

Kathleen Banks Nutter, "This Greenback Lunacy: Third Party Politics in Franklin County, 1878" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 22, No. 2 (Summer 1994).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

You may use content in this archive for your personal, non-commercial use. Please contact the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* regarding any further use of this work:

masshistoryjournal@westfield.ma.edu

Funding for digitization of issues was provided through a generous grant from MassHumanities.



Some digitized versions of the articles have been reformatted from their original, published appearance. When citing, please give the original print source (volume/ number/ date) but add "retrieved from HJM's online archive at <http://www.westfield.ma.edu/mhj/>."



"This Greenback Lunacy": Third Party Politics in Franklin County, 1878

Kathleen Banks Nutter

As the first crop of hay was being mowed in Franklin County, Massachusetts, several men gathered in Greenfield's Grand Army Hall on Main Street. They elected officers and proposed to meet every Saturday evening. The subject to be discussed at the next meeting was "The present hard times and their remedy."¹ Soon to be sanctioned by the state and national organization, the Greenfield Greenback Club had been born.²

Who were these men and why did they seek political affiliation with a movement seen as a "craze" by many, as a danger by some? The shiretown of Franklin county — a small town in a rural county of Western Massachusetts — was briefly part of "this Greenback lunacy."³ An understanding of the composition of the Greenback Party on a local level might provide more insight for generalizations about the national movement. Previous historians have depicted the Greenback movement as one comprised primarily of farmers and workers who were reacting to the inequities of industrial capitalism. In Greenfield, the class identities were not so distinct. Furthermore, this was not a backward looking movement. In evoking the producer-as-citizen

1. Greenfield Gazette & Courier, June 10, 1878.

2. Greenfield Greenback Club state charter, June 6, 1878, and national charter, June 10, 1878, in the Greenback Club of Greenfield minutes, Greenfield Historical Society, Greenfield, Mass.

3. Quote attributed to Henry E. Alvord, Labor-Greenback Party Ticket, 1880, in Levi Stockbridge Papers, Manuscript and Archives Dept., University of Massachusetts Library, Amherst, Mass.

image of the early Republic, Greenbackers sought not to challenge capitalism, only to maintain their place within the system.

A party that started as a monetary philosophy polled, at its height, more than ten percent in some state elections and sent fourteen Congressmen to Washington in the peak year of 1878. Even more important, the Greenback presence forced the two major parties to take a stand on currency issues. The Greenback demand for reform clarified the positions of Democrats and Republicans alike. Political historians tend to see the rise of third parties as an "expression of discomfort with the majority parties and their candidates."⁴ If we agree that forming a third party is an extraordinary act, then the transformation of an ideology into a third party can be seen as equally impressive.⁵

Such a transformation took place in Greenfield in the 1870s. Economic depression, scarce money, and high interest rates touched both carpenters and storeowners in much the same way. The two major parties seemed unsure at best, unwilling at worst to respond to popular needs. Belief, for a time, in the Greenback creed was an act of political faith based on personal financial need and a desire for a better way of life for all. While some called it "lunacy," a few saw it as mere common sense.

In the immediate post-bellum era, the Republican Party hoped to maintain its hold on Massachusetts state politics. At the same time, the party was going through an identity crisis of sorts now that the turmoil of Civil War had passed. Meanwhile, the Democrats hoped to shed the bloody shirt once and for all.⁶ New issues came to the fore during the 1870s — temperance, labor reform, women's suffrage and currency reform — that would

 4. Steven Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure (Princeton, N.J., 1984), p. 5.

5. The standard work on Greenbackism on the national level is Irwin Unger, The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Thought, 1865-1879 (Princeton, N.J., 1964). Also useful are Robert P. Sharkey, Money, Class and Party: An Economic History of Civil War and Reconstruction (Baltimore, Maryland, 1967), and David Montgomery, Beyond Equality: Labor and Radical Republicans, 1862-1872 (Urbana, Illinois, 1981). Two studies on the local level, both of which emphasize working-class support, are John D. French, "Reaping the Whirlwind: The Origins of the Allegheny County Greenback Labor Party in 1877," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, LXI (1981): 97-119, and Gordon B. McKinney, "The Politics of Protest: The Labor Reform and Greenback Parties in New Hampshire," Historical New Hampshire, XXXVI (1981): 149-170.

