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Coxey's Montana Navy

A Protest Against Unemployment on the Wageworkers' Frontier

Carlos A. Schwantes

From the moment the flotilla left the Fort Benton waterfront it was in trouble. An inexperienced crew of 340 sailors, mostly metal miners, challenged the Missouri in 10 homemade pine scows, and the river, swollen by the waters of an unusually heavy spring runoff, determined to drown them all. Apprehensive spectators watched as the Big Muddy spun the craft around crazily, and oarsmen struggled to regain control as they swept beyond view. So began, on June 5, 1894, an expedition designed to carry a personal protest from the unemployed of Montana to lawmakers in Washington, D.C. Though the voyagers never reached the Capitol, their 2-month, 2,000-mile trip downriver became one of America's great, if unsung, adventures, an adventure that recalled the nation's frontier past no less than it raised unsettling questions about its industrial future. Indeed, the Coxey's Army movement, of which this protest was a part, confirmed the worst fears of those who believed that postfrontier America lacked enough free land to diminish working-class discontent.¹

The trip downriver was a vignette harking back to an earlier era. For the better part of a century, frontier explorers and exploiters had traveled the Missouri River highway. Fort Benton, head of steamer navigation on the waterway, was from the 1860s through the 1880s the supply and transportation center for the northern plains and Rockies, and its waterfront a hub of activity. But the coming of the railroad drained the upper river of traffic, and in 1891 the last steamboat called at Fort Benton. For a fleeting moment the building and launching of the Coxey flotilla reanimated the silent waterfront and rekindled memories of the river's former importance. Despite its familiar appearance, however, the drama that began in June 1894 was essentially a parody of long-standing popular perceptions of western opportunity: rather than searching the West for relief from hard times, members of Coxey's Montana navy preferred to look eastward, to the legislative halls of Congress.²

Protestors planned to float, row, and sail downstream until they reached the mouth of the Ohio, hire a steamer for Pittsburgh, and there beg or steal a train

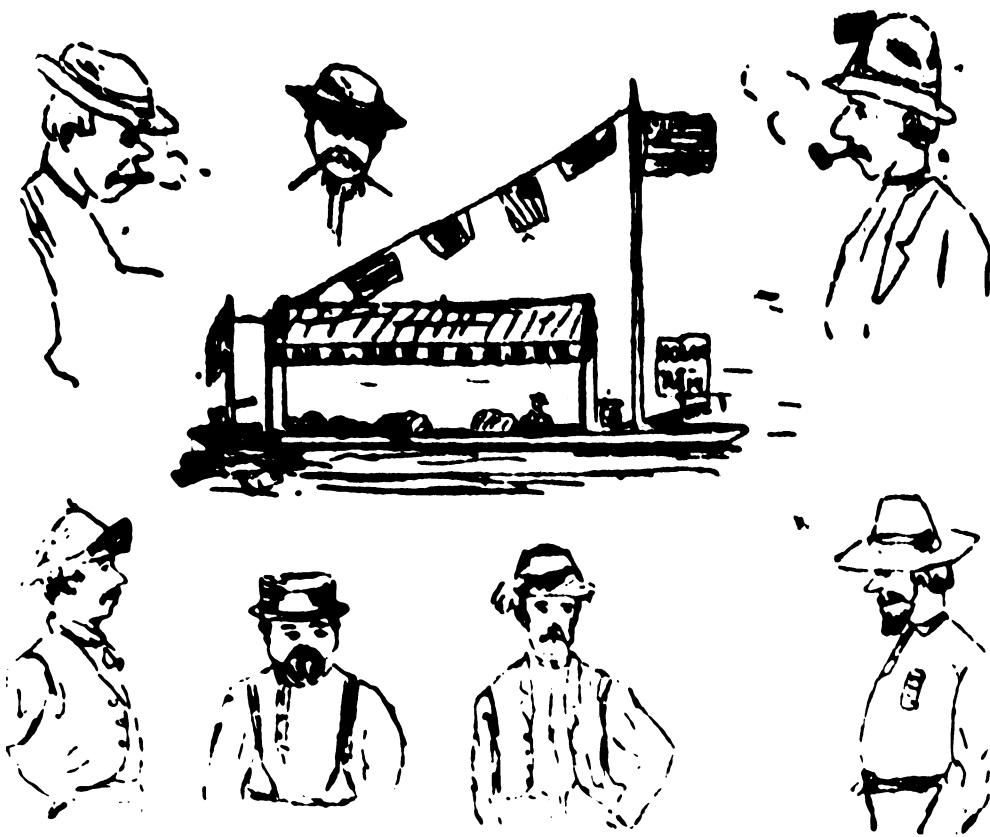
ride to Washington. If necessary they might even steal an entire train. They had already proved they could. The main reason the Coxeyites were traveling down the Missouri instead of by rail was that they had earlier stolen a train in Butte to hasten their journey east, been overtaken by the United States Army, and forbidden by a federal court to again appropriate the property of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The train stealers believed that suffering for weeks and months without work justified their bold and desperate actions.³

Their torment began with the panic of 1893. The economic depression that followed was the worst the nation had yet experienced, and when spring 1894 promised little or no relief from the hardships of the previous winter, America's jobless arose en masse. Almost spontaneously, they formed 20 or more "industrial armies" representing every region of the nation except the South. The protesters who proposed to travel down the Missouri were in many ways typical of other western contingents that formed in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Spokane, Salt Lake City, and Denver. Groups from smaller communities like Walla Walla, Pocatello, and Reno joined the metropolitan armies marching east. The sheer novelty of the overland trek by thousands of men and an occasional woman attracted extensive newspaper coverage that fostered further growth of the movement. No American spectacle since the Civil War had been the subject of so much press comment.

1. *Helena Independent*, June 7, 1894; *Yankton (S.D.) Press and Dakotan*, June 28, 1894; *Seattle Telegraph*, April 26, 1894; *San Francisco Examiner*, April 26, 1894. On the issue of land as a "safety-valve" for labor discontent, see the *Seattle Telegraph*, May 20 and June 8, 1894. Information about the trip down the Missouri was gleaned from newspapers published in towns along the way. The *St. Joseph, Missouri*, paper, for example, was only one of several that ran feature stories giving details of the voyage from Ft. Benton.

2. *Ft. Benton River Press*, May 9, 1894; John W. Reys, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton, 1979), 507.

3. *Ft. Benton River Press*, June 6, 1894; *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 10, 1894.



