire, "The Alliance Movement," p. 3; Elizabeth N. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, William E. Connelley, ed. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1918), v. 2, pp. 1142-1143; Henry Vincent, "Unpublished Memoirs," pp. 12-14, notes to M. Pettit, March 4, 1930, courtesy of Mrs. A. P. Ford.

38. Henry Vincent, "Unpublished Memoirs," pp. 13-14. These notes, according to his daughter, Mrs. Cummings, were dictated by Vincent and written by hand by his wife. For full account, see Piehler, "Henry Vincent: A Case Study," p. 163.

39. *Nonconformist*, September 5, 12, 26, 1889, July 30, 1891.

The Republican opposition attempted to win as it had in 1888 against the Union Labor party by attacking the character and integrity of the new party's leadership in an effort to discredit the entire party. Contemptuously Greer's *Courier* charged that "the Vincents are the sole originators of the late People's Convention."<sup>40</sup> By October 31 the *Courier* was even more scornful and specific in its charges that the Vincents were the chief principals responsible for the new party's organization. "This convention was used to carry out the carefully prepared plan of the Vincents by the nomination of a ticket made up of men whom they dictated as fit for their purposes."<sup>41</sup> Greer personally attacked the Vincents as parasites: "They have no credit, no reputation, and are regarded as dangerous and unhealthy citizens."<sup>42</sup>

It is worth noting that neither Henry Vincent nor his brothers ever claimed to have been the sole originators of the People's party in Cowley county in 1889 or in Kansas in 1890. Henry Vincent's role as one of its principal organizers and promoters as revealed by the records and his own memoirs, however, is truly significant. During the campaign, of course, Vincent minimized his role as a founder of the party he had helped organize, obviously believing that the radical-anarchist label pinned upon him the previous year would scarcely be an asset to the new party.<sup>43</sup>

Stung by the *Courier's* charges, however, the Vincent brothers fought back with increasing vehemence, accusing Greer of publishing falsehoods and distorting facts with "the cunning of a fox and the fiendishness of a human hyena."<sup>44</sup> Vincent's strongest attack upon the Republicans, however, centered on the unsolved dynamite explosion at Coffeyville the previous year. No conclusive evidence had been unearthed to indicate the identity of the guilty party who had sent the dynamite. Nevertheless, Henry Vincent was certain it was the work of Greer and his Republican friends. Before the election of 1889 was over, Vincent was

40. *Courier*, October 3, 1889. See, also, October 17, 31, 1889.

41. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1889.

42. *Ibid.*, September 12, 1889.

43. *Nonconformist*, September 5, 26, October 3, 10, 1889, July 30, 1891. In Vincent's unpublished memoirs he takes considerable pride in his role in organizing the People's party, claiming that he risked his life in order to make the campaigns in Kansas a success. See, also, Chicago *Searchlight*, January 9, 1895.

44. *Nonconformist*, September 26, 1889. See, also, September 12 and October 31, 1889.

categorically accusing E. P. Greer, C. A. Henrie, Republican Governor Humphrey, and others as being directly involved in the Coffeyville explosion.<sup>45</sup> Although there was inconclusive evidence for Vincent's charges, two actions by the Republican administration tend to substantiate his assertions. First, C. A. Henrie was appointed as assistant in the State Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Republican state administration. The Vincents claimed that his appointment was payment for his services not only for preparing the exposé but also for sending the dynamite. Repeatedly Vincent called for a state investigation of the Coffeyville dynamite explosion, but the Republican administration chose to ignore the demand.<sup>46</sup>

Second, Greer was appointed postmaster in Winfield; and Vincent was certain that this was a payoff and that he had been correct in his allegations. "Rewarded At Last" was the headline of the *Nonconformist*. "Common murderers are hanged or otherwise punished; but political murderers are appointed to office in the state house and various postoffices at the hand of the high lord executioner."<sup>47</sup>

Just before the election, Vincent made a dramatic appeal to the electorate to consider the economic conditions, their hunger and cold. "As editors, we have dared to take a stand," he concluded after denouncing the Coffeyville outrage "that now stands unquestioned at the door of a few men high in authority in the councils of the present dominant party."<sup>48</sup>

Greer countered by declaring that the People's party ticket had been dictated by the Vincents for their purposes and "is a direct result of the teachings of socialism and debauchery. People of Cowley County," he pleaded, "it is left with you to choose between these two sets of men—between decency, law and order upon the one hand, and socialism debauchery and heathenism upon the other."<sup>49</sup>

