



12-1991

One Grand United Hymn: Boosterism in Knoxville, Tennessee at the Turn of the Century

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Recommended Citation

Brooks, Jennifer E., "One Grand United Hymn: Boosterism in Knoxville, Tennessee at the Turn of the Century." Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1991.

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jennifer E. Brooks entitled "One Grand United Hymn: Boosterism in Knoxville, Tennessee at the Turn of the Century." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

James C. Cobb, Major Professor

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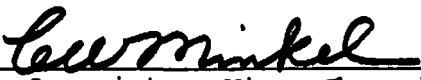
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"One Grand United Hymn:" Boosterism in Knoxville,
Tennessee at the Turn of the Century

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jennifer E. Brooks

December 1991

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Shirley H. Brooks

and

Charlie R. Brooks

and to my grandparents

Everett and Connie Hale

and

Alix W. Brooks

for their patience throughout a

somewhat tortuous process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. James C. Cobb, for his guidance and patience, and Dr. Michael McDonald, Dr. Charles Johnson, and Dr. Bruce Wheeler for their comments and suggestions. I express my heartfelt thanks to my mother, Shirley H. Brooks, for her skilled and patient editing, and to my father, Dr. Charlie R. Brooks, for his humor and support. I would also like to thank the rest of my family for their understanding throughout this process, and my fiancé, John T. Ellisor, for keeping me grounded in the real world.

ABSTRACT

In the first quarter of the century, Knoxville's business-civic leadership in the late nineteenth century agreed that the city's prosperity demanded an active program of economic development. Most believed that the proper direction to take was to foster industrial-commercial expansion. Such a plan required attracting outside industry and capital.

The city's promoters also believed that attracting new investment required community solidarity behind any and every booster proposal. Knoxville's business-civic leaders rarely managed, however, to translate these convictions into a unity of purpose behind various developmental schemes. The following study asks why Knoxville's boosters remained seriously divided despite their efforts to maintain a social consensus for industrial-commercial development. At least part of the answer lies in the fact that the city's business-civic leadership failed to keep a mutual commitment to Knoxville's economic development above the mire of local political bickering and factionalism. As a result, they failed to translate a consensus for industrial-commercial progress into a consensus on issues with important ramifications for their developmental aims.

Part One of this thesis demonstrates that Knoxville's

boosters believed that a social consensus behind their schemes and programs was crucial to attracting new industry successfully. A subsidy election held in 1887 to subscribe public money to two new railroads illustrates that business-civic boosters were determined to establish at least the appearance of harmony to facilitate their recruitment efforts. Throughout the subsidy campaign, boosters stressed the importance of diminishing the public visibility of dissent expressed towards the subsidy propositions. Local newspapers called for enthusiastic supporters to convince those inclined to vote against the propositions to refrain from voting at all. For business-civic leaders convinced of the all-consuming necessity of recruiting industry and investment from outside the community, the appearance of a social consensus outweighed the importance of dissent as a "quality-check" on the efficacy of certain schemes.

The stiff competition of hundreds of other southern communities looking to prosper by the same methods led business-civic boosters to emphasize the less obvious advantages their community offered to any prospective investor. In Knoxville, like many other towns, boosters stressed the city's alleged social and political harmony. They hoped that a community that "unanimously" supported all methods of fostering industrial-commercial prosperity would

promise enough political, economic and social stability to attract outside capital. Despite their exaggerations, however, boosters clearly recognized that Knoxvilleians did not agree unanimously to much of anything. Their appeals to black citizens, the white working-class, rural citizens and wealthy conservatives during the subsidy election suggested that they believed these groups were likely to oppose the propositions.

Part Two of this thesis examines political conflict in the 1890s in order to expand our understanding of the divisions that persisted in spite of the developmental consensus. The municipal controversies of 1893 and 1894 appear to be typical of public issues dominating local headlines throughout the era. As a rapidly expanding city, a growing demand for urban services plagued city leaders struggling to modernize a limited infrastructure. Boosters believed that improved urban amenities, such as transportation and utilities, attracted investors while a deteriorating city repelled them. Thus, municipal schemes became central to the efforts of Knoxville's promoters; however, such schemes also often provoked opposition. By examining the controversies surrounding the Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad schemes in 1893 and 1894, I hoped to determine who opposed these schemes, why they were against them, and if

such opposition was related to statewide faction politics.

The municipal election of 1893-4 reveals something of the nature of this dispute because these controversies became central to the campaigning of both Democrats and Republicans. On the surface the dispute might be dismissed as simple Democratic versus Republican rivalry. In addition, personal factionalism perhaps explains why some Democrats chose one side over another. However, as the campaign proceeded, both parties adopted anti-ring and pro-reform rhetoric. This suggests that a measure of general discontent with city leadership characterized a portion of Knoxville's business-civic community.

Opposition to the municipal schemes reflected a concern that the KWC and the KOG&L proposals would saddle the city with unwanted and unwise debt. The national depression plaguing the country at the time probably heightened this concern. Reform-minded Knoxvilleians believed that corruption threatened the city's "progress" and development because it led some city officials to back questionable municipal schemes. The solution, in their view, was to oust the city council "clique" from office and replace it with a body of experienced, wise and honest businessmen committed first and last to the city's overall progress. Thus, the election of 1894 became a battleground between two groups of business-boosters whose commitment to development failed to

unite them behind important developmental schemes.

In 1887, boosters saw certain Knoxvilleians outside of the business-civic community as the citizens most likely to oppose the railroad subsidies. In 1893, however, boosters disagreed among themselves over the municipal schemes. A political consensus behind booster plans may have seemed extremely important in recruiting capital successfully, but Knoxville's promoters were unable to draw on such a consensus when discord characterized the business-civic community itself. Local political bickering and factionalism divided Knoxville's leadership, and undermined efforts to promote an image of unity as a key element of the development effort.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1826, physician, historian, farmer and entrepreneur J.G.M. Ramsey joined other Knoxvilleians to welcome the arrival of the first steamboat ever to make the perilous journey up the Tennessee River to Knoxville successfully. A jubilant and eager crowd greeted Captain William Conner of Cincinnati as the Atlas steamboat chugged past Knoxville to Ramsey's home at the Forks of the River. The enthusiastic reception that met Capt. Connor's arrival reflected a broad concern with the languishing condition of Knoxville's trade. Although the city served as an agricultural and commercial hub for East Tennessee, the surrounding mountains and a nearly unnavigable river limited the town's prosperity. Knoxville's leadership cast a covetous eye towards the West where Nashville and Memphis seemed to be booming by comparison. ¹

Most Knoxvilleians in the 1820s and 1830s probably agreed that somehow the city had to transcend these barriers in order to develop and prosper. Yet even this early, Knoxville's leadership did not agree on the direction their

¹ William B. Hesseltine, ed., Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey: Autobiography and Letters (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1954), vii-xvi.

efforts should take to diminish the town's trade isolation. Some prominent leaders, including Dr. Ramsey's brother William B.A. Ramsey, dreamed of improving the navigability of the Tennessee River. Clearing a channel or digging a canal would clear obstructions like the "Boiling Pot" from disrupting the course of the river from East Tennessee into Alabama. Dr. Ramsey aided efforts to improve the Tennessee River, yet he believed that a water route to Muscle Shoals, and ultimately to New Orleans, did not represent the best route to prosperity for East Tennessee. Instead, Dr. Ramsey "turned his gaze away from the beautiful siren which stretched before his door to lure men on to Muscle Shoals. He looked instead across the mountains and saw a vision of a substitute river that ran on iron and could be made to go where men willed." ²

Like Dr. Ramsey and his brother in the first quarter of the century, Knoxville's business-civic leadership in the late nineteenth century agreed that the city's prosperity demanded an active program of economic development. Most believed that the proper direction to take was to foster industrial-commercial expansion. Such a plan required attracting outside industry and capital.

The city's promoters also believed that attracting new investment required community solidarity behind any and

² Ibid., ix.

every booster proposal. Knoxville's business-civic leaders rarely managed, however, to translate these convictions into a unity of purpose behind various developmental schemes. The following study asks why Knoxville's boosters remained seriously divided despite their efforts to maintain a social consensus for industrial-commercial development. At least part of the answer lies in the fact that the city's business-civic leadership failed to keep a mutual commitment to Knoxville's economic development above the mire of local political bickering and factionalism. As a result, they failed to translate a consensus for industrial-commercial progress into a consensus on issues with important ramifications for their developmental aims.

In 1951, C. Vann Woodward argued that a "new rising middle-class" assumed political, economic and social hegemony in the South with the formerly ascendant planter class defeated and decimated by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Woodward's thesis that discontinuity in southern leadership, institutions and "ethos" characterized the South after the war faced little challenge until the 1970s. Then, revisionists found that continuity characterized much of postwar southern society despite the turmoil of the 1860s and 1870s. For example, Jonathan Wiener argued that in Alabama the planter class persevered in its control of both land and labor, and in its subordination of

industrial-commercial interests. Dwight Billings found continuity in North Carolina, but argued that planters did not oppose industrial development as a threat to their own hegemony. Instead, they controlled and directed the "industrial revolution" in the South. ³

My research indicates that Knoxville's business-civic leaders in the late nineteenth century mirrored the class described by Woodward and others. A diverse group of prominent, influential and ambitious businessmen and professionals led Knoxville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These aspiring business-civic leaders shared a commitment to industrial-commercial development as the surest path to Knoxville's prosperity. Whether or not such leadership marked a significant change from the past, however, is not the focus of this study. Instead, it examines the business-civic community well after the immediate postwar period. By the late nineteenth century, these business-oriented Knoxvilleians already had established

³ C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, vol. 9 in A History of the South, eds., Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Jonathan Wiener, Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1880 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Dwight B. Billings, Jr., Planters and the Making of a "New South:" Class, Politics and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Don H. Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), x-xiii.

a consistent leadership role in Knoxville. ⁴

In New Men, New Cities, New South, Don H. Doyle argues that only a few urban histories of the region focus on New South cities, and even fewer examine the businessmen who dominated urban society in the postwar South. Doyle argues that although the urban business class had a prominent role in shaping the modern South, its influence varied from city to city. He argues that the actual process of "city-building" forged a business class with common goals for the "cities, the region and themselves." My study suggests, however, that despite this consensus for industrial-commercial expansion, Knoxville's business-civic community remained divided. As a result, business-boasters proved incapable of maintaining a consensus behind important developmental schemes. ⁵

In The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking, Paul M. Gaston writes that "with bountiful resources, confidence in the acquisition of capital, and faith that labor adequate to develop the region would be attracted, New South prophets...envisioned a balanced, diversified, dynamic economy that would produce incalculable riches." The irony in the New South creed, however, as Gaston sees it, is that

⁴ Michael McDonald and Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

⁵ Doyle, xiii.

although the image of the modernized South remained powerful and persuasive, it actually became a hollow shibboleth:

"Unable to bequeath to the next generation of Southerners a legacy of solid achievement, the New South spokesmen gave them instead a solidly propounded and widely spread image of its success, a mythic view of their own times that was as removed from objective reality as the myth of the Old South." New South boosters lauded southern economic "success" even as poverty and economic stagnation continued to trouble much of the region. ⁶

Several scholars have sought to explain why poverty persisted in the South, and why the economy failed to fulfill the exaggerated predictions of New South boosters. In Old South, New South, Gavin Wright argues that regardless of booster rhetoric, southern employers tried to restrict the influx of outside capital and industry into the region in order to protect low-wage standards in the South. Letting in industry that paid higher wages common to other regions of the country would spark the labor competition and wage increases that southern industrial and agricultural employers wanted to avoid. Thus, while boosters proclaimed that industrialization would bring prosperity to all, the South remained a poverty-stricken and low-wage region well

⁶ Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 78, 109.

into the twentieth century.⁷

In Southern Tradition and Regional Progress, William Nicholls found a more traditional explanation for the South's economic problems. He argued that southern traditions impeded economic progress. The region's 1)agrarianism, 2)rigid social structure, 3)undemocratic political structure, 4)lack of social responsibility, and 5) a tradition of intellectual and behavioral conformity prevented the southern economy from sufficiently "expanding, diversifying, and industrializing" to solve the persistent problem of southern poverty.⁸

My study localizes the search to identify what hindered the South's economic advancement. In the late nineteenth century, Knoxville's boosters believed that any disagreement with their plans for development threatened the city's prosperity. If such dissent actually damaged Knoxville's economic potential, however, the boosters themselves must share the blame. Knoxville's business-civic leaders agreed that prosperity lay in industrial-commercial development, and that political and social discord threatened efforts to

⁷ Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), 270; James C. Cobb, "Making Sense of Economic History," The Georgia Historical Quarterly LXXI (Spring 1987).

⁸ William H. Nicholls, Southern Tradition and Regional Progress (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

attract capital and industry. Yet, local political bickering and factionalism among business-boosters undermined any image of consensus they hoped to maintain. The disunity that characterized Knoxville's business-civic community may have contributed to the city's failure to achieve the level of prosperity enjoyed by Nashville, Chattanooga and Atlanta. In this sense, my study suggests a partial explanation, in microcosm, for the persistent sluggishness and backwardness of the southern postwar economy.

Part One of this thesis demonstrates that Knoxville's boosters believed that a social consensus behind their schemes and programs was crucial to attracting new industry successfully. A subsidy election held in 1887 to subscribe public money to two new railroads illustrates that business-civic boosters were determined to establish at least the appearance of harmony to facilitate their recruitment efforts. Throughout the subsidy campaign, boosters stressed the importance of diminishing the public visibility of dissent expressed towards the subsidy propositions. Local newspapers called for enthusiastic supporters to convince those inclined to vote against the propositions to refrain from voting at all. For business-civic leaders convinced of the all-consuming necessity of recruiting industry and investment from outside the community, the appearance of a social consensus

outweighed the importance of dissent as a "quality-check" on the efficacy of certain schemes.

The stiff competition of hundreds of other southern communities looking to prosper by the same methods led business-civic boosters to emphasize the less obvious advantages their community offered to any prospective investor. In Knoxville, like many other towns, boosters stressed the city's alleged social and political harmony. They hoped that a community that "unanimously" supported all methods of fostering industrial-commercial prosperity would promise enough political, economic and social stability to attract outside capital. Despite their exaggerations, however, boosters clearly recognized that Knoxvillians did not agree unanimously to much of anything. Their appeals to black citizens, the white working-class, rural citizens and wealthy conservatives during the subsidy election suggested that they believed these groups were likely to oppose the propositions.

