Industrial Pioneers:
Scranton, Pennsylvania and the Transformation of America, 1840-1902

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To Emily Stiles, who always listened to me talk about Scranton
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Top: Slocum Hollow (now Scranton) in 1840
Bottom: Panorama of Scranton, Pennsylvania in 1890
In the eighteenth century, the area which is now Scranton was known as Capoose or
Capouse, after the chief of the Monsey Indians, the original inhabitants of the area. By
1840, the present-day boundaries of Scranton contained four villages: Slocum Hollow
(sometimes known as Unionville), Razorville (later Providence), Hyde Park, and
Bucktown (later Dunmore). In 1845, the name Slocum Hollow was changed by
William Henry to Harrison (in honor of Presidential candidate William Henry
Harrison), and the 1850 establishment of a post office again changed the name to
Scrantonia. In 1851, postmaster John W. Moore finally changed the name to Scranton,
and Scranton later annexed Providence, Hyde Park and Dunmore.

Map Courtesy of Susan Pieroth
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Introduction: The Face of America

If the American white working class were a sect, Scranton, Pennsylvania, might be its Jerusalem. The old coal town has declined steadily since its heyday in the middle of the last century. Hillary Clinton played up her family roots in Scranton during the Democratic primaries against Barack Obama, drawing large support from anxious, white, working classes. In turn Mr Obama chose a running mate, Joe Biden, in part for his own ties to the town: Mr Biden spent his childhood in Scranton. On Sunday November 2nd the latest Scranton-lover was John McCain, who gave a speech there. His slim hopes for the presidency rely on sowing enough doubts in places such as north-eastern Pennsylvania to overcome the polls and win that state.

The Economist, November 3, 2008 (one day before the election)

Ain’t no party like a Scranton party ‘cause a Scranton party don’t stop!

-Michael Scott, The Office
Scranton, Pennsylvania seemed to be everywhere during the 2008 Presidential election. Politicians flocked to the city because it embodied many of the concerns of voters throughout America: jobs being sent overseas; businesses struggling to adapt to a 21st century economy; and citizens trying to defend a traditional set of values in a rapidly changing world. Throughout the late twentieth century Scranton has been, as the title of a recent book suggests, “The Face of Decline” in the United States, and presidential candidates seeking to reassure voters concerned about the future of the nation could find no better platform.

What most political candidates and talking heads probably did not realize during the election is that during the nineteenth century, Scranton served as the face of a rising America and a hub of technology and innovation. The city was the first in the nation to produce the iron rails necessary to expand the nation’s railways, and it mined the anthracite coal and forged the steel which drove America’s industrial revolution. In 1886, Scranton began operating the nation’s first electric streetcar system, earning it the nickname “The Electric City” at a time when electricity was the most exciting innovation in the world. Scranton was, in a sense, the Silicon Valley of the nineteenth century. Scranton also served as the face of immigration during the nineteenth century, as immigrants from England, Wales, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia and throughout Europe flocked to the city in search of employment. As a city at the epicenter of the economic, social and political changes sweeping the nation, Scranton truly was the face of industrializing America.
Periods of extraordinary change often provide the best material for historians, and perhaps the most remarkable facet of Scranton’s development is the fact that the city grew from an egalitarian backwoods community to a modern industrial society of 100,000 residents within 62 years. The way that Scranton’s residents thought about themselves and their value within society did not evolve in step with technological and economic progress—rather, those living through these changes slowly and painfully adapted extant modes of thinking in light of their new life circumstances. By identifying the mindset of Scranton’s residents at the commencement of industrialization and tracing how events and developments affected the thinking of those living in the city, this thesis attempts to weave a unified narrative that explains how Scranton—and America—went from the personal, egalitarian society of the early days of the republic to the rigidly institutionalized society that endures today. This thesis traces the development of Scranton from 1840 to 1902 and argues that within this period, Scranton’s residents passed through four distinct mindsets in their quest to reconcile their assumptions about the world with their life experiences.

While many books and articles describe certain aspects or elements of this period, this thesis treats the period from 1840 to 1902 as a unified story. In this sense, it is a fundamentally integrative undertaking which brings together many sources and builds upon previous scholarship. While multiple residents of Scranton like Frederick Hitchcock and Benjamin Throop wrote books intended as histories of the city during the nineteenth century, these works must be understood as heavily-biased primary sources. Every in-depth secondary sources on the city focuses on a specific element relating to the city’s development: Grace Palladino examines the relationship between labor, capital and the
state during the Civil War; multiple authors including Craig Phelan chronicle Terence Powderly’s dual role as mayor and union leader; Harold Aurand studies the conditions of coal miners throughout the region; R.G. Healey models the business dynamics of the coal industry; multiple works relate the 1902 anthracite strike; and a number of authors focus on specific ethnicities within the city. No work, however, has brought all of this rich material together to trace the rise of the city over an extended period of time. For the sake of clarity, this thesis is organized both chronologically and categorically.

The first chapter covers the years from 1840 to 1860, and describes the Village Blacksmith ideology which predated Scranton’s industrial development. Before the Scranton family began producing iron in the area, residents lived like the Village Blacksmith in the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem of the same name: they derived respect from their status as independent producers and members of an egalitarian community. During the twenty year period covered by this chapter, Scranton grew from the small town of Slocum Hollow to a rapidly expanding industrial city integrated into the national market. This growth created opportunities for ambitious individuals to prosper, but residents retained their pre-industrial assumptions: non-institutional power, like the power of personality in the workplace, retained its importance within the community throughout most of the period. By 1860, however, a capitalist ideal, distinct from the Village Blacksmith ideal, was emerging.

The second chapter explores the development of the city between 1860 and 1877 by comparing the lives two remarkably similar men—Thomas Dickson and Terence Powderly—and examining how they came to articulate opposing viewpoints. While Dickson attained extraordinary success as the founder of the Dickson Manufacturing
Company and later as president of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company, Powderly failed in his attempts to break into the capitalist class early in his life, and instead turned to organizing labor through unions. The chapter describes how the Civil War spurred rapid economic growth in Scranton, and how subsequent economic downturns revealed the crystallization of distinct capitalist and labor classes through the strikes of 1869, 1871 and 1877. Throughout this period, workers could not reconcile their worldview with their status in a cyclical economy, and the resulting frustration led to the riots of 1877, in which workers resorted to violence, but failed to defeat the combined forces of capital and state government.

The third chapter examines the period from 1878 to 1886, during which Terence Powderly worked towards social, political and economic reform that extended across occupational, ethnic, and gender lines. In Powderly’s dual role as mayor of Scranton and Grand Master Workman of the national Knights of Labor union, the largest labor organization in the United States in the 1880s, he unsuccessfully attempted to translate the frustration evidenced by the riots of 1877 into a broad and enduring working-class identity. The chapter describes the importance of ethnicity in the workplace, at the voting booth, and in society, and argues that Powderly’s belief in the coincidental interests of labor and capital led to the failure of his ideas. By 1886, the Knights of Labor was collapsing, Powderly’s political career had ended, and workers in Scranton once again encountered an ideological vacuum.

The fourth chapter chronicles the emergence of the trade union ideology and capital mobility during the period between 1886 and 1902. The chapter begins by describing the terrible living conditions of mining families and the disrespect accorded to
them by their employers. In an attempt to ameliorate these conditions, the United Mine Workers arrived in Scranton 1899, and began organizing the area’s miners. Two major events occurred in 1902: an anthracite coal strike called by the United Mine Workers proved so disruptive to the national economy that it forced intervention by the federal government, and the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company decided to relocate production to Buffalo, New York. These two events foreshadowed the characteristics of industrial America in the twentieth century: organized labor developed effective organizational strategies and the state progressively enacted more labor-friendly legislation, but in response to labor’s success in demanding higher wages, organized capital utilized ethnic and occupational divisions to divide workers, and periodically moved production to new locations in order to take advantage of an unorganized workforce.

Taken together, these four chapters trace the trajectory of industrializing Scranton. The four chapters overlap at points—ethnicity played an important role in the development of Scranton between 1860 and 1877, the cyclical economy operated from 1878 to 1902, and miners faced deplorable conditions throughout the entire history of the city. The aim of this thesis is not merely to recount events however, but to understand the processes, trends, and most importantly, ways of thinking which defined Scranton’s growth, and presaged developments brought on by industrialization and urbanization throughout the United States. This organization provides the clearest means to understand an immensely rich period of history.

When presidential candidates in the 2008 campaign flocked to Scranton, the city gained widespread media attention as a symbol of white, working-class voters. Even at the height of the campaign, however, most young Americans would have associated the
city with NBC’s television show “The Office,” which chronicles everyday office life at the Scranton branch of the Dunder Mifflin Paper Company. The show debuted in 2005 and quickly attained popularity with viewers across the country for its humor, but the show also conveys those characteristics that made Scranton a representation of the concerns of many Americans. Dunder Mifflin is a paper company in a world going digital, and competes with larger, more streamlined companies that can offer lower prices. The boss of the Scranton branch, Michael Scott, serves as the face of the company and, in a strange way, of Scranton. He takes pride in his office’s diverse workforce, and attempts to celebrate diversity, even if it often confuses him. Michael despises institutional regulations that interfere with his personal management style, and especially hates the Human Resources representative, Toby, who constantly reminds him of the rules he should follow. In Michael’s opinion, “Toby is the worst.”¹ Michael Scott also distrust the corporate office in New York, which he faults for putting profits ahead of the well-being of the company’s employees. Most importantly, Michael attempts to control his office through humor and personal relationships, and argues that Dunder Mifflin derives its advantage over its larger competitors from its superior customer service and local presence. These characteristics of Michael Scott’s personality—the emphasis on personal relationships, the distrust of authority, the strong sense of community—both faintly echo aspects of pre-industrial Scranton and explain Michael’s difficulties in adapting to the rigors of the twenty-first century’s global economy. It is the purpose of this thesis to recover the world that the residents of Scranton lost as the modern industrial economy reorganized their society, and to understand how they adapted to these changes.

Chapter 1: The Village Blacksmith
1840-1860

The Village Blacksmith
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Ballads and Other Poems, 1841

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.
His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling---rejoicing,---sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.

I guess the atmosphere that I've tried to create here is that I'm a friend first and a boss second. Probably an entertainer third.

-Michael Scott, The Office
In 1840, the area which is now Scranton, Pennsylvania had changed little over the previous half-century. Four quiet villages had grown up at the intersections of the rough roads which ran though the wilderness, and small farms tucked into clearings in the woods dotted the region. Most of the residents of the Lackawanna Valley traced their ancestry back to New England, and according to one contemporary observer, still retained “the manners, the steady habits, the enterprise and intelligence, and even the pronunciation of their New England fathers.” Slocum Hollow, which would grow into one of the most successful industrial centers in the United States within fifty years, consisted of 100 people, five dwellings, a cooper shop, a school-house, a saw-mill, and a grist-mill. Longfellow’s village blacksmith probably would have felt right at home.

When Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published Ballads and Other Poems in 1841, he struck a chord that resonated in the American psyche. The Village Blacksmith, in particular, articulates an ideal which was at the center of the American identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially in New England: a skilled worker owns his own business (“owes not any man”), takes pride in his work (“his brow is wet with honest sweat”), is physically strong (“a mighty man is he”) and participates in his community as an equal (“looks the whole world in the face”). The blacksmith’s monetary success is relatively unimportant—he “earns whate’er he can,” but derives respect from his hard work, integrity, and status as a member of the village.

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The *Village Blacksmith* ideal is largely descriptive of the residents of the Lackawanna Valley in 1840. In *History of the Lackawanna Valley*, Dr. Horace Hollister gives this description of the early settlers in the region:

Roads were few and rugged, and the inhabitants, priding themselves in assiduous labor and frugality, lived and died contented. They enjoyed neither churches nor school-houses, nor none had yet emerged from the clearings; were annoyed by few or only light taxes; and yet kindness and hospitality were so blended with their daily toil on farms rendered fertile by a good burn or unvaried cultivation, that the social relations of the residents of the township were rarely, if ever, disturbed by sectarian partiality or political asperities.\(^4\)

Hollister probably romanticizes the lives of early settlers to some degree, but clearly emphasizes hard work and egalitarian relations within the community. An analysis of the Slocum Hollow area in 1840 elucidates two elements of the pre-industrial system: the importance of non-institutional power, and the fundamentally local character of economies and communities.

Dr. Benjamin Throop arrived in Slocum Hollow in 1840, and his description of the town in his 1895 memoir *A Half-Century in Scranton*, provides further evidence that the *Village Blacksmith* ideal was very much a part of everyday life. He writes that the hotels which catered to travelers on the roads functioned as “political headquarters” for high-standing members of the local community, and that general stores served as a “hailing place” in the evenings where residents could gather and listen to violin music.\(^5\) Debating societies, which Throop viewed as fundamentally democratic institutions, were well-attended by area residents, and were unaffected by the “social distinctions and clique proscriptions which have since grown up.”\(^6\) The individualism and disdain for

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\(^5\) Throop 40-41

\(^6\) Throop 48
authority which defined the communities around Slocum Hollow can be elucidated through Throop’s recollection of a visit from one of the traveling ministers that periodically spoke in the area:

Father Hunt, I recollect, in the winter of 1840, gave notice that he would deliver a notice on “Temperance” at the school house opposite Providence, then better known as “Razorville.” The night came, and the old gentleman was on the ground, and had an audience of about twenty, each of whom had fortified himself with a bottle of “Old Hang’s Whiskey,” and whenever, in the lecture, a good point was made—and there were many such—each took his bottle out and drank, and when the lecture closed they were all lecturing on the same subject.7

The community’s reaction to the sermon reveals a strong egalitarian leaning that accords with the Village Blacksmith ideal—even if the audience’s attitude toward religion is rather different than that found in the poem. Throop wrote that “under the freedom of restraint that comes of pioneer life, they were sadly lax in some of their personal observances, and, perhaps, quite over the line which divides omissions from commissions.”8

The towns around Slocum Hollow were generally insular, and the economic activities undertaken by area residents were almost all confined to the Lackawanna Valley.9 Mild rivalries arose between towns in the valley—most notably between the towns in the Scranton area (and later Scranton itself) and the neighboring city of Wilkes-Barre, which had the twin distinctions of serving as the seat of Luzerne County and being located on the North Branch Canal, which connected the city to the market of Philadelphia.10 Wilkes-Barre’s status as county seat necessitated the outsourcing of administrative, regulatory and legal tasks from Scranton to Wilkes-Barre, and eventually

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7 Throop 30-31
8 Throop 196
9 Throop 39
led the residents of Scranton to form a new county in 1878, with Scranton as its seat, after a forty-year struggle in the state legislature.

In the early days, when the area around Slocum Hollow had little political power and was generally beholden to the decisions made at the county seat in Wilkes-Barre, residents still found creative means to assert themselves. When a summons from the captain of the local militia (who was disliked for being both self-important and from Wilkes-Barre) commanded all men of military age to report for training pursuant to a law which had not been exercised for two decades, those summoned decided to undermine the order. Residents dressed up in ridiculous military costumes “which would have put Don Quixote to blush,” thereby making a mockery of the drill itself, and elected a “notoriously half-witted egoist” to the position of captain of the militia at the next election. The resulting situation proved so ridiculous that its reporting in local newspapers eventually resulted in the revocation of the laws in question.\(^{11}\)

This episode cannot be written off as merely a humorous vignette, because it illustrates an important characteristic of the pre-industrial system: the ability of interest groups to assert themselves through informal means outside of an institutional framework. Communities were small and egalitarian enough that personalities often trumped prescribed power, and political decisions were often made through community debate and rough consensus. Residents of the Slocum Hollow area maintained constant community dialogue, and informal meetings at hotels and general stores often led to collective action which achieved important political and economic goals. The distrust of authority and lack of a concrete and hierarchical power structure in the villages masked the very real ability of citizens to assert themselves regarding the issues which mattered

\(^{11}\) Throop 63-70
to them. When circumstances necessitated recourse to the legal system, the interests of area residents were argued by the sole lawyer in the area, who enjoyed the “rough and tumble of the Justices’ courts in the region” and regularly squared off against opponents from the neighboring communities of Carbondale and Wilkes-Barre.\textsuperscript{12} By tradition, trials were held on Saturday mornings, often ran well-into the night, and provided a source of entertainment for the inevitable throng of spectators.