The Saint Joseph Daily News for July 10, 1894, carried pen sketches of Coxeys's sailors and one of the rafts. (State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia)

Especially was that true in parts of the West that could be described as the wageworkers' frontier, places where the intersection between a frontier heritage and the new industrial order was especially abrupt, both chronologically and geographically. There the armies enjoyed far greater support than elsewhere.⁴

Westerners enlisted under the banner of Jacob S. Coxeys, the Ohioan who gave his name to the industrial army movement by leading the first and most publicized march in the East, but they paid him only nominal allegiance. Coxeys planned to present Congress "a petition with boots on." He expected that a living petition, too unwieldy to table and too large to ignore, would force lawmakers to put the unemployed to work building roads. Westerners, however, were less interested in road building than in voicing regional demands for immigration restrictions on Chinese, federally funded

irrigation projects, and free and unlimited coinage of silver.⁵

Every western army promoted free silver, but none more vigorously than Montana's. Silver was the paramount issue in the state, where unhappy citizens from all walks of life singled out congressional repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in late 1893 as contributing most directly to their economic distress. Federal purchases of the metal had long subsidized the western silver industry, and repeal caused the already low price of the mineral to tumble. Silver production became uneconomical. Mines closed, idling thousands and shaking the foundation of Montana's prosperity. Many believed that eastern financial interests encouraged Congress to act as it had and that Montanans must now persuade Uncle Sam to resume large-scale buying and minting of silver not only to return life to the silent mines but also to halt the deflationary pressures that squeezed the state's business and agricultural interests. The silver issue thus cut across class lines and explains why Montana's Coxeys crusade had so many sympathiz-

ers. All who believed that the East considered the West an economic colony wished the marchers well.⁶

In mid-April 1894, William Hogan organized Montana's first Coxeys contingent among the unemployed of Butte. Soon the army attracted recruits from all over the state. Hogan's 500 followers expected that the Northern Pacific would provide them cheap rates east, but when it refused, they grew angry and stole a locomotive and 10 boxcars. Oblivious to danger and defiant of a federal injunction that had warned them away from the trains, Hogan's men headed east at high speed. Wherever they stopped, local sympathizers contributed liberally to their commissary. Federal troops intercepted the train thieves near Miles City and returned them to Helena for trial. In late May, Judge Hiram Knowles sentenced Hogan and several army leaders to prison for contempt of court and, upon extracting a promise to steal no more trains, freed everyone else. The city of Helena now took upon itself primary responsibility for Montana's unemployed army, which was still determined to go east.⁷

After examining several alternatives, including an overland walk to Washington, Helena decided to launch Hogan's men on a mission down the Missouri. The city purchased wood for building scows, hired a master boatwright to over-

4. Donald L. McMurry, *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894* (1929; rpt. Seattle, 1968); Carlos A. Schwantes, "Law and Disorder: The Suppression of Coxeys's Army in Idaho," *Idaho Yesterdays*, Vol. 25 (Summer 1981), 10-15, 18-26.

5. McMurry, 21-33; Thomas A. Clinch, "Coxey's Army in Montana," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 15 (Autumn 1965), 2-11.

6. Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle, 1976), 143-47, 162-64; Clark C. Spence, *Montana: A Bicentennial History* (New York, 1978), 98-100.

7. Clinch, 2-11; Jerry M. Cooper, *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport, Conn., 1980), 108-14.

see construction, and restocked the army's commissary. It also paid the men's rail fare to Fort Benton.⁸

For almost a week several hundred would-be sailors hammered together 10 sturdy flatboats under the expert direction of William Sprague, a man wise in the often brutal ways of the Missouri, who insisted that each vessel be constructed of a double thickness of pine planking. As a Fort Benton resident from 1864 to 1868, Sprague had constructed and sold many similar craft to frontier adventurers. Nine of his scows for Hogan's men measured approximately 10 feet wide and 40 feet long. He extended the flagship *Montana* to 60 feet because it carried a brick oven and a carload of provisions. Builders affixed to each vessel a rudder, four oars (six for the flagship), and a name. Besides the *Montana*, the *Hogan*, and the *Free Silver*, there were vessels christened after each of the seven cities (Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Fort Benton, Great Falls, Helena, and Livingston) that had befriended the men. On the sides of one boat, they painted gigantic silver dollars, and on the oars the cryptic inscription "16 to 1." Overhead floated banners bearing the legends "In Congress We Trusted," "We Come in Peace," and "Going to Meet Grover." To give the flotilla a colorful finishing touch, Fort Benton residents donated American flags and red, white, and blue bunting.⁹

As the hand-crafted navy took shape, Hogan's men eagerly anticipated the start of their great adventure. Following a farewell parade through Fort Benton, which netted them 120 pounds of tobacco to add to the supplies furnished by Helena, they returned to their waterfront quarters for one last restless night. Launch day, June 5, brought unexpected complications. Gale-force winds whipped the Missouri's already high water into whitecaps and sent them crashing against the north bank. Only fools dared to venture forth. When the winds finally diminished around 4:00 that afternoon, Hogan's navy hurriedly shoved off. Even without the high winds, the swift-running river was still dangerous. Powerful currents frequently spun the boats completely around and but for the strength of their construction would have smashed them. As Fort Benton receded from view,

the navy's contact with the outside world ceased. Until they reached Williston, several days distant, the sailors passed through some of the loneliest, most isolated parts of the American West, a land of big sky and fantastic rock formations that appeared virtually unchanged since Lewis and Clark passed that way 90 years before.¹⁰

The romance of the voyage caused Fort Benton's *River Press* to comment, "Just think of it. Boats and grub furnished, and free water passage for over 2,500 miles, with nothing to do but float, eat, sleep, admire the scenery, and discuss the Wilson bill. Who wouldn't be a Coxeyite?" But after several days passed without word of the sailors' fate, the *River Press* predicted that "there is little probability that 340 men, so inexperienced as they are, will make the long journey to Bismarck without accident or fatality." The equally pessimistic *Butte Miner* commented, "If the Coxey navy makes its trip on the treacherous Missouri without drowning half its men, it will be in luck. Navigation on the wicked old stream is none-too-safe even with the best of craft, but to attempt the journey in weak and hurriedly constructed boats is to invite disaster." The papers' premonitions of disaster probably were fostered by news of a terrible accident in Denver two days after *Montana's* navy departed Fort Benton: several hundred Colorado Coxeyites set sail on the South Platte but reportedly lost 15 men to the swirling waters when some of the vessels flipped over. The tragedy caused most of the novice sailors to abandon the South Platte for the more familiar course of the Union Pacific right-of-way.¹¹