In this county election, however, a combination of circumstances aided a party united against Republican domination. The severe economic depression, the prolonged drought, the Republican party split, the active support of the People's party by the Farmers' Alliance,

as well as the charges that the Republicans were responsible for the Coffeyville dynamite explosion—all these factors contributed to the victory of the People's party. All its county candidates were elected over the Republican opposition by majorities of approximately 500 to 800.<sup>50</sup>

**I**N RETROSPECT it is evident that Vincent overreacted to the county election victory of the People's party in 1889, as articles such as the following would indicate:

Cowley County is redeemed! The grandest peoples' movement ever inaugurated on Kansas soil, scored its first victory last Tuesday . . . that movement which meant business from the word go, and now it has started, may the Lord have mercy on those who think to impede its straightforward march to the state and national capitals.<sup>51</sup>

The *Courier* retracted nothing, only admitting that the election results, while not entirely unexpected, were still a surprise to most Republicans. They had not anticipated that the Farmers' Alliance would so strongly support the People's ticket.<sup>52</sup>

The victory of the People's party in the entire county, however, became well-known all over the state. "The way they did it in Cowley County," was on the lips of every reformer," according to one historian.<sup>53</sup> On June 12, 1890, the People's party was organized on the state level at Topeka. Benjamin H. Clover, a close friend of the Vincents who had supported the People's party in Cowley county, was selected as state president of the Farmers' Alliance; and he agreed to run for congress in the Third congressional district on the People's party ticket.<sup>54</sup>

In the ensuing statewide election, Vincent enthusiastically reported the campaigns with considerable journalistic hyperbole. Undoubtedly the large crowds who attended the rallies, as well as their enthusiasm, contributed to Vincent's confidence of another sweeping vic-

50. *Ibid.*, November 7, 1889; *Nonconformist*, November 14, 1889; Denton, "The American Nonconformist," pp. 119-122.

51. *Nonconformist*, November 7, 1889. For overreaction, see also, November 14, 21, 1889; November 13, 1890.

52. *Courier*, November 7, 1889.

53. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," p. 1143.

54. Rightmire, *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 9, pp. 4, 6. According to Rightmire, "he [Clover] placed himself under the guidance of the members of the executive committee of the Reform Association, and actions advised by its President and Committeeman Vincent always received his approval and hearty cooperation." In his unpublished memoirs, Henry Vincent refers to Clover as "a well-to-do farmer near Winfield," who became president of the Farmers' Alliance for Kansas, and "a speaker of homely eloquence, entirely spontaneous with him."

45. *Ibid.*, February 7, June 6, 20, September 12, 1889. The most sweeping and specific charges were made June 20, 1889.

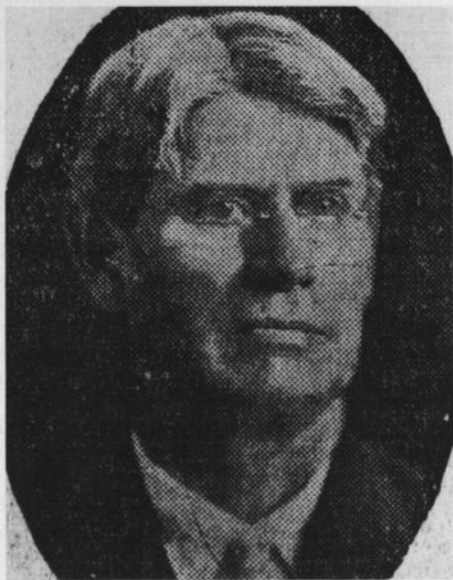
46. *Ibid.*, June 6, 20, July 25, August 22, September 5, 12, 26, October 31, 1889.

47. *Ibid.*, August 1, 1889.

48. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1889.

49. *Courier*, October 31, 1889.