One reason that citizens in the Slocum Hollow area could assert themselves effectively is that their social and economic interests were almost entirely confined to the Lackawanna Valley—in fact, most residents could not even conceive of trading with partners outside of the region.\textsuperscript{13} Almost all of the goods and services required by residents were produced within the community, as “almost every house contained a loom, one or two spinning wheels, and a dye pot.”\textsuperscript{14} Those few items which could not be produced domestically were available at small stores owned by area residents, or could be purchased from peddlers.\textsuperscript{15} In the agrarian economy of the early nineteenth century, “the men were agriculturists, and the women were manufacturers,” and industrious wives and productive husbands were highly sought-after.\textsuperscript{16} An excellent example of the self-sufficiency in the Lackawanna Valley concerns those products which later became the two major exports of the region: coal and iron.

Almost the entire area which now comprises Scranton was, in the nineteenth century, underlaid with anthracite coal, which has the fewest impurities of any type of coal. The value of this resource was only realized by area residents in 1808, when Jesse

\textsuperscript{12} Throop 42
\textsuperscript{13} Throop 39
\textsuperscript{15} Throop 40-41
\textsuperscript{16} Pearce 338
Fell, a blacksmith in Wilkes-Barre, contrived a means to reliably burn the fuel using a grate. While Fell immediately recognized the importance of his discovery, residents outside the Lackawanna Valley remained largely oblivious to the utility of the fuel: only one ton of coal per day was consumed in Philadelphia in 1820. When brothers Maurice and William Wurts commenced mining coal in the Lackawanna Valley in 1822, their initial attempts to sell it in Philadelphia were met with derision of “the black stuff.” It was only with the construction of the Delaware and Hudson Canal in 1828, which connected towns in the Lackawanna Valley to New York City, that the Wurtses met with success, although the benefits of this trade did not reach Slocum Hollow, and were confined to the neighboring towns of Carbondale, Honesdale, Olyphant and Providence. Anthracite’s usefulness led area residents to mine it themselves and burn it in their homes, and local trade in coal grew up around this practice. Members of the Von Storch family, for example, transitioned from mining coal for their personal use to selling it in limited quantities in 1830. The type of small-scale mining practiced by the Von Storches was made possible by the coal formations which dotted the area and required no heavy equipment to extract—in this case, outcroppings on the banks of the Lackawanna River. This easily-accessible coal allowed talented individuals to engage in the coal trade in accordance with the Village Blacksmith ideal, as miners could work for themselves, make a good living, and participate in a strong community. In 1828, skilled

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17 Hollister 349
16 Hollister 358
19 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 383
20 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 383
miners and skilled craftsmen in the Lackawanna Valley earned roughly equivalent wages.  

Iron manufacturing at the time also accorded with pre-industrial egalitarian norms, although the nature of production necessitated a relatively large labor force and therefore an employer/employee relationship. Iron production began in 1800 at “the Hollow”, an island of production in the wilderness which already boasted a grist-mill, saw mill, a cooper shop and a distillery, all of which served area residents. In 1800, settlers Benjamin and Ebenezer Slocum built a charcoal-fired forge to convert the iron-ore found in the area into iron, and attached a blacksmith shop which “wrought from the ore and iron all of the needed implements of the country for many miles around.” In addition to these goods, “the Hollow” also produced whiskey, pork, beef, flour and feed, all of which were conveyed by ox teams to neighboring communities. The Slocums employed a foreman, two employees, and two slaves in the forge and smith shop, and between 30 and 50 men at the works as a whole.

Despite the size of the works, the settlement at Slocum Hollow adhered to the Village Blacksmith ideal. After a flood washed away the two dams needed for operations, every farmer in the township participated in the “bee” to rebuild them. Local farmers and the community at large depended on the milling and iron production at the Hollow, and the bee demonstrates the frequent coincidence of individual and community interests that characterized pre-industrial America. The nature of community

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22 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 387
23 Hollister 218
at the Hollow can be further elucidated through a recollection from Joseph Slocum, the
son of Ebenezer Slocum:

The place was known near and far as Slocum Hollow, and was so named in 1816 by a jolly Dutchman named James Snyder. That year was known as the “cold season.” Little or no corn escaped the ravages of the frost, which killed all perishable vegetation. This Dutchman, who was fond of whiskey and convivial sports, employed at the forge, had ever before called the place Skunk’s Misery; but when this frost, with its disastrous breath, froze everything it could reach, he indignantly exclaimed that this spot was fit only for a Slocum to live in, and he should name it Slocum Holler.24

Again, this humorous anecdote reveals an important facet of life at Slocum Hollow—and the general mindset of the time. While the Slocums had attempted to name their settlement “Unionville” and stamped that name on their products, irreverent community consensus spurred by an immigrant’s joke ultimately settled on a different name. However obliquely, this episode demonstrates that the power of personality and community was capable of bridging economic and ethnic differences in the pre-industrial era.

The economic imperatives of iron production ultimately forced the closure of the Slocum Hollow works in 1822, despite the excellent reputation of its products.25 Easily-accessible iron ore had been exhausted, the cost of transporting products by ox-cart had grown prohibitively expensive, and the forge slowly became obsolete in the face of competition elsewhere in the region.26 The causes of the failure of the Slocum works are important because they could all have be remedied through increased access to capital, which would have allowed the Slocums to update their technology, undertake the mining operations necessary to extract less-accessible ore, and improve the transportation

24 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 387
25 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 387
26 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 387
system used to get their products to market. The failure of the Slocum works, in this
sense, foreshadows the later transformation of a forge in the wilderness built by industrial
pioneers into a metropolis built by immigrants and capitalists from around the nation and
the world.

The difficulties plaguing Slocum Hollow illustrate some of the fundamental
changes taking place in the United States at large during the early nineteenth century.
These changes, which were the result of both policy decisions and technological progress,
allowed goods and capital to move more freely throughout the nation and protected
American manufacturers from foreign competition. The “American System” supported
by Henry Clay in the United States Congress in the early nineteenth century provides
what is perhaps the best-known framework through which these changes were enacted.
Under the ideological aegis of the American System, the federal government created a
national bank to regulate currency and exchange, supported the construction of canals
and roads to link markets, and instituted protective tariffs. Of particular importance to
the development of Scranton, the tariff on quantities of rolled bar-iron in 1832 was
equivalent to a 95% duty. This increased the cost of iron from Great Britain and spurred
American companies to enter into the market.27 At the local level, these trends, which
both led to the failure of the Slocum Hollow forge and would play a large role in the
development of Scranton as a hub of manufacturing and mining, were just beginning to
reveal themselves in 1840.

One trend specific to the area was the exhaustion of easily-accessible anthracite
coal in the Lackawanna Valley. Early settlers like the Von Storches were able to access

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the limited quantities of coal they needed either above-ground or by stripping layers of rock from the surface to expose the coal underneath. By 1843, however, drifting—the creation of narrow tunnels deep in the earth, which is the method which most readers now associate with coal mining—had replaced surface mining. The supplanting of the Village Blacksmith coal miner by the industrial drifting process led to the need for huge amounts of capital and labor to extract coal economically, and allowed the Scrantons and their partners to translate their access to capital markets around the nation into efficient production in Scranton. Additionally, by the early 1840s technology had advanced to the point that coal was widely used in the manufacture of iron, and this both provided a market for the coal produced in Scranton and allowed the Scrantons and their partners to build an iron forge which took advantage of the natural resources in the Lackawanna Valley.

It was within this environment that William Henry, a “man of enterprise, but of an obstinate will and inclined to over-sanguine views,” began seeking support for a plan to build another iron furnace at Slocum Hollow. Henry called a meeting of interested parties in an attempt to attract investors, at which his plan met with the ridicule of all but Edward Armstrong from New York, a wealthy man who agreed to finance the scheme. In March of 1840, Henry and Armstrong purchased 503 acres of land in Slocum Hollow from three local residents for $8,000—a remarkable sum at the time for a tract of land in the wilderness of Northeast Pennsylvania. One of the sellers, William Merrifield, made a large profit after purchasing the land on speculation in 1837 and actively writing letters

28 Day 429
29 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 389
to attract entrepreneurs to the region.  

When Armstrong died suddenly in 1840, Henry succeeded in enlisting his son-in-law, Selden T. Scranton, who worked at Henry’s former place of employment, the Oxford Furnace in New Jersey, to join him in the enterprise. Selden, in turn, persuaded his brother George W. Scranton to join the venture, and the Scranton brothers together convinced Sanford Grant, also of New Jersey, to join. In 1840, the group executed titles for the land Henry had bought previously, and the company was incorporated as Scrantons, Grant & Co. The company had an initial capitalization of $20,000, of which the Scranton brothers invested $10,000, Grant invested $5,000, and another partner, Philip H. Mattes, also invested $5,000.

Henry initially served as the manager of the company, and in 1840 changed the name of the town from Slocum Hollow to Harrison, in honor of the then-Presidential candidate William Henry Harrison. Despite Henry’s experience producing iron through the hot blast method at the Oxford Works in New Jersey, the project faced almost continuous setbacks under his leadership. By early 1841, the venture was nearly broke, Henry had difficulty paying workers, and supplies necessary for the construction of the forge were arriving late. To generate cash for the struggling enterprise, Sanford Grant relocated from Oxford, New Jersey and established a company store which catered to local residents. The company then resorted to compensating its employees in

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30 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 392a
32 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 389. The precise ownership stakes at the company’s founding are a source of some debate; Lewis has a different view (Lewis 438).
33 The hot blast method of producing iron involved pre-heating the air fed into the bellows, and allowed for higher temperatures and more efficient production.
34 Lewis 440-441
“shinplasters,” which provided the recipient with credit at the company store. Henry finished constructing the furnace in early October, 1841, but after two “disastrous” attempts to operate the forge in October, which forced workers at the forge to painstakingly clear the furnace, George W. Scranton relocated from Oxford to manage operations.

George Scranton’s background is both interesting and important to the ideological climate at the forge. Scranton was born in Madison, Connecticut in 1811 to a family which could trace its ancestry to English settlers in 1638. After attending Lee’s Academy, he moved to New Jersey at the age of 17 where he drove horses as a teamster, and a few years later he became a storekeeper. From 1835 to 1839 Scranton was employed in “agricultural pursuits”, and subsequently partnered with his brother Selden to buy out the iron-making firm of Henry Jordan & Co. in Oxford. When he relocated to the Lackawanna Valley in 1841 to manage the forge, he brought with him extensive work experience and a working knowledge of the manufacture of iron.

Immediately upon arriving, Scranton joined in the arduous physical labor of clearing the forge. Throop writes:

Upon this occasion Colonel George W. Scranton came to the front, who, in those days, was a man for the occasion. He would swing the heaviest hammers with more blows than any of his athletic companions; and here it was that he injured his heart in a way that led, no doubt, to his early demise. Colonel Scranton was “every inch a man;” over six feet, broad shouldered, stout as a giant, as amiable and modest as a child, and on all occasions a gentleman.

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36 Lewis 444
37 Throop 82; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress; Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 7
38 Throop 108
The managers of the company, by all accounts, worked extremely hard—they slept in straw bunks in the casting house, and had their meals brought to them so they would not waste time eating. Following its initial failures, the company modified the forge, hired a new founder from New Jersey, secured the services of a Welsh immigrant who had “considerable experience with the blast furnaces in Danville [Pennsylvania],” imported better limestone via canal and wagon, and imported better ore from New Jersey. These actions were effective, and between January and October 1842, the forge produced over a thousand tons of iron. During this time, William Henry left the Harrison works, and was succeeded as “overall supervisor” by George Scranton.

Despite the company’s technical success, selling its product proved prohibitively expensive, as iron had to be carted to Carbondale, taken by railroad to Honesdale, transported by canal to the Hudson River, and finally shipped to New York by boat. Additionally, the price of iron had fallen by forty percent since 1840. In an attempt to make their product more marketable, the owners of the company decided to build a rolling mill and nail factory to convert their iron into bars and nails. To raise the necessary capital for the project, Scrantons, Grant & Company was reorganized as Scrantons and Grant, with a capitalization of $86,000. The Scranton brothers induced two of their cousins—Joseph H. and Erastus Scranton, then successful merchants in Georgia—along with John Howland, a wealthy New Yorker, to invest in the company. Despite the recapitalization of the company, the Scranton family maintained a majority

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39 Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 11
40 Lewis 446; Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 8, 9
41 Lewis 446
42 Lewis 447
43 Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 14
44 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 390
ownership. George Scranton, Selden Scranton, and Sanford Grant were made general partners, and were therefore personally liable for any losses the company incurred.\textsuperscript{45} As Frederick J. Platt notes, “these young pioneers had to succeed or financial ruin stared them in the face.”\textsuperscript{46}

Construction on the rolling mill and nail factory began in May, 1844, and the first nails were produced in July, 1845.\textsuperscript{47} While the thousands of tons of nails produced quickly glutted the markets, a large portion of the nails were rejected due to their poor quality—the iron produced by the company was “red short” and brittle, while good nails required “cold short” iron.\textsuperscript{48} Selden Scranton practiced driving nails into a log in an effort to develop a method which would not break them, but attempts by the company to sell any significant portion of its nails proved futile.\textsuperscript{49} Recognizing its predicament, the company arranged for a merchant to sell its remaining nails as quickly as possible, and resolved to halt nail production and move into the business of manufacturing the heavy rails which fueled America’s railroad construction boom—iron t-rails, which were just beginning to be manufactured in the United States.\textsuperscript{50}

The railroad construction boom in the United States played a pivotal role in the rise of Scranton, both as a driver of demand for iron from the Scranton’s forge and later as a means of transporting produced goods. The American railroad network tripled in size during the 1840s, and Scranton’s location near the commercial hubs of New York and Philadelphia, along with its access to iron and coal, made it perfectly situated to

\textsuperscript{45} Lewis 451; Throop 111; Folsom 26; Lewis 436
\textsuperscript{46} Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 9
\textsuperscript{47} Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 15
\textsuperscript{48} Throop 113
\textsuperscript{49} Lewis 454
\textsuperscript{50} Lewis 457
benefit from this expansion. Because Great Britain was going through a similar railroad boom during this period, the iron rails which American railroads had been importing were becoming increasingly expensive, and conditions were ripe for firms in the United States to enter the market. Additionally, while the “red short” iron produced in the Scranton’s forge was ill-suited for nails, it was perfect for railroad tracks. As pointed out by W. David Lewis, “the Scrantons were in the right place at the right time.”

The obvious barrier to entry into the t-rail market for the company was the extraordinary cost of building a rolling mill that would manufacture the iron produced by the extant forge into t-rails. Fortunately, just as the Scrantons were coming to accept the failure of their nail business, the Erie Railroad Company was planning an extension of its track from Port Jervis to Binghamton in exchange for the state of New York forgiving a $3,000,000 loan to the railroad if it completed the extension by a certain deadline. Joseph H. and George W. Scranton succeeded in securing a contract from the railroad to supply t-rails for the extension, and attracted the necessary capital to construct a rolling mill and two additional blast furnaces by playing off competing groups of investors from New York and Boston. In November, 1846, the firm of Scrantons & Platt was organized with a total capitalization of $230,000, with George, Joseph and Selden Scranton joining Joseph C. Platt as general partners (both Sanford Grant and Erastus Scranton had left the company).