Part Two of this thesis examines political conflict in the 1890s in order to expand our understanding of the divisions that persisted in spite of the developmental consensus. The municipal controversies of 1893 and 1894 appear to be typical of public issues dominating local headlines throughout the era. As a rapidly expanding city, a growing demand for urban services plagued city leaders

struggling to modernize a limited infrastructure. Boosters believed that improved urban amenities, such as transportation and utilities, attracted investors while a deteriorating city repelled them. Thus, municipal schemes became central to the efforts of Knoxville's promoters; however, such schemes also often provoked opposition. By examining the controversies surrounding the Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad schemes in 1893 and 1894, I hoped to determine who opposed these schemes, why they were against them, and if such opposition was related to statewide factions and politics.

In Bourbons, Redeemers and Populists, Roger Hart examines the political turmoil that characterized statewide politics in Tennessee in the late nineteenth century. He finds that this discord reflected a competition for social status within the social order rather than a battle of economic interests arrayed against it. He defines these status groups vying for statewide power as defensive versus optimist. The former were generally previous secessionists whose experience of Civil War defeat rendered them incapable of sharing in the general "American mood of optimism." The latter group, conversely, were those who could forget the war and move on to help create a better South, or those for whom the Union victory vindicated their opposition to the

Confederacy. In addition, Hart finds that shifting factions and coalitions disrupted the Democratic party at this time, while localism pervaded Tennessee politics overall.⁹

My study agrees in some respects with Hart's conclusions. For example, businessmen and professionals with business interests, ranging from small merchants to large industrialists or capitalists, participated on both sides of the municipal controversies of 1893 and 1894. Thus, the discord that arose over municipal issues does not appear to reflect clashing economic interests within the business-civic community. Personal factions existed in Knoxville although to a more limited extent, as seen in various elections throughout the era and in the apparent "generational" factionalism among some Democrats. However, these local factions do not appear to be related to those on the statewide level, including the faction led by Knoxville John C. Houk. Knoxvilleans, of course, were conscious of state activities, events and rivalries, but they do not seem to have defined local positions by state-level politics.

Hart's optimist-defensive political dichotomy does not hold true in Knoxville within the parameters of this study.

⁹ J. Eugene Lewis, "The Tennessee Gubernatorial Campaign and Election of 1894," Tennessee Historical Quarterly xiii (June 1954), 99-126; Roger L. Hart, Redeemers, Bourbons and Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975).

Political controversy in the election campaign of 1893-4 appeared to be among business-civic leaders who shared an essentially optimistic view of the city's potential. In other words, the members of both sides were boosters, and as such, expressed a positive faith in industrial-commercial development as the pathway to progress. Although significant discord occurred within this community, it does not appear to be a division between those Knoxvilleians with a negative view of the urban-industrial future versus those who thrived in that environment.

The support of Knoxville's boosters in 1887 for the subsidy propositions had the appearance of a consensus, if not in the community as a whole, then at least among business-civic leaders. The municipal controversies of 1893 and 1894, however, reveal that a very significant source of discord lay much closer to home.

In 1893, the Knoxville Water Company(KWC) asked the city for permission to issue \$750,000 in bonds to upgrade the waterworks system. In the same year, the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad(KCG&L), formerly the Powell's Valley Railroad involved in the 1887 subsidy election, demanded that the city pay the \$225,000 promised to the railroad in 1887. Business leaders and government officials generally agreed that an improved water system and new railroad connections were important to the city's

industrial-commercial progress. Yet, they soon split over whether the city should meet these corporate requests.¹⁰

The support of a majority of the city council for the KWC and KCG&L proposals incensed some business-civic leaders. They believed that a desire for personal profit and political ambitions explained why these city officials would back schemes that a significant portion of the business community deemed unwise. These disgruntled citizens called themselves the "progressive" business element, but labeled the members of the city council "clique" as mere "ward politicians" primarily committed to personal and party advancement. In fact, both sides were quite similar. Industrialists, capitalists, merchants, small businessmen, and lawyers comprised those who both supported and opposed the corporate schemes. In addition, many of those on each side were boosters as well. Despite these commonalities, however, Knoxville's business-civic community proved unable to resolve these controversies harmoniously.

The municipal election of 1893-4 reveals something of the nature of this dispute because these controversies became central to the campaigning of both Democrats and Republicans. On the surface the dispute might be dismissed

¹⁰The above discussion of the municipal controversies is a synthesis of information published in the Knoxville Sentinel and Journal over a period of several months in 1893 and 1894. For specific references, see Part Two, "Division Instead," of this study.

as simple Democratic versus Republican rivalry. In addition, personal factionalism perhaps explains why some Democrats chose one side over another. However, as the campaign proceeded, both parties adopted anti-ring and pro-reform rhetoric. This suggests that a measure of general discontent with city leadership characterized a portion of Knoxville's business-civic community.

Opposition to the municipal schemes reflected a concern that the KWC and the KCG&L proposals would saddle the city with unwanted and unwise debt. The national depression plaguing the country at the time probably heightened this concern. Reform-minded Knoxvillians believed that corruption threatened the city's "progress" and development because it led some city officials to back questionable municipal schemes. The solution, in their view, was to oust the city council "clique" from office and replace it with a body of experienced, wise and honest businessmen committed first and last to the city's overall progress. Thus, the election of 1894 became a battleground between two groups of business-boosters whose commitment to development failed to unite them behind important developmental schemes.

As Michael McDonald and Bruce Wheeler have noted, political progressivism formally reared its head in Knoxville around 1910 as some citizens pushed for the city commission form of government. They hoped to instill

"business-like efficiency and honesty" in government by replacing the mayor and aldermen with five commissioners elected at-large and assigned separate responsibilities. The 1893-4 campaign and election perhaps shows the earlier roots of this movement, dubbed "business progressivism" by George B. Tindall, as reform-minded Knoxvilleians in the 1890s similarly campaigned for a non-partisan and business-oriented city council. ¹¹

In 1887, boosters saw certain Knoxvilleians outside of the business-civic community as the citizens most likely to oppose the railroad subsidies. In 1893, however, boosters disagreed among themselves over the municipal schemes. A political consensus behind booster plans may have seemed extremely important in recruiting capital successfully, but Knoxville's promoters were unable to draw on such a consensus when discord characterized the business-civic community itself.

In The Urban Ethos, Blaine Brownell examines the consensus for economic development and social order that developed among the mostly white commercial-civic elite in southern cities by the 1920s. The "urban ethos," Brownell argues, consisted of "a general overarching conception of

¹¹McDonald and Wheeler, 41-48; George Brown Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945, vol. 10 in A History of the South, eds., Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 219-253.

the city which stressed the desirability---indeed, the necessity---of both urban growth and social order in such a way that they would be mutually reinforcing".¹²

My study of Knoxville follows Brownell in the sense that a consensus for economic development and industrial-commercial prosperity existed among the city's commercial-civic leaders. However, in the late nineteenth century in Knoxville, this developing consensus did not guarantee political accord on key municipal and political issues. Such an "urban ethos" strong enough to produce consistent political harmony may have developed among Knoxville's business-civic leaders by the 1920s. At the turn of the century, however, local political bickering and factionalism divided Knoxville's leadership, and undermined efforts to promote an image of unity as a key element of the development effort.

¹²Blaine A. Brownell, The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), xix.

PART ONE: A FACADE OF UNITY

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Commanding with her railroads and river communications the commerce of a large extent of country broader than the boasted kingdoms of the Old World, rich in all the varied products, whether from the mines, the orchards, the meadows, the gardens, the fields or the forests, of all the fair lands the sun ever shone upon, this is one of the fairest. ¹³

To many citizens at the turn of the century, Knoxville perched on the edge of full-blown status as a prospering New South city. Despite the bustle and hum of industrial activity, however, some citizens complained that Knoxville advanced too slowly. Although proud of the city's accomplishments, a group of ambitious white businessmen and professionals dreamed of leading a "progressive" Knoxville to match the prosperity of Atlanta and Nashville. Attracting new industrial investment stood as a cornerstone in the booster plan for progress.

New South boosters emerged from an expanding industrial-commercial sector. Business proprietors ranging from large wholesale grocers to industrial and financial magnates to successful professionals led the movement for

¹³ The Mineral and Agricultural Resources of East Tennessee...Knoxville: The Commercial Center and Business Emporium and the Pittsburgh of the New South: An Impartial Review (Knoxville, TN.: Chronicle Co., 1883), 21.

industrial prosperity. Based on memberships in various promotional associations, Knoxville spawned its own clan of New South boosters. ¹⁴

Both before and after the turn of the century, Knoxville's promoters numbered prominently within the upper-middle to upper class. Most were large scale, prosperous wholesale, retail and industrial proprietors, financial magnates or prominent professionals. Booster investments reflected diverse business activities, and both commercial and industrial proprietors sought to speed along Knoxville's economic development. Boosters hailing from outside the region as well as natives of both Knoxville and Tennessee belonged to a variety of promotional organizations. For example, J.C. Luttrell, described in 1889 as one of Knoxville's "best and most pushing citizens",

¹⁴McDonald and Wheeler, 18; In Origins of the New South, C. Vann Woodward first identified an ascendant postwar commercial and industrial middle-class vying with a greatly weakened plantation aristocracy for control of the southern economy. He believed that urban boosters represented new values, manners and institutions, and eventually eclipsed the power of aristocratic landowners. For different perspectives, see Jonathan M. Wiener, Social Origins; Planters; Gavin Wright, The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978); James C. Cobb, Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984 (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984); In New Men, Don H. Doyle argues that postwar boosters represented a wealthier segment of southern white society. New South boosters rose from the "middling levels" through expanded opportunities in commerce, manufacturing and transportation to assume leading roles in the business community.

became a large hardware merchant as well as a real estate investor. He served as vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce and filled two terms as mayor. J. Wiley Brownlee, a city alderman for two terms from 1904-1907, served on the promotional Appalachian Exposition Board of 1911, and completed two terms as President of the Board of Trade. He organized three textile mills in the 1890s as well as a local chapter of the Travelers Protective Association, a national booster organization. An "industrial spirit" motivated a diverse and mostly upper-class segment of Knoxville's business community both before and after the turn of the century. ¹⁵

Aware that expanding Knoxville's commercial-industrial base required outside capital, boosters touted the rich abundance of East Tennessee's natural resources. Communities developed a "flamboyant" promotional rhetoric, painting a glowing and exaggerated portrait of the region's natural advantages. One East Tennessean graphically described the

¹⁵ Knoxville, Tennessee: A City Unsectional and Cosmopolitan by the Varied Industries of Her People: Climate, Scenery and Modern Progress (Knoxville, TN.: Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, 1889), 48. All of the above biographical information can be found in Lucile Deadrick, Heart of the Valley: A History of Knoxville, Tennessee (Knoxville, TN.: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1976); Mary U. Rothrock, The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee (Knoxville, TN.: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1922); Russell W. Hanlon, Men of Affairs in Knoxville (Knoxville, TN.: Journal and Tribune Publishing Company, 1921).

region's advantages: "East Tennessee, always beautiful, looks like a beautiful bride, with her blue-peaked mountains in the background, the soft green leaves, bursting buds, blooming flowers, singing birds, broad fertile valleys." Boosters hoped to draw the avid, even amorous attention of northern and foreign capital to Knoxville. ¹⁶

Geography, climate and resources alone, however, might not be enough to attract investors. Hundreds of communities throughout the South promoted similar natural features that offered any potential investor a choice of many locations. Cities and towns bid against each other by offering a variety of inducements to woo such investors.

Improving city services became a favorite goal of Knoxville's promoters who believed that better transportation and sewer and water systems would greatly facilitate their efforts. Joined by similar communities throughout the South in a competition for capital, boosters also enhanced Knoxville's advantages through an industrial recruitment program offering free sites, tax exemptions, and cash subsidies. Boosters needed popular and governmental cooperation to obtain such inducements. They came to believe that influencing the course of development depended on maintaining both private and public cooperation among

¹⁶ The Review: A Journal Devoted to Commerce, Mining, Manufacturing Industries, etc. 6 (April 1897), 84.

business proprietors, local government and a significant number of voters.¹⁷

Wealthy citizens both in and out of the business community controlled the local investment which many industries demanded before committing their own capital. Governmental decisions and legislation favoring industrial development, such as low property value assessments, tax exemptions, and subsidy appropriations, depended upon the support of public officials. In addition, many of the same inducements required a popular referendum. Voters decided if cash subsidies or stock subscriptions, for example, became part of the booster scheme for industrial development. As wealthy citizens, and often as public officials, Knoxville's promoters worked to assemble a successful industrial recruitment program by seeking social cohesion above and beyond government-booster cooperation.

In the competitive economic environment after the Civil War, southern boosters feared that public divisions over the proper route to economic development could propel a potential investor straight into the arms of sister towns exhibiting a more solid, and thus stable, investment climate. They believed that any divisions within the business community would hinder local investment in

¹⁷ For a discussion concerning the scarcity of capital in the postwar South, see Woodward, 107-141.

development and damage the appearance of economic unity and stability. In 1910, William J. Oliver, a prominent industrialist and booster, addressed a promotional banquet calling for Knoxville's businessmen to "subordinate their prejudices and personal ambitions to the general upbuilding and advancement of Knoxville." He exhorted Commercial Club members to be of "one mind, of one faith when anything comes up that will tend to advance Knoxville's interests." In Knoxville, promoters publicly appealed for business unity, and founded organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, the Board of Trade and the Commercial Club to unite diverse business interests normally divided by free market competition behind a shared goal: Knoxville's "progressive" industrial development. 18

Many trade associations actively promoted economic development. For example, the Commercial Club, originally organized to advance jobbing interests, also raised ten thousand dollars in promotional funds to promote Knoxville's first Appalachian Exposition of 1910, an event aimed at promoting Knoxville's and East Tennessee's agricultural and industrial resources. Boosters often worked through several trade and promotional organizations at once. Many members of the Commercial Club, the Manufacturers and Producers

18 The Mineral and Agricultural Resources of East Tennessee, 22; The Knoxville Market Annual (Knoxville, TN.: The Commercial Club of Knoxville, 1908).