Its first full day on the river, Hogan's navy navigated 30 miles in four hours—not a particularly rapid rate, but the men needed to adjust to the routine of life on the Missouri. Far from being the leisurely excursion the *River Press* imagined, the voyage demanded discipline, cooperation, and hard work. They typically spent 16 hours on the river, from 4 a.m. until 8 p.m., and for many the workday lasted even longer. Every man performed a variety of tasks. Sailors manned the oars in four shifts, alternating between half an hour of rowing and half an hour of doing something else. The third day out they rigged each scow with a

square topsail to increase their speed, but the wind seldom cooperated. After tying up for the night, men ate supper before bedding down on a riverbank to contemplate the stars and moon in a clear Montana sky. Then, said one, "We dream of free silver and the good times coming that must surely arise after we have performed our mission."¹²

A night watchman on each scow made sure it did not slip from its moorings. At 2 a.m. he awakened the cook. Each boat had its own cook, who along with his helpers prepared meals from foodstuffs provided by the commissary. They served breakfast at 3 a.m., after having spent the previous evening preparing a noon meal, which crewmen ate on the run to avoid delay. The commissary also

8. *Helena Independent*, June 7, 1894. Two small groups of Hogan's men also made their way east by rail but remained well hidden on the trains. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 3, 1894.

9. *Ft. Benton River Press*, June 6, 1894; *Helena Independent*, May 31, 1894; *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 6, 1894; *Kansas City (Mo.) Star*, July 13, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1894.

10. *Ft. Benton River Press*, June 6, 13, and 20, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 3, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 9, 1894.

11. *Ft. Benton River Press*, May 30, June 13, 1894; *Butte Miner*, June 9, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, June 9, 1894; *Rocky Mountain News (Denver)*, June 8, 1894.

12. *Ft. Benton River Press*, June 20, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894 (quotation).

13. *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894.

14. *Ft. Benton River Press*, June 6, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 3, 1894; *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 28, 1894; *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 7, 1894; *Kansas City Star*, July 13, 1894. The men expected Hogan to rejoin them before they reached Washington. Popular sentiment in Montana strongly favored his early release. *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894. On the western tradition of community building for overland travel, see Robert V. Hine, *Community on the American Frontier: Separate But Not Alone* (Norman, Okla., 1980), 49-69.

15. *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894 (quotation); *Great Falls Tribune*, June 16, 1894.

provided each boat with fresh bread. Four bakers working in two shifts turned out 300-600 loaves a day. Doubtless, few crew members worked harder than cooks and bakers.¹³

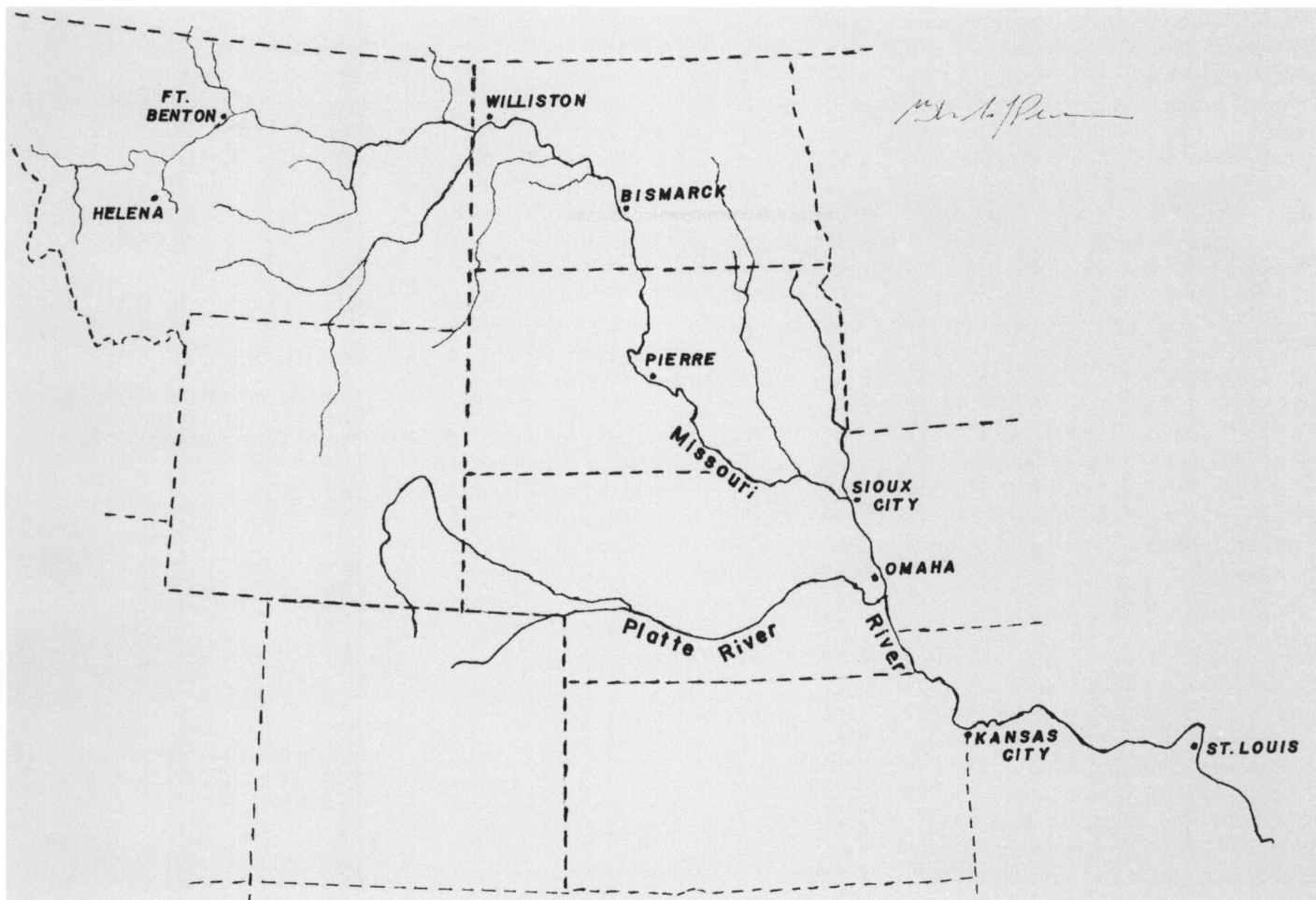
On the morning of the second day of the voyage, Hogan's navy made an unusual stop. In the best tradition of the frontier West, the men reenacted a ritual of popular democracy: they elected an interim leader to serve until the imprisoned Hogan could rejoin them. Their unanimous choice for "Hogan," as they jokingly entitled their new leader, was John Edwards, an unemployed metal miner who joined the crusade in Butte. Edwards, a 36-year-old native of Newark, New Jersey, the son of Irish immigrants, had 20 years earlier come west in search of gold and silver. A man of medium height and dark complexion, he had a refreshingly straightforward manner that earned him the respect of his fellow voyagers. They obeyed his orders to the letter. The only