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51 Lewis 456
53 Platt, Reminiscences 15
Scranton’s & Platt contracted with the Erie Railroad Company to deliver 12,000 tons of iron at a cost of $70 or $80 per ton. This price made considerable sense for the Erie, as it had previously purchased its rails from English firms at $80 per ton, plus the cost of transportation across the Atlantic. To meet the deadline set by the state of New York, the builders of the Erie railroad commenced grading and laying tracks at multiple locations along the planned route, and Scranton’s & Platt accommodated the accelerated schedule by delivering its product to six different locations along the line. These deliveries necessitated hiring every available team of mules and horses in the area, and “played sad havoc on the agricultural interests for a season.” One historian, writing in 1914, remarked on the improbability of the success:

Let us look through their glasses for a moment. What was the opportunity? They were offered a contract for 12,000 tons of T rails at $80 per ton—$960,000! —to bind themselves to deliver the last rail within two years! They had never made a rail!...It must be remembered that practically a new mill had to be built; that they had to go into the woods and cut the timber and saw their lumber, and everything else was done under like primitive conditions.

Remarkably, the Erie Railroad Company finished construction of the line four days ahead of the deadline.

The contract with the Erie Railroad Company marked an inflection point in the history of the Scranton’s company, after which the company enjoyed unmitigated, uninterrupted, and well-documented success. In 1848 the capitalization of Scranton’s &

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54 History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 390; although J.C. Platt states in Reminiscences 14 that contracts used a sliding scale of between $65 and $85 per ton.
55 Hitchcock 23
56 Throop 115; Platt, Reminiscences 14
57 Throop 115
58 Hitchcock 24
59 Throop 115
60 There are many excellent accounts of the success of the company: see Folsom, Urban Capitalists and Lewis, Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company.
Platt was increased to $400,000, and in 1853, the firm changed its name to the Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company and increased its capitalization to $800,000, which increased to $1.2 million by 1860. The company also expanded into the business of railroads. The Liggett’s Gap line, which was originally chartered in 1832 by residents of Slocum Hollow, was not begun in earnest until 1850, when Scrantons and Platt purchased the charter to preclude a rival attempt to run the line through Wilkes-Barre. George W. Scranton envisioned a comprehensive business plan for the railroad: his company would purchase coal lands, and use the extracted coal to ensure business on the line, which would connect Scranton with the Erie Railroad at Great Bend. In order to attract investors for the railroad, however, the Scrantons were forced to offer highly sought-after equity in the iron works. The railroad was completed in 1851, formally named the Lackawanna and Western Railway Company, and began freight and passenger operations. The Scrantons also invested in the establishment of a railroad connecting to the Delaware Water Gap, which offered access to central New Jersey and ultimately New York City. After the Pennsylvania Legislature granted it a charter, the railroad was incorporated in 1849, and in 1850 construction began after the Scrantons raised $900,000 dollars in capital. In 1853, the two railroads merged to form the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad, with ownership split between New York capitalists and allies of the Scrantons.

The construction of railroads provided the Lackawanna Iron & Coal Company with the advantages necessary to compete in the national market, and this success led to

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61 Platt, Reminiscences 15
62 Hitchcock 36
63 Hitchcock 51, 55
64 Hitchcock 56; Folsom 33
extraordinary growth in Scranton—between 1850 and 1860 Scranton grew at an extraordinary rate.\(^65\) During that period, the city went from having one brick building in 1850 to eighty in 1859, and Scranton surpassed Carbondale as the most important city in the Lackawanna Valley.\(^66\) This extraordinary growth attracted skilled and unskilled laborers to the city, and a large number of businesses peripheral to the major industries sprang up. One benefit of the rapid growth shared by both residents and the company was the steady appreciation in the value of real estate, a trend which accelerated with the construction of railroads linking Scranton to other cities.\(^67\) The Scranton family “viewed industrial and urban growth as symbiotic,” and made provisions for a well-planned city with carefully laid-out streets.\(^68\) In 1854, at Dr. Throop’s urging, leading citizens chartered the Scranton Gas and Water Company.\(^69\)

In an 1859 overview of Luzerne County, an observer describes Scranton in glowing terms and provides an excellent snapshot of the growing city:

> Scranton is laid out with regularity, nearly all the streets crossing each other at right angles. Business is thriving, and many spacious brick buildings are being erected. The town is supplied with water from the Lackawanna, being forced up by steam-power into a reservoir, and thence distributed in pipes through the burrough [sic]. The streets are lighted by gas, and the sidewalks are paved with plank and stone. The capital of the company which erected the gas and water works is $100,000. The place contains 59 groceries and stores of all descriptions, 18 stationary steam-engines, 10 churches, 2 printing offices, 4 foundries and machine-ships, 2 bakeries, 7 hotels, 4 smelting furnaces, 1 rolling-mill, 1 planing mill, 2 banking-houses, 6 insurance agencies, 2 flouring mills, each with 4 run of stone, 1 brewery, 2 resident dentists, 12 doctors, and 13 lawyers.\(^70\)

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\(^{65}\) Folsom 35  
\(^{66}\) Pearce 223; Folsom 34  
\(^{67}\) Throop 273  
\(^{68}\) Folsom 34  
\(^{69}\) Throop 306  
\(^{70}\) Pearce 222-223
Compared with the five dwellings and four shops which composed Slocum Hollow in 1840, this description underscores the remarkable growth which industrialization brought to Scranton: a city had grown out of the wilderness in twenty years.

Scranton’s growth was largely fueled by foreign-born immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Wales and England. The population ballooned from 100 in 1840 to 1,396 in 1848, and 2,730 in 1850. A census taken by the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company found that of the 4,241 residents in 1854, only 1,151, or 27 percent, were native-born Americans, while 42 percent of residents were Irish, 19 percent were German, ten percent were Welsh, and two percent were English immigrants. In 1859, only about half of the over 12,000 residents were thought to be native-born Americans. The implications of the high proportion of immigrants in the city will be examined in-depth in subsequent chapters, but one incident relating to ethnic conflict merits mention here.

In 1850, the Irish immigrants working on the Liggett’s Gap railroad were divided into two antagonistic groups, the “Corkonians” and the “Far-downers.” Both sides were determined to “drive the other off the road,” and a pitched battle on May 28th left three Corkonians dead and others wounded. Two days later, 200 Connaught men (as the far-downers were also known) returned to the Corkonians, “armed with almost everything that could be used in a melee,” and attempted un成功fully to drive off their opponents. George W. Scranton served as the manager of construction at the time, and contemporaries credited his policy of dividing the two groups with avoiding further bloodshed and allowing work to resume. While the incident had no lasting effect on construction, it underscores the ethnic tensions in the city, especially when one considers

71 Platt, Reminiscences 25-26
72 Platt, Reminiscences 26
73 Pearce 223
that in addition to their hostility toward each other, “both parties were, if possible, more hostile to the Germans.”  

The status of labor between 1840 and 1860 is also important. In the early 1840s, the company paid skilled carpenters building the blast furnace 75 cents per day, while unskilled laborers earned $17 each month. The company boarded its employees for $1.50 per week, which included meals and laundry. The company quickly began contracting out its labor; in 1844 it paid Charles Manness $350 to furnish the labor to build its first rolling mill, with the company providing necessary supplies. A similar arrangement with a man from New Hampshire named Peter Jones provided the labor force for the Liggett’s Gap railroad, although Jones brought with him both laborers and equipment, and according to J.C. Platt, proved excellent at maintaining order among his workers.

I think he was the physical equal of three or four men. He was the largest man I ever saw. He stood nearly six feet tall, but his width and thickness was out of all proportion to his height. I think he weighed fully 400 pounds, without one ounce of loose flesh on him... It was told of him that he was a terror to all of his hands who got to brawling. One day he came upon two of them the worse for liquor, who were fighting. Without a word he grabbed each with one hand, slapped their heads together, and then threw them a dozen yards down an embankment. Withal his strength he was a thorough gentleman; though brusque and vigorous in his movements, he was gentle and kindly in his speech and intercourse with men, and very popular with employers and employees. His word was better than a bond. Mr. Scranton’s confidence in his judgment was soundly placed.

Again, as with George Scranton, Peter Jones’ personality allowed him to function as a well-respected and effective intermediary between labor and business. Employing

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74 Platt, Reminiscences 18, Hitch 43
75 Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 9
76 Platt, History of Scranton and the First Presbyterian Church 15
77 Throop 247
78 Hitchcock 45
migrant workers, as Jones did, was a common practice in early Scranton—especially in the years in which the infrastructure of production was being built, labor was often temporary, and after workers completed a project they were dismissed.79

While the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company provided the engine of Scranton’s growth and employed much of its population, however, the residents of the city were by no means dependent on the company. A well-rounded economy developed along with the city, which allowed innovative locals to form businesses in a city with a population growing at a rate of about 1,000 residents per year.80

One of the most important elements of the story of Scranton—and one which is consistently overlooked by historians—is how the rise of the city challenged the worldview of local residents. As described at the beginning of this chapter, the lives and general outlooks of the residents of the Slocum Hollow area in 1840 conformed to the Village Blacksmith ideal. By 1840, however, the way of life to which the locals were accustomed was quietly besieged by events, trends and ways of thinking that were developing on a national scale, and were radically manifested in the rise of a modern city in their backyards. Consigning the concerns of the communities disrupted by industrialization to a footnote on “opposition to economic development”—as one historian of Scranton does—is entirely too simple.81 The Village Blacksmith ideal, with its emphasis on community, the dignity of physical labor, and integrity of the individual, did not vanish as industrialization progressed, but maintained a powerful position in the American psyche that clarifies subsequent developments, both in Scranton and the United States at large. The rapid transition from Slocum Hollow to Scranton allows for an

79 Lewis 442
80 Folsom 35
81 Folsom 31
analysis of the interaction of two opposing ideals—the *Village Blacksmith* ideal and the emerging capitalist ideal—which continue to shape the world today.

George W. Scranton struggled to hold these two ideals in his mind, and seems to have had trouble adapting to the world he was shaping. While historians generally credit his tireless efforts at industrial production and attracting capital with turning the fortunes of his company around, he harbored doubts about the project to which he devoted so much energy. Scranton’s material success allowed him to live a relatively luxurious lifestyle, and at one point he traveled to New York City to purchase domestic luxuries which he predicted would “astonish the natives.”

In 1843, however, he wrote to his wife, “I often think that I had rather be poor and hoe corn by day than to be deprived the happiness and pleasure of my sweet little family.” Despite these misgivings, Scranton was an excellent manager and entrepreneur, and as a physically strong, honest and community-oriented man he possessed many qualities of the *Village Blacksmith* ideal. The force of his personality allowed him to maintain good relations with both his employees and the residents of the area, and serve as a bridge between the capital holders, employees and local residents.

Residents of Slocum Hollow initially had mixed reactions to the arrival of the Scrantons and their partners. Horace Hollister writes:

The relations of the Scrantons with the public were harmonious, and characterized throughout by *general* good feeling. It is true, there were then as there are yet, and ever will be, a class of croakers who gathered in bar-room groups and gravely predicted that “the Scrantons must fail.”

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82 Lewis 453
83 Lewis 449
84 Hollister 251
These sentiments were echoed by local residents who declared the forge “the Jersey Humbug” after initial failures to produce iron.\(^{85}\) Throop notes that there was a “general antagonism toward all things that had not their origin in individual enterprise,” and for this reason the words “monopoly” and “corporation” were generally despised.\(^{86}\)

Within this context, George Scranton was the perfect ambassador between his market-driven capitalist backers and the community-oriented residents around his forge, as “his business and geniality could not be separated.”\(^{87}\) Col. Frederick Hitchcock, a historian of Scranton, writes that the most important factor in attracting the necessary capital to continue operations after three successive failures in operating the forge was the “personal magnetism” of Scranton, and adds that, “he was one of those men who was by nature wonderfully endowed with the elements of leadership.”\(^{88}\) Throop claims that “no man was ever given better powers of persuasion than Colonel Scranton had,” and he “always filled his contracts sooner or later.”\(^{89}\)

The power of Scranton’s character explains the absence of labor strife in Scranton between 1840 and 1860, with the sole exception of the “Irish War”.\(^{90}\) When the exigencies of business led to inevitable conflict with area residents or employees, Scranton drew upon his charm and standing in the community to further his company’s interests and prevent antagonism between labor and management. Throop recounts how Scranton spent days traveling throughout nearby towns to raise enough money to hold a St. Patrick’s Day parade in 1843 at the behest of his workers.\(^{91}\) As was the case in

\(^{85}\) Throop 268  
\(^{86}\) Throop 124-125  
\(^{87}\) Hitchcock 40  
\(^{88}\) Hitchcock 21  
\(^{89}\) Throop 118  
\(^{90}\) Throop 311  
\(^{91}\) Throop 117
Slocum Hollow, personality often trumped prescribed power. As Scranton and the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company grew, however, the breakdown of community bonds and the corresponding decrease of the importance of personality led to increased class consciousness and labor troubles. George Scranton’s life evidences these conflicting trends: while he built a somewhat ostentatious mansion modeled on an Italian villa in 1857, the residents of Scranton still respected him enough to elect him to the United States Congress in 1858.\(^{92}\)

*The Village Blacksmith* struck a chord in the American psyche because it articulated a familiar ideal in an era in which nascent industrialization was confronting communities throughout the country. This ideal served as the framework through which many Americans viewed society, and the extent to which industrialization challenged these traditional views can be understood through an attempt to fit the Scrantons into this framework. The Scrantons had almost certainly read *The Village Blacksmith*—a Longfellow biographer writes that following the publication of *Ballads and Other Poems*, “the quickness with which the public not only bought this book but memorized the poems…was without parallel in U.S. publishing history.”\(^{93}\) While Selden and George Scranton earned respect, dignity and community status through their physical labor, they incurred massive debt—in contrast to Longfellow’s blacksmith, who “owes not any man”—and were constantly away from their families. The Scrantons were simultaneously participating in a national market and attempting to define their role in their local community, and their confusion related to these attempts is understandable. At


one point when the company was deeply in debt, George Scranton wrote, “I have many a
time wished I had never seen this place.”

Confusion about the rise of Scranton extended to the community, as well. An
excellent example of the conflicted sentiments in the Lackawanna Valley can be found in
Pearce’s Annals of Luzerne County. Writing in 1859, he paints a grim picture of the
effect of the trends sweeping the nation:

A false and pernicious idea of what is respectable seems to pervade the
great body of the people. Manual labor is viewed as mean and degrading,
while white hands and idleness are considered the test of respectability.
The consequence is, there are multitudes of idlers in all portions of the
country, who relieve the tedium of their lives by ridiculous day-dreams,
and the perusal of immoral literature. As their bodies grow effeminate and
weak, their minds also lose their natural healthy tone. Dissipation and
debauchery ensue, want stares them in the face, life becomes a burden,
and poison or the pistol often closes the scene.

While Pearce’s fears may be slightly overstated, the sentiments he expresses were
genuine and widespread. Pearce also describes how “this false idea with respect to labor”
leads to land speculation, which interferes with agriculture. He counters that “usefulness
is the proper test of what is respectable,” and praises mechanics and farmers for their
utility. Indeed, white-collar professions have an uncertain status in the Village
Blacksmith ideal, as bankers, lawyers, and capitalists generally do not work with their
hands, often rely on credit and do not produce tangible goods. In the context of the mid-
to late-nineteenth century, however, these supposedly unproductive members of society
played vital roles in the development of cities like Scranton, as they supported the
creation of the new businesses that allowed others to work with their hands. Pearce
quickly follows his criticism of the “idlers” with glowing tributes to the achievements of

94 Lewis 448
95 Pearce 339
96 Pearce 340
the Scrantons, who “laid the foundation of the flourishing town of Scranton,” and “filled
the valley of the Lackawanna with an industrious and thriving population.”\textsuperscript{97} Pearce
disregards the importance of capital to the success of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal
Company and the growth of Scranton, however, and this seemingly contradictory
criticism and praise underscores the difficulty faced by those attempting to reconcile their
ideologies and experiences in light of the rise of Scranton.