Association and the Travelers Protective Association also belonged to Knoxville's promotional Board of Trade. Boosters directed agendas towards encouraging cooperation among Knoxville's business proprietors. The Board of Trade included among its broad objectives in 1906 the commitment to "cooperate in business and municipal affairs" as well as "create more civic pride." Through promotional associations and public appeals for business unity and cooperation, boosters hoped to create a consensus behind the chosen course of economic development. ¹⁹

Business cooperation comprised only one of the essential components needed to foster social cohesion. Most inducements, such as stock subscriptions or tax exemptions, required the cooperation of local public officials, and to ensure that support Knoxville's boosters often ran for public office. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the memberships of the boards of aldermen, city councils and city commissions primarily reflected mercantile, wholesale, industrial, financial and professional interests, and boosters numbered prominently on local government bodies throughout the period. For example, several members of the Appalachian Exposition Board of 1910 simultaneously filled terms as city aldermen. Samuel R.

¹⁹ James T. Grady, The City of Knoxville, Tennessee and Vicinity and Their Resources, Illus. (Knoxville, TN.: Knox Board of Trade, 1906).

Rambo began a term in 1908 and completed it with Nathan Kuhlman in 1911. William Kephart, T.H. Heald, M.J. Condon and Peter Kern, all directors on the Chamber of Commerce Board in 1896, held various positions in city government throughout the period. Knoxville's boosters wielded political influence as members of the city's primary decision-making bodies. ²⁰

In the late 1880s, promoters initiated an exuberant public campaign to subsidize two new railway lines. The prosubsidy campaign preceding the election in August of 1887 illuminated the role local government cooperation could play in securing an important inducement. In 1887, the Knoxville Southern and the Powell's Valley railroads applied to the city for stock subscriptions totaling \$500,000. Each company promised to construct standard gauge lines through or near Knoxville within a certain number of years in return for the subsidies. The mayor and aldermen scheduled an election for August 13 for the voting public to decide the fate of the proposition. Ordaining the election could have been a neutral decision, but local officials clearly favored the subscription. The aldermen and mayor appointed and organized ward committees to canvass support and bring in a favorable vote. In addition to sending out prosubsidy canvassers,

²⁰ For a listing of members of city government for the period, see Dadrack, 640-645.

Mayor J.C. Luttrell, this time with the board of public works, also appointed "secret policemen" allegedly to guard the polls against attempted bribery. Ward committees submitted "suitable" security nominees to the mayor and board for approval. Following a frenzied campaign of meetings, parades and rallies, the subsidy propositions carried by an overwhelming majority. ²¹

As the election illustrated, directing public money towards industrial recruitment schemes required the cooperation of the general voting public as well as business proprietors and local government. Knoxville's promoters sought wide electoral support in several ways. They hoped to encourage prosubsidy support through parades, rallies, meetings and canvassing. On August 6, 1887, boosters sponsored a mass rally in support of the railroad subsidies. The Daily Sentinel described the event in an article entitled "GRAND RALLY; THE YOUNG MEN PAINT 'ER RED," and designated it "the biggest kind of railroad jubilee" with an estimated participation of five thousand. After a procession including marchers, bands, marshals on horseback and ladies exhibiting "the greatest enthusiasm concerning the roads," supporters rallied at the customs-house square to hear prosubsidy speakers. The leading orator, Samuel G. Heiskell, a leading attorney and a very active Democratic politician,

²¹ Daily Sentinel 3 August 1887.

declared that, as the crowd indicated, Knoxville sang "one grand united hymn to a future that is gladsome and sure." ²²

In addition to exuberant parades and rallies, boosters used local newspapers to appeal for support. Both the Knoxville Daily Journal and the Daily Sentinel exhorted readers to vote for the subsidies. Many articles and editorials claimed that Knoxvillians almost unanimously favored the propositions. Declaring that all people against the railroads had left the city, the Daily Sentinel proclaimed the election safe for the railroads. In a later and similar subsidy election the same year, the Knoxville Daily Journal stated that no one who wanted "Knoxville's prosperity to increase and its people to become more prosperous [could] afford to stay away from the polls." The Daily Sentinel described an incident to illuminate the apparent dearth of anti-subsidy sentiment: "A few days ago a jolly old German was down from New Market armed with a club. He said that he had come down to break the head of any Knoxville Dutchman who opposed the railroads, but that he couldn't find any." ²³

In the drive for social and political cohesion, boosters appealed directly to particular groups they felt

²² Daily Sentinel 12, 6 August 1887.

²³ Daily Sentinel 3, 8 August 1887; Daily Journal 29 October 1887; Daily Sentinel 10 August 1887.

might not approve their schemes for "progress." Clearly, every citizen did not benefit directly or equally from new railroads or industries. Boosters appealed across urban-rural, black-white, and class divisions by emphasizing the rewards all would reap from such investments.

Boosters appealed for working-class support by linking Knoxville's prosperity to expanding employment through industrial development. Citing a railroad subsidy as an appropriate step to take, promoters claimed that "The more employment we can have for labor and capital in Knoxville the more prosperous it will be and the more rapid its growth." Evan Jones, "a laboring man of traveled experience" talked "freely of the blessings to come from voting the subscriptions" while addressing a meeting to foster blue-collar support.²⁴

Appealing to the working-class included speaking to black workers who comprised a significant portion of railroad and industrial labor. Boosters tied the interests of black citizens to development schemes by emphasizing their role in the industrial sector. Reverend J.C. Lawrence, pastor of Shiloh Presbyterian Church often spoke at pro-subsidy meetings. During a subsidy election in 1889, he stated that he failed "to see how the colored man as a laborer and wage earner could afford to vote against the new

²⁴ Daily Journal 8, 12 September 1887.

road." The participation of black voters in the 1887 parade indicated support for the propositions among some segments of Knoxville's black population. ²⁵

Railroads which appeared to benefit primarily urban dwellers seemed to offer intangible rewards to citizens in the rural parts of the county. Boosters followed the same line in jockeying for rural support as they had when appealing to the working-class. According to their argument, railroads and the industries they attracted benefited the entire community, and thus, rural as well as urban citizens should support the propositions. As the Daily Sentinel graciously declared in 1887, "Knoxville will share the benefits to be derived from the new roads. The prosperity of the county goes hand in hand with the growth and greatness of the city." Another subsidy election held two years later elicited assurances that the railroad would benefit people living along the line as well as city-dwellers. Boosters tried to link rural, working-class and black interests to their schemes. By waging a strong pro-subsidy campaign throughout the city and county, they hoped to convince a diverse electorate that all interests lay with the booster vision of economic "progress." ²⁶

²⁵ Daily Sentinel _ 6 August 1887; Daily Journal _ 15 September 1889.

²⁶ Daily Sentinel 1 November 1887; 7 September 1887.

As prosperous and influential citizens often holding local public offices, business-civic boosters believed they could shape the direction of economic development in Knoxville. Successfully wielding their power, however, demanded cooperation among business proprietors, local government and a wider electorate. Boosters sought social and political cohesion to secure the inducements they believed necessary to recruit industrial investment. A facade of overwhelming confidence that the subsidy propositions would carry did not diminish booster worries about the election. They believed negative votes weakened their claims that a community consensus existed behind the railroad scheme. Negative votes indicated disagreement which boosters hoped to avoid at all costs. In case the parades, rallies, meetings and public appeals failed to inspire unanimous support, promoters tried to maintain the appearance of unity by urging anti-subsidy voters to stay away from the polls on election day. Prosubsidy writers in the Daily Sentinel urged canvassers to approach "every man known to be against the railroads and do all in their power to induce him to change his mind and vote for the subscriptions; and if that fails try to prevail upon him not to vote at all." In this way, boosters hoped to prevent anti-subsidy citizens from registering their opposition. Failing to achieve it, the appearance of political, economic

and social unity became more important than actually creating a popular consensus. 27

The active drive for unity implied that unity did not occur naturally or easily. Business-civic leaders believed that successfully directing the city's economic development depended upon the cooperation of a diverse population. As a result, business-civic leaders were very sensitive to any sign that Knoxvilleians did not support their efforts wholeheartedly. Boosters often commented on what they sometimes described as a lack of "progressive" spirit among the city's residents. Knoxvilleians often disagreed over what changes or improvements the city needed to prosper. Upon the establishment of a new cotton mill in the city, the Daily Chronicle remarked that "the croakers who [were] always ready to pronounce every important enterprise mere gas work [had] the props knocked from under them this time." 28

In January of 1897, Knoxville's manufacturers heard presentations responding to the query "How Can Knoxville Best Promote her Manufacturing Industries?" While addressing the meeting, Howard Karnes designated competitive freight rates as an important factor in attracting new industry. Despite the fact that smaller cities successfully recruited competing lines, Karnes believed "a want of a competing

27 Daily Sentinel 8 August 1887.

28 Daily Chronicle 2 April 1882.

railroad in a town of this size [indicated] a want of public spirit on the part of its citizens." This comment came after Knoxvilleians voted \$500,000 to help subsidize new railroads a decade earlier. Yet, in Karnes' view, disagreement concerning the desirability of new lines hindered the city's development as a prime manufacturing center. Another decade later, the Knoxville Market Annual found that despite the ceaseless knock of opportunity at "doors where Energy and Enterprise accord a hearty welcome," others answered with "Ignorance and Apathy [with] no ears for the cheering sound." ²⁹

While city boosters published a wealth of promotional literature outlining their views, Knoxvilleians opposed to particular schemes of economic development left little direct record of their objections. In addition, business-boosters owned, published or edited the major newspapers. For example, the Knoxville Blue Book of 1894 lists R.H. Hart, a business-booster originally from Chattanooga, as the business manager and editor of the Sentinel, and Republican William Rule, a prominent capitalist and booster, as the editor and general manager of the Journal. As participants in the effort to foster social cohesion, both newspapers often downplayed dissent over

²⁹ The Review 4 (February 1897), 46; Knoxville Market Annual.

economic development. Information about opposition to the schemes, can be gleaned, however, from what boosters said about their opponents. Most objections coalesced into three areas: taxation, benefits and the quality of investment. ³⁰

Taxation complaints involved interest payments on bonds issued to fund subscriptions and for eventual overall remuneration. The Daily Sentinel reassured citizens that the tax increases needed to pay subsidies would remain manageable: "Never mind the taxes. Don't be frightened of your own shadow. They are not going to kill or hurt you. You'll survive, and your children, if you have any, will reap the fruits of your labor." In September of 1889, the Knoxville Daily Journal admitted that subscribing public money to the Knoxville and Northeastern Railroad required increasing the property tax by four to five thousand dollars per annum. Yet, the paper still claimed that the subsidy would decrease the overall tax burden. Eventually, taxation on the new railway, adjacent buildings and a promised blast furnace would pay the bonds off as well as cover interest in the interim. Despite the promise that future revenues would come solely from new enterprises, Knoxvilleans concerned

³⁰ The Knoxville Blue Book of Selected Names of Knoxville and Suburban Towns...for the Year Ending 1894 (Knoxville, TN.: E.W. Crozier, 1894).

with taxation worried about immediate increases. ³¹

Concerns over changes in property values also related to complaints over taxation. In 1887, the Daily Sentinel declared that all property owners, including boosters, wished to avoid a leap in property values that might cause increased assessments and taxes.

No thoughtful and level-headed citizen desires an over-inflation of the price of city property. A normal and legitimate advance all desire. Let it be steady and solid. We want no wild cat speculation and no fool-hardy adventures. ³²

Complaints that publicly financed industrial schemes produced tax increases indicated an element of dissension among Knoxville's middle-class taxpayers. Wealthier citizens also felt the impact of increased taxes, yet the middle-class were much less likely to purchase the bonds they helped to fund. Citizens not concerned with property values and assessments also worried about potential tax increases. One Daily Sentinel editorial exhibiting a rare anti-subsidy tone protested the inequity of funding the subscription with a uniform tax increase. Taxes hit every

³¹Daily Sentinel 3 August 1887; Daily Journal 6 September 1889.

³²Daily Sentinel 9 August 1887.

citizen, yet the rich could afford to pay while the poor could not.³³

The exuberant and often professed belief that new industry and railroads benefited the entire community did not inspire confidence among all elements of the population. One writer addressed the complaint that while all citizens shared the expense of railroad construction equally, the lines only benefited those parts of the county through which it passed. Denying that an equal burden produced unequal rewards, the pro-subscription writer declared that what built up one portion of the county relieved the expense in another. Another writer discredited the complaint that establishing new industries or railroads with public support discriminated against rural areas in favor of urban ones. New railroads attracted new industries which employed more people: "If Knoxville, by the upbuilding of such enterprises is made a city of 100,000 inhabitants, its consumption of the products of the farm will be increased 250 per cent."³⁴

Some citizens questioned the wisdom of public investment in industrial schemes. One writer addressed a concern that funding a new line in 1889 potentially hindered fulfillment of the city's previous commitment to the

³³ Daily Journal 14 September 1889; Daily Sentinel 3 August 1887.

³⁴ Daily Journal 15 September 1889.