punishment for insubordination was expulsion. In the forbidding country of eastern Montana and North Dakota, where men believed their chances for survival apart from the navy were the same as in the Sahara wastelands, none dared disobey or desert.¹⁴

Almost a week out of Fort Benton, after bucking nearly constant headwinds and running rapids that made "some of the able 'seamen' think of home and mother," the flotilla rowed into Williston, the first stop in North Dakota. Their arrival was no surprise to townspeople. Rumors that they intended to quit the river at that point and capture a Great Northern train on the main line that paralleled the north bank had panicked railway officials, who hired Indian scouts to go upriver to warn them of the navy's approach. They implored the commander of nearby Fort Buford to send three companies of troops to guard railway property. Failing that, they persuaded local

officials to deputize 50 citizens. Along the north bank, armed deputies built bonfires and waited nervously all night for the presumed band of pirates.¹⁵

Hogan's men, who had earlier been warned by Judge Knowles that they would find few sympathizers outside Montana, calmly halted on the south side of the river. From there three emissaries crossed in a lighter to obtain medicine for the sick. On the opposite shore they found deputies armed with Winchesters and women begging them not to shoot the visitors unless it was necessary. Once the three got past that distraction, however, they found the townspeople, especially the women, surprisingly sympathetic. An elderly black woman exclaimed that she had not danced for 12 years but now she felt like "footing a jig for Coxe's men." To the navy, Williston contributed tobacco, pipes, and several recruits. Such signs of popular support were invariably the best



medicine to revive the spirits of the protest navy.¹⁶

From Williston to Bismarck, the men again traveled through a great and lonely land. Their main concern was to reach the North Dakota capital before their dwindling food supply ran out. And even if they reached Bismarck ahead of starvation, they were afraid to travel on unless sympathizers restocked their commissary. They knew that to the south remained several hundred miles of sparsely settled country and that the ever cantankerous Missouri would lose much of its water as the summer progressed, exposing the sandbars and snags that complicated and slowed navigation. Events in Bismarck would thus determine the mission's future course.¹⁷

When Hogan's navy reached the North Dakota capital on June 14, a tumultuous welcome initially lifted the sailors' spirits. Crowds from Bismarck and Mandan, across the river, lined both banks, waving, clapping, and yelling themselves hoarse. Adding to the noisy salute were the whistle blasts of powerhouses and railway locomotives. The Bismarck City Council struck a sour note, however, when it refused to reprovision the navy, saying that it had enough trouble supporting the local poor. Sympathizers donated an impressive array of foodstuffs, but not nearly enough to see protesters through to the next significant population center, Pierre, a town of 3,500 people. At this bleak juncture, when for the first time the sailors realized they might fail, supporters in Butte sent a check for \$100, enough money for food to reach the South Dakota capital. After three days in Bismarck, the navy—diminished to 247 men—raised its gangplanks and with flags, banners, and sails snapping in a stiff breeze proceeded single file down the Missouri.¹⁸

The supply problems that bedeviled Hogan's navy—and at times all other western contingents—revealed clearly the workings of the protest movement's institutional underpinning. Contrary to popular belief, Coxeyites never lived the haphazard life of hoboes and tramps. Only rarely did they rely solely on door-to-door solicitation and streetcorner panhandling for their next meal. The Coxey

movement instead adopted a military style of organization that systematized procurement and distribution of food. Some contingents might even in an emergency turn to their home guards, as Hogan's men in Bismarck had appealed to Butte for aid. Because two-thirds of the men in the Montana navy were married and many had children, they could not have joined the trek to Washington had not local supporters in Butte provided for their families during their extended absence. Home guards not only sustained wives and children but also gave men on the road legal help, psychological support, and, in times of desperation, hard cash.¹⁹

In addition, Coxeyites in the West benefited from the special relief work often conducted on their behalf by the Populist party and organized labor. In the North Dakota capital, these two institutions were weak or ineffective, but in Omaha, on the other hand, a strong labor movement helped reprovision Charles T. Kelly's California army and several additional contingents that followed. Members of Hogan's navy, almost all union men, anticipated this support as they made their way south from Bismarck. In rural Iowa, Populists were the main sustainers of Coxey contingents that crossed that state. Where the Populist party and organized labor were both strong, as in parts of Montana, Idaho, and Colorado, Coxeyites fared best of all.²⁰

In a less tangible way, the Coxey movement also benefited from extensive newspaper coverage. Sympathetic editors were common in the area from the Missouri Valley west, but even negative press was sometimes better than none at all. For example, several South Dakota river towns that feared the worst contributed most liberally to Hogan's men in hopes that they would quickly pass on. The press was well aware of its role in sustaining the crusade. In mid-April the *Kansas City Star* editorialized that

whatever Coxey and Kelly and their so-called armies of Industrialists may become or do, they must give credit to the newspapers. If it were not for the press, which has exploited their mad performances, they would never have been heard of, and when the press tires of them they will sink back to the obscurity to which they belong.

The *Chicago Tribune* published a car-

toon depicting Coxey and Kelly as hot air balloons kept aloft by a constant stream of "newspaper notoriety." In late June and early July, though, the men of Hogan's navy worried little about the sustaining stream of publicity failing, for in the valley of the Missouri above Omaha they still caused quite a stir. Depending on the local paper, they appeared either as reform-minded Huckleberry Finns or as depraved, work-avoiding thieves.²¹

The men admitted that they had butchered a stray cow or two, and as they adjusted to shipboard routine, they increasingly adopted the carefree life of Huckleberry Finn. They took time to swim, fish, play cards, smoke, boat race, and admire the wild flowers and birds. For countless hours they sang free-silver songs, recited poetry, or polished their oratory in preparation for the big day in Washington. Each boat contained a great deal of well-thumbed reading material, the favorite item being a *Forum* article entitled "What Can We Do for the Poor?"²²

On the unpleasant side were chigger bites and sunburn. Daily exposure to sun, wind, and rain prompted them to rig canopies from strips of tenting, blankets, and old clothes. Occasionally they fes-

16. Ft. Benton *River Press*, June 20, 1894; *Great Falls Tribune*, June 16, 1894 (quotation).

17. *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1894.