Between 1840 and 1860, the Scrantons “changed the monotonous a quiet, fairly
moral town, not unlike many that surrounded it, into a hurly-burly business mart,” and
the confusion felt by Pearce and the Scrantons was an understandable reaction to the
amazing growth of Scranton and the associated challenges to established modes of
thinking.\textsuperscript{98} The general sentiment in the city seems to have been one of admiration for
successful and enterprising founders tempered by trepidation and uncertainty regarding
the unprecedented changes and challenges the city experienced. The industrial pioneers
were great men, but what had they wrought out of the wilderness?

\textsuperscript{97} Pearce 358
\textsuperscript{98} Throop 125
Chapter 2: The Son and the Apprentice
1860-1877

The experience of the year has taught the parties who control this great and growing interest, the folly of exhausting their resources in ruinous competition...

Railroad competition, once healthy, has gone, and in its place we find the railroad pool...operators who mine coal have pooled their issues against the interests of the people...

Age 50
President of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company, 1873

Age 50
Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, 1889

I'm friends with everybody in this office. We're all best friends. I love everybody here. But sometimes your best friends start coming into work late and start having dentist appointments that aren't dentist appointments, and that is when it's nice to let them know that you could beat them up.

-Michael Scott, The Office
In its tenth year of operations in 1866, business at the Dickson Manufacturing Company in Scranton was booming. Extraordinary demand for the company’s locomotives and steam engines spurred by the Civil War had allowed the company to expand rapidly, even as it remained a family business. James Dickson, a Scottish immigrant who had learned his trade in England from George Stephenson, the inventor of the first locomotive, served as the master mechanic. His sons, George and Thomas, took care of the business and financial aspects of the company. Thomas, especially, demonstrated an extraordinary aptitude for business, and since 1859 had served the “double position” of both general manager of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company—which owned a vast network of railroads, coal mines and canals—and president of the Dickson Manufacturing Company.1

In August of 1866, James Dickson accepted a seventeen-year-old apprentice named Terence Powderly into the shop, agreeing to initiate him into the “arts and mysteries of the machinist trade” in exchange for his pupil’s diligent studies. By the time Powderly’s apprenticeship ended in 1869, the master mechanic had grown so fond of the teenager that he presented Powderly with the calipers Stephenson had given to him years before at the completion of his apprenticeship in England.2 Dickson’s attachment to his apprentice might have been due in part to Powderly’s similarity to his son, Thomas, who was 25 years older than Powderly. Like Thomas Dickson, who drove mules for the Delaware and Hudson at an early age, Powderly had gone to work for the same company at the age of thirteen.3 Like Thomas, Powderly had been born in Carbondale, a

3 Logan, The Life of Thomas Dickson: A Memorial 24; Powderly 18
neighboring coal town, but ventured to Scranton in search of an outlet for his extraordinary intelligence and ambition. Both men were first generation Americans who would later develop penchants for poetry, juggle two positions of extraordinary responsibility by the age of 35, and manage extensive networks of friends and associates.4

Finally, and unbeknownst to James Dickson, both his son and Powderly would quickly rise to the top of their respective fields, but would acquire radically opposing points of view on industrial production. Dickson would rise to the presidency of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company and become renowned for his “aggressiveness in business” and support for railroad combinations.5 Powderly would become mayor of Scranton, the leader of the largest labor union in the nation, and a fierce advocate for “uniformity of action” among workers in Scranton and throughout the nation.6 This chapter examines the development of Scranton between 1860 and 1877, and describes how the changes which characterized the city’s development led two extraordinarily similar individuals to lead such radically different lives and view the world around them from such radically different perspectives.

Between 1860 and 1877, Scranton experienced rapid growth, and citizens of the city struggled to make sense of the changes in their lives and in the lives of those around them. Terence Powderly and Thomas Dickson both attempted to apply the Village

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4 While Dickson actually came to the United States from Scotland as a young child, I categorize him as a first-generation American rather than an immigrant. Powderly was born in Carbondale of Irish immigrant parents. Terence Powderly often expressed his political views through poetry, while Thomas Dickson read and recited poems constantly. By the age of 35, Powderly was both mayor of Scranton and Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, while Dickson was the general manager of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company and the President of the Dickson Manufacturing Company. Biographers of both men comment on their extraordinary ability to start and maintain friendships.


Blacksmith ideal to understand the changes in Scranton, but their vastly different life experiences led the two men to arrive at opposing conclusions. The chasm between the opinions of these two otherwise remarkably similar men illustrates the degree to which Scranton—and America—changed during that period. Quite simply, Dickson’s Scranton and Powderly’s Scranton were two different worlds. The opportunities which had been open to Dickson, and which shaped Dickson’s way of thinking, were closed to Powderly.

In Malcolm Gladwell’s book Outliers, the author writes that of the 75 richest people in history, fourteen are Americans born between 1831 and 1840. He explains:

In the 1860s and 1870s, the American economy went though perhaps the greatest transformation in its history. This was when the railroads were being built and when Wall Street emerged. It was when industrial manufacturing started in earnest. It was when all the rules by which the traditional economy had functioned were broken and remade. What this list [of wealthy Americans] says is that it really matters how old you were when that transformation happened.\(^7\)

In this context, Dickson’s extraordinary success makes sense. His birth in 1825—outside of Gladwell’s 1831-1840 window—also makes sense when one considers that the industrial revolution happened in Scranton before it happened anywhere else in the United States. The city was located in one of the first areas to produce the anthracite coal that fueled America’s growth during the period, and Scranton’s residents made innovations that lay the groundwork for industrialization elsewhere, like the iron t-rail, the anthracite-burning stove, and the culm coal-burning locomotive.\(^8\) Dickson was motivated, ambitious and intelligent; but he was also in the right place at the right time.

Gladwell is only partially correct in writing that the rules which governed the conduct of the American economy were remade in the 1860s and 1870s. In fact, those


\(^8\) Throop 302; Hitchcock 233
living through the transformation applied the old rules—described in the first chapter as the Village Blacksmith ideal—to the new system, and modified them according to their experiences. Dickson lived his early life in small town, in an era defined by the Village Blacksmith ideal. As a boy, a neighbor hired him to chop a supply of wood for the winter, and rather than chop it himself, young Thomas used the money to purchase whiskey and held a “chopping bee” through which his neighbors finished the work in one day.\(^9\)

Dickson took great pride in his lowly origins, and later in life referred to himself as “Thomas Dickson, M.D.” When asked what the “M.D.” stood for, he would reply with his first job, “mule driver.”\(^10\)

Those around Thomas Dickson applied the Village Blacksmith ideal to Dickson’s experiences, and decided that his success affirmed the American Dream. In a statement made by the Dickson Manufacturing Company at its founder’s death, the directors and stockholders of the company proclaimed:

> His high success from humble beginnings against difficulties and obstacles are an honor to our AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS, showing that energy, merit, and true ambition will meet their reward.\(^11\)

While Dickson’s extraordinary ingenuity allowed him to prosper as a businessman in the rapidly-growing Scranton of the 1850s, however, Terence Powderly encountered a very different environment when he entered the workforce.

Like Dickson, Powderly bought into the Village Blacksmith ideal at the beginning of his career—Powderly’s ideal centered on the conditions he encountered in James Dickson’s shop at the start of his apprenticeship. As Powderly later recalled, Dickson’s personality, rather than company regulations, governed conduct at the shop:

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\(^9\) Logan, *The Life of Thomas Dickson: A Memorial* 15  
\(^10\) Hitchcock 89  
\(^11\) Logan, *The Life of Thomas Dickson: A Memorial* 134
He was no task master, yet every man and every boy in his employ would cheerfully remain on duty until all hours of the night at his request. He never discharged anyone.  

For his part, Powderly enjoyed the intellectual challenge of building and repairing engines immensely. For a time, Powderly believed that his labor earned him the respect of his fellow citizens, and attempted to break into the upper crust of Scranton society. He downplayed his Irish Catholicism, became an active Republican, joined a union of skilled machinists, and in 1872 proudly noted in his journal that William W. Scranton had offered him a chair at the barber shop. Powderly’s idyllic perception of Scranton evaporated when he lost his job in during the Panic of 1873 due to his presidency of a chapter of the Machinists and Blacksmiths Union, however, and chronic unemployment caused by the cyclical industrial economy and his blacklisting shattered his dreams of making his living as a machinist.

Powderly viewed his opinion on labor organization and unionization, which he believed allowed workers to function as equals within a community, as the logical successor to the Village Blacksmith ideal manifested in the New England town:

Co-operative and fraternal forms of industrial association are as ancient as society itself. The joint undivided family, from which grew craft guilds and brotherhoods, and the village communities, from which sprang the English parish and the New England town were to a great degree communistic in their industrial affairs.  

In exactly the same way that technological and political developments besieged the Village Blacksmith status-quo in Slocum Hollow and forced George W. Scranton to adapt his way of thinking to the changing circumstances around him, so too the emerging

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12 Powderly, The Path I Trod 21
14 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 511
industrial economy slowly eroded Powderly’s conception of his value as a laborer in an industrial economy, and forced his understanding of the world to evolve.

By 1877, Powderly’s thinking had shifted almost completely, as his early efforts to earn his living as a mechanic were foiled by a succession of economic downturns and layoffs. His subsequent unemployment, even despite his willingness to work and status as a skilled mechanic, demonstrated to Powderly the cruelties of the evolving industrial economy. This period of Powderly’s life fundamentally shaped how he viewed the world, as he spent the winter of 1873-1874 traveling through the Western states, Canada, and upstate New York in search of a job. As he would later reflect,

Only the man who stands utterly alone, friendless, moneyless, ill clad, shelterless and hungry, looking at the sun sinking red in a mid-winter snow, can know what it is to be a real tramp. That experience was mine, through no fault of mine.\textsuperscript{15}

Powderly eventually returned to Scranton, and found a steady job at the Dickson Manufacturing Company in December of 1875. In response to his constantly falling wages, Powderly became involved in the Knights of Labor, a secret society dedicated to unionizing workers across ethnic, occupational, and gender divisions. Powderly organized his coworkers into Labor Assembly 222 of the Knights of Labor in October of 1876, and in May of 1877 he quit his job at Dickson Manufacturing to take a job as an organizer for the Knights. Throughout 1877, Powderly actively organized assemblies of the Knights throughout the Scranton area, and his organizational abilities led to his almost celebrity status within the growing organization.\textsuperscript{16}

In Terence Powderly’s book \textit{Thirty Years of Life and Labor}, he recounts an episode in which a business owner offers him what he views as an unfairly low wage, and

\textsuperscript{15} Powderly, \textit{The Path I Trod} 27
\textsuperscript{16} Phelan, \textit{Grand Master Workman} 23
tells Powderly that he succeeded through his own industry by purchasing a corner lot in the town which appreciated in value. This business owner could well have been Dickson, whose first commercial venture was as a partner in a general store, and who certainly employed Powderly. When the man asked why Powderly could not do as he had done, Powderly reflected,

Others could do exactly as he did if the conditions were the same…the land is all absorbed, and no matter how high the price of labor may be, the workman can not secure the corner lot as his predecessor did. True the corner lot is still there, but the man who fortunate enough to be born first got his chance grab it before his less fortunate neighbor was ushered into the world. The corner lots are all taken…\(^\text{17}\)

Powderly recognized that of the three factors of industrial production—land, labor, and capital—workers of his generation without access to capital could only ever hope to assert themselves economically by controlling their own labor. This was the insight that led him to realize that something fundamental had changed in America, and the way of thinking that drove him to become a labor organizer. In Powderly’s Scranton, a handful of wealthy citizens controlled a huge portion of production in the city.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, capital-intensive industrial activities drove Scranton’s growth during the 1850s, and throughout the 1860s and 1870s four major companies dominated the mining, manufacturing and transportation sectors.\(^\text{18}\) A basic description of these four companies is necessary to understand the growth of the city, but this thesis does not cover the specifics of business development during the period.\(^\text{19}\) The Delaware & Hudson Canal Company and the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western

\(^\text{17}\) Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor* 456

\(^\text{18}\) It is possible to include the Pennsylvania Coal Company as the fifth major company, although the Pennsylvania Coal Company operated in Dunmore, a town which only became part of Scranton with the city’s incorporation in 1865. For a description of the company, see Hitchcock, 107-110

Railroad both operated extensive rail and anthracite mining networks throughout the region which connected Scranton to markets all over the country, and especially to New York, Philadelphia and Buffalo. The Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company primarily produced railroad bars, and operated multiple blast furnaces, an iron rolling mill, a foundry, and shops necessary to produce many other products.\textsuperscript{20} Finally, the Dickson Manufacturing Company, founded by Thomas Dickson, produced steam engines for use in industry and mining, as well as locomotives for railroads across the nation. So few companies dominated Scranton’s business environment because the industrial processes undertaken in Scranton—coal mining, manufacturing and railroad transportation—all required huge amounts of capital. Coal mining, for example, required specialized equipment to set charges to blast rock; steam engines to pump water out of the mines, coal carts, livestock, massive breakers to crush coal into marketable sizes, and a transportation network to ship coal to market. Iron and steel production, along with manufacturing, also required large up-front investments.

A relatively small group of successful and wealthy individuals controlled the major business interests in the city, as well as a number of smaller companies. As Burton Folsom points out in his book \textit{Urban Capitalists}, “these men were Scranton’s captains of industry.”\textsuperscript{21} Thomas Dickson, for example, founded Dickson & Company (later the Dickson Manufacturing Company) in 1856, co-founded the First National Bank of Scranton in 1863, co-founded the Moosic Powder Company in 1865, became president of the Delaware & Hudson Company in 1869, and later served as director of the Crown

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania} 407
\textsuperscript{21} Folsom 44
Point Iron Company and trustee of the Mutual Life Insurance Company.\textsuperscript{22} The 1863 founding of the First National Bank of Scranton by prominent businessmen in response to monetary instability brought on by the Civil War provides an excellent example of the interconnecting business relations that characterized Scranton at the time, as major figures in each of the four companies named above cooperated in establishing the bank.\textsuperscript{23}

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Scranton family continued to play a prominent role among the small group of men that dominated Scranton’s business community. Joseph H. Scranton, mentioned in the previous chapter, served as the President of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company, and all three of his sons went on to enjoy great success in the city. Joseph H. Scranton purchased the \textit{Scranton Republican} in 1867 and gave it to his firstborn son, Joseph Augustine Scranton, who served as the editor until his death in 1908.\textsuperscript{24} Under his direction, the newspaper served as the voice of Scranton’s business establishment, as well as the Republican Party. Joseph Augustine Scranton would also go on to serve five terms in the United States House of Representatives between 1881 and 1897. William Walker Scranton, the second son, succeeded his father as a leader in the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company in his capacity as superintendent, and later general manager, of the company.\textsuperscript{25} The third son, Walter Scranton, became president of the Lackawanna Steel Company later in the century.

The degree to which prominent personalities and non-institutionalized action still influenced business in the region can be elucidated through an event which occurred

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\item \textsuperscript{22} Logan, \textit{The Life of Thomas Dickson: A Memorial} 49, 59
\item \textsuperscript{23} Hitchcock 408
\item \textsuperscript{24} Hitchcock 528
\item \textsuperscript{25} Hitchcock 489, 385
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during 1860 in Gouldsboro, a town about 22 miles away from Scranton.\textsuperscript{26} The now-
famous Jay Gould, then twenty-four years old, had helped build an industrial tannery in the town, and found himself in a dispute with one of his business partners, Charles DuPont Breck. Breck had hired several armed locals and occupied the facility, and Gould, on the advice of his New York City lawyer,

appeared upon the scene with a motly [sic] crowd of backwoodsmen, armed with their long squirrel rifles, and all well braced with whisky. Without waiting for a parley the tannery was surrounded, a fusillade opened, and a charge made. They came from all directions, shooting and yelling like fiends. In less time than it can be told every defender who didn’t go out himself was unceremoniously helped out.

