



*Henry L. Loucks*

## *Dakota Images*

The life of Henry Langford Loucks, a Dakota farmer and political activist, is reflected in this statement from his writings: "I try to show the discrimination against agriculture, in legislation, transportation, and finance." Throughout his long involvement with the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist party, Loucks campaigned for various reforms to aid the farmer. He supported government ownership of railroads, a national credit system, and free coinage of silver.

H. L. Loucks was born in Canada in 1846. Part of his early life was spent working for the railroads and as a lumber contractor in Michigan and Missouri. He married Florence McCraney in 1878 and was the father of seven children. About 1884, Loucks moved to Dakota Territory and claimed a homestead in Deuel County. His political career began innocently the following year when he founded the Farmers' Club in order "to learn how to farm from my neighbors in Dakota." The club eventually became affiliated with the Northern Farmers' Alliance, and Loucks was elected president of the Dakota branch in 1886. Leading the reorganization of the Dakota Farmers' Alliance in 1889, Loucks was instrumental in its decision to transfer its allegiance to the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Loucks became national president of the southern alliance in 1892.

Although Loucks did not at first favor the alliance's desire to form a third party, the political climate prompted him to join the Populist movement in 1890, and he ran for governor on the Independent party ticket that same year. Receiving over twenty-four thousand votes, he placed second behind Arthur C. Mellette, the newly elected governor. Becoming an ardent Populist, Loucks frowned upon other party members who wished to fuse with the Democrats in the mid-1890s. He was a dominant force behind the 1896 passage of South Dakota's initiative and referendum, a Populist-based reform, and he was unwilling to compromise any principles. With the demise of the Populist party in the late 1890s, Loucks returned to the Republican fold.

Throughout his life, Loucks wrote a number of books and pamphlets concerning his political views and was the editor of the *Dakota Ruralist*, an alliance newspaper. Moving from his farm to Watertown in 1908, Loucks resided there until his death in 1928.

by CARLA BATES

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