6. Dale Baum, The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984), chaps. 7 and 8.

muddy the political waters for both Republicans and Democrats and give rise to a third party that would further confuse the electoral scene. Election results within Franklin County are indicative of this ferment. In 1874, Franklin County was divided between Republicans, Democrats and Independants. A pre-election editorial from the *Greenfield Gazette & Courier* correctly predicted a divided county, split over temperance and the Hoosac Tunnel.⁷ In elections of 1876 and 1877, local issues were not so divisive. Lack of contention brought Republican victory. By 1878, however, a third party would surface in Franklin County, causing both major parties to question the depth of their support. A brief look at the economic and social conditions of this rural corner of Massachusetts will help explain how and why Greenbackism came to be.

The decline in Massachusetts agriculture began before the Civil War. Competition from the West, starting in the 1820s with the completion of the Erie Canal, hurt Franklin County farmers. Further competition (and harm) came in the 1870s with the construction of the Hoosac Tunnel which provided a direct rail link between Massachusetts and the West. In response, the farmers of Western Massachusetts were forced to grow new and more marketable crops such as broomcorn and tobacco, even though hay continued to be a vital product. Equally important was the commercial development of vegetables and dairy products.⁸ While the opening of the Hoosac Tunnel in 1874 brought further unwanted competition for area farmers, it also established Greenfield as a major railhead and chief source of employment for railroad workers. Yet economic benefits often have special costs or so the — *Gazette & Courier* — thought in 1876 when it reported that "Our town was full of drunken

7. *Gazette & Courier*, September 28, 1874.

8. Percy W. Bidwell and John Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860* (Washington, D.C., 1925), pp. 450-451. See also Margaret Richards Pabst, "Agricultural Trends in the Connecticut Valley Region of Massachusetts, 1800-1900," *Smith College Studies in History*, XXVI (1941): 1-84; and J. Ritchie Garrison, *Landscape and Material Life in Franklin County, Massachusetts, 1790-1860* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1991). A general history of Greenfield can be found in Paul Jenkins, *The Conservative Rebel: A Social History of Greenfield, Massachusetts* (Greenfield, 1982).

railroaders on Saturday."⁹ Meanwhile, the town also supported a growing "professional" class of doctors, lawyers, and shopkeepers.

By the mid-1870s, Greenfield had forty-six manufacturing concerns. The total value of its products was less than that of other county towns that concentrated on paper or lumber. Greenfield's industrial strength rested upon its diversity. Although primarily known for its cutlery and tool making industries, other trades flourished as well. Everything from cheese to picture frames, from carriages to cemetery monuments was also manufactured in Greenfield at this time.¹⁰ In the mid-1870s the shiretown seemed a veritable beehive of industry and commerce. Yet the prosperity proved fragile.

The panic of 1873 that triggered a five-year depression would make it difficult even for the machinist to maintain a decent standard of living as he saw his hours reduced and wages slashed. Shopkeepers felt the financial strain as they lowered prices repeatedly in the hopes of attracting business in a strapped economy. Even some doctors and lawyers must have had difficulty paying their bills when their clients could not pay them. In the midst of such economic hardship, the federal government chose to return to the pre-Civil War gold standard and decrease the supply of paper money, popularly called greenbacks. For the skilled worker and the salaried professional alike, especially those who had homes with mortgages, such a contraction of the money supply during hard times threatened their financial status. Out of this economic, social and political crisis, the Greenback party was born.

The Independent Greenback Party of Massachusetts platform called for five basic reforms. Repeal of the Resumption Act headed the list. It was followed by demands for government-issued legal tender, restoration of the silver dollar, equal taxation of all property and public lands reserved for the people, and finally, an end to the policy of contraction.¹¹ A political platform that sought to establish a system of money for the "people" without undermining private property had a cogent appeal for the thirty-five Greenfield men verified as Greenbackers. As skilled

9. Gazette & Courier, June 26, 1876.

10. Massachusetts Bureau of the Statistics of Labor, Ninth Annual Report (Boston, 1878), p. 61.

11. Greenback Club minutes.

workers and small business owners, these men had a stake in the community, a community like most of the nation plagued by a stubborn depression.