Carolina, Knoxville and Western Railroad. The C., K., and W. still awaited completion although the city had subsidized the line by popular approval in 1887. The railroad reneged on a promise to begin and complete the line within a given time, so boosters claimed the city had no further obligation to the C., K., & W. With clear conscience, Knoxville could abandon the earlier project in favor of the Knoxville and Northeastern. One anti-subscription writer, however, objected to publicly funding any industrial venture, and cited the failure of the Carolina, Knoxville and Western as a prime example of misguided public investment. Capitalists involved in the scheme should dispense with seeking public support and fund the subscription themselves. Other citizens protested issuing bonds to finance railroads:

One Fellow says he is unalterably opposed to the issuance of bonds. He is for the railroads, but thinks we ought to pay as we go. He says there will be rascality in handling them.³⁵

Yet, certain middle-class, poor, or rural taxpayers comprised only part of the opposition boosters believed hindered economic "progress." Throughout the period, promoters attacked the economic conservatism found among some of the city's wealthy citizens. Such Knoxvilleans were far less inclined than boosters to commit money to new

³⁵ Daily Sentinel 3 August 1887; Daily Journal 15 September 1889.

industrial schemes. Karnes found Knoxville in 1897 to be "a town of some wealth [where] business men [were] conservative---it may be too conservative." William J. Oliver articulated booster contempt for Knoxville's wealthy conservatives: "Conservatism belongs to the man who has money invested in government bonds and only has sufficient brains to play ping pong." While addressing the Commercial Club banquet in March of 1909, booster E.C. Mahan claimed that Knoxvilleians who complained about contributing to the "betterment" of Knoxville seldom gave at all. Any dissension among voters hurt booster schemes at the polls, but wealthy opposition hurt recruitment efforts financially as well.³⁶

Despite simply labeling such complaints as anti-development and anti-progressive, booster statements reveal more than one attitude. A negative vote might reflect anxiety concerning tax increases and land speculation without denying the importance of railroads in fostering industrial growth. Opposition to particular industrial recruitment schemes voiced among certain middle-class, poor, or rural taxpayers and wealthy conservatives did not necessarily indicate total opposition to the booster vision of economic progress. Rather, complaints reflected concerns with the practical application of certain schemes, an individual's relation to the booster vision, and a realistic

³⁶Knoxville Market Annual; The Review 6 (April 1897), 84.

assessment of rewards derived from ventures not directly beneficial to everyone.

Opposition among certain groups did not indicate that all members, or even a majority, opposed either particular recruitment schemes or the overall booster vision of progress. Subsidy propositions generally carried by an overwhelming majority just as boosters predicted. Despite efforts to diminish their influence and visibility, however, some Knoxvilleians did oppose booster proposals even if they failed to carry the day. Regardless of size or strength, dissension worried boosters whose faith in economic development depended upon a significant level of social cohesion. As municipal controversies in the 1890s will reveal, however, Knoxville's business-civic leaders failed to keep this shared faith in industrial-commercial expansion above local political bickering. Agreeing on the desirability of economic development did not guarantee business-civic solidarity behind all schemes related to development.

PART TWO: DIVISION INSTEAD

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As the railroad subsidy campaign of 1887 illustrated, not all Knoxvilleians agreed that subsidizing particular railroads with public money was essential to the city's growth and prosperity. Business-civic promoters expected anti-subsidy votes to be cast during the election, and they did whatever they could to nullify their effect. Boosters often claimed in promotional literature that Knoxville was a city of harmonious interests, but their own statements belied this appraisal. Knoxvilleians always found more than one side to every issue of public interest. City brick-paving contracts generated complaints about the bidding process as well as unfair employment practices. Some citizens protested the extravagant costs of sewer construction while others claimed that a "progressive" city like Knoxville needed an improved sewer system at all costs. Some business proprietors, fed up with muddy, unfiltered water, called for a city-owned waterworks system. Other businessmen, however, argued that improvements of the water system should be left to the private sector. Some business-civic leaders believed that the city should fulfill a contract with a subsidized railroad by paying the promised stock subscription. Others argued just as vehemently that

the railroad had long ago violated the terms of the contract which nullified the city's obligation to pay. Despite the hopes and assurances of its promoters, like most cities, Knoxville rarely exhibited a solid front on anything.

Knoxville's leaders would have liked every public improvement to meet with unanimous approval and speedy implementation. Unfortunately, this seldom happened. In February of 1893, the Knoxville Sentinel noted that city streets suffered from neglect and decay. The editors called for the "unsightly" pavements to be removed "as soon as possible." A month later the paper reiterated its plea, and explained why better streets were important.

That the streets should be speedily paved is an all important matter, the longer they remain in the present condition, the greater detriment it will be to Knoxville in keeping people from coming here to locate and keeping capital from coming here for investment, for who can deny the extreme disadvantage under which a [badly] paved city labors? ³⁷

Business and city leaders recognized the importance of good streets to promoting the city. Despite this, however, they did not agree on how to improve their condition. The exasperated editor of the Sentinel declared that "Knoxville is no sooner out of one municipal row than she is in another. Since the beginning of the truce in regard to the water works, the sewer and brick paving questions have

³⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 1 February; 1 March 1893.

became more prominent and are proving fruitful sources of discord." "Poor Knoxville!," the Sentinel lamented, "The city is feeling the effects of this lack of unanimity on the part of the city guardians... Will the public stand it long?" "The whole life of our people, business and social," admonished the Journal editor, "is divided into little cliques...Instead of banding together for attack we divide into little groups. To attract investors, boosters described Knoxville as a city of diverse but harmonious interests. More often than harmony, however, discord characterized the scene in Knoxville. 38

Several municipal controversies dominating local headlines in 1893 and 1894 revealed a sorely divided business-civic community. Knoxville's leadership split when trying to determine a position for the city regarding disputes with the Knoxville Water Company (KWC) and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad (KCG&L). In 1887, boosters had worried that negative votes cast by rural, black, or working-class citizens or wealthy conservatives would damage Knoxville's "reputation" as a unified, stable and accomodating industrial-commercial community. In 1893, dissent over municipal schemes emanated

38 For more information concerning disputes among business-civic leaders in the South, especially over municipal issues, see Don H. Doyle, New Men; Carl V. Harris, Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921 (Knoxville, TN.: University of Tennessee Press, 1977).

not from "non-boosters" alone, but from among business-civic leaders themselves. A majority of city council aldermen, mostly businessmen and boosters themselves, favored the corporate interest in these schemes, much to the dismay of those who labeled themselves the "progressive" business element of the community. ³⁹

On July 1, 1882, the city of Knoxville signed a contract that granted an exclusive, thirty-year franchise to the newly-established Knoxville Water Company, reserving the right to purchase the utility at the end of fifteen years. In 1892, H.M. Branson published a promotional pamphlet that described the advantages of Knoxville and East Tennessee in some detail, including the "progressive" state of municipal services in the city. Although he describes East Tennessee's abundant and beautiful streams and rivers, perfect for water power, he neglects to mention anything about the city water supply. In 1890, George W. Englehardt remarked in another publication on Knoxville that "an ample and wholesome water supply is everywhere a desideratum of importance in respect of the general welfare; quite as important with regard to the public health as it is for fire protection, or as a

³⁹For this study, "progressive," broadly speaking, means pro-development, but specifically means favoring local city government run by business principles rather than the demands of party patronage and political ambitions. Knoxville Sentinel 26 January; 1, 22 February 1893; Knoxville Journal 11 February; 27 March 1893.

business facility." He then noted that the Knoxville Water Company provided the city with "a quantity equal to present demands." Indeed, water from the Tennessee River and reservoir reached Knoxville "direct from the living springs of the mountains, in all its original purity, uncontaminated by the waste of any settlement higher up, large or small." 40

Despite these assurances, complaints concerning high rates, an inadequate and poor water supply, and weak water pressure plagued the KWC from the very beginning. Popular dissatisfaction with the company culminated in 1893 with a movement to obtain a publicly-owned waterworks system. On January 25, 1893 Knoxville alderman James P. Kennedy submitted an act to the city council requesting the state legislature "to authorize the board of mayor and aldermen of the city of Knoxville to issue bonds for water works, to acquire and condemn lands necessary therefore, and [to create] a board of water work trustees, and prescribing rules for its government." The support for city ownership that emerged demonstrated that few Knoxvilleians agreed with Branson's and Englehardt's rosy appraisal of the

40 H.M. Branson, The Annual Handbook of Knoxville, Tennessee for the Year 1892 (Knoxville, TN.: Tribune Job Office, 1892), 5, 12; George W. Englehardt, Knoxville, Tennessee, The Englehardt Series: American Cities. (St. Louis, MO.: George W. Englehardt, around 1892-1893), 15-16.

privately-owned municipal water system.⁴¹

Several complaints underlay popular dissatisfaction with the service provided by the Knoxville Water Company. The proprietors of Shields Brothers, wholesale dealers in groceries, tobacco and cigars, favored city ownership because the Knoxville Water Company provided low quality water: "If the water company has to make a living some way let them start a hash house with the dead fish, water snakes and other reptiles which are so constantly found in the reservoir." In their opinion, Knoxville hardly needed an "aquarium" for a reservoir. W.P. King of Bayless, King and Cruze, manufacturers of stoves, ranges, furnaces, tinware, roofing, et cetera, believed that the company should provide more water of a better quality as promised under the current contract. For this reason, he favored city ownership over signing a new contract with the company. Proprietors Calloway and Brown, dealers in shoes, hats, valises and

⁴¹Dudley E. Brewer, A History of the Knoxville Utilities Board: City of Knoxville, Tennessee (Knoxville, TN.: The Knoxville Utilities Board, 1979), 28-30. The Knoxville Water Company was incorporated in 1882 with a capital stock of \$250,000. The Utility pumped water from the Tennessee River just above the city. Goodspeed's History of Hamilton, Knox and Shelby Counties of Tennessee (Nashville, TN.: Charles and Randy Elder, Booksellers, 1887, 1974), 875. The act offered by Alderman James P. Kennedy called for issuing \$400,000 in bonds to obtain city-owned waterworks. Knoxville Sentinel 26 January 1893.

trunks, hoped that city ownership would bring cheaper rates. ⁴²

According to the Knoxville Journal, the city needed five million gallons of water in addition to what it currently received from the company. The editors later described the KWC's service as "incomplete, insufficient and often unwholesome." One anonymous proprietor whose business consumed large amounts of water opposed granting further privileges to the KWC because "their rates are exorbitant and their policy is opposed to ideas of progressiveness." He wanted the city to own the waterworks and charge rates that only covered operation and interest on the bonds, and nothing more. ⁴³

Such criticisms stung, and KWC officials wasted little time before responding to Kennedy's challenge of the company's exclusive monopoly over the local water supply. Through Alderman George W. Callahan, the company offered its own proposal for improving the current utility, requesting permission to issue \$750,000 in bonds to increase and upgrade the facilities. Controversy simmered as the city council split between those who favored the KWC's proposal and those who wanted city ownership.

Aldermen Samuel A. Bailey, George W. Callahan, James P.

⁴² Knoxville Sentinel 26 January; 2, 22 February 1893.

⁴³ Knoxville Journal 11 February 1893.

Kennedy, Gregory J. Ashe, Matthew M. Nelson and Richard J. Jarnagin favored the KWC ordinance. The most vocal supporter, alderman Callahan, vehemently stumped for the KWC proposal, arguing that ownership of the waterworks system would overburden the city with debt. Mayor Thompson, however, along with aldermen A.G. Payne and Benjamin S. Boyd, favored city ownership, and the Mayor vowed to veto the Knoxville Water Company ordinance if the city council passed it. To many, the waterworks controversy "has become a universal topic of conversation and it is regarded by many as the most important matter of public interest which has ever arisen." 44

Knoxville's business-civic community essentially split over the waterworks question. The composition of both the supporters of and the opposition to the Knoxville Water Company was essentially the same. Aldermen on both sides were businessmen and/or professionals with business interests. George W. Callahan, for example, the alleged "ringleader" of the pro-KWC clique on city council, was president of Callahan Construction Company and proprietor of George W. Callahan and Bros., marble contractors. One biographical account praised him for having the "business

⁴⁴The main point of contention with the proposal offered by the water company was the provision to issue \$750,000 in bonds to upgrade the system. Knoxville Sentinel 11 February 1893.

sagacity of a Pennsylvanian and the congeniality and polished manners of the typical southern gentlemen." His other business activities included a seat on the board of directors for the City National Bank, and ownership of a very large (in local terms) and very fertile plantation in the county. James P. Kennedy was a druggist associated with Stephenson Manufacturing Co., manufacturer of drugs and essences. Gregory J. Ashe was a liquor wholesaler, and Richard J. Jarnagin, a butcher, was associated with a meat market and grocery. ⁴⁵

On the other side, incumbent Mayor Melville Thompson, outspoken opponent of the KWC, began his business career as a teamster, and then entered the livery business. This line of work proved so successful that Thompson retired after only ten years. Known as a real estate agent and large property owner, Mayor Thompson's "judgement, business tact, and faith in the city's future, applied whenever the golden opportunity offered, have secured him an ample sharing of its enhancing realty." And alderman A.G. Payne was a clerk with J.E. Lutz and Co., retailer of shoes and hats. Thus, the occupational compositions of both sides in this

⁴⁵ Men of Affairs in Knoxville (Knoxville, TN.: Joel L. Baker and Stuart Towe [1917], 33); Knoxville City Directory 1891-2; 1893; 1894.

controversy, despite their disagreement, were not markedly different. ⁴⁶

Other businessmen besides those on the city council soon spoke out against the KWC ordinance. As an organization of local business proprietors aimed at promoting the city, the Chamber of Commerce took the developing controversy quite seriously, and called a meeting to gauge popular opinion. The ensuing discussion revealed significant opposition to the KWC ordinance not only in city council, but among Knoxville's businessmen as well. To further test public opinion, the Chamber decided to call a mass meeting of citizens for February 19 to address the issue. ⁴⁷

When citizens assembled in City Hall for the mass meeting, the Journal remarked the next day that the familiar faces of "well known and prominent business men" filled the meeting. In fact, "the majority of the wealth of the city was represented." The Sentinel labelled the gathering an "indignation meeting" because emphatic applause and hearty cheers met each person who spoke against the proposal. Participants applauded when W.L. Welcker, an established private attorney, denounced the ordinance and declared that "the kid council had just as well get in the way of a drove of runaway mules as to oppose public sentiment. If they

⁴⁶ Englehardt, 14-15.