18. *Anaconda Standard*, June 20, 1894; *Great Falls Tribune*, June 16, 1894; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, June 15, 16, and 18, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894.

19. *St. Joseph Daily News*, June 10, July 9, 1894.

20. *Sioux City Daily Tribune*, July 2, 1894; *Omaha Bee*, July 4, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 4, 1894; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 12, 1894; *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894; Clinch, 10-11; Schwantes, 10; James Edward Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven, 1974), 180-81.

21. *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894; *Kansas City Star*, April 17, 1894; *Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1894.

22. *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894; *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 27, 1894; W. S. Rainsford, "What Can We Do for the Poor?" *Forum*, Vol. 11 (1891), 116-26.

tooned these shelters with wild roses and green boughs plucked from the riverside. Try as they might, though, they could never take their minds off their biggest problem: food.²³

Quartermaster General Dick Berthold needed every bit of the experience he had gained during his 25 years as steamboat captain to run an efficient commissary. The men had plenty of utensils—fashioned mostly from tomato and sardine cans—and an occasional powder can, which they used as a boiling kettle. They made the yellow water of the Big Muddy drinkable by cracking an egg into a barrel of it. But seldom did they have a reassuring supply of food. Fortunately, several towns lined the river in South Dakota, and the people there were exceptionally generous. Pierre officials not only contributed beef, bacon, flour, coffee, rice, and salt but also allowed Hogan's men to solicit individual citizens. The village of Chamberlain was equally generous, donating a two-day supply of food consisting of 500 pounds of flour, 200 pounds of bacon, 200 pounds of beef, 100 pounds of beans, 50 pounds of coffee, 40 pounds of rice, and 2 pounds of hops. The hops were used in baking not brewing. To almost identical donations Yankton added a bottle of liniment and 100 bricks, a stovepipe, and a barrel of mortar for repairing the oven, which had been badly damaged in a storm.²⁴

Though citizens may have sometimes given out of fear, Hogan's men never threatened if they were not fed. "Admiral" Edwards told Pierre citizens that "while his men wanted provisions they were not to be understood as making a demand for them, only a request, and if they were not supplied they would have to go without." Upon leaving the South Dakota capital, Edwards stood on the bow of his flagship, and as the fleet passed slowly before a crowd of spectators, his men gave cheer after cheer for Pierre's generosity. In Chamberlain, too, polite crewmen seem to have won the grudging respect of townspeople. A U.S. marshal who went there to appraise Hogan's men reported to Yankton citizens downriver that "I saw everybody in the army and they are average laboring men and not tramps. They desire no trouble and only ask for food."²⁵

People who imagined the worst about the sailors before they arrived were surprised to find that they used no loud or profane language, carried more Bibles than weapons, and took pride in their respect for law and good order. They regularly washed themselves and their clothes and visited the fleet's makeshift barbershop.²⁶

Hogan's voyagers were especially fortunate that a series of favorable reports preceded them to Yankton, for the high winds and waters that pummeled their craft and damaged the vital Dutch oven forced them to remain there several days longer than expected. Although the state's worried governor ordered militiamen to stand by in case Hogan's navy became unruly, townspeople responded positively, as if the visitors were entertainers in a Wild West show. Crew members seldom appeared on Yankton streets without a friendly crowd gathering around to hear details of their adventure. In the process, residents also learned about hard times in Montana and how well posted the unemployed were on political and economic issues. Hogan's men left Yankton with fond memories, a commissary rebuilt and restocked, and a wagonload of clothes and old shoes.²⁷

Except for the damaging storm near Yankton, the trip from Bismarck to Omaha was uneventful. On the last day of June, Hogan's navy made a brief overnight stop in Sioux City, where police brought them two carloads of food and an ultimatum to move on. They needed little urging, for they were now so eager to reach Omaha that they started rowing double time, motivated, in part, by thoughts of apple pie and other treats that the city had earlier lavished on Kelly's Californians.²⁸

Omaha surveyed the Missouri Valley from a plateau 80 feet above the west bank. Its population of 140,000 was the largest of any city on the river, larger by 10,000 than Kansas City's, larger even than that of the entire state of Montana. For Hogan's men, it was the biggest city they had seen since moving to the far Northwest. With hard rowing the sailors arrived hours earlier than expected, just at dusk, when from the river the light-bejeweled metropolis appeared most en-

chanting. What they could not know as they moved in awe toward the great city on a hill was that in a few moments a serious accident would spoil their reverie and portend troubles to come.²⁹

Hogan's men threaded their way down the unfamiliar stretch of water when suddenly, dead ahead and barely visible in the darkness, loomed the East Omaha bridge. From above someone shouted, "Turn to the right, or you'll upset." The sailors, though exhausted by an unusually long and arduous day, reacted quickly, perhaps too quickly, for the current caught the *Livingston* broadside, threw it against a bridge pier, and rolled it over. Into the river pitched 17 men and their belongings; six found handholds on the pier and scrambled up to safety, but the rest fought for life in the inky water. Fellow crewmen and policemen finally rescued all but one sailor, who floated away in the darkness. The missing man later turned up unhurt, but the accident spread gloom among Hogan's men, gloom that was made worse by a most

23. Jefferson City (Mo.) *Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1894; Leavenworth (Kans.) *Times*, July 12, 1894; *Butte Bystander*, June 23, 1894.

24. *Kansas City Star*, July 13, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 2, 1894; Jamestown (N.D.) *Daily Alert*, June 29, 1894; *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 23, 28, 1894.

25. *Pierre Daily Capital Journal*, June 22 (first quotation), 23, 1894; *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 28, 1894 (second quotation).

26. *Sioux City Daily Tribune*, July 2, 1894; *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 26, 1894; *Leavenworth Times*, July 12, 1894; *Jefferson City Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1894; *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894.