As one historian flippantly noted, this episode demonstrates the “crudity and uncertainty of legal proceedings during the early days.” The event also speaks to an important facet of the emerging industrial system: the wealthy often asserted their interests through armed force in the absence of state-sanctioned institutions capable of responding to their demands.\textsuperscript{27}

Between 1861 and 1865, the Civil War dominated life in Scranton, as it dominated life throughout the country. Following Abraham Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers in 1861, Scranton’s residents organized two companies—one Irish, and one non-Irish.\textsuperscript{28} While the first groups of volunteers sent to the front departed to extraordinary fanfare, the war quickly stoked incipient class divisions. The 1863 Conscription Act, for example, allowed wealthy individuals to buy their way out of the draft for $300, and

\textsuperscript{27} Hitchcock 217
\textsuperscript{28} Throop 206. While Throop does not explicitly note the ethnic organization of companies, the names of each company’s officers makes the trend obvious.
“underscored the popular belief that this was a rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight.”

The Conscription Act also mandated the appointment of a provost marshal, appointed by the President, in each congressional district. Provost marshals had the power to use federal military force to administer the draft, without seeking approval from state or local authorities. In practice, provost marshals represented the interests of major coal mining and manufacturing companies, and sometimes held financial stakes in major businesses within their districts.

As Grace Palladino argues in *Another Civil War*, this wartime climate allowed organized capital to co-opt state power in defense of its interests by conflating labor organization and strike activity with draft resistance, terrorism and unpatriotic behavior. While before the war coal miners had sometimes utilized violence to achieve job-related goals by intimidating their bosses, Palladino notes that “violence was not the basis of labor organization in the coal regions.” With the onset of the Civil War, however, violence in the anthracite regions increased dramatically, as federal officials charged with enforcing the draft often encountered organized, violent resistance in the discharge of their duties. Most officials did not distinguish between draft-related and job-related violence, however, and as a result officials began to utilize federal force in response to any sort of violence perpetrated by workers. The use of federal force during the Civil War resulted in an informal but enduring alliance between business and the state, and would eventually come to define the relationship between labor and capital in Scranton.

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30 Palladino 11-12
31 Palladino 135
Economically, the Civil War was excellent for business in Scranton. The war effort increased the need for the anthracite, iron, and machinery which the city specialized in producing, and “both the coal-mining of the valley and the work of the machine-shops were doubled in a very short time.”\textsuperscript{32} Compounding this phenomenon, the departure of workers for the battlefield “increased the demand for labor of every character, both skilled and unskilled, and the wages paid for mining and iron working reached the highest point that had ever been recorded.”\textsuperscript{33} This financial windfall, together with the city’s struggle to keep up with the nation’s demand for its products, masked the crystallization of distinct classes during this period. As industries grew and advanced, the role of personality in the workplace decreased, company regulations gradually took the place of charismatic business leaders who earned the respect of their employees, and the issue of control of the workplace became more contentious. Few in Scranton noticed this gradual trend, however, because the Civil War proved so lucrative that both workers and business owners profited immensely during the war and in the boom years immediately following. When employees of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad in Scranton went on strike in 1862 under the organizational auspices of the Miners’ Benevolent Association, they demanded both increased wages and more control in the workplace. In February 1863 the miners went back to work with higher wages, but with no concessions regarding their status in the workplace. As Throop later wrote, “both labor and capital began to develop the arrogance that insensibly grows from unbroken and unprecedented success.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} Logan, \textit{The Life of Thomas Dickson: A Memorial} 55-56
\textsuperscript{33} Throop 311
\textsuperscript{34} Throop 311
High production and steady wages endured for a few years after the Civil War ended, but by 1869 investors had begun to cut back, production dropped, and the price of coal fell. In May of 1869, the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad and the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company refused demands from their miners to increase the price paid per car of coal, leading workers organized by an early union, the Workmen’s Benevolent Association (WBA), to go on strike. While peaceful activity characterized most of the strike, at one point striking miners burned a major coal breaker. After five weeks, the two companies agreed to a one-time pay increase, and miners returned to work.

Labor troubles cropped up again in January of 1871, in the form of the “Long Strike” or “Six Months Strike.” After coal companies announced higher than anticipated rate cuts in response to falling coal prices—from $1.31 per car to $0.86—the WBA announced a general miners’ strike throughout the region. When the WBA had made little progress by April, a group of predominantly German miners resumed work at the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western’s Hampton Mine in the Hyde Park section of Scranton. As these strikebreakers traveled to and from the mines each day, crowds of striking miners accosted them with “hootings and jeers and assaults with opprobrious epithets,” for breaking ranks. On April 7th—Good Friday—striking miners resorted to physical violence against those going to work in the mines. As Hitchcock writes:

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35 The WBA had effectively organized many coal miners by the time of the 1869 and 1871 strikes, and a number of other unions also organized successfully in Scranton during the period. See Kenny, Kevin. Making Sense of the Molly Maguires. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
36 Throop 313
37 For more info on how this happened in Schuylkill Co., a description of the Workingmen’s Benevolent Association, and of the 1869 strike, see Kenny, Making Sense of the Molly Maguires 131-156
38 Throop 314; Hitchcock 488
39 Throop 314
40 Hitchcock 488
The whole town seemed to be in the hands of a lawless mob. Men going to work were seized and badly beaten, one of the breakers that was in operation was deliberately burned and a thousand rioters marched the streets with drawn revolvers and muskets, defying the police and civil authorities.\textsuperscript{41}

In response to this violence, Mayor William Monies requested military intervention from the Governor of Pennsylvania, and the following day units of the Pennsylvania National Guard arrived in Scranton.\textsuperscript{42}

Despite the involvement of state troops, miners steadfastly refused to end the strike. On April 25\textsuperscript{th}, the \textit{New York Times} reported that,

If mine operators refuse to meet strikers’ demands, “the strike would continue until the starvation point was reached, because the miners felt that their dignity and manhood was interested in refusing to accept the exact terms for which they refused to work.”\textsuperscript{43}

On May 13\textsuperscript{th}, the Delaware and Hudson offered to allow miners to resume work at 93 ½ cents per car. While union members rejected this offer, the \textit{New York Times} points out that it divided striking miners between those willing to hold out for greater concessions and those who felt that “they must do something to obtain food, and that at once.”\textsuperscript{44}

As the strike continued, more miners became willing to resume work, and in early May the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company opened up the Briggs’ Shaft mine in Hyde Park. Daily life for those working at the mine settled into an uneasy rhythm: each day, a group of National Guardsmen and armed workers led by William W. Scranton, then the superintendent of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company, marched to and from the mines, while an angry crowd of striking Welsh miners gathered around the group to

\textsuperscript{41} Hitchcock 489
\textsuperscript{42} Hitchcock 489
\textsuperscript{43} "Probability of the Present Strike Continuing." \textit{New York Times}, April 25, 1871
\textsuperscript{44} “The Coal Suspension.” \textit{New York Times} May 12, 1871.
scream insults and make “threatening gestures.”45 On May 17th, this daily ritual devolved into violence, as striking miners began throwing stones at the procession, provoking an armed worker to fire a single shot which killed two men in the crowd.46 According to a Sergeant in the National Guard detachment, as the crowd fled and the Guardsmen and armed workers prepared to fire, William Scranton shouted, “don’t fire, boys; that will do,” and lifted up the men’s muskets to prevent them shooting.47 According to members of the crowd, however, Scranton had yelled, “fire, boys.”48 The Sergeant also claimed that both men killed were throwing stones at the workers, while The Scranton Times, a Democratic paper, claimed that neither of the men killed had participated in the violence, and in fact one man had been on an errand to get medicine for his sick child.49

While authorities promptly arrested Kearns, the worker who had fired his rifle, this incident plunged the already divided city into chaos. The following day, May 18th, Alderman Jones, a Welsh elected official in Hyde Park, issued a warrant for the arrest of William Scranton, and two companies of soldiers were required to protect him during his transit to the county seat at Wilkes-Barre for trial.50 On May 19th, 8,000 people attended the funerals for the two men killed, and every business in Hyde Park closed. On the same day, WBA members decided to resume work at a rate of 93 ½ cents per cart—the same offer they had declined a week previously.51 On May 20th, after his friends posted bail for him, William W. Scranton posted bail for Kearns, who returned to Scranton. Upon recognizing Kearns, however, a large, armed group of miners chased him through the

45 Hitchcock 489; Throop notes that ten workers were armed with Winchester rifles 316
47 Hitchcock 490
49 Hitchcock 490
streets until he arrived in an area of the city protected by soldiers. Multiple fights occurred between those on opposing sides of the labor divide on the night of May 20th, and Irish laborers even required the protection of a National Guard company after receiving credible information that a crowd of Welsh miners would attack them. As the New York Times reported, “the excitements at this hour is intense, many of the soldiers are intoxicated and there is little security for either life or property.”

Events in Scranton quickly calmed down, however, and members of the WBA voted to resume work throughout the city. Despite this resumption, however, the class-based animosity revealed by the 1871 strikes continued, and the interests and opinions of labor and capital continued to diverge widely. The strikes and disorder of 1871 represented a sudden and radical expression of feelings and conflicts that had been developing since 1860, but were obscured by extraordinary economic growth resulting from the Civil War. As the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company (with Thomas Dickson as its president) pointed out in its 1871 shareholders’ report,

During the war the rapid increase in the demand for coal stimulated production beyond precedent, forced higher rates for mining than were paid by any other branch or industry, and attracted to the mines a larger number of men than could be profitably employed when business returned to its natural channel.

Members of the WBA sought to challenge the “natural channel” of business, however, by seeking not just higher wages, but a role in the business’s production decisions and a stake in the overall well-being of the company. The Delaware and Hudson characterized this position as committing shareholders’ property “to the care and

direction of an irresponsible organization.” This disagreement underscores the fact that the strikes during 1871 were only partially about wages. At a deeper level, they reflected miners’ desires to participate in society and the economy as producers, and conversely reflected business owners’ unwillingness to cede control of production.

Thomas Dickson articulated one of the most inflexible manifestations of the capital ideology during the period, both relative to labor and relative to other companies. Following the 1871 strikes, the New York Times reported that Dickson was “roundly censured by the entire business public,” for proving so inflexible in negotiating with his employees that the strike lasted longer than it would have otherwise. If he did not allow higher wages or cede control of production decisions during the strike, however, he was certainly willing to relinquish some control over his company’s production to a cartel including other, potentially competing railroads, with the aim of controlling coal transportation and pricing and mitigating the unpredictability of the business cycle. In 1872, Thomas Dickson complained to the Board of the Delaware and Hudson that “jealousies of producers prevented concert of action,” and as a result the company lost money on each ton of coal it shipped. In 1873 Dickson decided to join forces with other railroads to form “America’s first industry-wide price-fixing agreement.” The presidents of participating companies—including the Delaware and Hudson and the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western—formed a “Board of Control,” which had authority to examine each company’s books to ensure compliance with the rules of the combination. As Dickson wrote at the time, companies should join together to avoid

58 Healey 254-5
59 Healey 256
“exhausting their resources in ruinous competition.”60 This arrangement lasted from 1873 to 1876, when market pressures inherent in any cartel led to overproduction and the collapse of the combination.

Even at the same time that Dickson fought combined labor and attempted to break strikes by playing ethnicities against each other (as will be examined in the next chapter), he adamantly supported combined capital. One fellow railroad president even went so far as to refer to this tendency as “Dickson’s hobby of restricted production.”61 Already by 1871, two distinct classes with opposing objectives operated in Scranton—labor and capital. Industrial combination was a boon to industry, but a lose-lose proposition for coal miners: restricted production led to fewer hours worked and prolonged periods of inactivity, but with the collapse of the cartel coal prices plummeted and the companies cut wages. Coal companies lowered wages by ten percent at the end of 1874, and again by fifteen percent at the end of 1876.62 These wage cuts, combined with a number of politically, socially and ethnically polarizing incidents, had reawakened the still unanswered questions regarding the relation of labor and capital raised by the 1871 strikes. During the summer of 1877, three major events exacerbated the already tense relationship between labor and capital, and underscored destabilizing ethnic divisions.

On June 21, 1877, a “mass execution” of citizens convicted of murder in connection with the Molly Maguires occurred in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.63 The Molly Maguires, a secret Irish society which utilized targeted violence against mine company representatives to win concessions from the companies, quickly became ingrained in the

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60 Healey 253
61 Healey 273
62 Throop 316
63 Kenny 225
public’s imagination, and the trials leading up to the execution became a point of extraordinary contention between Irish workers and their employers. Employers obviously feared a murderous secret society with motives opposing their own, and the Molly Maguires became a symbol of physical violence perpetrated by Irish workers. Conversely, Irish workers condemned the trials leading up to the executions as unfair, and indeed a recent historian even writes of one capital trial that, “It is difficult to imagine how, under normal conditions, a verdict of guilty could have been reached in this case.”

In 1876, the efforts of a number of wealthy citizens, working through a group called the Taxpayers’ Association, succeeded at securing the conviction of Frank Beamish, the Irish leader of Scranton’s predominantly Irish Democratic Party, on charges of corruption. Frederick Hitchcock, a supporter of the Taxpayers’ Association, characterized Beamish as “a smaller edition of New York’s Boss Tweed,” who “not only manipulated political offices but had gotten his hands into the funds of the public schools.” A group of Beamish’s supporter, however, held a meeting on June 23, of 1877, which concluded that the prosecution was, “prompted by partisan hate and a desire on the part of political opponents to get rid of a rival who stood in the way of their peculations, jobberies and frauds.”

Unionization activity had also increased greatly in the period leading up to the summer of 1877, as the national depression lasting from 1873 to 1878 exacerbated the difficulties faced by laborers everywhere. Terence Powderly quit his job at the Dickson Manufacturing Company to become a full-time labor organizer for the Knights of Labor

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64 Kenny 227
65 Hitchcock 493
66 Hitchcock 495
in May of 1877, and by July, District Assembly 5, which included Scranton, boasted 108 subsidiary assemblies. Powderly later wrote that, “although the [organizational] work was carried on at fever heat, not a word concerning the order was breathed above a whisper, not a sentence that could be understood as having a bearing on the organization appeared in the press.”

When the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company announced a wage cut effective July 1, the Knights quickly and quietly used the announcement as an opportunity to recruit more members at the company.

Wealthy citizens of Scranton attempted to address rising unrest by appointing a new director of the Scranton Poor District, who changed the name of the institution from the “Providence Poor Farm” to the “Hillside Home,” and according to the generous assessment of Benjamin Throop, “He found the place a disgrace; He left it a paradise for the poor.” These efforts did little to mitigate the tension in the city, leading Powderly himself to attempt diffuse the situation by pleading with Mayor McKune to create public works projects and enact relief schemes, but the Mayor’s apparent agreement to Powderly’s suggestions and subsequent inaction earned him the title of “slippery Bob.”

On July 14th, railroad workers at Martinsburg, West Virginia, went on strike, and came into violent conflict with soldiers arriving to restore order. This set off a chain of strikes and violence that extended to cities throughout the country and became known as the “Great Railroad Strike.” Within this charged environment, on July 22, brakemen employed by the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad met in Scranton and petitioned Samuel Sloan, the president of their company, to return wages to 1876 levels.

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67 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 198
66 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 198
69 Throop 151
70 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 25
After receiving a negative reply from Sloan the next day, the brakemen stopped operating trains, and that same day workers at the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company ceased production. On July 25, miners employed by the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western—who could not work as long as the brakemen refused to operate trains—began striking after Sloan refused their request for a 25 percent advance on their wages. The strike gripped the town completely: on July 25th, and the Scranton Republican reported that “The spirit of unrest impregnates the very atmosphere, and the contagion of discontent is borne on every breeze.” Indeed, unprecedented labor unrest characterized the summer of 1877 throughout the nation, with strikes occurring in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Reading, New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Ohio, Chicago, Saint Louis, San Francisco, along major railways, and in many smaller towns.