Edwin P. Greer (1857-1924), publisher of the *Winfield Courier* for 40 years, was a Republican leader in Cowley county and served in the state legislature in 1893 to 1894. Believing Henry Vincent was dangerously radical, he published materials accusing him of being a ringleader of an anarchist conspiracy. Stung by the *Courier's* charges, the Vincent brothers fought back with increasing vehemence and accusations of their own.

tory. As in 1889, the Vincents were charged by Republican critics as being part of the group of radical, anarchist Union Labor leaders who were actually running the People's party. In 1890, however, the charges were more statewide in their scope; and the Topeka *Daily Capital*, edited by J. K. Hudson, denounced the Vincents and their friends as "anarchists" and "professional agitators" who were trying to manipulate the election and frighten Republican farmers into voting for the People's party.<sup>55</sup>

As the campaign of 1890 progressed, all of the old issues were renewed with added zeal. The distress of the unemployed and the poverty of the farmers were again emphasized by the Populists. In addition, Sen. John J. Ingalls, who had represented Kansas in the U. S. senate since 1873, became one of the chief targets of

55. Topeka *Daily Capital*, September 4, 11, October 7, 1890. See, also, Coffeyville *Journal*, October 10, 1890.

Populist campaigners. No newspaper was more scathing in its denunciation of Ingalls than the *Nonconformist* which had accused him, among other things, of being "a caricature of the strongest type," "a bombastic egotist," "an inborn traitor to highest American principles," and one who had made "an ass of himself in the United States senate."<sup>56</sup> For additional campaign literature, Vincent printed "The Plot Unfolded," a history of the "Coffeyville Dynamite Outrage," which had previously been published by installments in the *Nonconformist*. A popular Alliance and Labor song book, compiled by Leopold Vincent, went through three printings.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, the *Nonconformist* printed "patent insides"<sup>58</sup> for as many as 40 local newspapers throughout Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Missouri, and other states in the same region through a chartered corporation known as the Independent Newspaper Union.<sup>59</sup> About the same time the Vincents organized a lecture bureau whose most popular speaker was Mary Elizabeth Lease, an able lawyer whose fervent, colorful speeches made her an effective campaigner.<sup>60</sup>

In the election results of 1890, the Populists found much reason to be encouraged although no party won complete control of the state government. The People's party had, however, elected five of seven congressmen to the U.S. house of representatives. The new state house of representatives would consist of 91 Populists, 26 Republicans, and eight Democrats, thus assuring the retirement of Senator Ingalls, who was replaced with Populist Sen. William A. Peffer. Despite the Populists' successes in these areas, every Republican on the state ticket was elected except the attorney general, whose opponent had been on both the People's and Democratic tickets.

56. *Nonconformist*, August 15, 1889. See, also, September 25 and October 9, 1890.

57. *Ibid.*, February 20, March 6, 1890.

58. "Patent insides" or "ready-prints" were sheets printed on one side with news and blank space on the other side for local advertising or additional news. Use of "ready-prints" saved considerable time and expense in hand-setting of type and were especially helpful to newspapers just getting started or to editors with limited finances. Advertising space, as well as news, was also sold in advance on "ready-prints." The type of advertising, particularly patent medicines, gave the product the name of "patent insides."

59. *Nonconformist*, March 8, 22, April 5, June 14, 21, September 20, 1888.

60. Mrs. Lease, a former Republican, had broken with the party to campaign for the Union Labor party candidates in the election of 1888 and for the Populist party in 1890 and 1892. She also sold subscriptions for the *Nonconformist* after her rallies.—See *Nonconformist*, September 25, 1890.

In Cowley county it was, Vincent admitted, "clearly a case of over-confidence on the one hand, and unparalleled effort on the other."<sup>61</sup> The Republican party had not only succeeded in cutting down the Populist majorities in Cowley county from the previous year but had also elected two Republicans to county offices. Benjamin H. Clover won his congressional seat but lost Cowley county by almost 100 votes. Editor Greer congratulated himself for having put up such a good fight, declaring that if the other counties had done as well as Cowley, the state would have gone safely Republican. "The *Courier* does not want to claim the credit for the admirable campaign in Cowley county, which resulted in almost the defeat of the party that found birth here, but it will share in the credit."<sup>62</sup> The Topeka *Capital* also rejoiced in Republican gains in 1890 and later in 1891: "Calamity," it declared, "is dead. It was born in Cowley county and was cooked in its cradle."<sup>63</sup>

**I**N 1891 the Kansas legislature investigated the Coffeyville dynamite explosion with hearings that lasted over seven weeks and involved more than 80 witnesses. The investigating committee was composed of four Populists, three Republicans, and one Democrat. All the principals testified, but little new evidence or significant information that might determine the guilt of those responsible for the blast was unearthed. Much of the testimony consisted of speculation, innuendo, and circumstantial evidence. Since the committee as a whole could not agree except on the basic facts of the explosion itself, its members submitted differing party reports.<sup>64</sup>

