

John Simpson: A Radical Voice for Farmers

The **Farmers Union** movement started in Texas in 1902 and quickly moved into Oklahoma and Indian Territories. Some of the goals of the union were to help farmers get fairness in **mortgage** and **credit** practices, to help them get fair prices for their crops and to promote the use of science in agriculture. In 1905 the Indian Farmers Union requested the first study of soils ever made by the US Department of Agriculture. The state union played an important part in **drafting** the Oklahoma constitution. Union leadership represented almost half the elected **delegates** and was responsible for the election of “Alfalfa Bill” Murray as convention president. Murray was an organizing member of the Oklahoma Farmers Union.

Enrollment in the union dropped **dramatically** after statehood, partly because of the union’s objections to US involvement in World War I. When the US did enter the war, groups that had been opposed were called unpatriotic and cowardly.

John Simpson was a teacher, lawyer and banker who migrated from Kansas to Oklahoma Territory to become a farmer. In 1914, after serving one term in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, Simpson joined the Oklahoma Farmers Union. Two years later he was elected president.

In his 16 years as president Simpson helped **revive** the organization with his **outspoken** speeches. He criticized **federal** officials for setting prices for farm goods during the war. He was convinced farmers were being cheated. After the war Simpson organized more than 110 farm **cooperatives** to help farmers join together to get fair prices. His other accomplishments included establishing the Farmers Union Insurance Company and the Oklahoma Union Farmer as the official state newspaper for the union. Under his direction the Oklahoma Farmers Union became the largest state organization in the nation. In 1930 Simpson was elected president of the National Farmers Union.

Vocabulary

cooperative— an association owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services

credit— an amount or sum that a bank or company will let a person use

delegates— persons sent with power to act for others

draft— to put into written form

dramatically— sudden and extreme

Farmers Union— organization founded in 1902 with a mission to protect and enhance the economic well-being and quality of life for family farmers and ranchers and their rural communities

federal— of or relating to the central government

mortgage— a transfer of rights to a piece of property (as a house) usually in return for a loan and that is canceled when the loan is paid

outspoken— direct and open in speech or expression

revive— to bring back or come back to life, consciousness, or activity