⁴⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 11 February 1893.

opposed the wishes of their constituents whom they were elected to represent, they would never more be heard of politically." Welcker later advised citizens to "drink beer and whiskey" rather than accept another unfavorable water contract. Both meetings further illustrate that while some businessmen supported the ordinance, an increasingly vocal number did not.⁴⁸

Knoxville's business-civic community similarly split over another municipal dispute that embroiled city leaders when the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville railroad (KCG&L) filed suit against the city of Knoxville in 1893. The roots of this quarrel dated back to the subsidy election of 1887 when Knoxvillians approved the public subscription of \$225,000 to the capital stock of the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville railroad (then named the Powell's Valley). In return, the railroad company promised to build a line within one mile of the city within

⁴⁸ The report of the Chamber committee on the Knoxville Water Company's ordinance addressed several points of contention. For example, the KWC preamble stated that the need of the city for an increased water supply demanded an enlarged capacity, but failed to prove whether or not the company had complied with the original contract to supply two million gallons of water per day to the city. The committee disapproved of issuing \$750,000 in bonds when, according to an earlier study, "the honest expenditure of \$300,000 would give the city a water plant sufficient in capacity as to afford ample supply of potable water." For further details, see Knoxville Sentinel 20 February; 20 March 1893; Knoxville Journal 19 February 1893.

twenty-four months. ⁴⁹

The new line connected Knoxville to the Louisville and Nashville railroad at Middlesboro, Kentucky, a "booming" town in 1889. Middlesboro's boom, however, soon petered out, and feeling the effects of the city's decline, The KCG&L railroad entered bankruptcy in 1892. A booster pamphlet published the same year noted that the KCG&L had been "of very great service already to Knoxville. It [made] a modern highway of steel of the old trail at Cumberland Gap, which [had] been used for a century as a wagon road." However, many attitudes changed a year later when the railroad company filed suit in chancery court to force the city of Knoxville to pay the \$225,000 it had originally promised to subscribe. Initially, some city officials argued that the railroad's failure to comply with the original contract nullified the city's obligation. Nevertheless, Chancellor Henry R. Gibson ruled in favor of the railroad and against the city. The board of mayor and aldermen appealed the decision to the state supreme court. ⁵⁰

As with the Knoxville Water Company, the controversy

⁴⁹ For specific details on the history of the city's dispute with the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad, see William Rule, Standard History of Knoxville, Tennessee...Down to the Present Time (Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co., 1900), 293-299.

⁵⁰ Deadrick, Heart of the Valley, 200; Branson, 55; Knoxville Sentinel 1 August 1893.

erupted when the railroad offered a compromise proposal to settle the dispute as the case pended in court. Once again, a majority of the city council favored the proposal, and passed a resolution to that effect. And once again, the Mayor disagreed. He believed the city stood a good chance of winning the appeal, and accordingly, he vetoed the compromise resolution. Knoxvilleians then waited to see if the city council, and in particular the majority "clique" of aldermen Callahan, Jarnagin, Ashe, Kennedy, Nelson and Bailey, the same one that supported the KWC ordinance, would override or sustain the Mayor's veto. ⁵¹

Pending this decision, some nervous citizens filed an injunction bill, which the court soon granted, to enjoin the city council from accepting any compromise resolution from the railroad company. This injunction, as well as the mayor's veto message, articulated many of the reasons some Knoxvilleians opposed fulfilling the city's contract with the railroad. ⁵²

According to the injunction, the railroad company had violated various terms of the contract which nullified the city's obligation to pay the subscription. When he vetoed the first compromise plan, Mayor Thompson argued that the

⁵¹ Knoxville Sentinel 12 August 1893; Knoxville Journal 12 August 1893.

⁵² Ibid.

city never agreed simply to give the railroad \$225,000, but rather, promised to subscribe that amount to the company's capital stock. But the company had rendered its stock essentially worthless through the manipulations of "a construction company, financial agents, bonds and mortgages." The Mayor concluded that "we should observe all obligations, which in good conscience should be binding, even though not legally enforceable; but I can not reconcile with my sense of duty a gift to an association, which in all its dealings has failed in every observance of good faith." 53

While these controversies brewed, local newspaper editors worried that the discord they provoked endangered the city's progress. Journal editors called for Knoxvilleans, especially councilmen, to lay aside differences and jealousies:

It is when we have pulled together that Knoxville has taken steps forward. Jealousy, strife, petty bickering and pulling in all directions with diverse and antagonistic objects never built a city...a confusion of purposes are a mill stone around the neck of a city. Let us lay aside every weight and the contemptible...jealousy which besets us, and we will profit by it. 54

The Journal nervously admonished readers that no reason existed to give in "to angry passions in the discussion of a

53 Ibid.

54 Knoxville Sentinel 25 March 1893.

matter in which the great bulk of the people have a common interest...Let us reason together like men who have the good of the community at heart..." Even as they diverged over the waterworks and railroad questions, the editors of both papers agreed that disunity threatened the city's progress. A Journal writer admonished Knoxvilleians for splintering over the municipal questions, and noted that "so many of these congeries are hostile, one to another, like the children of Ishmael, and a potent reason is given for the lack of progressiveness and slow growth." Then the writer justified the need for harmony with an allegory:

There is an old story about a bundle of twigs. Separately an infant might break each of them in childish sport. United they are beyond the strength of a giant. The single wires that suspend a bridge are trifles; but welded into a cable they bear enormous weights. So it is with a city. Adversity finds sport in dealing with individuals; but passes by a community banded together for mutual protection. ⁵⁵

Both pro-development papers, organs for Knoxville's businessmen, still stressed the importance of unity to Knoxville's advancement even as the the business-civic community divided over an important question of municipal improvement.

Despite these pleas for unanimity and compromise, the suspicions expressed by both sides diminished the prospect

⁵⁵ Knoxville Sentinel 28 March; 9 April 1893.

of resolving the dispute harmoniously. Discarding the pretense that opinions diverged because of honest differences, each side denigrated the other's position with accusations of foul play and corruption. Such suspicions fueled much of the early sentiment against both the KWC and the KCG&L railroad.

For example, the proprietors of Shields Brothers preferred city ownership of the waterworks over a company that had never fulfilled its promises. "The city," they declared, "should own the water works, [and] the water works should not own the city as at present." The report of the Chamber committee to the mass meeting questioned the KWC's ability to use the money issued in bonds properly, and declared that the work did not require a sum as large as requested: "the honest expenditure of \$300,000 would give the city a water plant sufficient in capacity as to afford ample supply of potable water." W.P. King of Bayless, King and Cruze questioned the company's motives in requesting to issue such a large amount in bonds. He believed the company wanted "to speculate with the water works... [and] water its stock for nearly three-quarters of a million dollars, and in return give the city of Knoxville about three hundred thousand dollars worth of water works improvements." Many citizens considered the Knoxville Water Company as

suspicious at best and corrupt at worst. ⁵⁶

Those against the ordinance not only questioned the motives of the company, but soon suspected those of its supporters as well. Beyond the aldermen who supported the ordinance, stated the Knoxville Sentinel, "there were only a few people who favored it, and these few people were those who were seeking their own emolument and had their own gains in view." The first major public accusation of foul play appeared in a bill for injunction filed with the chancery court by a citizens' watchdog committee. The bill accused the attorneys and agents of the Knoxville Water Company with improperly lobbying and "[securing] seven of ten aldermen in favor of the contract." It charged "that two aldermen who had heretofore found it necessary to work for a living had given up good jobs to lobby for the ordinance." ⁵⁷

The Sentinel denied that it directly accused anyone of bribery, but nevertheless claimed that an impression of misconduct committed by council members prevailed among Knoxvilleians. The situation arose, according to the editor, when a "MAJORITY CLIQUE" on the city council ignored popular opinion and passed an unpopular ordinance that signed away the city's water rights. The Sentinel accused the aldermen

⁵⁶ Knoxville Sentinel 1, 20, 22 February; 21, 18 March 1893; Knoxville Journal 18 March 1893.

⁵⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 18, 20 March 1893.

with secretly conspiring with "emissaries" of the company to produce the waterworks proposition, and condemned them for railroading it through the council. One writer warned that the "people believe their rights are being trampled on and that their servants are endeavoring to deliver them into the hands of the Philistines." Knoxville had fallen into the hands of a city council clique that sought to control the city's fortunes and future. This was, indeed, a "sorry thing" and "a menace [that has often] proved disastrous." 58

Advocates for the KWC ordinance soon responded in-kind to such attacks by voicing similar protests against city ownership, and questioning the motives of the opposition. The aldermen of the city, claimed one writer, could "properly and safely disregard the factious opposition of men who cover selfish motives with patriotic protestations and disinterested professions." The writer accused "these dissidents" of falsely presenting themselves as average taxpayers and claiming to express popular opinion to legitimize their opposition. Yet, they would never "dare publish in parallel columns their actual worth, or commercial ratings and their tax assessments," because each would far outdistance the means of the average taxpayer. 59

⁵⁸ Knoxville Sentinel 20, 21 March 1893.

⁵⁹ Knoxville Sentinel 18 March 1893; Knoxville Journal 27 March 1893.

Not surprisingly, the superintendent of the water company, C. F. Woods, declared that "it would be much better for the water works to be in the control of a good reliable company than to be at the mercy of political jobbers." In cities that owned the water system, according to Woods, so many scandals had erupted concerning the utility that he was "sick" of hearing about them. Alderman George Callahan, the most vocal advocate on the city council for the ordinance, agreed that corruption troubled city-owned utilities: "Cincinnati owned her plant and because of it her political parties were the worst and most corrupt set of boodlers any city in the union was cursed with." And now, "the city was dancing to their music with exorbitant water rates." To some, city ownership of the waterworks system promised to foster more foul play than a monopoly by the water company. 60

Just as in the waterworks dispute, charges of foul play soon crept into the railroad controversy as well. The public, as understood by the Sentinel, once again suspected the motives of those aldermen who supported the railroad's position. Just as they supported the Knoxville Water Company, aldermen Ashe, Bailey, Callahan, Jarnagin, Kennedy and Nelson appeared to ignore public sentiment and continued

⁶⁰ Knoxville Sentinel 15 February; 1 March 1893; Knoxville Journal 15 February 1893.

to favor the KCG&L railroad. The editors of the Knoxville Sentinel accused the aldermen of "playing" right into the railroad's hands. In accepting the compromise settlement, they pursued their own objectives "against the city, whose interests they are sworn to protect, right in the face of a mayor's veto, a court's injunction and the people's wishes." A "mysterious bond of sympathy" seemed to bring the "clique" together "whenever they have an opportunity to vote for a corporation against the interests of the people."

If the people would only quit kicking and filing injunction suits the kids would soon make the corporations a pile of money at Knoxville's expense. But the tax payers of the city have an exasperating way of objecting to nearly every great measure the kids undertake to pass. They will not even agree to pay the K., C. G. & L. the half million dollars that the kids in their great generosity want to give that needy corporation...Surely the kids have a hard time of it. They would so much like to serve their friends, but the perverse people will not let them. ⁶¹

In the case of alderman George Callahan, the alleged leader of the "clique," accusations of spurious motives may have been well-founded. Little evidence exists to prove that railroad interests directly influenced Callahan's advocacy of the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville railroad compromise. However, one biographer noted that Callahan, who owned a large construction business, was known as "a

⁶¹ Knoxville Sentinel 18, 5, 28 September 1893.

railroad builder of extensive experience and nationwide reputation." This information does tend to cast a suspicious light on Callahan's support for the railroad, and probably helps explain why he earned the special vituperation of the anti-KOG&L citizens. Still, no direct evidence exists to substantiate such charges. ⁶²

Opponents of the KOG&L railroad questioned the wisdom of fulfilling the city's contractual obligation. The Sentinel warned that the KOG&L debt would increase the city's indebtedness by \$225,000, plus the interest thereon for thirty more years, and create a burden that could overwhelm the public treasury: "The situation demands serious thought and vigorous action. It is inconceivable that the business men of Knoxville, noted everywhere for their ability to take care of their own interests, should sit in idle indifference and let such a gang as the clique get hold of the public treasury again."

Once again, the Chamber of Commerce sided with the the "progressive" business element, warning city council not to impede the appeal of the chancery court's decision: "In the opinion of the chamber of commerce the tax-payers and the business interests of the city would be grievously wronged by any interference...by the city council with the suit of the KOG&L railroad vs. the city of Knoxville, which is now

⁶² Men of Affairs, 33.

pending in the supreme court." To those against the railroad, only corruption could explain why the "clique" backed such an unwise scheme. ⁶³

Like the waterworks issue, the railroad controversy revealed conflict not only between the city and a corporate interest but, more importantly, among Knoxvilleians at large. The stock subscription to the railroad in 1887 was originally a booster scheme to appeal to industrial and financial interests by expanding the city's transportation facilities. In 1893, however, some business-civic leaders wanted to cancel the city's obligation because they believed that the railroad had reneged on the contract. ⁶⁴

Knoxville's "progressive" business element believed that personal ambition or corporate influence motivated certain city officials to make decisions detrimental to the city's interests, and to support patently unwise proposals. Allegedly, the Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville railroad lobbied aldermen improperly to propel legislation through city council that favored their own interests. The waterworks company wanted to issue an additional \$750,000 in bonds to upgrade an inefficient and inadequate waterworks system, and to

⁶³ Knoxville Sentinel _ 2, 16, 27 September 1893; Knoxville Journal 2 September 1893; Knoxville Sentinel _ 16 November 1893.

⁶⁴ Knoxville Sentinel 5 August 1893.

forestall the development of a city-owned utility. The KCG&L railroad wanted the city to pay the \$225,000 it pledged in 1887 to the railroad's capital stock. To a significant number of business-civic leaders, both schemes promised to saddle Knoxville with unwanted debt without benefitting the city adequately in return.

These two municipal controversies reveal disagreement within the business-civic community. The Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville railroad had both friends and enemies among the city's business-civic leadership. For example, industrialist George W. Callahan consistently supported the railroad while textile industrialist Edward Epps MacMillan just as consistently opposed it. The pro-development Knoxville Journal supported the schemes while the promotional Chamber of Commerce condemned them.

More important than the fact that all were businessmen, however, is the fact that boosterism pervaded both sides of the dispute. Although the Democratic Sentinel and the Republican Journal generally opposed each other throughout these controversies, both were booster papers. The Journal, for example, in regard to those Knoxville hesitating to support the KWC ordinance, noted that "caution and mature deliberation are commendable virtues; but they should be based always on sound reason and practical common sense.