27. *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 22, 26, and 27, 1894; *Ft. Benton River Press*, July 4, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, June 28, 1894. About the time they reached Yankton, Hoganites also began using an advance agent who preceded them by a day or two to facilitate local arrangements. Usually that was Nolan Davis, an unemployed journalist who joined the crusade in Montana. He wrote stories of the voyage for the *Great Falls Tribune* and *London Telegraph* and planned a book on the subject. The book was never published.

28. *Sioux City Journal*, June 30, 1894; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 2, 1894.

29. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 3, 1894.

disappointing welcome to Omaha. Actually it was hardly a welcome at all: on the shore a dozen policemen and six or seven sympathizers waved lanterns to guide them to a dubious camping spot circumscribed by a railroad bridge, a garbage dump, and a large sewer.³⁰

Life looked a little rosier the next day. Omaha's Central Labor Council, which explained that it had not greeted the voyagers at the waterfront because it expected them the next morning, arranged a public rally to demonstrate the city's support. The Omaha *World-Herald* also prodded citizens to help Hogan's men, commenting that they are "very much in need of help, and if some of the enthusiasm displayed during Kelly's stay is revived, the army will fare very well." The Central Labor Council collected from businessmen gifts of potatoes, crackers, onions, eggs, sugar, coffee, and flour. County commissioners contributed \$225 worth of supplies, including 100 bars of soap, and individual members of the city council gave \$53 in cash. Local merchants provided fresh bunting to spruce up the navy for the Fourth of July. Each man also got a shiny new badge. It was the last big handout the protest navy received.³¹

Their Omaha stay taught Hogan's men an important lesson in human psychology. As a rule, the first army to visit a community got the apple pie; all others got leftovers—or nothing at all. Little of the movement's novelty value remained after an initial visit. Thus it must have sobered Hogan's men to know that they would be the second, third, or, in some cases, fourth Coxeys contingent to visit the remaining big cities on their itinerary. In fact, because Kelly's men had already traveled the water route from Saint Louis most of the way to Pittsburgh, Hogan's flotilla would likely attract little press coverage in the Ohio Valley. News accounts of their adventure were already becoming scarce when they left Omaha. The public was by that time far more interested in the gigantic Pullman strike that radiated out from Chicago and caused the greatest railway tie-up west-ers had ever experienced.³²

Hogan's men sympathized with Pullman strikers, and at every landing they sought

latest news of the conflict. So, too, did most other Americans. As the strike dragged on, becoming increasingly disruptive and violent, it crowded news of the Coxeys movement from the papers and caused many frightened people to turn against the working class in general. For Hogan's navy, that meant loss of popular support and lean times that grew progressively leaner as they floated through parts of Missouri where organized labor—like Yankee soldiers—had never been welcome. Unlike people in the Dakotas, Iowa, and Nebraska, many Missourians were most unimpressed by letters of introduction reminding readers that a number of Hogan's men had fought during the Civil War for the North.³³

The flotilla reached Leavenworth, Kansas, a town once noted for its Southern sympathies, on July 11. The men desperately needed a show of popular support to inject life back into the flagging crusade. The day before, they had lost a scow, and the clothes and food inside, when it hit a submerged snag and overturned. It was a loss they could not afford, with more mouths to feed now than at any point since Bismarck. Their number had increased to 325 men at Plattsmouth, Nebraska, where Hogan's men were joined by four skiffs of Coxeites, the remnant of the ill-fated Colorado contingent, which itself included eight survivors of an army of 600 that left Portland, Oregon, in late April.³⁴

About the only thing Coxeys' navy had in its favor in Leavenworth was a Populist police force, which allowed the visitors liberty of the city. Their show in Leavenworth was a familiar one. With banners flying and fifes shrieking, they marched from their boat camp uptown to the courthouse square for some fiery oratory, during which spokesmen explained to townspeople their reform mission. The fact that only about 75 of the curious turned out nettled Edwards. He lost his temper and criticized the community, saying that people were slaves when they took so little interest in the nation's politics. His assistant, John Byron, likewise complained that Leavenworth's lack of sympathy made it difficult for the reformers to make any impression on Congress. Edwards then passed the hat, but onlookers gave only 87 cents. The men returned to the fleet in a downcast

mood. Claiming that he was physically ill, Edwards withdrew \$6 from the treasury and took a train to Kansas City for unspecified treatment, promising to rejoin the men when they passed through a few days later. Some perhaps wondered whether Edwards would do what other discouraged army leaders had done: get drunk and disappear.³⁵

When the navy got to Kansas City it received the municipal cold shoulder. Mayor Webster Davis would not permit the men to land within the city limits, and he posted mounted policemen along the waterfront to enforce his edict. From atop a high bluff along the river, the chief of police anxiously scanned the horizon with an ancient spyglass; his men waited in the sweltering heat, mopping their brows and preparing to repulse the invaders. Coxeites, having been forewarned of possible trouble, kept to the middle of the river as they rounded the bend and rowed by slowly in single file. All the while they hooted derisively at the mounted escort that followed along the shore. According to previous arrangements, the commissary boat dropped out of line and drew near to a place where the mayor, a crowd of the curious, and a police guard waited. There Hogan's emissaries collected a to-