In the face of the strike, Mayor McKune took two actions. First, he issued a statement that urged citizens to remain peaceful and avoid property destruction. Second, and unbeknownst to the vast majority of Scranton’s citizens, McKune organized a quasi-legal group of “special policemen” from among the Civil War veterans and prominent citizens residing in the city. William W. Scranton commanded this group, armed its members with Remington rifles purchased by the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company, and volunteered the company’s store as a base of operations. The group agreed to meet in the case of an emergency, which would be signaled by “violent and continued ringing of the bell of the First Presbyterian Church.”

72 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 205-207
73 Hitchcock 497
75 Hitchcock 497
76 Hitchcock 500
77 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 215
78 Hitchcock 500
On July 31, the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western’s brakemen returned to work, and the company’s striking coal miners, along with striking employees of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company and the Dickson Manufacturing Company, called a meeting for the next day at Round Woods, a point outside the city, to discuss resuming work. Later that afternoon, however, a rumor circulated that the location of the meeting had changed to the silk mill, although this news did not reach the meeting’s organizers. The next day, between 5,000 and 6,000 men gathered at the silk mill, but without the stabilizing presence of those leaders who had called the meeting in the first place. Speeches at the silk mill “were calculated to appeal to the passions, rather than the reason,” of the workers, and the chaos at the meeting allowed a man to push his way to the front of the crowd and read an incendiary (and probably forged) letter. While the man’s identity and the exact contents of the letter have been lost to history, the letter purportedly was written by William W. Scranton, who claimed that he would have his employees working for a ridiculously low wage, or else either he or they (sources differ) would be buried in a culm pile. Incensed by the letter, a sizable portion of the crowd armed themselves with sundry implements of destruction and proceeded into the city, forcibly driving workers out of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company shops and looting stores.

When news of the mob reached Mayor McKune, he ordered the “Citizens’ Corps” to assemble. The group gathered at the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company’s store, armed itself, and proceeded down Lackawanna Avenue. Meanwhile, McKune

79 30 Years 211
80 30 Years 212
81 Martin 205; Powderly Thirty Years of Labor 213
82 Hitchcock 501
approached the mob in an attempt to disperse it, only to have his jaw broken by a club-wielding rioter.\textsuperscript{83} The Citizens’ Corps arrived on the scene, and the mob promptly began hurling insults, clubs and stones at the armed group. At this point, Powderly claims, Mayor McKune, “with blood streaming down his face gave the order to fire.” Frederick Hitchcock, who was present and fired his rifle as part of the Citizens’ Corps, claims that pistol shots from the mob wounded a member of the Corps before the Corps began shooting.\textsuperscript{84} Regardless, the Corps fired three volleys into the crowd, killing three rioters, wounding about twenty, and quickly dispersing the crowd. As a book written in the months following the riots describes,

The ghastly picture presented upon the street as they left was horrible. On the corner near Hunt’s store lay a man with the top of his head torn off and his blood and brains scattered upon the sidewalk. Three others in the street were struggling in the death agony. The sounds of the firing had scarcely ceased when Father Dunn returned to carry comfort to the dying…\textsuperscript{85}

Following the incident, the Mayor declared martial law and telegraphed the Governor of Pennsylvania for assistance. In response, the governor promised to lead 4,000 troops from Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia to Scranton, although they would not arrive until early the next morning.\textsuperscript{86}

The citizens’ corps patrolled the city throughout the night, and repelled an attack on William W. Scranton’s house. By dawn, however, a mob had assembled at the train depot, and was threatening to loot a freight train when the Governor’s force arrived by rail:

[W]ith two Gatling guns on a platform car in front of the engine, glistening in the moonlight, and hundreds of bayonets sticking out of the

\textsuperscript{84} Powderly, \textit{Thirty Years of Labor} 217; Hitchcock 502
\textsuperscript{85} Martin 209
\textsuperscript{86} Martin 210
car windows, the effect was miraculous. There was an instant stampede made for the fields and mountains, and in five minutes not a man was to be seen about the depot.87

The next day, August 3, the Governor met with representatives of the striking miners, who asked him if he could help them broker a deal with their employers. The Governor replied, “I haven’t come here, gentlemen, to represent anybody but the State of Pennsylvania and the people, to preserve the peace…I doubt whether I could be made arbitrator, as I represent the State, and merely come here to execute the laws.”88 The state, in other words, still did not provide an institutional framework for workers to address their grievances.

The aftermath of the strikes of 1877 proved remarkably similar to the aftermath of the strikes of 1871. An Alderman from a working-class section of Scranton issued warrants for 52 members of the citizens’ corps, including William W. Scranton, all of whom were transported to Wilkes-Barre under heavy guard to protect them from mob violence.89 Little came of these arrests, however; when the case went to trial the jury returned a verdict of “not guilty” for every man charged.90 Strikers held out for a few more months, with some even hiring themselves out to farmers in the countryside in exchange for provisions.91 On October 16, 1877, at a mass meeting at Round Woods, the intended site of the meeting on August 1, striking coal miners decided to return to work at the same conditions as before the strike.92 The failure of the 1877 strike did not surprise Terence Powderly, who had counseled calm throughout the difficulties. “Those

87 Martin 213
88 Martin 215-216
89 Hitchcock 509-510
90 Hitchcock 511
91 Martin 217
92 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 219
who know human nature know that when violence is once invoked in a labor trouble,” he later wrote, “the odds are from that time against the success of the strikers.”93

By 1877, the residents of Scranton were deeply divided on almost every issue related to society, labor, and business. The ideological gulf between Terence Powderly and Thomas Dickson, the two men described throughout this chapter, represents the fault line in Scranton which had been growing since 1860, and which became glaringly obvious with the riots that took hold of the city during the summer of 1877. While both men condemned the strikers for resorting to mob violence, they and their associates disagreed thoroughly in their interpretation of the particular circumstances surrounding the events that summer. Powderly later wrote that he faulted three people for the riots—William W. Scranton, for giving the “shoot to kill” order; Mayor McKune, for allowing what Powderly viewed as the private army of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company to act under the auspices of the law; and the unidentified man who incited the riot by reading the forged letter. “If ever a man was accountable for the blood of his fellow man,” Powderly wrote, “the writer of that letter stands in the sight of heaven a red-handed murderer.”94

While Dickson’s associates also condemned the violence, they viewed the incident quite differently. Dickson served as a director of the First National Bank of Scranton, a company which issued an official history in 1906, when Thomas Dickson’s brother George served as director and vice-president.95 The company’s history viewed the incident in simple terms: “the majesty of the law was asserted in the voice of the

93 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 215
94 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor 213
95 The author of this thesis found this book on Google Books, and found that the digitized copy of the volume had been signed by George Dickson.
firearms, and several men offered up their lives as a sacrifice to their misguided judgment and unlawful energy.”96 Dickson’s Presbyterian preacher, S.C. Logan, agreed that the mob, a “brainless monster with a cowardly heart” had to be destroyed with “quick and remorseless force,” and viewed the violence as an inevitable outgrowth of the strikes, which “are to mobs what the egg is to the viper.”97

The central disagreement between Powderly and Dickson came down to whether labor provided the basis for all wealth, or whether it only represented one factor of production, like land and capital. If labor was only valuable in combination with land and capital, it required an entrepreneur or businessman to utilize effectively. Thomas Dickson almost certainly agreed with the consensus articulated by S.C. Logan, who Dickson’s family chose to write his biography. In his book on the riots, A City’s Danger and Defense, Logan writes that by 1877, “Labor, both skilled and unskilled, had learned to place a value upon itself that past experience had never justified.”98 Logan’s treatment of labor in his biography of Dickson is perhaps more telling. While Logan writes that “it had been [Dickson’s] life-work to employ and serve” his employees, Logan elsewhere lumps laborers and animals together in describing Dickson’s responsibilities as president of the Delaware and Hudson:

There was live stock, in the way of hundreds of horses and mules, with all the supplies and equipments necessary to their efficient use; and with these the immense care included in the active superintendence and control of miners, and other employees of all sorts.99

96 History of the First National Bank of Scranton 63
98 Logan, A City’s Danger and Defense 6
99 Logan, The Life of Thomas Dickson: A Memorial 97, 56
Unsurprisingly, Powderly disagreed completely: he viewed labor as the “foundation and cause of national prosperity,” and the ultimate source of all wealth. Empowered by the ideals which Powderly articulated, laborers and workers dissatisfied with the status quo of falling wages and job insecurity in Scranton during the 1860s and 1870s attempted to assert themselves through unions, strikes and eventually violence, but the failure of this strategy became evident when the strikes of 1871 and 1877 ended in bloodshed and a resounding defeat for workers.

On August 3, 1877, the day after the arrival of state troops, a reporter for the Philadelphia Times wrote:

My eyes fill with tears as I write when I recall the wretchedness which encountered me on every hand to-day in a miners’ settlement which I visited west of this city. Most of the men know me, but they seemed inclined to shrink away on seeing my approach, ashamed to meet me and their wretchedness at the same time. Years ago they were, comparatively speaking, well off, but now, between the poor house and the mine, the former is far preferable for them…They will be peaceable while the soldiers are here, but when they go away they will have many a grievance to redress from their standpoint.

With the failure of violence, miners and workers in Scranton searched for a new avenue through which to improve their conditions in life. It was in this context that Terence Powderly announced his candidacy for mayor of the city.

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100 Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor
101 Martin 214
Chapter 3: A Knight in Shining Armor?
1877-1886

He took up the work by others left undone
and after doing his part turns it over to other hands to finish

Terence Powderly’s Self-Written Epitaph
Undated

You may look around and see two groups here: white collar and blue collar. But I don’t see it that way- you know why not? Because I am collar blind.

-Michael Scott, The Office
If Terence Powderly was right when he wrote that “discontent is the breeder of ambition,” Scranton’s workers must have been an ambitious group by the fall of 1877. In the wake of the previous summer’s riots, the business interests of Scranton transformed the hastily-organized citizens’ corps into a formally structured City Guard, armed and equipped by the major businesses and leading residents of Scranton. Thomas Dickson, the President of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company at the time, resided in New York during the strike. As one member of the guard wrote,

[Dickson] was always a man of peace…Hence he was always a little doubtful of the wisdom and necessity of dispersing with deadly means the mob which he did not see. Nevertheless he sustained, with characteristic generosity, all the measures undertaken to establish a City Guard of the best character.  

The Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company donated company land for use as a firing range for the newly formed Guard, and William W. Scranton and an associate purchased metal targets for rifle practice. National Guard troops remained in the city for over three months after the August 1st riots to deter any further violence, and only departed in November after the ceremonious laying of the cornerstone for the Scranton City Guard’s armory. By the fall of 1877, workers in Scranton realized that they could not assert themselves through violence.

Conditions for workers in Scranton deteriorated following the violence of 1877. After returning to work at pre-strike wages, coal miners found workplace safety worse than ever: more mine accidents occurred in the area around Scranton in 1878 than in any

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2 Logan, A City’s Danger and Defense 233
3 Logan, A City’s Danger and Defense 274
4 Hitchcock 516, 515
other year during the nineteenth century. Combined with low wages and terrible working conditions, miners had to contend with cyclical changes in the price of coal. To make matters worse, coal producers and railways formed numerous, short-lived industrial combinations to control production, which served to worsen the boom-and-bust cycle of demand for miners’ work. In December of 1877, for example, high levels of production brought on by the collapse of one combination caused coal prices to drop to an all-time low, but by early 1878 another, almost identical combination had “resumed business as usual,” causing both the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western and the Delaware and Hudson companies to cut coal output to about half of the previous year’s levels. This economic situation further crystallized class distinctions, and by 1880 a tight-knit group of forty “economic leaders” served as partners, directors or officers of multiple companies in Scranton.7

Terence Powderly’s Knights of Labor benefited more than almost any other group from the 1877 strike. During the summer, Powderly had busied himself by organizing boycotts of merchants opposing the strike, establishing a cooperative grocery store, expanding the Knights of Labor apparatus throughout the region to accommodate the large numbers of striking miners who wanted to join the union, and making preparations to enter the political arena.8 By the fall of 1877, the Knights of Labor membership in Luzerne Country had ballooned to 18,000.9 The year before the strikes, Powderly had become interested in the Greenback-Labor Party, a nascent national movement formed by an alliance between labor and farmers. The farmer contingent derived its nickname from

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5 Hitchcock 75  
6 Healey 269, 270  
7 Folsom 43  
8 Phelan Grand Master Workman 27  
9 Powderly, The Path I Trod 68
its support for the introduction of “greenbacks,” or paper currency, which it hoped would spur inflation, and thereby make debts easier to pay off while stimulating industry.\footnote{Fine, Nathan. Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States: 1828-1928. New York: Russell and Russell, 1961. Page 64.} While the Knights of Labor did not endorse candidates, many Knights supported the party, and the national organization quietly worked to help organize the movement. Powderly participated in this effort by organizing a Greenback Labor club, but the party fared poorly in the 1876 elections, leading Powderly to suspect the established political parties of fraud.\footnote{Falzone, Vincent J. “Terence V. Powderly: Mayor and Labor Leader, 1849-1893.” University of Maryland: Dissertation. 1970. Page 36.; Powderly, The Path I Trod 68}

Powderly encouraged Knights of Labor assemblies to establish separate “Committees on Progress,” which sent delegates to a convention held in September of 1877 to nominate a slate of Greenback-Labor candidates for county elections in November. Powderly campaigned tirelessly in the run-up to the election, enlisted thousands of Knights throughout the county as poll-watchers on election day, and assigned 900 Knights of Labor to stand guard outside the county courthouse to prevent ballot tampering.\footnote{Gallagher, John. “Scranton and Labor Politic, 1870-1884.” Catholic Univeristy of America: Dissertation, 1961. Page 76.} Laborers were desperate for some means to improve their station in life in the wake of the failed strikes the past summer, and Powderly was deadly serious in his devotion to fair elections: he brought rope with him to the courthouse and in a speech to supporters proclaimed, “[i]f we find that the ballot boxes have been stuffed as on previous elections and ascertain the identity of the scoundrels who do it, let us hang every one of them.”\footnote{Powderly, The Path I Trod 69} The Greenback-Labor party won all five positions it contested, and the
party turned its attention to the upcoming election for mayor of Scranton. To truly understand electoral politics in Scranton, however, one must understand the role of ethnicity in the city.

In 1877 three major immigrant groups dominated the population of Scranton: the Irish, the Germans, and the Welsh, in that order. A few thousand English and Scottish immigrants lived in the city, but because they differed little from native-born Americans, neither group developed a distinct identity. Irish immigrants to Scranton generally composed the lower class in the city; many had emigrated from agrarian communities in Ireland and had no industrial skills. Almost every Irish immigrant practiced Catholicism, and the Catholic Church played a central role in Irish social life. Irish politicians dominated the local Democratic Party machine, but the party relied on an uneasy political alliance between Germans and the Irish. In contrast to the Irish, Germans immigrants did not maintain a distinctive and unified ethnic identity because they were divided between Catholics and Protestants and also between skilled and unskilled workers.

The Welsh were the third largest immigrant group in Scranton, but the city was home to the largest Welsh community in the United States. The Welsh dominated the Hyde Park section of the city to such an extent that “in its outward appearances at least, Hyde Park was a mini-Wales. Here Welsh postmen walked along Welsh-named streets to

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14 Phelan Grand Master Workman 28
17 Dolan 107
18 Jones 12
19 Jones 15
deliver letters from Wales to Welsh homes.” Scranton’s Welsh immigrants generally emigrated from industrial areas in Wales, and arrived in Scranton with critical skills in mining, iron manufacturing and other industries. As a result, coal companies utilized so many Welsh managers and supervisors that the Welsh “enjoyed a near-monopoly of such positions of power and responsibility” which they then used to consolidate their ethnicity’s status by helping other Welsh workers. Benjamin Hughes, the Welsh superintendent in charge of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railway’s underground mining operations, often wrote to his subordinates in Welsh to inform them of disciplinary infractions without alerting his superiors. This favoritism continued at the level of the Welsh mine foremen, who consistently gave the best work assignments to Welsh miners, and understandably earned the ire of their Irish and German employees. The fortunes of most of the Welsh in Scranton fluctuated with the coal industry, and this insecurity created a tight ethnic community. Because of their favored positions within the business establishment, the Welsh consistently voted with the Republican Party, which their employers dominated.

