Lorenzo D. Lewelling and Kansas’ ‘Civil’ War

Jordan A. Poland
Faculty: Jay Price

Department of History, Wichita State University

Lorenzo D. Lewelling and Kansas’ “Civil” War research, will examine one of the most obscure periods in Kansas political history, the early 1890s. The paper will explore the rise of Populism, a grassroots third-party movement, that upset the long-standing Republican majority in Kansas and show how this movement brought Kansans to the brink of all out war on the Capitol grounds. This study will examine the topic through the eyes of the state’s twelfth governor, Wichitan Lorenzo D. Lewelling, and show how his action, and inaction, in office changed reform politics in Kansas for the next twenty five years. Drawing on primary source documents, a look into Lewelling’s legacy illustrates some important issues of the early Populist movement in Kansas like fusion with the Democratic Party, prohibition, women’s suffrage, and other social reforms that helped to shape Kansas into the state we see today. Blamed largely for his role in the events on the Capitol grounds during the first three months of his term, Lewelling was not able to follow through on his campaign promises and became one of the first “casualties” of the Populist movement in Kansas. Research will show that although Lewelling was the face of the Party in Kansas, he was never the commanding voice that the moveme