As Tappan wound up business for 1896, the depression was bottoming out. Months earlier, the eye of the maelstrom had passed right over Minneapolis. An army of unemployed workers tramped through the city, heading east for a showdown with the Republican administration in Washington, D.C. Dubbed “Coxey’s Army,” this stream of discontent had its origins in the summer of 1894, when 500 men on foot, led by Jacob Coxey and his family, marched out of Massillon, Ohio. Making fifteen miles per day, they invited others to join them in the nation’s capital, where they would petition Congress to alleviate the economic suffering.

For several summers, similar “armies” followed, departing from Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. They went on foot, hopped freight, and in a few cases commandeered engines and cars from railroads. The group that passed through Minneapolis was most likely “Jumbo” Cantwell’s group from Seattle. This band of unshaven, rough-hewn lumbermen and miners no doubt frightened the respectable citizens of the city. But Tappan would have recognized the type from his days out West. More disturbing were their ideas. The handsome Cantwell, a former saloon bouncer, frontier gambler, and prizefighter, mounted a stage in the Twin Cities to address a crowd of
supporters and well-wishers. He offered that it was no worse to hang a few congressmen than to let Congress steal from the people what was theirs.\textsuperscript{1} Political corruption, brought on by concentrated wealth and monopoly power, was overshadowing American institutions of democracy, in Cantwell’s opinion.

With their martial organization and occasional outrageous statements, the Coxeyites gave the threat of impending violence to an already tense moment in American history. But the tumultuous end of the nineteenth century was marked by real violence elsewhere. In the Homestead steel works of Pittsburgh, striking workers were fired upon by company-employed Pinkerton agents, and returned fire. State militias were called out, bayonets fixed on rifles, to end labor disputes. A bomb exploded in the middle of a march by Chicago anarchists, killing several policemen. Two presidents were assassinated. Anyone who thought the 1896 election had settled the nation’s conflicts was mistaken.

Though the industrial armies of the unemployed hanged no one, Cantwell’s threat aside, they did converge as promised in Coxey’s camp outside of Washington. Boasting that a half-million men would join him, the march’s leader settled for several thousand and carried his “petition in boots” directly to Congress. Coxey supported an agenda of expanded currency to pay for public works, which would be undertaken by unemployed industrial workers. For a moment, he merged in one program the answers to the two main sore points of the economy: the shrinking money supply and the insecurity of industrial employment. Generally these were distinct concerns of different classes, farmers and workers, who rarely saw their interests in common. Indeed, in the 1896 election, Bryan had lost precisely because too few industrial workers supported his plans to raise farm prices and deal with problems of credit and capital that bedeviled producers. Coxey momentarily bridged this rift, by emphasizing the weakness of traditional notions of independence and self-reliance in a modern economy. Neither workers nor farmers would be able to support themselves, his petition implied, without intervening organizations and programs designed to deal with periodic instability.

Tappan’s view of Coxey and his protest movement is revealing of the young Minnesotan’s mind and his mixture of social values and business. While stumping for his program around the country, Coxey visited Minneapolis. There he and Tappan met. A representative from Investors Syndicate