30. *Ibid.*

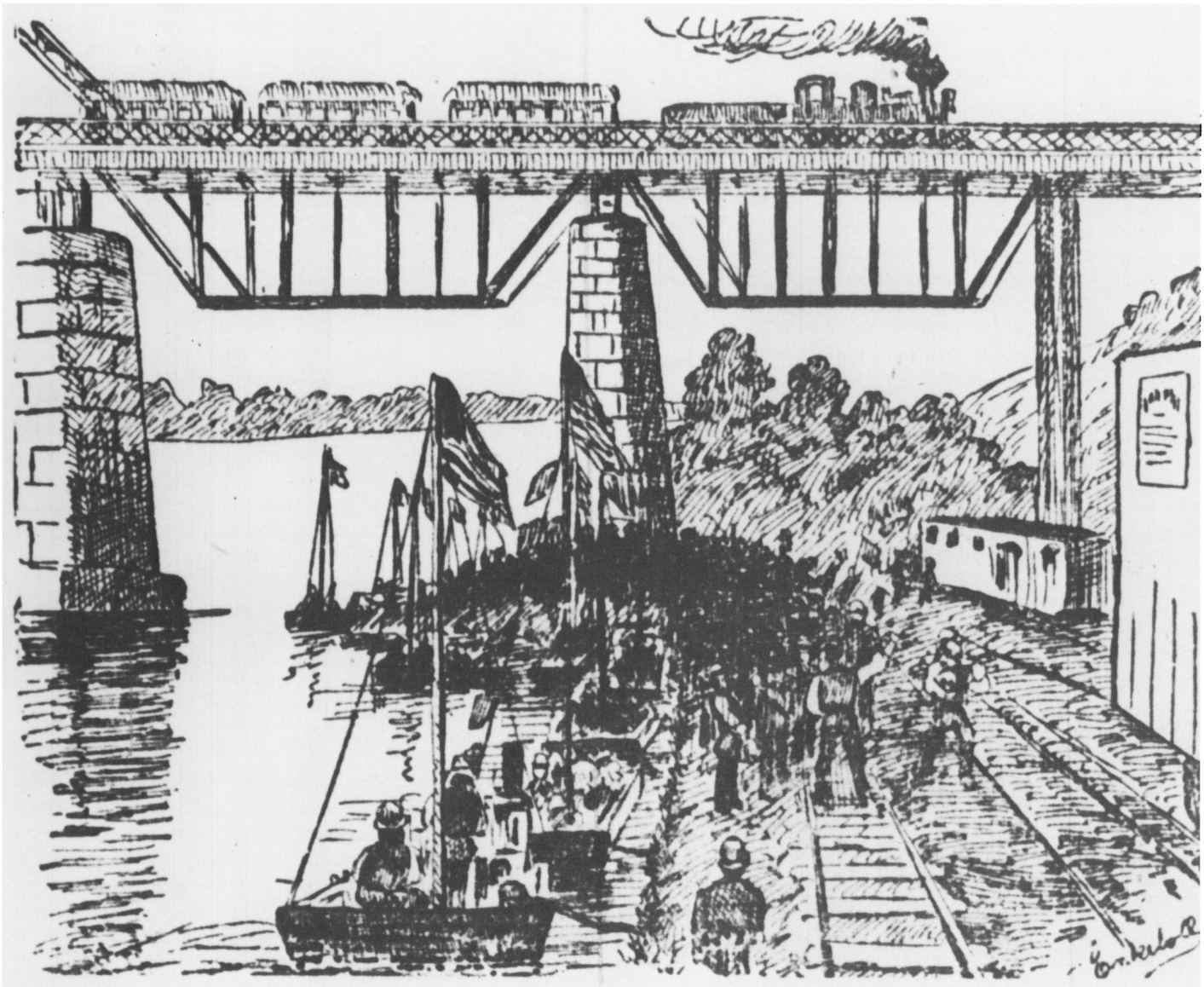
31. *Ibid.*, July 3 (quotation), 4, 1894; Omaha *Bee*, July 4, 1894. Badges bore the inscription "Hogan's Industrial Army of Butte City, Mont." *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894.

32. McMurry, 195-96; Almont Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Unique Experiment and a Great Labor Upheaval* (1942; rpt. Chicago, 1964).

33. *Yankton Press and Dakotan*, June 26, 1894; *Leavenworth Times*, July 12, 1894; *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 10, 1894.

34. *Nebraska City Daily News*, July 6, 7, 1894; *St. Joseph Daily News*, July 9, 1894; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 11, 1894; *Leavenworth Times*, July 12, 1894. On the Oregon Coxeites, see Herman C. Voeltz, "Coxey's Army in Oregon, 1894," *OHQ*, Vol. 65 (1964), 263-95; Schwantes, 11, 15, 24.

35. *Leavenworth Times*, July 12, 1894; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 12, 1894; *Kansas City (Mo.) Mail*, July 13, 1894; *Kansas City Star*, July 13, 1894.



The Omaha World-Herald for July 4, 1894, recorded for posterity the brief stay of Coxeys' Montana navy in that city. (Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln)

ken gift from the mayor consisting of flour, bread, and coffee—about enough food, observed a sailor ruefully, for one meal. Complaining that they had received no meat, men hungrily eyed a small pig picked up in Nebraska by one boat's crew.³⁶

As Coxeites debated their meager food supply, police warned again that they would "vag" any crewman found inside the city limits. In other words, they

would arrest men for vagrancy, a charge that likely meant an unpleasant stay in the local workhouse. Once more Hogan's men suffered the consequences of being latecomers in the progression of western armies. Mayor Davis claimed that he barred Hoganites from the city because he had earlier given a Coxe contingent permission to remain there for three days, but it defiantly remained for three weeks, pillaging residences and raiding saloons. He feared a repeat from Hogan's outfit. Hogan's men discounted the mayor's story and in effect thumbed their noses in contempt when they pitched camp on a stretch of riverbank just beyond the Kansas City limits and dared him to evict them. They refused to move

until they had searched the city's hotels for the missing Edwards, fearing that he might be too ill to summon aid. Mayor Davis fumed but did not attempt to stop a small search party led by the navy's treasurer, J. D. Sullivan. The men were relieved to locate their absent leader in a hospital. He was well enough to return to the flotilla but relinquished command to a new "Hogan," John Byron.³⁷

36. *Kansas City Mail*, July 11, 13, 1894; *Kansas City Star*, July 13, 1894.

37. *Kansas City Star*, July 7, 13, 1894; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 11, 1894; *Jefferson City Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1894.

As the men continued down the Missouri, they found food increasingly scarce. Sometimes they had barely enough to get them from one population center to another. At Jefferson City the mayor and councilmen donated a meager amount of flour, bacon, and bread. To this they added 30 pounds of coffee after a Coxeyite cried out, "Mr. Mayor, we want some coffee worse than anything else, and we would be very thankful if you could let us have a few pounds."³⁸

Hogan's navy finally arrived at Saint Louis during the last week of July, half starved and wholly demoralized. The reform crusade had become a battle for personal survival. About the only group to give them any aid was the tiny Socialist Labor party. Its members held a public rally that netted \$11.80, and they collected from businessmen two dozen loaves of bread and a few bundles of clothing. Though Byron maintained that the men would still reach Washington before the snow flew, most sensed that their once grand crusade was tottering toward collapse.³⁹

Approximately 60 days and 2,670 miles from Fort Benton, life left the movement at Carondelet, on the south side of Saint Louis, but not before the men suffered one last disillusioning blow. After enduring several frustrating and unproductive days at Carondelet, the men convened a council to debate their fate and therein decided to let the crewmen of each boat decide the future for themselves. Five crews elected to proceed down the Mississippi to Cairo or New Orleans and from there travel overland to Washington. The remainder agreed to sell their boats, divide the proceeds, and separate for individual destinations. The sailors also decided to divide equally the navy's \$435 treasury, most of the money being a recent gift from a Dubuque philanthropist.⁴⁰