The panic of 1873 and ensuing depression gave new urgency to currency reform. The effects of the depression on many of the nation's farmers served to bring them into the Greenback fold. However, it was the Great Strike of 1877 that would truly ignite Greenbackism. Workers from Manchester, New Hampshire to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania joined the Greenback Party in reaction to the growing inequities of industrial capitalism.¹²

But in Greenfield, Massachusetts the local Greenback Club that formed in 1878 did not have such a narrow social base. A small industrial town with a farming mentality gave rise to a diverse group. A Yankee mechanic and an Irish-born laborer would join in signing the initial petition for a Greenback charter. A clairvoyant and a prosperous manufacturer would run on the local Greenback ticket. Was Greenfield's Greenback Club an anomaly compared to others across the country? Only further research will answer that question in a definitive way. However, a look at Franklin County's Greenbackers can begin to answer why some men chose to follow, for a time, the Greenback "faith."¹³

A variety of occupations were represented in the Greenfield Greenback Club. While fifteen percent were unskilled laborers, another fifteen percent were small business owners. Forty percent were skilled laborers, and thirty percent were petty professionals.¹⁴ Obviously, this was not a strictly working-class association. Nor was it primarily middle class. The Greenback

12. See McKinney, "The Politics of Protest . . ." and French, "Reaping the Whirlwind."

13. Leon Fink, Workingmen's Democracy: the Knights of Labor and American Politics (Urbana, Ill., 1983), p. 48.

14. The twenty-two verified occupations for Greenfield's Greenbackers are as follows: two saloon keepers and one livery stable owner (classified as small business owners); two newspaper agents, one telegraph operator, one lawyer, one homeopathic physician, and one clairvoyant (petty professionals); two carpenters, two shoemakers, and two cutlers (skilled laborers); and three laborers (unskilled laborers). Sources used were local street directories and genealogies, census reports, and the local newspaper.

Club of Greenfield found its members at the point where the two classes met.¹⁵

Neither the poorest workers nor the upper middle-class appear to have belonged to the club. Rather, it was the more prosperous workers and those who were maintaining a tenuous middle-class status during the lean years of the 1870s. Both groups felt in danger of losing all that they had worked for, and they believed that neither of the major parties were responding to the financial crisis.

According to the Greenfield street directories for this period, only six known Greenbackers were boarders. The rest occupied houses and were heads of households. Though the street directory did not distinguish renters from owners, it can be concluded that these men were primarily in their thirties and forties, with established families. Although few were born in Greenfield, they had an interest in the community, and were deeply involved in its civic life.

Several belonged to one or more fraternal organizations. Four were Masons, and four more headed the local temperance society. Three Greenbackers also organized the local lyceum, and three men were officers in the Sovereigns of Industry. Three men also belonged to the local post of the Grand Army of the Republic, and two were Odd Fellows. A month before the formation of the Greenback Club, two had founded a local Spiritualists' Society. One man belonged to the Irish Land League, another to the Greenfield chapter of the Robert Emmett Association. Still another served as foreman of the Glen Hose fire company, number 2, and yet another was a member of the Knights of Honor. A brief look at a few of the leaders of the Greenback Club should further illustrate its social variety.