Without these elements what is in itself a virtue may become ridiculous, and instead of allies to enterprise may become blind obstructions." In other words, if "caution" rested not on "practical common sense," but on innate prejudices, it would not facilitate business prosperity nor aid in the city's progress. To the Journal, that "progress" toward industrial-commercial prosperity was an all-important goal. In early 1892, the Sentinel declared to be "for Knoxville, first, last and all the time and every business concern that tends to build up our beautiful city shall have the hearty and cordial support of this paper." 65

Although the Sentinel sided with those who opposed the KWC ordinance, the paper's editors agreed with the company's supporters that the waterworks question was important to Knoxville's growth and prosperity. For example, one article noted that well-conditioned streets were important to boosters in attracting new industry and capital. Yet, Knoxville's pitted and rugged streets could not be repaired and paved until waterworks officials, whether public or private, installed new water mains and lines below the streets. Arguments over the best way to improve the water system interfered with the city's economic advancement by delaying efforts to improve the city streets. Potential investors would immediately notice the sad state of

⁶⁵ Knoxville Sentinel 18 February 1893.

disrepair: "You may tell people who come here to look at the place, we intend paving our streets, but they will judge you from what they see already, rather than by the magnificent promises you make." ⁶⁶

The pro-development Journal and Sentinel took opposite sides in these controversies, but both believed the dispute hindered finding a solution, and thus obstructed the city's industrial-commercial progress. The Sentinel remarked that "the best and surest way in the world to defeat the waterworks scheme (for city ownership) or other business enterprise, is for the people to get at loggerheads and to quarrel among themselves. Don't do it." ⁶⁷

In 1887 boosters argued fervently that the city's progress depended upon a pro-development unity of purpose among Knoxvilleians. Indeed, business-civic leaders apparently still believed that in 1893 and 1894. Despite these convictions, however, Knoxville's business-civic leadership could not impose a consensus upon themselves, let alone anyone else. And these differences grew even sharper when accusations of foul play and corrupt dealings began to fly.

Having established that the municipal controversies reflected a divided business-civic community with boosters

⁶⁶ Knoxville Sentinel 1 February; 1 March 1893.

⁶⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 1 March 1893.

appearing on both sides of each issue, a question still remains concerning the nature of the dispute. Why did these Knoxvilleians split over these issues? The 1893-1894 campaign and election for city offices reveals something of the nature of the dispute because the municipal questions became central to the campaigning of both parties. Some reform-minded citizens anticipated the election as a chance to register their displeasure with city officials who backed the corporate proposals by ousting the city council "clique."

As the municipal election of 1894 approached, the Knoxville Sentinel editor advised Knoxvilleians to "look to the future and watch the affairs of the city. Nominate and elect men who will work for Knoxville and for no corporation...Democrats and Republicans, be on your guard and nominate men who will not be dictated too (sic)." Voters would remember as the election drew near who stood with the Knoxville Water Company and who had sided with "the people." Indeed, if Knoxville's businessmen had realized "what class of citizens" they were electing to office in January of 1892, lamented the Sentinel, the city would have been far better off. "There would have been no attempt at the city water company jobbery... nor the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville bond jobbery." Knoxville's voters, however, would not repeat the same mistake twice. They would remember

who tried to auction off the city's interests, and thus, the people's welfare, to the corporations.

Will somebody gently kick a clod of dirt into the yet unopen grave of Knoxville's poor, dead aldermen. Just throw in a little dirt and withdraw, solemnly, fearfully as from a suicide's grave...In its persistent effort to defraud the people, or, at least, to misrepresent them in all matters of public interest, the council has dug its own grave... 68

According to some Knoxvilleians, the "clique's" propensity to favor questionable corporate schemes would haunt them during the municipal election of 1894. And, not surprisingly, it did.

As the municipal election of 1894 approached, Democrats and Republicans appeared to square off against each other over the municipal questions, as seen in the initial stances taken by the local party newspapers. The Democratic Sentinel opposed the Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad and thus, the Republican Journal, which initially favored both companies' proposals. The disputes might represent nothing more than regular interparty rivalry. In other words, the municipal questions became the battleground in 1893 for traditional party wrangling in anticipation of the coming election.

Though the party newspapers initially opposed each other over the issues, the dispute cannot be dismissed as

⁶⁸ Knoxville Sentinel _ 1 April; 25, 27 October; 1, 28 November 1893.

simple and traditional Democratic versus Republican rivalry. For example, on the local level, one party was not necessarily more pro-development than the other. Knoxville's boosters participated in both parties throughout the era. For example, Democrats Edward Henegar and William S. Shields worked alongside Republicans Cary Fletcher Spence and J.G. Sterchi to promote Knoxville's economic development at the turn of the century, and in 1893, Democrats George Callahan and A.J. Albers stood on opposite sides of each municipal question. In addition, the villified city council "clique" of 1893-1894 included both Democrats and Republicans. Clique member and Alderman Matthew M. Nelson, a Republican, sat on the council with five other clique members who were Democrats. In fact, this particular city council had been elected in 1892 as a bi- or non-partisan body.⁶⁹

Although both Democrats and Republicans appeared on both sides of the controversies, partisanship still proved central to the conflict. The primary point of contention in these controversies appears to have been among Knoxville's Democratic businessmen. Probably delighting in the fighting that disrupted the unity of local Democrats, the Republican

⁶⁹ In his publication on Knoxville, Englehardt described the city council elected with Mayor Melville Thompson in 1892, the "kid council" of the "iniquitous clique," as progressive: "These are men, alive, like the Mayor, to the fact that the growth of the city requires a broad, liberal and forward municipal policy, and a progressive administration." (15)

Journal noted in October of 1893 that "it is understood that if a certain clique can control city nominations there will be a partisan race. But, on the other hand, if a certain other clique of democracy gets control of the machine there will be an independent race." Indeed, with Knoxville's Democrats, "all [was] not serenity." Factional fighting during Democratic nominating conventions held in the wards provoked the Journal to add that "Knoxville's democracy is not as harmonious as it might be." A few days later the Journal remarked that with the Democratic nominations settled, "Old friends will doubtless...proceed to fall out and quarrel over local politics." The writer left no doubt as to the subject of this dispute: "the water works...and the K., C.G. & L. subsidy will now become burning issues." 70

Party deliberations concerning the type of Democratic ticket to run reflected a dissatisfaction among some Democrats with party leadership. The reform-oriented Democratic Sentinel declared before the nominating conventions met to choose candidates that "if the party puts out men who favor any of the big jobs which the clique have sought to fasten on the city they deserve to be beaten and will be beaten." One Sentinel writer spelled out their

⁷⁰ Knoxville Journal 24 October; 22, 25 November 1893; Knoxville Sentinel 24 November 1893; Knoxville Journal 28 November 1893.

complaint more clearly:

the influence brought to bear by certain citizens and business men on the council in the interest of certain measures, in which these men had no earthly personal interest, only to help corporations who had sought their influence in these matters, and speak a word to the 'boys' MEANS REFORM."⁷¹

Members of the Democratic County Executive Committee met on November 11, 1893 and discussed whether candidates should adopt a definite public position on each of the municipal questions. Knoxville's disgruntled Democratic reformers initially did not want to define the suitability of candidates by party membership, but rather by their opposition to the corporate side of the municipal controversies. A candidate should "oppose any proposition of the water company which [increased] its bonded indebtedness to an amount which [precluded] Knoxville purchasing the plant at the expiration of its option at a reasonable price." He should also oppose any interference of the city council in the appeal of the KOG&L bond matter.⁷²

Indeed, the editor of the Knoxville Sentinel warned several times that if the Democratic convention did not nominate reformist candidates, many reform-minded party members would vote independent or Republican. No longer

⁷¹ Knoxville Sentinel 21 September 1893; 31 October 1893.

⁷² Knoxville Sentinel 6, 12 November; 27 October 1893.

would the "politicians...have it all their own way." "It is a travesty on Democracy," stated the Sentinel, "to run a party municipal ticket simply in order to give ward politicians fat jobs without reference to the interests of the people at large." In short, the "right" candidate should "favor legislation that is honest to the people and which is not the schemes of designing men controlled through cliques." ⁷³

One editorial called for a reformist Democratic ticket if at all possible, but a reform ticket first and foremost. "It is only the ring men, the political wire pullers who ignore the reform idea, and talk of a straight ticket without reference to how candidates shall stand on municipal policies." Reform-minded Democrats refused to be "hoodwinked" into supporting any candidate, regardless of his prominence and high standing, merely because the party machine labelled him a "good man and Democrat." The Sentinel claimed to have spoken to a "working man" on the subject. If the ward conventions did not produce "decent" democratic nominees, he warned, he and practically everyone he knew would vote a straight Republican ticket, and would not bother to initiate an independent campaign. The Journal queried, "Will the 'boys' control the Democratic municipal

⁷³ Knoxville Sentinel 30, 27 October; 15, 22 November 1893; Knoxville Journal 22 October 1893.

convention or will the kid gloves and the silk handkerchief run 'de masheen?'" 74

Ultimately, the Democratic executive committee decided against non-partisan candidates. The decision to run a straight ticket dismayed party reformers. A Sentinel editorial charged that committee leaders treated reform ideas "as matters of no consequence and [with] ill-disguised contempt." The Sentinel added "It was the politicians that spoke on Saturday. The businessmen and taxpayers will be heard from later on." The editor did not expect that Knoxville's businessmen, including many merchants, manufacturers, doctors, lawyer, clerks, et cetera, would even bother to attend the ward conventions which were allegedly "cut and dried before the chairman is selected." 75

Such charges soon proved exaggerated as ward voters chose primarily reform candidates for the upcoming election. The front page Sentinel headline the morning after the ward conventions met read "Well Done Thou Good and Faithful Democrats...Ring Rule Repudiated and Dishonest Men and Measure Got It Where the Chicken Got the Axe." The paper proclaimed its satisfaction with the nominees except the

⁷⁴ Knoxville Journal 29 October 1893; Knoxville Sentinel 31 October 1893; Knoxville Journal 6, 3, 14, 23, 9 October 1893.

⁷⁵ Knoxville Sentinel 13, 15 November 1893.

third ward 's choice. There, "the ring run the wild hog over the democrats... and one-----and, thank God, the only one-----of the 'old' kid council was nominated-----Jarnagin." 76

Most of the ward candidates took an immediate pro-reform stand on the municipal questions. Out of nine ward nominees for aldermen, six sided with the "progressive" business element on all three issues. (Horace McMillan refused comment and Joseph L. Wade could not be reached.) Dick Jarnagin, the third ward incumbent and "clique" member, still supported the Knoxville Water Company but came clean on the railroad matters. 77

The municipal questions appear to be the splitting point for Democratic factionalism in the 1893-1894 municipal campaign. Those who favored strict party loyalty stood against those Democrats who wanted a reform ticket. Some Democrats favored the proposals of the Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad while others adamantly opposed them. Yet, it was not a clear-cut division. For example, incumbent Mayor Mel Thompson ran as an independent against Democratic candidate A.J. Albers for mayor. However, both men were businessmen

⁷⁶ Knoxville Sentinel 24 November 1893; Knoxville Journal 24 November 1893.

⁷⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 24 November 1893.

and Democrats, and both sided against the corporate proposals. Alderman Benjamin S. Boyd, a dealer in coal, coke, wood and lime, belonged to the minority on the council who opposed the corporate proposals. Yet, as he stated during party deliberations, he wanted a straight ticket to run in the 1894 city election. Still, a significant number of Democrats in the business-civic community found that their own dissatisfaction with local political leaders, and in particular with their position on these questions, threatened to qualify their local party loyalty.⁷⁸

Once the Democrats nominated reform candidates (although it was a straight ticket), a regular Democrat versus Republican rivalry emerged with the municipal questions in the center. Rather than comprising a pro-reform versus anti-reform fight, however, the campaign consisted of both parties vying to be the "best" pro-reform choice for voters.

The Knoxville Sentinel argued throughout the campaign that if a citizen wanted to defeat the waterworks, the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville and other such schemes, "the surest way to obtain his object [was] to vote the Democratic ticket." Unity was essential: "If Democrats divide there is a fine opening for ring men. If they stand

⁷⁸ Knoxville Sentinel 16 November 1893; Knoxville Journal 12, 22 November 1893; Knoxville City Directory 1891-2; 1893; 1894.

together they are sure of electing men who are both Democrats and reformers." Only the Democratic candidates had the qualities essential to a non-partisan, business-oriented government. For example, the Sentinel found that business principles and Democratic loyalty complemented each other nicely in mayoral candidate A. J. Albers, in Reps Jones, running for chairman of the board of public works, and among most of the party's aldermanic nominees: "Albers and Jones and a majority of the aldermanic candidates are business men of long and successful experience...The party could ask [for] no better representatives and the business interests of the city need wish no better guardian." 79

"Patriotic, progressive and upright voters of Knoxville" aimed to elect men who were "not running for office and seeking to get in for the sake of politics alone." To the Sentinel, the Democratic nominees (except for Jarnagin in the third ward) were the answer because they were the only candidates explicitly pledged for reform: "After the election of the Democratic ticket tomorrow, there will be no more danger that the tricksters and boodlers will work their schemes in favor of the water-works, the Knoxville, Cumberland and Louisville, and the Knoxville and Ohio railroads. The candidates with the exception of

⁷⁹Knoxville Sentinel 12 December 1893; 14 January 1894.

Jarnigan are all on record against these plots to rob the people." 80

Although many Republicans previously sided with the KWC and the KOG&L railroad, the opportunity provided by Democratic bickering proved hard to resist. Having scented a chance for victory in the wavering loyalties of malcontented reform-minded Democrats, astute Republican leaders quickly adopted "anti-ring" rhetoric for its political benefit. The Republicans endorsed men who ran as non-partisan candidates to attract any drifting voters rather than running their own ticket. Usually, however, these candidates opposed Democratic nominees and were themselves Republicans. Like their opponents, they now linked their favorites to the "right" side of the issues. 81

First, Republicans had to discredit the "reformism" of their political opponents. They argued that patronage ambitions motivated the Democratic decision to run a party ticket, and canceled out the fact that the Democrats had nominated reformist candidates. The Republican Journal praised the Democratic choices for mayor and chairman of the board of public works. "It is well," the editor wrote, "since partisanship in local municipal government must go,

⁸⁰ Knoxville Sentinel 17, 18 January 1894; 12 December 1893; 14, 19 January 1894.