The Populists on the committee felt the evidence still pointed to the Republicans as the guilty party although Upham had failed to identify Henrie positively as the mysterious Jason who had presumably delivered the package to the agent for shipment. The Populists believed, however, that Henrie might have been disguised; at the very least they felt he

had "some connection" with the explosion. The strongest evidence was probably the fact that a close Republican friend of Governor Humphrey, Leland J. Webb, testified that the governor had told him that he had to appoint Henrie.<sup>65</sup> Vincent's *Nonconformist* insisted that the investigation had proved, with only one minor exception, every charge advanced by the Vincents for the past two years, particularly that Greer and state Republicans were the sole authors and operators in the conspiracy which resulted in the Coffeyville dynamite explosion.<sup>66</sup>

The Republicans, however, felt that the investigation completely exonerated them of any blame or responsibility for the explosion, declaring the entire investigation "A Howling Farce."<sup>67</sup> They somewhat weakly defended Henrie's appointment to the Labor Bureau but introduced a number of reputable witnesses who testified that Henrie was in Topeka rather than in Coffeyville on the day the dynamite exploded. The Republicans also believed that the explosion was an attempt by Upham to kill his wife and stepdaughter rather than an overt act by Union Labor party leaders to punish Greer for his exposés. Greer himself was convinced that the investigation had proved beyond doubt that the Vincents were "irresponsible scoundrels and irredeemable liars—if not procurers of perjury."<sup>68</sup>

The lone Democrat on the committee, Sen. Edward Carroll, criticized the conduct of both Republican and Union Labor participants but declared that no one had been shown to be guilty of any conspiracy. Although he was convinced that Henrie was a disreputable person, he did not believe that Henrie could have delivered the box of dynamite for shipment. Neither did Carroll believe that there was any evidence to connect the Vidette organization with the explosion.<sup>69</sup>

**D**ESPITE the incomplete Populist triumph of 1890, Vincent continued to believe that the People's party was riding a crest of national support that would sweep eastward and capture the White House in 1892. Hence, the Vincents made the decision to move the

61. *Nonconformist*, November 6, 1890.

62. *Courier*, November 13, 1890.

63. Topeka *Daily Capital*, November 4, 1891.

64. *Joint Committee of the Legislature*. Perhaps the most exhaustive studies and analyses of the investigating committee's work have been done by Denton, "The American *Nonconformist*," and Lutsky, "The Reform Editors." Denton believes that the striking aspect of the investigation was the fact that the Videttes were cleared of any responsibility for the Coffeyville dynamite explosion.

65. *Joint Committee*, pp. 288, 631-636.

66. *Nonconformist*, April 9, 1891.

67. Topeka *Daily Capital*, April 5, 1891.

68. *Courier*, March 26, 1891.

69. *Joint Committee*, pp. 636-638.

*Nonconformist* newspaper plant to Indianapolis early in September, 1891, where, "As a national organ the NON CON can serve the masses of Kansas far better than from its present location."<sup>70</sup>

Although the *Courier* could not resist in rejoicing in "the last shipment of the *Nonconformist* crowd"<sup>71</sup> from Winfield, it nevertheless testified to the influence and effectiveness of the Vincents by declaring that never, perhaps, in history had any political reform party so quickly risen to power and swept the county as the Populists had in the past two years. Scornfully, Greer gave the Vincents and Benjamin Clover the credit for organizing a people's party on a statewide basis. "But what did Cowley county get for originating this brilliant affair called the 'people's party?'" he asked.<sup>72</sup>

As for Henry Vincent, his five years on Kansas soil had been years of tumult, worry, vigilance, and struggle which he hoped he would not experience again. He charged that he and his family "have lain beneath a stigma of anarchism; have been boycotted in the community; ostracized in society; . . . and to cap the climax, deadly explosives were to be shipped to this city, and the scenes of the Haymarket repeated."<sup>73</sup>

From the earliest issues of the *Nonconformist* in Kansas, Vincent had quickly established himself as a radical-reform editor whom his opponents could not lightly dismiss. His loud and persistent defense of the Haymarket anarchists, his membership in the secret oath-bound Order of Videttes, his slashing attacks upon orthodox religious institutions, and, most of all, his ability to establish and promote political organizations that could, and sometimes did, win crucial elections—all these factors made Vincent a genuine threat to the established powers in Kansas and elsewhere.