Dr. James W. Thomson, homeopathic physician, was the first president of the Greenfield Greenback Club. He arrived in town the summer of 1876, boarding with a Mrs. Graves on Main Street. By the fall of 1876, when Thomson opened his office in the Union Block, he was not the only "Homeopathician" in Franklin County. In May of 1877, Thomson was elected chair of the pathology committee for the newly-formed Homeopathic Society of (Western) Massachusetts. Seen as "ridiculous" by the orthodox medical community, homeopathy nonetheless had a large

15. Ernesto Laclau, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (London, 1977), p. 172.

following in America, especially during the 1870s and 1880s.¹⁶ Dr. Thomson was also an avid checker player, whose public matches earned notice in the local newspaper.¹⁷

Thomson is last mentioned in the club minutes on October 23, 1880. It seems that he left town as quietly as he had arrived. Although a resident for only four years, Thomson left his mark, not just as a checker player. His name appeared on the club's state charter, and while he was not a member of the short-lived Labor Reform Club that preceded the Greenback Club, it seems safe to assume that Thomson was a guiding force in the development of Greenbackism in Greenfield.

E. A. Blake's name also appeared on the state charter, as secretary of the local club. Even less is known of Blake than Thomson, though Blake's brother E. B. was known to be a prosperous coal merchant and real estate owner. E. B. Blake started out as a telegraph operator, a position that E. A. also held. The Blake brothers were born in the small town of Hill, New Hampshire, in the 1840s. By 1876, E. A. was living in Greenfield and working as the operator of the new Atlantic and Pacific telegraph line's Greenfield office. He was appointed station-master and telegraph operator in nearby Charlemont, in 1878.

In addition to being a charter member of both the Labor Reform Club and the Greenback Club, Blake was cofounder of the Spiritualists' Society, in May of 1878. Two years later, Blake left Greenfield, possibly for the South. In 1895, his brother's biographical entry in a county publication placed him in Roanoke, Virginia, where he was still working as a telegraph operator.¹⁸ Like Dr. Thomson, Blake's stay in Greenfield was brief but crucial from the perspective of Greenbackism.

Jonathan Johnson would succeed E. A. Blake as secretary of the Greenback Club, and it is he that we have to thank for the extant minutes. Perhaps Johnson learned his clerical skills during

16. See Martin Kaufman, Homeopathy in America: Rise and Fall of a Medical Heresy (Baltimore, 1971), and Kaufman, American Medical Education: The Formative Years (Westport, Conn., 1976), pp. 70-71.

17. Gazette & Courier, July 17 and November 6, 1876, and January 21, 1878; Turners Falls Reporter, May 30, 1877.

18. Lucy Cutler Kellogg, Genealogical Notes Concerning Franklin County Families (unpublished manuscript, 1953, in the Greenfield Historical Society); Gazette & Courier, October 2, 1876, May 12 and December 9, 1878; Biographical Review, The Leading Citizens of Franklin County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1895), p. 339.

his time as a reporter for the *New England Homestead*. For most of the 1870s and into the 1880s, Johnson was an agent for the paper, a monthly publication for farmers. He was born in 1825, and shared a home behind the Court House with his wife and three grown children. In addition to his membership in the Labor Reform Club and his very active role in the Greenback club, Johnson was an organizer of the Sons of Temperance, in 1874. He helped start the Greenfield Lyceum in 1876, leading several debates, and by 1879 was an officer of the Sovereigns of Industry.¹⁹ At the age of fifty-three, Johnson was one of the older members of the Greenback Club, and unlike Blake and Thomson he lived in town for a much longer period. Still, Johnson does not warrant a single mention in the extensive town history which was completed at the turn of the century. Perhaps it was his politics that kept him out.

Politics did not cause the omission of F. L. Burnham, the second president of the Greenback Club, from the *Biographical Review of Franklin County*. Frederick Lord Burnham, born in Buxton, Maine, in 1843, was the son of a lumberman who died when Fred was only ten. By the age of seventeen, Burnham was working in Orange, Massachusetts, in a shop that made piano cases. He enlisted in the army in 1861, and was discharged four years later as a third sergeant.

Burnham came to Greenfield in 1867, to work as a carpenter, a trade he plied for twenty-five years. He left carpentry for four and a half years to serve as superintendent of the Greenfield Cooperative Cutlery Company. At the end of 1884, he returned to the building trades, until turning to real estate in the mid-nineties. Burnham's fraternal associations were many. He was a founder of the Grand Army of the Republic post of Greenfield, an organizer of the Sovereigns of Industry, and a thirty-year member of the Odd Fellows. Despite his role in both the Labor Reform and Greenback Clubs, the *Biographical Review* had only this to say in 1895: "In political affiliations Mr. Burnham is a strong Prohibitionist from the Republican ranks."²⁰ Only a decade earlier he had been a staunch Greenbacker.