Sullivan, their treasurer, headed for town to get the necessary cash. The men trusted Sullivan, who for the past 12 years had been a hod carrier and part-time miner in Butte, but they also sent along John Edwards and Edward H. Hogan (apparently no relation to his more famous namesake). The sailors waited for the three to return. Eventually it became obvious that their erstwhile com-



The Ohio State Journal in Columbus labeled General Hogan one of the "New Crusaders" and ran this portrait of the Montana navy's absentee leader. (May 15, 1894)

panions had betrayed and abandoned them. Penniless and dispirited, Hogan's navy broke up. Singing a bitter version of a song entitled "He Never Came Back," a few men headed down the Mississippi, others continued east toward Washington, but most apparently returned to Montana in "side-door Pullmans," better known as boxcars.⁴¹

The day after the great betrayal, Saint Louis police arrested Edward Hogan for public drunkenness, and while in jail he confessed to taking \$145 of the navy's money. Sullivan, he said, had headed for Denver and Edwards to another western city. Doubtless, if Edwards made it back to Butte he found some angry people awaiting him. As for the original Hogan, at about the time of the breakup, Judge Knowles released him from prison to take a job. Now that he had work, quipped Knowles, he hoped Hogan would stay away from railroading, especially the kind that landed him in jail. Hogan received many congratulations from local supporters, although the navy that bore his name halfway across the continent was no more.⁴²

Because few newspapers noted the demise of Montana's protest navy and because any records kept by the men themselves apparently failed to survive, it is impossible to say how participants looked back upon their adventure in reform. What did they think they had accomplished? Until the final days Hogan's men quite clearly believed they were making history. The fleet's journalist, Nolan Davis, intended to immortalize the adventure in a book. Another voyager, upon showing his membership book to a reporter, remarked, "I would not part with that book for anything, for long in the future it will be something for my people to be proud of." Many indicated that they endured present hardships because they expected their mission to result in better times. Men also believed that their protest would further the economic and political education of people they encountered along the way. In fact, though, the historical record fails to say how successfully they enlightened people; neither does it indicate whether Hoganites still regarded their membership books with pride after their leaders betrayed them and their movement collapsed.⁴³

Though Hogan's navy, like the Coxey movement as a whole, failed to secure its reform demands, it nonetheless served an important purpose: it provided a way for one group of unemployed workers to vent their discontent. It gave men involuntarily idled—men feeling sorry for themselves and growing increasingly bitter as they watched their families suffer privation—a new sense of purpose, a

38. Jefferson City *Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1894.

39. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 29, 30, 1894.

40. Anaconda *Standard*, Aug. 8, Sept. 2, 1894.

41. *Ibid.*, Aug. 8, 9, Sept. 2, 1894. On the financial organization of the navy, see St. Joseph *Daily News*, July 9, 1894.

42. Ft. Benton *River Press*, Aug. 15, 1894; Anaconda *Standard*, Aug. 9, 1894.

43. Leavenworth *Times*, July 12, 1894 (quotation); Yankton *Press and Dakotan*, June 28, 1894.

new feeling of being able to direct their own destiny. By channeling their discontent into a novel form of self-help, the reform navy heightened workers' self-worth. Hogan's men stopped short of the Capitol, but perhaps surviving a two-month raft voyage down the Missouri without the loss of a single life was for many protesters accomplishment enough.⁴⁴ □

Carlos A. Schwantes, professor of history at Walla Walla College, is a frequent contributor to a wide range of journals, both regional and national. He is currently preparing a book of readings on Pacific Northwest history and is writing a book on the Coxe's Army movement.

44. Ft. Benton River Press, May 30, 1894; Yankton Press and Dakotan, June 28, 1894; St. Joseph Daily News, July 9, 1894.

Here the Country Lies: Nationalism and the Arts in Twentieth-Century America. By CHARLES C. ALEXANDER. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. xiv, 336 pp. Notes, index. \$32.50)

Charles Alexander, professor of history at Ohio University, has had a long interest in the intellectual history of the 1930s and 1940s and, specifically, in expressions of nationalism during those years. In 1969 he published *Nationalism in American Thought, 1930-1945*. The same period and theme comprise the heart of *Here the Country Lies*, which surveys artists' ideas of cultural nationalism throughout the 20th century.

Here the Country Lies belongs to the historiographical tradition pioneered by Merle Curti's *Growth of American Thought*. The lives of hundreds of artists (writers, painters, architects, musicians, dancers, and popular culture figures), their works and views are briefly characterized in their "external" relation to society and to large movements of ideas. Relying upon a now extensive primary and secondary body of writing on the people discussed, *Here the Country Lies* is informed and clear, but it is too comprehensive to probe deeply into any of the hundreds of subjects introduced.

Most familiar, because of the prodigious scholarship produced by others, are the first portions of the book dealing with the years prior to 1920, in which Alexander recounts the orthodoxies of the establishment's custodians of culture and the attack made upon them. The genteel traditionalists were formalistic, academic, elitist Anglophiles who were not enthusiastic about things natively American. Although expressions of genteel traditionalism survived the Great War and even through the 1920s, younger groups of rebels gained increasing influence.

The romantic nationalists moved from youthful cultural dissent before World War I to a position of prestige and power during the depression and into the Second World War, when democracy and patriotism seemed most congruent and successful. Celebrating homegrown artistic materials, language, and theories, the romantic nationalists tried to give the American dream artistic and cultural viability. Their search was for the American arts, not merely the arts in America.

After World War II the genteel tradition was forgotten, American artists were increasingly influential throughout the world, but the romantic nationalists passed dominance to avant-garde modernists who have had unparalleled artistic successes. Overpowering waves of internationalism made the purely national appear merely provincial. Most post-war artists have been impatient with earlier attempts to regenerate America through its culture and indifferent to claims of social responsibility.

Alexander concludes:

The history of cultural nationalism in twentieth-century America is ultimately a story of failure—the failure of an idea and a belief to sustain themselves in the face of swift intellectual and social change. That failure, Howard Mumford Jones suggested in 1965, meant "either that the American dream has been universalized or that it has disappeared. . . ." And if Americans of the late twentieth century could glory in their continuing artistic renaissance, they still seemed a long way from their regeneration—through art or otherwise. (p. 276) □

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Here the Country Lies