Although Vincent recognized his nonconformity and even boasted of it on occasion, he never considered himself to be dangerous or a

menace to society. Rather, Vincent believed that the changes he proposed might preserve democracy from a violent upheaval or bloody revolution. Throughout his life Vincent believed that reform could best be accomplished through peaceful means. He was confident that if the public were fully informed and educated, a peaceful revolution could take place at the ballot box. Vincent abhorred violence and openly rebuked "Anarchistic-Socialistic exiles" who sought to overthrow the government through bloodshed or warfare.<sup>74</sup> He was convinced, however, that change could not be brought about through the two major parties, either Republican or Democratic. Essential change and reform, Vincent believed, could best be effected through an independent third party.<sup>75</sup>

Vincent was not without weakness and faults. He was an intensely human individual, ambitious, strong-willed, determined—a proud man who sometimes played the role of martyr. Idealistic and occasionally naive, he never achieved financial success. His daughter declared that he never indulged in such worldly things as drinking or smoking; on the other hand, he was never at home very much nor did he provide very well for his family. "He had to save the country," she stated, "and the family could get along how they could."<sup>76</sup>

As an editor during a period of intense personal journalism, Vincent was unabashedly partisan. His bombastic rhetoric, wild charges, bitter local feuding, and occasional disregard for the facts were not untypical of this period of rough-and-tumble journalism. For Vincent it was often a matter of survival. Finally, the Panic of 1893 and debts incurred by overexpansion accomplished what Vincent's opponents had failed to do. The Vincent brothers were forced to sell their printing establishment in Indiana and thereby lost control of the *Nonconformist*.

In 1893 Vincent went to Chicago where he was associate editor of the *Chicago Express* for almost a year. In 1894 he established the *Chicago Searchlight*, a Populist newspaper which lasted less than a year before it merged with the

70. *Nonconformist*, September 3, 1891. In his unpublished memoirs, Henry Vincent admits that the move was a mistake: "In this heyday of our youth we didn't realize that one swallow doesn't make a summer or that one or more victories for Kansas didn't cover the U.S.A. Our firm yielded to an invitation to 'come over to Damascus and help us.' We went bag and baggage to Indianapolis in 1891, printing plant, families, and all. There the plant was lost to us through that terrible financial slump of 1892-93 and the three brothers were separated."—Letter by Henry Vincent to Ford M. Pettit, *Detroit News*, March 4, 1930.

71. *Courier*, October 1, 1891.

72. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1891.

73. *Nonconformist*, April 9, 1891. See, also, September 3, 1891.

74. *The Age*, Chicago, April 13, 1895.

75. *Nonconformist*, October 31, 1889, February 26, 1891; *Chicago Express*, September 16, 1893; *Sound Money*, Massillon, Ohio, August 22, 1895.

76. Mary Vincent Cummings, Glendora, Cal., interview, July 26, 1971. Mrs. Cummings died February 22, 1978.

Chicago Age. From 1895 to 1896 Vincent was editor of Jacob S. Coxey's newspaper, *Sound Money*, having previously participated in Coxey's 1894 "March to Washington" as publicity director and official historian. In 1907 Vincent and his family moved to Girard, Kan., where he became active in the Socialist party, serving as its district secretary from 1908 until he left Kansas in 1911. The Vincent home in Girard became a mecca for many Socialists, including Eugene V. Debs, a good friend whom Vincent vigorously supported as the Socialist party candidate for President in five national elections. Poverty or near-poverty characterized Vincent's later years, during which the family moved about the country seeking employment. Vincent died in Ypsilanti, Mich., October 29, 1935.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> For a more detailed account of Vincent's later years, see Piehler, "Henry Vincent: A Case Study," pp. 197-238.

It is impossible, of course, to measure precisely the exact extent or degree of Vincent's influence, since so many factors were involved; but the actions and testimony of his opposition indicate that his influence was significant. The short-lived but decisive victories of the People's party in Cowley county in 1889 and in the state of Kansas in 1890 were all too real to Republicans, who, without the advantage of hindsight, may have overreacted to Vincent's journalistic attacks. Although the People's party had many leaders and many beginnings, Henry Vincent appears to have been among the most active, the most resourceful, and the most influential in organizing and promoting the People's party in Kansas. Certainly, he was among the most criticized, the most stigmatized, and the most abused by his Republican opponents—a tribute to his efforts and a measure of his success.