19. Tenth Census, Mass., Franklin County; *Gazette & Courier*, August 17, 1874, January 3, 1876, and December 29, 1879.

20. *Biographical Review of Franklin County*, pp. 348-349; Kellogg, *Genealogical Notes*.

These four men — a homeopathic physician, a telegrapher, a newspaper agent, and a carpenter turned superintendent of a cooperative factory — were among the leaders of Greenfield's Greenback Club. This variety of occupations is found in the general membership of the club as well. What these men shared was an apparent dissatisfaction with the economic order. They sought a political solution to what they perceived as economic injustice.

Unfortunately, the club's minutes begin only after the fall election of 1878. But from accounts in the local newspapers, it is evident that the Greenbackers were making their presence known. In editorial, the *Gazette & Courier* tried to explain the Greenbackers' threat:

The Greenbackers' cry is against the man of wealth and against the man of position. They class all together and condemn them alike. . . . There is a failure to allow cheerfully that what a man earns is his own. And, too, if we take a glance at the Communists we cannot fail to see that they gather under the cry²¹

Linking Greenbackers to Communists was a warning to all, especially to those who might be tempted by the Greenback philosophy of an ample money supply and low interest rates. One man who apparently ignored this warning was Bowdoin S. Parker. In 1876, Parker graduated from the Boston University Law School, at the age of thirty-five. He returned to his hometown of Greenfield that year, to practice patent law, a brisk business in a community of inventive mechanics. He was active in the Masons and the local G.A.R., as well as president of the local Butler Club in 1878, and a member of the Greenback Club after the two merged following the 1878 election.²² According to the *Turner Falls Reporter*, Parker had only recently been a Republican:

It is generally believed at the shiretown that B. S. Parker has left the Republican fold to pin his faith to greenbacks. If Mr. Parker had received the

21. *Gazette & Recorder*, July 8, 1878.

22. Francis S. Tompson, *History of Greenfield, 1692-1900* (Greenfield, 1904), II: 828.

Republican representative nomination last fall, in all probability he would have worried along with metal money for some time to come. Block a man's political aspirations, and he will fly for consolation to a new party.²³

Was a snub all it took to turn a Republican into a Greenbacker? B. S. Parker left no record of what prompted his decision, so we are left only with village gossip. Nonetheless, the *Gazette & Courier* saw cause for alarm in the approaching election. "The great political parties are so evenly divided just now that a third political party could easily create a disturbance."²⁴ And the gubernatorial campaign of General Benjamin F. Butler caused such a disturbance.

Press accounts of the day depict a man who was both villified and adored. A sordid military career and more than one questionable financial deal made Butler an improbable candidate. An antebellum Democrat turned Radical Republican, Butler now ran as an Independent Democrat with Greenbacker support.²⁵ Butler Clubs popped up across the Commonwealth, as state Democrats nominated their own candidate, Josiah Abbott. For the Greenbackers of Franklin County, this first campaign was to be a messy one.

The *Gazette & Courier* disliked Butler just as much as it disliked Greenbackers. Many an editorial warned of this "bird of prey [who] had his gaze upon our old State."²⁶ For many, the link between Butler and the Greenbackers did little to enhance either the General or the party. But for some, in the cities of Boston and Lowell, Salem and Lynn, and even in Greenfield, Butler seemed the right man to lead the Greenbackers to victory in November.

Early elections in other states indicated growing support for the party. In September, Maine's Greenbackers ran well

23. *Turners Falls Reporter*, July 17, 1878.

24. *Gazette & Courier*, August 19, 1878.

25. Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler's Book* (Boston, 1892); Edward T. James, "Ben Butler Runs for President: Labor, Greenbackers and Anti-Monopolists in the Election of 1884," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CXIII (1977), p. 69, n. 10.