Supporters of Scranton’s Greenback-Labor party believed that their organization could transcend the ethnic divisions of the Democrat-Republican split by emphasizing clean government and effective municipal services, and the party nominated Powderly as its mayoral candidate. Although initially unwilling to accept the nomination, he ultimately acceded in a characteristic fit of contrarianism after someone questioned his

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20 Jones 27  
21 Jones xix  
22 Jones 31, 33  
23 Jones 35  
24 Jones 43
suitability as a candidate. In response to Powderly’s entry into the race, the Democratic and Republican parties joined forces to form a “Citizen’s Party,” which nominated a Welsh Civil War veteran in a transparent attempt to siphon votes from Powderly through ethnic division. Powderly viewed his campaign as a socially transformative movement, and emphasized the need for worker solidarity to avoid becoming “slaves to liquor and political boss rule.” More pragmatically, Powderly promised to pay down the city’s debt, reform the antiquated tax system, and imprison corrupt officials.

In the midst of the mayoral campaign, on January 1, 1878, the Knights of Labor held their first national congress at Reading, Pennsylvania, and elected Philadelphia Uriah Stephens as Grand Master Workman. Powderly played an important leadership role at the convention, and heavily influenced the preamble to the organization’s constitution, which called for workplace safety laws, strike arbitration, the eight hour day, and equal pay for men and women. Most importantly, the preamble called for making “industrial and moral worth, not wealth, the true standard of individual and national greatness,” and establishing cooperative manufacturing and transportation industries. The Knights of Labor explicitly recruited members from across gender, skill, occupational, ethnic, racial, and geographical divides, and sought to better the lives of this diverse group by reforming society at a fundamental level.

In the month following the Knights’ convention, Powderly won the Scranton mayoral election by just 500 votes. He became the youngest mayor of the city in April,

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25 Powderly, The Path I Trod 72
26 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 30
27 Powderly, The Path I Trod 75
28 Falzone 47
29 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 32
1878, and the first mayor that did not belong to either of the two major parties. 31
Scranton’s residents re-elected Powderly in 1880, again on the Greenback-Labor ticket, but by 1882 the Greenback-Labor Party had deteriorated to such a degree that Powderly had to run as a Democrat to win a third term. 32 In 1879, Powderly replaced Uriah Stephens as the Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, and from 1879 until 1884 Powderly served a dual role as Mayor of Scranton and leader of the Knights.

Upon taking office as mayor, Powderly quickly followed up on his campaign promises to improve the efficiency of municipal government by firing the entire police force, with the exception of the Democratic chief of police, who Powderly viewed as one of the most honorable and honest men in the United States. 33 Powderly replaced every other policeman with Greenback-Labor and Knights of Labor allies who, despite the partisan overtones of their appointment, proved very effective. 34 Early in his first term as mayor, Powderly asserted his authority as the sole “peace officer of the city” by arresting a number of armed members of the Scranton City Guard—which at the time had no legal standing—for “inciting to riot by parading around with firearms.” 35 Successful businessmen in Scranton initially distrusted Powderly completely. Early in Powderly’s first term as mayor, S.C. Logan, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and later the biographer of Thomas Dickson, led a meeting of the “best people” to “discuss the feasibility of removing from the city.” 36

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32 Wenzel 25; Phelan, Grand Master Workman 102
33 Powderly, The Path I Trod 76
34 Falzone 64
35 Powderly, The Path I Trod 77
36 Powderly, The Path I Trod 76
Logan was not the only religious leader who voiced concerns about Powderly’s role as mayor, however. About a month after Powderly assumed the mayor’s office, the Bishop of Scranton fumed to the press,

I warned you against these pernicious secret societies... We have one instance of it in this city in a man who has hoodwinked the workingman into electing him mayor. He is a busybody and a slanderer. He has circulated the rumor that I have approved one of these secret societies; I have not even considered it. He is a fraud, an imposter, and I warn you against his scheming. Beware of being misled by such a character. Have nothing to do with him!  

The Knights of Labor maintained strict secrecy until 1878, and as a result the Catholic Church viewed the organization and its initiation rituals with intense suspicion. Irish Catholics composed a huge portion of the Knights’ membership, and avoiding condemnation by the Church took on huge importance for the union. Largely in response to opposition from the Catholic Church, the national assembly of the Knights of Labor decided in 1879 to allow individual assemblies to decide whether to remain secret. This half-measure was not enough, as a Jesuit mission to Scranton in 1881 led to more attacks on the Knights of Labor and incited defections from the union.

At the Knight’s 1881 convention in Detroit, delegates voted to make the name of the union public and drop the requirement of an oath of loyalty—both actions that the delegates hoped would appease the Catholic hierarchy. The Knights still maintained secret rituals, however, and the Pastoral Letter of 1884 issued by American bishops held that any society that bound its members to secrecy or required obedience to orders  

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37 Wenzel 25  
38 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 36  
39 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 72  
40 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 77-78
emanating from its leaders “puts itself outside the limits of approval.” Powderly began writing letters to Bishops throughout the country, and formed an especially close bond with Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, who believed Powderly to be a “devout and conservative Catholic.” Powderly viewed his labor ideology and faith as inseparable:

Christ, if I read Him aright, did not die for the unjust rich man any more than He did for the lazy, poor man. He lived and worked for the industrious poor, for them He agitated, for them He died. He could have lived and been honored by the rich of that day. He elected to die rather than pay such a price for life…

In 1887, Gibbons wrote a letter to Rome on behalf of the Knights of Labor, and in 1888 the Vatican decided to tolerate the Knights. More importantly, the questions raised by the Knights of Labor factored into Pope Leo XIII’s decision to issue the encyclical Rerum Novarum in 1891, which unambiguously affirmed the right of laborers to unionize, and removed serious obstacles to future labor organizers throughout the world.

Despite the initial concerns of religious figures, Powderly’s moderation and efficacy as mayor slowly won over many of his critics. He quickly fell into the role of a highly effective magistrate, and his first report as mayor emphasized the necessary if mundane tasks of eliminating sidewalk obstructions, purchasing street lights, dealing with

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42 “Knights and the Church”, undated clipping. Terence V. Powderly Papers, Mullen Library, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., Box 119.
43 Powderly, *The Path I Trod.* 39
prison overcrowding, and appointing a police surgeon. Mayor Powderly also passed ordinances to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and prohibit the sale of adulterated foods. Powderly maintained a balance between standardizing the city’s practices and laws while still maintaining personal relations with residents and dealing with conflicts in an informal and conciliatory manner whenever possible. This management style “enabled him to attain the unquestioned support of the community,” and contributed greatly to his personal popularity.

Powderly also threw himself into the decades-long battle to make Scranton the seat of a new county, which would allow Scranton to finally break free from the administrative influence of the neighboring city of Wilkes-Barre. The campaign preceding the referendum on forming the new county brought prominent citizens from across Scranton’s ideological spectrum together, and Powderly served as the corresponding secretary of the committee to create Lackawanna County. Spirits ran high throughout the city when the vote finally succeeded on April 17, 1878:

None who witnessed the grand celebration of the victory can ever forget it. The city was illuminated from one end to the other. Bells rang, whistles blew, bands played, thousands sung, shouted and cheered. The streets were light as day and the weird, fantastic rejoicing below was mirrored toward the blue dome above in the kaleidoscopic colors of fire-works of every description. Good nature reigned everywhere...

The response to the organization of Lackawanna County demonstrated that despite their many differences, residents of Scranton shared an intense civic pride. This universal emphasis on the well-being of the community recalls the Village Blacksmith ideal, and in

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47 Falzone 62
48 Falzone 94
49 Throop 157-8
fact during his time as mayor, Powderly worked to encourage the parallel development of Scranton’s business interests and its working class. At a banquet held in celebration of the formation of the new county, William W. Scranton proclaimed,

We want good government; we want law and order; we want moderate taxation. If you will give us these things, we will prosper and foster these little industries, and, in our time, we will take care of you.  

Powderly delivered on all three, and in his efforts to attract industries to Scranton even went so far as to solicit and publish circus man P.T. Barnum’s testimonial that the city had recovered from the violence of 1877.  

Terence Powderly believed that the interests of business and labor coincided, but realized that his success in fostering a favorable business climate would only benefit workers if he could fundamentally change the way that business related to labor. Powderly initially proposed a radical new tax system based on economist Henry George’s theories. George, the author of Progress and Poverty, worked from the assumption that natural resources—like coal—comprised the shared inheritance of all people, and that corporations which extracted value from land ownership should share their profits with society. Scranton’s City Council quickly voted down Powderly’s taxation scheme, as well as his less radical—but still ambitious—plans to municipalize the gas and water works and establish a cooperative boot and shoe factory. While Mayor Powderly performed his administrative tasks effectively, his venture into the political world failed to achieve the type of basic social change at the heart of the Knights of Labor movement.

50 Throop 175  
51 Falzone 68  
52 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 33  
54 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 33
Industry in Scranton continued to expand throughout the 1880s. William W. Scranton left the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company after its board of directors proved reticent to expand, and formed the rival Scranton Steel Company in 1882 after touring steel mills throughout Europe with his chief engineer. The new company built state-of-the-art works in Scranton which incorporated the Bessemer process, and in 1885 William W. Scranton suspended operations at the facility to force his employees to sign a contract requiring them to give advance notice before quitting their jobs, and agreeing to forfeit two weeks’ worth of wages if they failed to comply. The New York Times reported that “sentiment was strong against signing the contract,” and Powderly took this opportunity to organize the affected workers into two Knights of Labor chapters. William W. Scranton had apparently not planned for organized resistance, and within a week he dropped his demands.

Throughout his tenure as mayor, Terence Powderly maintained his involvement in organizing workers around Scranton for the Knights of Labor. Even after workplaces were organized, he expended considerable energy in maintaining union strength and morale. Meanwhile, business owners worked just as hard to frustrate his efforts. The infiltration of the Knights of Labor assembly at the Dickson Manufacturing Company by company spies particularly disturbed Powderly, who condemned the infiltrators as “reptiles” with “no manhood.” By the fall of 1879, only 34 of the approximately 1,000 workers at Dickson Manufacturing belonged to the Knights. The 1879-1880 period

57 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 157
58 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 34
59 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 34; History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 409
marked a low point for the Knights, which Powderly attributed to the favorable economy, which “always thins the ranks of the trade union.”

The union grew slowly, and by 1883, Powderly devoted almost all of this time to managing strife within the Knights organization. As Craig Phelan writes, “chronic infighting, factionalism, intrigue, and disregard for authority were hallmarks of the Order from its very birth, and these problems grew along with the membership rolls.” The practical considerations of managing a large national union took a toll on the Knights’ ideological precepts, and by the mid-1880s the union downplayed its emphasis on cooperative forms of industrial production.

Despite the diminution of the Knight’s institutional emphasis on ideological issues, Terence Powderly proceeded from the belief that the nature of a system dominated by collaborative capital,

made it utterly impossible for [the worker] to properly guard his ‘inherent rights’ without associating with other men in an effort to overturn the existing conditions in the industrial world which made of him a serf in a land of liberty and sunshine.

He wanted workers to share in the extraordinary growth America experienced, but believed that workers could only accomplish this by fundamentally changing the way that society understood the three factors of production: land, labor and capital. Throughout his tenure as Grand Master Workman, Powderly expended huge amounts of energy working to advance ideas that would fundamentally change society. One of his dearest causes concerned preventing railroads and speculators from purchasing and profiting from public land, and he also supported proposals to reform the banking system and issue a

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60 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 77
61 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 114
62 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 139
63 Fine 119
national currency that would lead to inflation and therefore massive losses for the wealthy. Unfortunately for Powderly, a huge portion of members of the Knights of Labor viewed the strike as the union’s most effective strategy.

Unlike previous and subsequent labor leaders, Powderly did not think strikes could function as the primary means for workers to assert themselves. As early as 1880 he believed, “ Strikes are a failure. Ask any old veteran in the labor movement and he will say the same. I shudder at the thought of a strike, and I have good reason.”64 Indeed, Powderly’s skepticism regarding the efficacy of strikes accurately reflected his life experiences—the two major strikes he had witnessed in Scranton in 1871 and 1877 had each ended in violence and failed miserably. In his autobiography, Powderly wrote,

I regarded the strike as a system of warfare…Not once did I, during my fourteen years’ incumbency of the office of General Master Workman, order a strike. I wish to make that so plain to you that I cannot be misunderstood….65

The Knights of Labor devoted huge portions of their conventions to discussing strikes and lockouts, which Powderly characterized as “harassing details,” compared with the larger issues of land and banking reform.66

Local assemblies of the Knights of Labor often inaugurated strikes without consulting the national organization. Throughout the late nineteenth century, financier Jay Gould was one of the most powerful industrialists in the United States, and in many respects the personification of monopoly.67 Gould controlled a huge network of railroads in the Southwestern United States, and when he cut wages along these lines in early

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64 Fine 121
65 Powderly, The Path I Trod 105
66 Fine 120
1885, employees staged a spontaneous strike. The Knights quickly organized the striking workers, and the speed with which the Knights organized strikers caught Gould “with his pants down.” Within a month, Gould restored wages, but dismissed thousands of members of the Knights for their role in the strike.\(^{68}\) Powderly threatened a general strike of Gould’s lines in response, causing Gould to meet with the labor leader and promise to reinstate dismissed workers and cease discriminating against members of the Knights of Labor. The promise held little practical value, but served as a public symbol of victory for the Knights.\(^{69}\) Membership swelled, and by 1886 the union boasted 700,000 members throughout the nation.\(^{70}\)

If Powderly had trouble managing the Knights of Labor before 1885, by 1886 the union was an “ungovernable mob.”\(^{71}\) As the Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, Powderly had to supervise the extensive administrative affairs of the organization, maintain contact with the press, court public opinion, oversee multiple strikes, and formulate the Order’s political strategy. The union’s practical successes before 1886 generally depended on surprise, as exemplified by the strikes against William W. Scranton’s Scranton Iron Company and the strike against Jay Gould. While the strategy of surprise functioned well against wage cuts imposed by unprepared employers, the Knights did not have a support infrastructure in place for local assemblies involved in prolonged strikes. Powderly’s attempts to organize such an infrastructure and increase cohesion within the Knights’ organization inevitably ran up against resistance from local

\(^{68}\) Phelan, Grand Master Workman 158
\(^{69}\) Phelan, Grand Master Workman 160
\(^{70}\) Wenzel 25
\(^{71}\) Falzone 194
assemblies. Craig Phelan argues that these trends led the Knights to become a “decentralized, undisciplined, impoverished, and fractured movement still struggling to define its goals and strategies through democratic means.” In March of 1886, Knights of Labor members employed by Jay Gould’s Union Pacific railroad struck for higher wages without consulting Powderly, and continued the strike despite Powderly’s opposition. Gould had prepared for the strike, and quickly brought in private detectives and strikebreakers.

Powderly quickly recognized the futility of continuing the strike, but nonetheless devoted the Knights’ resources to the effort by calling for donations of funds to aid the strikers. On March 27th, Gould met with Powderly, consented to arbitration, and promised to allow every striking worker to return to work with no repercussions. Powderly ordered an end to the strike, and Gould promptly refused arbitration, claiming that Powderly had deceived him. This duplicity forced Powderly to reverse his previous order, and in a letter to a colleague, Powderly later wrote,

[Gould] is as untruthful as the devil and as full of tricks. He says in this morning’s dispatch that I deceived him, well if that is true then I will never go to hell for if I can deceive Gould then it will be an easy matter to get the best of the devil.

With the breakdown of communication between the Gould and the Knights of Labor, the strike continued.