⁸¹ Knoxville Sentinel 19 January 1894.

that the democrats have stumbled on two excellent gentlemen to head the ticket." Unfortunately, candidates A.J. Albers and Reps Jones had "cut themselves off from republican and independent support by pasting the label 'Democrat' so conspicuously on their garments." The Journal praised mayoral nominee A.J. Albers as a frugal and wise businessman, and declared that in any other situation, the Republican paper would endorse his candidacy. By running on a straight Democratic ticket, however, "he represents one idea and no principle. His candidacy simply means offices for his followers." 82

The Journal summarily dismissed the reform sentiment among some of Knoxville's Democratic businessmen.

That is the milk in the coconut of this partisan movement. It is a struggle for pie for the faithful with a few rich, juicy slices of fruitcake for the inner ring. Its highest purpose is to control the board of public works and thus control the payrolls of the city government. Otherwise the race would be non-partisan. 83

In the ninth ward, Republicans held a political meeting attended by many "laboring men". They came to hear two speakers from "the ranks" discuss the municipal campaign. Evan Jones, formerly in the rolling mill business but now in the marble industry (and later the superintendent of the Knoxville Iron Company), spoke on the Wilson bill and the

82 Knoxville Journal 29 November 1893.

83 Ibid.

protective tariff. Then, he focused on the local race. He endorsed Republican Thomas Price for ninth ward alderman, and concluded his speech by "roasting the rings and cliques who have had the control of municipal affairs." 84

The Republicans had an advantage in this election when denouncing ring politics because only one member of the "clique" was Republican. This enabled them to use the opposing party as a convenient scapegoat. Local attorney E. F. Mynatt blasted the competition during yet another meeting in the ninth ward. He argued that the Democrats would "ruin" Knoxville if they continued to run the city government, and the city's condition reflected their incompetence:

Knoxville is in a worse condition now than any city in the country, and taxes continue to climb higher and higher. The kid council is getting the spoils and we are getting the devil and a few other undesirable things... if it were not for such corrupt legislation, Knoxville would be in better condition than she is in. 85

If the Democrats succeeded in electing A. J. Albers as mayor, Mynatt predicted, "we will soon smell the water works and the city's \$100,000 stock in the Knoxville and Ohio railroad bonds." Republicans should nominate John Hudiburg, W.E. Gibbins or Capt. S. P. Evans for mayor, and remember that the Knoxville Water Company stood behind Democratic

84 Knoxville Journal 30 December 1893.

85 Knoxville Journal 9 December 1893.

nominee Reps Jones. By denouncing the "ring" and "clique", and warning of Democratic ties to the "iniquitous" corporate interests, the Republicans hoped to erase from the memories of Knoxville's voters their own previous advocacy of all three corporate interests. 86

Predictions that any association with the corporate side of the controversies would determine a candidate's success or failure in the election appeared to come true. For example, the Sentinel claimed that its muckraking articles which revealed the "kid council" prostituting public office for personal advantage caused the clique's electoral defeat: "The water works, the KOG&L and the K&O conspiracies have been driven from the field." The three great municipal questions, "The Politician" stated in a letter, were uppermost in Knoxville's minds as they voted. Any candidate they believed favored these interests lost votes as a result. Thus, the knowledge that Albers had business associations with E.J. Sanford canceled out his proclamations of reform and spelled his defeat. In addition, claimed another Albers' supporter, "clique" leader George Callahan, "a waterworks advocate, a Knoxville and Augusta stock sale pleader, and a Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville bond issue manipulator," seconded Albers' nomination during the Democratic nominating convention. This

⁸⁶ Knoxville Journal 19 December 1893.

endorsement by a "clique" member cast suspicion on Albers. ⁸⁷

Such connections allegedly affected other candidates as well. For example, Democratic nominee for alderman of the eighth ward, Tim Donahoe, allegedly lost because he ran a restaurant in the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia depot. Apparently, ward voters feared that this corporate connection might influence him improperly. The same fate met clique member Richard Jarnagin's bid for re-election in the third ward. According to the Sentinel, "candidates of the party who were well known to be naturally and consistently opposed to the monopolistic plots had no difficulty in securing election." ⁸⁸

Personal factionalism among Democrats perhaps explains, at least partly, why some Democrats split over the municipal questions. Perhaps the KWC and the KOG&L railroad issues merely provided new ammunition to factions already engaged in a local political battle. On December 17, 1893, the Knoxville Journal speculated why some Democrats opposed the city council "ring." The Journal suggested that they opposed the clique because it interfered with their own political ambitions, and not because it impeded the city's progress.

⁸⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 27, 22 January 1894; 23 November 1893.

⁸⁸ Knoxville Sentinel 24 January 1894.

One Journal reporter claimed to have overheard a Democrat remark that "Gen. J. C. J. Williams; Col. W. L. Ledgerwood; Col. Thomas L. Williams; Col. G.W. Mabry and Hon. S. G. Heiskell" once were "notable leaders" of the party. Now, however, they found themselves "shut out by the ring and left to flock by themselves. They are utterly excommunicated from participating in the great and glorious privilege of being members of the ring." ⁸⁹

Mostly attorneys, these frustrated political leaders allegedly insisted that the current "ring" was "a little fresh" to be dictating Democratic policy. The "clique's" Democracy only dated back a few years whereas they themselves were "the Democratic standardbearers [who had] borne the heat and burden of the day for the past twenty-five years. Thus, a "generation-gap" factionalism, between older Democrats with a longer record of service to the party and a younger group who comprised a majority on the city council, may have generated some of the opposition to schemes the "kid council" advocated. The fact that both Democrats and Republicans adopted pro-reform rhetoric to garner support during the municipal campaign, however, suggests that real displeasure with city government existed in Knoxville's business-civic community. Both parties hoped to capitalize on this dissatisfaction by linking their

⁸⁹ Knoxville Journal 17 December 1893.

candidates to the reform side of the issues. Thus, while local factionalism perhaps explains why some Democrats and businessmen chose one side over another, it does not explain the nature of the discontent expressed by some business-civic leaders. ⁹⁰

A significant part of this opposition reflected a concern that the KWC and KCG&L schemes ultimately would saddle the city with unwanted and unwise debt. For example, some citizens opposed the ordinance proposed by the KWC because it requested to issue \$750,000 in bonds to upgrade the waterworks system. In five years, however, the KWC's contract with the city would expire. At that time, as stated in the current contract, the city could buy the waterworks. Purchasing the system, however, also meant assuming the company's original bonded indebtedness which currently stood at \$150,000. But if the city agreed to amend the current contract to allow the KWC to issue an additional \$750,000 in bonds, as requested, the indebtedness of the company would increase markedly: "By the proposed ordinance it is claimed by responsible and sensible business men that the bonds to be issued will be so great that the load will forever bar the city from buying." ⁹¹

As for the KCG&L Railroad, many Knoxvilleians questioned

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Knoxville Sentinel 26 January 1894; 20 March 1893.

whether the company had complied fully with the original contract. Those who opposed paying the promised \$250,000 subsidy to the railroad objected to increasing the city's debt for a company which, in their view, never fulfilled its own contractual obligations. To reform-minded Knoxvilleans, both proposals were questionable schemes that only promised to increase the city's debt at the expense of taxpayers. ⁹²

Worrying over the state of the national economy probably helped fuel concern with the city's assumption of new, unwise or unnecessary debt. From 1893 into 1897, a full-scale industrial and agricultural depression hit all parts of the country. An economic collapse in the railroad business spread to associated industries, and when combined with the weakening of confidence in the gold standard, triggered a general business collapse throughout the country. According to one author, the South surpassed the national average in the percentage of business failures throughout the depression. Knoxville did not escape the crunch of depression in 1893. Like most other cities throughout the nation, in Knoxville railroads went into receivership; companies reduced their labor force; unemployment remained a consistent problem; and the ranks of the poor and needy swelled. In August of 1893, the East Tennessee Railroad announced that a need for retrenchment

⁹² Knoxville Sentinel 5 August 1893.

compelled the company to reduce individual pay by ten to twenty percent. This came after the railroad had reduced its labor force and payroll "by thousands" already over the past few months. ⁹³

Even a month before the Panic erupted, Knoxville had difficulty accommodating the needs of the local poor. A Sentinel article in January of 1893 noted that the Charity Relief Headquarters found it necessary to move from the city hall to a Gay Street address. The tremendous number of people coming to the city hall for charity was actually threatening the safety of the building, ostensibly because it had not been constructed to hold such numbers. On one Saturday, almost 2,000 people received charity relief; on the following Monday, over 1,500; Tuesday, over 600; and Wednesday over 700. In fact, by Thursday, the Relief headquarters had to suspend food services because supplies had run out. ⁹⁴

In August of 1893, recognizing the faltering state of the local economy, the Knoxville Journal suggested that city council repeal penalties on unpaid taxes for ninety days in order to relieve the pressure to pay in September. Because of the nation's financial straits, "Rich men and poor men

⁹³ Knoxville Sentinel, 21, 24, 30 August; 25 September 1893.

⁹⁴ Knoxville Sentinel 19 January 1893.

find, at this time, their taxes burdensome... hundreds of men...have been enforcedly idle for weeks past. Their taxes are unpaid. They have no money with which to pay them." The Journal hoped the city could survive without the extra revenue for ninety days. If the city council would "pass an ordinance postponing the imposition of penalties until that time many men [would] rise up to call it blessed." The Depression of 1893 hardly presented the best time to consider increasing Knoxville's debt, particularly through companies with a questionable record. If citizens worried about meeting their current tax obligations as they struggled with the 1893 panic, they were not likely to favor anything that might make their situation worse. ⁹⁵

According to the Sentinel, Knoxville's took a special interest in the financial maneuverings of city government: "Our city offices are more important to us than those of the county, state or nation. They levy and collect more than half of the taxes we pay, and have the management of those affairs which most directly affect our homes and our happiness." Thus, a significant number of Knoxville's business-civic leaders viewed the actions of the city council "clique" in supporting unwise (in their view)

⁹⁵ Paul S. Boyers and others, eds., The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People: Volume 2, from 1865 (Lexington, MA.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 729; Woodward, 264; Knoxville Sentinel 19 January 1893; Knoxville Journal 15 August 1893.

corporate schemes quite unfavorably. They determined to register their displeasure in the approaching municipal election: "Let us make assurances doubly sure in selecting our candidates, and prevent the possibility of again saddling ourselves with a council that will load us with disgrace and cover us with debt." ⁹⁶

Knoxville's reform-minded businessmen believed the way to end corruption in city government, as represented by the "clique," was to elect a non-partisan government to be run by business "principles" rather than personal ambitions and political patronage. That meant electing a city council of "progressive," or pro-reform, businessmen who understood and appreciated the relationship between the city's overall industrial-commercial prosperity and their own personal fortunes. Rather than judging each scheme or proposal by its potentiality to provide personal, individual profit or patronage rewards, such council men would determine a proposal's efficacy by its capability to help the city's overall prosperity and progress. Thus, a corporate scheme that only offered to reward an individual while penalizing the city with debt would be discarded in favor of one that promised to benefit the city's economy as a whole. Such businessmen would not prosper at the expense of the city, but rather would advance along with Knoxville as they worked

⁹⁶ Knoxville Sentinel 28, 25 August 1893.

to foster the city's overall prosperity.

The municipal campaign of 1893-4 aptly demonstrates what kind of government reformist Democrats wanted running the city. The Sentinel called for voters to elect only those men whose "honesty, integrity and business life" were beyond reproach. City government had to be above partisan squabbling and political corruption in order for Knoxville to advance:

The future greatness of Knoxville does not depend on her ward politicians: it depends on her business men. If the city is to be run in the interest of ward politicians she had as well bid farewell to hopes of progress. The only interest they have in the city is for their own aggrandisement. With businessmen it is different. Their interest is the city's interest. Whatever advancement the city makes will benefit them. In building up Knoxville they are building up themselves. ⁹⁷

Thus, Knoxvillians felt it to be "of the utmost importance" that the city have not a Democratic or Republican mayor, but one "who [would] put his veto upon schemes that would crush them under a load of taxation and deliver them eternally to the rapacity of the bond-holders." To have an honest city government, voters had to elect honest men, whether Democrat or Republican. And to have city government "carried on in a business-like way [voters had to] elect business men." ⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Knoxville Sentinel 25 August; 25, 27 October; 28, 1 November 1893.

⁹⁸ Knoxville Sentinel 28 August 1893.

The fall meeting of the Chamber of Commerce underscored the desire of many businessmen and professionals for a non-partisan city government administered by business principles rather than political favors. Organized to advance and protect the city's economic interests "without regard to political cliques," the chamber's membership reflected a variety of businesses and professions. According to the Sentinel, it perhaps remained the only organization that truly expressed, if unofficially, the sentiments of Knoxville's taxpayers. 99

At the fall meeting on September 27, chamber members indicated their displeasure with the controversies and suspicions that plagued local headlines. The chamber passed a resolution that detailed its position on several questions of "great importance, not only to the taxpayers, but to the future welfare of Knoxville." In view of the municipal controversies, the chamber resolved that

the good and prosperity of the city and the voice of the people demand that, irrespective of party affiliations, good men shall fill the official positions, men who have the welfare of the city at

⁹⁹ Knoxville Sentinel 27 September 1893.

heart, progressive men, who bear their part of the burdens of taxation; men of character and standing in the community, and who are known to have no affiliations with cliques and rings; honest men, who know their duty and dare to perform it. Such men we have, and they must fill official positions. ¹⁰⁰

Democratic factionalism probably explains why some local businessmen opposed the Knoxville Water Company and the Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railroad. Yet, a number of business-civic leaders were sincerely disturbed that certain city council members, both Democrats and Republicans, backed patently unwise schemes in the face of significant opposition to them in the business community.

Reformist Knoxvillians believed that corruption explained why city leaders supported the KWC and KCG&L proposals. A desire for personal profit or political ambitions, or a commitment to political patronage at all costs, allegedly motivated the kid council "clique" to side with the corporate interests. Such corruption threatened the city's progress, as these leaders saw it, because it led councilmen to favor schemes that were not in the city's best interests, and thus impeded its industrial-commercial advancement. To reformers, the solution was to replace the political clique dominating city government with a non-partisan and reform-minded council of "progressive," experienced and successful businessmen. As wise

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

entrepreneurs, they would run the city efficiently, honestly and successfully because they were sincerely committed to the city's progress. Their own fortunes depended not upon political favors and corporate bribes, but upon the city's overall industrial-commercial prosperity.