26. *Gazette & Courier*, September 16, 1878.

throughout the state, electing eight out of thirty-one candidates for the state assembly, as well as United States Congressman.²⁷ A month later, Ohio would also send a Greenbacker to Congress, and in Indiana the party held the "balance of power in the Legislature."²⁸

Meanwhile, in Franklin County, Greenback Clubs and Butler Clubs proliferated through the summer and into the early fall. Throughout the campaign, newspapers harangued Butler and the Greenbackers, and printed lengthy letters from citizens that spoke for both sides. On September 21, 1878, D. C. Fisk wrote the *Orange Journal of Industry* that "Everyone knows, or ought to know, gold to be the standard of values." "Laborer" responded that "there is no more value to gold than of paper minus the sanction of the governments."

"Laborer" knew who the real villains were — the bank corporations who controlled the world's money supply. The solution? "Drive the blood-suckers of financial tinkering out of the synagogue and let them become producers." The notion that those who earned a living by producing a tangible good were inherently more honorable than those who made money by being financiers was a central theme in early nineteenth-century republicanism.²⁹ Yet, "Laborer" offered a vision of the world with greenbacks not as a plea for a return to an earlier time, but rather as a solution for a more equitable future:

Make Greenbacks a full legal tender . . . and then the greenback would pay debts and taxes, would purchase property, would hire labor, would supply food, shelter and raiment, would educate our children and beautify homes, would supply all the wants and needs of society.³⁰

27. Boston *Herald*, September 10, 1878.

28. Boston *Daily Globe*, October 9, 1878.

29. See Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984) for a discussion of what Wilentz calls "artisan republicanism" and the role it played in class formation.

30. *Orange Journal of Industry*, September 28, 1878.

The following week, another letter from "Laborer" appeared. He complained that Greenbackers were not receiving their fair share of news coverage, because "the publishing papers are in the interests of the monied aristocracy and two old party rings." "Dishonest class legislation" had hurt the farmers and workers of America, he declared. According to "Laborer," this was particularly onerous, because the "strength and wealth of this republic are industrious young men with families and homes of their own."³¹ Whether or not they were the strength of the Republic, Greenbackism sought support from these very same men.

Hopes were high that November would bring victory for the Greenback party in Franklin County. However, that victory was not to come. Of the six Butlerite-Greenback candidates for state representative, only Charles P. Aldrich of Deerfield was elected from the Fourth District. B. S. Parker, running in the Third District, nearly took Greenfield, but he lost badly in Shelburne Falls and Gill. The final tally was 671 votes for the Republican editor of the *Gazette & Courier*, E. A. Hall, and 463 for Parker. In his bid for the tenth Congressional seat, Greenbacker Wilbur Whitney beat the Democrat James Grinnell by a margin of two to one. However, the Republican, Amasa Norcross, beat Whitney by a similar margin. And, to the relief of many, "Massachusetts [was] Safe, with Talbot 26,000 Ahead." Ben Butler beat the Democrat Josiah Abbott by 100,000 votes, but he still lost to the Republican Thomas Talbot in Greenfield, in the county, and the state.³²

A few days later, the Greenback Club of Greenfield gathered in Grand Army Hall. Invited guests were the members of the local Butler Club, including its president, B. S. Parker. It was jointly decided that the two groups would unite, given their "common political opinions."³³ Thereafter, the club met each week until the town elections in March. Every week a question was put forward for discussion, such as "Should the Poll Tax Be Abolished?" In that case, the Greenbackers decided in the affirmative, though the scope of the debate was seldom recorded.

31. *Journal of Industry*, October 5, 1878.

32. *Gazette & Courier*, November 11, 1878.

33. Greenback minutes, November 16, 1878.

One debate that was duly noted by club secretary J. Johnson was a discussion of the recent candidacy of General Butler. On February 22, 1879, the regular question was dropped, in favor of a report from club member E. D. Pratt on the recent campaign in the state of Maine. President Burnham made some "pleasant remarks" regarding his birth place, and then the talk turned to Butler. Thomson "spoke at some length on the former mismanagement of the party in this state." All of his remarks were not recorded, but he was quoted as saying that "if the party had nominated some clean man like Charles McLean [chairman of the Greenback state central committee] it might have elected him." Johnson responded in support of Butler, and quoted himself as saying "we should not stop to haggle about the past or its mistakes, but should go for measures, and not just quarrel about men."³⁴ Such dissension in the ranks pre-dated the state party's split with Butler by about four years. However, the Greenfield Greenbackers chose to set aside their differences for the time being, for more pressing matters, such as attracting new members and putting a slate together for the upcoming town meeting.

Local Greenbackers supported the Independent Labor ticket for the March 3, 1879, Greenfield town meeting. None of the nine principal candidates can be documented as being Greenbackers, although one of the men running for selectman, Quincy A. Seward, seems to have joined soon thereafter. Seward, co-owner of Seward & Willard Clothiers ("Headquarters for Bargains!") began experiencing financial problems, as so many did, in 1873. By the end of the decade, Seward had been bought out by baby carriage hardware manufacturer Henry Warner, and his financial backer, John Sanderson.³⁵ Seward remained as manager of the store, and he appears to have changed his party affiliation. In 1874, he had been a Republican. Five years later, he was a delegate to the state Butler Independent Convention. In 1883, Seward was involved with the Democratic Party, on the county level, and in 1884 he was a delegate to the state People's Party convention.³⁶ He was unsuccessful in his 1879 bid for selectman.

34. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1879.

35. *Massachusetts* Vol. 33, pp. 187 and 307, in R. G. Dun & Company Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration.

36. *Gazette & Courier*, October 26, 1874, September 15, 1879, October 22, 1883, and September 22, 1884.

The economically dispossessed and the politically dissatisfied — those who questioned the structure of society and those who placed themselves on the outside of that structure — these were the men who became Greenbackers in Greenfield in the late 1870s. Given the great number of fraternal organizations they supported, these men were certainly "joiners." Yet, joining the local Greenback Club implied a challenge to the existing political order. Such was not the case when one joined the Masons or the G.A.R.

Greenfield's small property owners felt the effects of the lingering depression of the 1870s, as did the propertyless Irish laborers. Yet, in a very real sense, the man who had worked hard to amass a bit of property had more to lose than the impoverished laborer. For homeowners with mortgages or even those in need of a mortgage, a return to the gold standard meant higher interest rates. The tenets of Greenbackism accommodated these needs with a simple plan. The working class and the petit bourgeoisie stood together against "the money changers." The Greenback party found its strength in an appeal that crossed class lines, just at the point where the line itself blurred.

The thirty-five Greenfield Greenbackers represented a scant ten percent of the town's population, yet they made their presence felt. So too did the Greenback party have an impact on national politics. If the measure of success for third parties is the adoption of its policies by one or both of the major parties, then the Greenback Party did eventually succeed. Its demands for economic fairness in a troubled economy could appeal to many. This wide appeal enabled the Greenbackers, in Greenfield at least, to form a diverse coalition that crossed a hazy class line. As the self-proclaimed producers of the wealth of the Republic, these men sought only to hold on to their fair share. If it meant being part of "this Greenback lunacy," then so be it.

Despite the revolutionary rhetoric of their national leaders, what these men really sought was to remain a part of the system that threatened their financial well-being. The Greenback creed struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of those who stood between the impoverished working class and the financially secure middle class. These men saw themselves as representatives of what America fifty years earlier had championed as its own — the honest mechanic and the yeoman farmer. Yet this was not a regressive movement. Rather, while accepting the existence of industrial capitalism, Greenback philosophy sought to improve the system.

Greenbackism can be seen as an attempt to dull the edges of the potential class conflict that industrial capitalism had created in its wake. The death of this movement does not imply its failure. In Greenfield, the loss of key leadership and, on both the local and national level, the absorption of Greenback tenets by one of the two major parties dissipated the third party effort. However, the ambiguous position of those who hovered precariously between the destitute workers and the successful capitalists continued to haunt politics for years to come.