What these disgruntled Knoxvilleians failed to mention, however, was the fact that those leaders who sided with the KWC and the KCG&L were pro-development businessmen as well. Like their opponents, these leaders questioned the motives of those who sided against them. Clique member alderman Samuel Bailey remarked that he supported the proposals because he believed they were in the city's best interests. While "there are opponents to progress in Knoxville, as everywhere else," he added, "I believe in letting the wheels of progress revolve even if they roll over a few rattling bones and dry hides." 101

However each side defined either itself or the opposition---whether as corrupt politicians or progressive businessmen---in truth, businessmen and boosters appeared on both sides of the controversies. Knoxville's business-civic leaders may have believed that unity was important to progress. Yet, they were unable to lift that mutual commitment above the mire of political bickering and factionalism. Despite the existence of a social consensus of

101 Knoxville Sentinel 17 February 1893.

sorts for development among business-civic leaders, boosters proved unable to translate this into a unity of purpose behind important developmental schemes.

CONCLUSION

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The municipal campaign of 1893-4, revolved around several municipal controversies and the issue of reform. Knoxvilleians divided over how to obtain an improved waterworks system, and whether the city should fulfill its obligation to the KCG&L Railroad. Some businessmen viewed the support shown by a majority of the city council for these schemes very unfavorably. When the "clique" continued to advocate them even when a significant number of civic leaders obviously opposed them, these disgruntled citizens became suspicious and charged the "clique" with corruption and fraud. Reforming city government to eliminate "cliques" or "rings" which felt no compunction in acting against the city's welfare became the primary focus of opposition to the schemes. These opponents believed that progressive, honest and experienced businessmen were the key to a "clean" city government and a progressive and prosperous city. ¹⁰²

The most important aspect of these municipal

¹⁰² In Political Power, Carl Harris offers a different interpretation of local political disputes. He found that the major cleavage in local electoral politics was not defined by economic interests, but by social groups, such as ethnic or religious groups, and by moral issues, such as temperance, et cetera. He argues that these kind of issues were more prominent than economic ones because local officials had little ability to change economic policy. On the other hand, they did have the authority and police power to affect moral or social issues (279).

controversies is what they reveal about those who opposed these schemes. Rather than comprising a homogenous group completely united on how to make Knoxville prosper, boosters opposed other boosters throughout the waterworks and KOG&L controversies.

That this was not simply a "businessmen" versus "politicians" dispute is revealed by the position of the Chamber of Commerce. Whereas the chamber wholeheartedly supported publicly subsidizing the railroad in 1887, by 1893 its position had changed. The Chamber wanted the state supreme court to decide whether the city had to pay the subscription, and disapproved of accepting the railroad's compromise settlement. In 1887, both newspapers lauded the men who earnestly worked to convince all Knoxville's to vote for the railroad subsidies. In 1893, even though it was still a booster paper, the Knoxville Sentinel questioned the motives of those who advocated the KOG&L's interests. Supporting the railroad in its lawsuit with the city, or supporting its offer to settle seemed synonymous with working for the railroad against Knoxville's best interests.

Boosters worked continually to obtain wide support for their schemes, and believed a social consensus remained important to the city's success. Yet, business-civic leaders opposed each other over certain schemes as well. Booster papers and publications called for harmonious solutions to

avoid public discord, but simultaneously accused the other side of having specious motives and working for their own interests.

In 1893-4, many business-civic leaders believed that local government-corporate corruption comprised the primary obstacle to the city's progress. Corporations, like the Knoxville Water Company or the railroads, too often obtained aldermen's support for their particular schemes, and city officials too often took up the corporate cause. City officials also relied on patronage to fill important city offices rather than depending upon the experience and suitability of each applicant. Thus, it seemed that no harmony of interests could ever dominate the political and economic scene in Knoxville. Reform-minded businessmen wanted a non-partisan government while others were determined to install a Democratic or Republican administration, proving that old party lines still existed. Boosters still hustled to persuade a populace they believed might not agree with them, even as they often disagreed amongst themselves.

Not surprisingly, since both sides included many businessmen and professionals, amid all of this discord, a social consensus of sorts did exist. Business-civic leaders, regardless of which side they favored in municipal or party issues, seemed to agree that Knoxville needed to grow,

improve services and attract new investment in order to achieve industrial-commercial prosperity, and that such prosperity was the all-consuming goal. Thus, despite the disagreement over particular schemes and the accusations of corruption levied upon one another, perceptions of the "proper" society perhaps were not so different.

Few, if any, business-civic leaders questioned the morality and wisdom of capitalist-industrial society. For example, most would agree with the Knoxville Journal when it differentiated between the "worthy" poor and "anarchists" or mad socialists. Essentially, the Journal stated that a poor man suddenly unable to pay rent or provide for his family represented the "honest toiler...unfortunately out of work." Such persons deserved to be "dealt with tenderly and met with practical measures of relief." But, idle men who merely "bemoaned" their fate, and congregated to complain and waste money on beer that could have been spent on food for the family, deserved little sympathy: "When they ostentatiously parade themselves on the streets of a crowded city, marching under a foreign flag, or worse still, under the black flag of anarchy, they forfeit the respect, confidence and sympathy of everybody." Thus, the professional agitator, "the professional idler, the professional calamity-howler, the man who believes that the world owes him a living whether he works or not, should not be confounded with the

honest man who is glad to earn his living when he can." In short, the poor were worthy of help only so long as they did not criticize the society in which they suffered. 103

If most business-civic leaders had a shared perception of progress and of the "proper" society, the abundance of disagreement among them reveals that significant political dissent could co-exist with "ideological" or "philosophical" accord. Business-civic leaders wanted a progressive city with a prosperity to rival Atlanta or Nashville. Success to them meant obtaining a thriving industrial-commercial city that continued to grow, expand and progress. Boosters failed, however, to keep a common commitment to industrial-commercial development above local personal and political squabbling. Ultimately, Knoxville's promoters, for all their efforts, failed to turn a social consensus for development into a unity of purpose behind important developmental schemes.

Although human decisions could wield significant power determining the course of development, establishing a clear and direct relationship between human actions and the rate of industrial growth or decline proves difficult. The relationship of boosterism to industrial growth presents a "chicken-and-egg" dilemma. Did industrial growth arise from a successful booster program, or did boosterism emerge

103 Knoxville Journal 1 September 1893.

because active growth encouraged its development? Put another way, did a lack of industrial growth indicate an unsuccessful recruitment effort, or did declining or stagnating industrial growth produce weak boosterism? Did opposition to the booster vision hinder industrial growth, or did economic stagnation produce an anti-booster atmosphere? Business-civic leaders believed that to influence economic development they had to sustain private and public cooperation among business proprietors, local government and a significant percentage of the electorate. In their view, both the ability to maintain a facade of consensus or to disrupt it could affect Knoxville's economic future significantly. 104

104 In New Men, Doyle argues that city growth is determined at least partly by human decisions which should be seen as choices, not "automatic responses to clearly perceived opportunities." For example, "railroads, banks, factories, hotels, industrial expositions, and sewer systems did not just spring up; they were the products of local planning, promotion of investment, and government legislation" (17). However, William N. Parker in "The South in the National Economy, 1865-1970" Southern Economic Journal 46 (April 1980), discounts the influence of individual, and perhaps even collective, human decisions on southern economic development. He sees the South from the postwar period into the twentieth century in a "fixed mode of underdevelopment" due to significant underlying social conditions, including the destruction of physical capital; northern and southern racism; and the lack of a strong indigenous industrial-commercial capitalism. These conditions hindered the flow of labor both within and into and out of the South, and subsequently, impeded economic growth and development. Parker minimizes the capability of human decision-making alone to alter the southern economy. Altering this fixed mode of underdevelopment required "massive jolts" of "physical, technological and extraneous market and political events" (1045).

Knoxville and Knox County did show significant growth, in terms of population and industry, from 1880-1920, matching a broad pattern of growth among the other three principal counties and cities. 1880-1890 was a decade of tremendous growth for the county as the population increased by 40%; industrial establishments by 94.9%; total capital by 411.6%; the wage-earning population by 547%; and the value of products by 310%.¹⁰⁵

Although the rate of growth appears to have slowed in the next decade (1890-1900), possibly because of the national depression from 1893 to 1897, Knoxville still increased its population and industrial capacity. The city's population increased by 44.8% (perhaps due to annexations) while the number of industrial establishments only gained by 6.3% which ranked Knoxville in last place behind Memphis, Nashville and Chattanooga. In total capital, however, Knoxville came in first at a 99% increase and first in the growth of the wage-earning population with a 51.4% increase. Knoxville also came in first in the percentage increase of the value of products, but curiously, showed a decrease in

¹⁰⁵All census data on Tennessee's four principal cities and counties came from the Census of Manufacturing and the Census of Population for 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920.

the amount of wages paid over the decade, marking an 11.4% decline.

Knoxville's population growth slowed from 1900-1910, increasing only by 11.4% and ranking last behind the other three cities. This decade appears to be one of industrial consolidation for Nashville, Memphis and Chattanooga, but one of decline for Knoxville. All four cities registered significant decreases in the number of industrial establishments, with Knoxville at minus 27.1% losing more than Nashville's minus 21.5%, but less than Memphis' 50.1%. That these figures probably reflected consolidations rather than loss becomes evident when considering total capital and the value of products. Despite the decrease in the number of establishments, Nashville and Memphis increased their total capital and value of products. If the decreases in establishments reflected an actual loss of industry, then a corresponding decrease could be expected to show in the value of products. These figures suggest that in Nashville and Memphis industry consolidated, rather than declined. The picture for Knoxville, however, was different. Knoxville showed decreases not only in the number of establishments, but also in the number of wage-earners and the amount of wages paid over the decade as well. Knoxville ranked behind the other cities in both categories, and showed the largest decreases. While the city's loss of establishments, tempered

by a small gain in the value of products, could indicate industrial consolidations, the decrease in both wage-earners and wages suggests that Knoxville experienced an actual loss of industry in this decade.

Along with the other four principal counties and cities, Knoxville registered a significant slowdown in the proliferation of industrial establishments from 1900 to 1920. Only Hamilton County showed an increase, and it only amounted to four new establishments. All others declined. Yet, all four principal cities showed great increases in the number of wage-earners, the wages paid, and the value of products for the two decades combined. Knoxville increased its wage-earning population by 141.5%; the amount of wages paid by 572.3%; and the value of products by 644.5%.

In considering the overall picture from 1880 to 1920, Knoxville's industrial community expanded considerably. It did appear, however, to fall behind the other cities in certain categories from 1880-1890 and especially from 1900-1910. Figures are unavailable for 1910-1920, but the city shows significant industrial growth from 1900-1920. Although census figures reveal a lag in the city's industrial development from 1890-1910, compared to the other cities, it remains impossible to determine if a lack of

consensus among Knoxville's boosters contributed to this lag. 106

Knoxville's economy certainly expanded over the period, but other factors beyond direct human influence helped determine Knoxville's rate of development. The hills and mountains boosters promoted as harboring untold mineral wealth first hindered the establishment of railroads, and later the construction of highways. Consequently, commerce and industrialization in East Tennessee and Knoxville lagged behind the rest of the state. Knoxville finally established the competing railroad lines boosters had long desired when the Louisville and Nashville entered the city in 1905 to compete with the Southern system. By that time, however, trade patterns were beginning to shift from railways to highways. Once again, Knoxville fell behind the rest of Tennessee as the surrounding resource-rich but nearly impenetrable mountains blocked utilization of important new avenues of industrial and commercial development. 107

Over and above the question of effectiveness lay the fact that voting thousands of dollars to support a particular industry committed county coffers to investments with little guarantee of success. The most avid, positive and engaging booster program might overcome geographic and

106 Ibid.

107 McDonald and Wheeler; Deadrick.

internal obstacles to development without securing a guarantee that new enterprises would succeed once established in the city.

Following the pattern established in the 1820s and 1830s by Dr. Ramsey and his associates and continued at the turn of the century by the city's business-civic boosters, Knoxville has yet to emerge from an atmosphere of conflict and crossed purposes concerning economic development. While trying to maintain a facade of consensus, city, county and Chamber of Commerce officials frequently are found at odds over industrial recruitment issues. A recent county executive campaign presented an interesting, if speculative, congruity between past traditions and present practices. One candidate offered a proposal reminiscent of a turn of the century booster program. He proposed organizing "a powerful, new economic development authority" to "end the sometimes divisive efforts to bring new business here." The scope of the Knox County Investment Dominion included powers to "sell or lease county property to private companies, develop new industrial parks, give new businesses financial incentives and develop Knoxville's marketing strategies and advertising campaigns." Complaining that no one voice spoke for Knoxville's economic development, one county commissioner supported the proposal as a means to formulate a new consensus concerning Knoxville's economic future. Candidates

criticized the incumbent for not being "progressive enough" in pursuit of industrial opportunities. Both the Republican and Democratic candidates claimed Executive Dwight Kessel's "attitude toward new industry...[had] stymied the county's growth and development." Kessel declared that "making Knox County an attractive location...[through] improving the infra-structure---roads, sewers and utilities---around industrial sites" to be more important than actively recruiting new industries. 108

Important industrial inducements in 1890 remain relatively unchanged a century later. In 1893, Knoxville's promoters wanted to improve city streets to facilitate their efforts to recruit new industry. In 1990, the county government under the direction of County Executive Dwight Kessel struck a deal with a Michigan firm. If Forbes-Cohen built a new enclosed shopping mall in West Knoxville, as promised, the county would improve the surrounding roads to improve public access to the new mall. Social cohesion continues to be a concern to promoters of economic development as well. For example, much like turn-of-the-century boosters, a Democratic candidate for county executive asked in March of 1990, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we started the 1990s with a climate of cooperation, if we all realized that no entity can do it

¹⁰⁸Knoxville News-Sentinel 26 March 1990.

alone, that it didn't become important who gets the credit for the new industry, but that we get the new industry?" 109

A century has passed since William J. Oliver exhorted Knoxvilleians to be "of one faith when anything comes up that will tend to advance Knoxville's interests." Yet, boosters in the late twentieth century still struggle to implement a vision of economic progress dependent upon cohesion where division predominates. 110

109 Ibid.

110 Knoxville Market Annual.

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