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73 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 172
74 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 180
76 Phelan, Grand Master Workman 182
77 Letter from Terence Powderly to McDowell. April 13, 1886. Terence V. Powderly Papers, Mullen Library, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., Box 119.
In addition to confronting Gould and reigning in dissent within the Knights of Labor during 1886, Powderly had to manage relations with other unions. The most important of these, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, only organized skilled workers—in stark contrast to the Knights’ commitment to organizing all producers. The rival union called for a nationwide strike on May 1, 1886 in pursuit of the eight-hour workday, and despite Powderly’s resistance to the action, many Knights of Labor assemblies joined in the strikes.\(^78\) On May 4, anarchists demonstrating in Chicago attacked police with dynamite, and the police fired into the crowd.\(^79\) The “Haymarket Riot,” as the Chicago violence was known, had the exact same effect as the violence in 1871 and 1877—the strikes for the eight-hour day and against Gould’s railroad both ended, and public opinion turned overwhelmingly against the Knights of Labor, despite its lack of involvement in the violence.

These two major defeats signaled a turning point for the Knights of Labor. In the aftermath of the Haymarket Riots, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions reorganized itself into the American Federation of Labor, which also only admitted skilled workers. The Federation explicitly rejected the Knights’ commitment to social and political avenues for improving workers’ lives, and instead devoted itself fully to achieving higher wages, better working conditions and shorter workdays.\(^80\) Members of the Knights of Labor who worked in skilled trades defected en masse to the American Federation of Labor, and “by the end of 1886 [the Knights of Labor’s] fortunes had

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declined, and the labor union veered in the direction of dissolution and ultimate extinction.  

At first glance, Terence Powderly’s foray into the fields of politics and trade unionism between 1877 and 1886 seems like a failure. While he did succeed in building a broad-based union that brought together workers across gender, ethnic, religious and occupational lines, the Knights of Labor proved so unwieldy that,

[n]o single labor leader could have consistently led effective strike efforts by this huge, centralized, heterogeneous union against the combined forces of business, the press, and, after 1886, the public at large.  

Because of the instability inherent in its structure, the Knights of Labor organization could not prioritize its transformative goals of reforming society, nationalizing the communications, transportation and banking infrastructure, and creating cooperative forms of industrial production.  

Similarly, while Powderly served as an efficient and generally respected mayor, he failed to achieve his most ambitious plans, and ultimately lost his bid for a fourth term to Frank Beamish, the head of Scranton’s Democratic party machine, in 1884.  

By 1886, Powderly’s career had fizzled, and Scranton reverted to two-party politics and a trade union vacuum.

Terence Powderly’s contribution to the progress of Scranton—and to the labor movement as a whole—can best be understood through his self-penned epitaph cited at the beginning of this chapter: Powderly built on the accomplishments of previous labor leaders, and subsequent labor leaders also built on his legacy. The Knights of Labor set a precedent of a national union defeating a national business interest, helped to secure the

81 Falzone 194
82 Falzone 11
83 Voss 86
84 Wenzel 26
Catholic Church’s approval of unions, and at a fundamental level caused American workers to view themselves as a unitary class with shared interests, if only for a brief period.\textsuperscript{85} Just as importantly, the Knights’ downfall provided two fundamental lessons, one ideological and one pragmatic. Future labor leaders took both lessons to heart.

The ideological lesson concerned the conflicting interests of labor and capital within an industrial system. In an 1886 letter to Jay Gould, Powderly wrote,

There are people who say that this struggle is the beginning of the war between Capital and Labor, that statement is false, this certainly means war, but it is a war between legitimate capital, honest enterprise, and honest labor on the one hand and illegitimate wealth on the other hand.\textsuperscript{86}

As late as 1889, Powderly believed in the coinciding interests of capital and labor, but could not reconcile himself to the fact that consolidated industries presented the permanent face of capital in America. Powderly’s social preconceptions prevented him from accepting the fact that any successful union would have to interact with the world as it existed, and not as the union wished it existed.

The pragmatic lesson concerned the dangers of overreaching. The Knights’ melding of political, social, and economic objectives confused members of the Order as well as members of the public, who often viewed the massive organization with distrust. For his part, Powderly could not manage the Knights effectively—no one could have—and as a result the union lacked the discipline necessary to win concessions through strikes. In an interview reported in the \textit{New York Times} in 1886, Jay Gould made this exact point:

“The Knights of Labor,” Mr. Gould continued, “have entered upon far too great an undertaking for the size of their brain and their shoulders. Not

\textsuperscript{85} Voss 80

\textsuperscript{86} Letter from Terence Powderly to Jay Gould. April 11, 1886. Terence V. Powderly Papers, Mullen Library, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., Box 119.
content with a limited scope for their work, they are attempting to run and rule everything the wide world over. The result would be a roaring farce but that their shameful policy is at the same time responsible for so much of distress and disorder. They accomplish none of the things they declare within the compass of their ambition. Setting out to govern the earth, they govern nothing and nobody, court ridicule and insure defeat… Mr. Powderly has assured the Congressional Labor Investigating Committee at Washington that, compared with his duties as Grand Master Workman, the tasks of President Cleveland are trivial. You see,” and Mr. Gould smiled in his characteristic way, “you see, after all that it is a fairly good-sized job to rule and regulate the universe.”

By 1886, Jay Gould understood the reality of the industrial economy better than Powderly did. In another life, Gould might have made an excellent labor leader.

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Chapter 4: Labor Progresses and Capital Moves

1886-1902

They deliberately butchered in cold blood, a magnificent six million dollar plant!! This is not all; apparently madness knew no limits; they dismantled and freighted two hundred and sixty miles to Buffalo, and threw into the junk pile, machinery that was actually earning for them yearly almost its weight in gold! They even freighted the dressed stone of some of their buildings all the way to Buffalo, which was ground up for concrete! Evidently madness must have ruled. The achievements of this great enterprise, to which Scranton really owes its existence, is splendid history. The crime of its destruction beggars comment!

Colonel Frederick L. Hitchcock, writing about the decision to relocate the steel production of the Lackawanna Steel Company to Buffalo, New York

It’s tough on Scranton.

Reaction of Walter Scranton, President of the Lackawanna Steel Company, when asked about the effects of his decision to relocate his company’s production from Scranton, Pennsylvania to Buffalo, New York

Attention everyone, hello! Yes, I just want you to know that this is not my decision but from here on out, we can no longer be friends. And when we talk about things here, we must only discuss work associated things. And uh, you can consider this my retirement from comedy. And in the future if I want to say something funny, or witty, or do an impression I will no longer, ever, do any of those things.

-Michael Scott, The Office
In the early 1890s, Pennsylvania’s anthracite coal region was the “greatest stronghold of the trusts in the coal industry”—seven major railways controlled 96 percent of the coal fields in the area, and the Vanderbilt and Morgan financial combines in turn controlled these companies.\(^1\) Coal miners in Scranton lived terrible lives, and depended on their employers for almost everything—in the absence of effective labor unions, miners had not received a wage increase since 1880.\(^2\) Miners quickly exhausted what little money they did earn at their employers’ company stores, which sold common goods at wildly inflated prices, or at local stores, which often entered into deals with their patrons’ employers.\(^3\) Mine foremen, too, opened stores with inflated prices, and because miners depended on the goodwill of the foremen for their livelihood, such stores had a “guaranteed patronage.”\(^4\)

According to a survey conducted by the state of Pennsylvania, the average miner’s income only covered 73 percent of his family’s living expenses.\(^5\) To make ends meet, families relied on child labor. Young boys generally took jobs as slate pickers, who removed unsuitable material from crushed coal along a conveyor belt, or trappers, who sat in the dark for hours on end and opened mine doors for passing coal cars. So many boys worked during school hours that the Catholic Church established a special night school for them.\(^6\) Girls often worked at Scranton’s silk mills, one of which almost exclusively employed females under the age of twenty.\(^7\)

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\(^1\) Gluck, Elise. *John Mitchell: Labor’s Bargain with the Gilded Age*. New York: John Day, 1929. Pages 65, 70; Dolan 81
\(^2\) Gluck 75
\(^4\) Jones 41
\(^6\) Dolan 91
\(^7\) History of Luzerne, Lackawanna and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania 412
Coal companies treated their employees extremely poorly. Historian Harold Aurand relates two widespread stories:

One insists that the company would never discharge a mine worker for killing another person by negligence, but it would fire him if he had been responsible for the death of a mule. The moral of the story being that the company valued a mule more than it did a man. The second story, usually affirmed as an eyewitness account, depicts the callousness. In this tale the company ambulance was seen bringing home the body of a man killed in the mines. Discovering that no one was home at the time, the attendants opened the door and placed the cadaver on the living room floor and left.8

Coal mining was a dangerous occupation, but operators absolved themselves of responsibility for reimbursing miners’ survivors in the event of their death or incapacitation. The superintendent of the coal mining department for the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad, for example, believed that “99 per cent of the men injured inside the mines are injured through their own gross carelessness.”9

Competition for poor-paying jobs in the mines was fierce: during the 1890s, huge numbers of southern and eastern Europeans migrated to Scranton. These immigrants exerted a powerful downward pressure on wages and working conditions, and allowed companies to fire troublesome employees at will.10 A hierarchy within the mines quickly formed in response to the influx of new immigrant groups: the Welsh, Scots, Irish and Germans, who had resided in the area for decades, held the skilled mining jobs, while Italians, Poles, and others from southern and eastern Europe worked as helpers.11 Mine operators played up these ethnic divisions in an effort to keep their workers from uniting

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8 Aurand, Coalcracker Culture 97
10 Gluck 17
11 Gluck 68
and pressing for higher wages, and even encouraged Europeans to migrate to the United States and come to work for them.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1897, organizers for the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) union began arriving in Northeast Pennsylvania after a string of successful strikes in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{13} The UMWA belonged to the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and focused solely on organizing miners with the intent of working toward higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions. The UMWA’s president, John Mitchell, proved extremely successful at recruiting members for the union in the Pennsylvania anthracite fields for three major reasons. First, Mitchell explicitly played to peoples’ self-interest: he convinced miners that by joining the UMWA they would quickly improve their lots in life, and he convinced middle-class members of mining communities, like storekeepers, that higher wages for miners would mean more business for them.\textsuperscript{14} Second, the union repeatedly emphasized shared occupational identity while making provisions for ethnic identity—while Mitchell continually spoke to miners about the need to overcome racial antagonism and focus on their shared identity as workers, the UMWA’s organizers formed ethnically homogeneous local chapters that conducted business in their members’ native languages.\textsuperscript{15} Third, John Mitchell made an effort to reach out to religious institutions and social organizations—he carefully cultivated a friendship with the Bishop of Scranton, Michael Hoban, spoke to the Scranton Elks Club,

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\item \textsuperscript{12} Ruotolo, Joseph A. Personal Interview. December 30, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Gluck 74
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and upon hearing that a Lutheran minister had denounced him, earnestly paid him a
“friendly call.”

The UMWA’s organizational efforts proved remarkably successful, and when the
union called a strike in September of 1900, 112,000 of the anthracite region’s 150,000
miners complied. Discipline during the strike proved extraordinary: “breaks in the ranks
of the strikers were unknown.” Mitchell’s efforts to reach out to the community paid off
during the strike—Catholic priests administered temperance pledges and merchants
extended credit to striking workers. The UMWA avoided charges of property damage by
retaining engineers and pumpmen in the mines to prevent flooding. In mid-October,
mine operators conceded to the establishment of committees to address worker
grievances, a ten percent increase in wages, and the elimination of sliding-scale
compensation based on the price of coal. Mitchell had timed the strike to coincide with
the 1900 presidential elections, and operators cited the political implications of their
actions in conceding to the strikers.

In 1901, the American Federation of Labor held its national convention in
Scranton, where it adopted the “trade autonomy principle.” This decision defined the
new face of the American labor movement: it affirmed the independence of craft
unions—such as the UMWA—to regulate their own affairs without interference from
unrelated unions, and encouraged the national organization of each craft. By prioritizing
trade autonomy, the AFL gave craft unions the latitude they needed to enforce discipline

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16 Gluck 73
17 Gluck 80
18 Gluck 83
19 Roberts 13
and effectively conduct their affairs, and implicitly rejected the central tenet which had served as Terence Powderly’s oft-repeated ideological guidepost, that “an injury to one is the concern of all.” The principle of trade autonomy adopted at the Scranton convention came to define the American Federation of Labor, and by extension a huge portion of the labor movement in the United States throughout the early twentieth century.

In April of 1902, the UMWA’s settlement with its members’ employers in the anthracite regions ran out. Mitchell doggedly attempted to reach a compromise with mine operators, but they refused to negotiate. On May 12, Mitchell ordered a temporary suspension of work, pending a convention to determine the union’s course of action. The convention voted to continue the suspension, despite John Mitchell’s fervent opposition, and on May 15 the president of the UMWA reluctantly ordered a strike in Pennsylvania’s anthracite fields. Aggressive chapters of the UMWA in other regions quickly began agitating for sympathy strikes, but Mitchell realized that this would abrogate many of those chapters’ contracts with employers and reduce the credibility of the UMWA as a whole. Instead, he instructed members of sympathetic unions to raise money for the striking workers, and as a result striking anthracite miners amassed enough money to hold them through the following winter.

The UMWA maintained extraordinary discipline throughout the strike: striking miners relied on intense economic and social pressure to discourage workers from contravening the strike and to punish those that did. Strikers pressured merchants not to do business with non-union workers, and boycotted those stores that did not heed their

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22 Gluck 94
23 Gluck 99
24 Gluck 101
25 Gluck 108
The social ostracism of those breaking ranks with the union proved so complete that one Lutheran minister reported having trouble finding pallbearers for a deceased non-union worker. In light of the extraordinary passions aroused by the strike, strikers perpetrated relatively few incidents of violence, and the union leadership quickly condemned any violence on the part of the striking workers as “in utter disregard of the teachings and principles of the United Mine Workers, as an organization, and contrary to the explicit instructions of the leaders.”

With no sign of the strike abating before the winter, political leaders began to get nervous—the Northeastern United States depended on anthracite coal for its heating needs, and the governors of Massachusetts and New York warned President Theodore Roosevelt that a continuation of the strike would lead to intense human suffering in their states with the onset of cold weather. Roosevelt called a conference between Mitchell and the presidents of the affected companies—including the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western and the Delaware and Hudson—on October 3, 1902. At the meeting, the coal operators refused to recognize the UMWA in any way.

Mitchell’s initial reticence to strike coupled with the coal interests’ refusal to negotiate with the union led most in the press and the public to side with the striking miners, and the publication of a letter written by the president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railway Company during the summer further shifted public opinion in favor of the UMWA. In the letter, the president wrote,

The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for—not by the labor agitators, but by the Christian men to whom God has

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27 Cornell 145
28 Cornell 152
29 Gluck 121
given control of the property rights of the country, and upon the successful management of which so much depends.\textsuperscript{30} By October, the public had grown restless over the strike—huge numbers of people depended on anthracite coal in their daily lives, and a massive portion of the coal consumed nationally came from Northeast Pennsylvania. Citizens began pressing the federal government to resolve the strike, and railroad operators feared that a continued stalemate would lead to a government takeover of their companies. On October 13, the operators submitted to arbitration, and on October 23 the UMWA strikers returned to work pending its results.\textsuperscript{31} Roosevelt appointed seven commissioners to oversee the lengthy arbitration process. The commission conducted an in-depth investigation into the lives of coal miners and the conditions of the companies that employed them, collected its findings in “The Report to the President on the Anthracite Coal Strike,” and held three months of hearings on the issue before rendering its decision to increase wages by ten percent, inaugurate a nine-hour workday, and establish a permanent arbitration board.\textsuperscript{32}

The anthracite strike severely damaged Scranton’s coal-based industrial economy.\textsuperscript{33} At the time of the strike, Walter Scranton, the younger brother of William W. Scranton, served as the president of the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company, which had formed out of the merger of the Scranton Steel Company and the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company in 1891. Scranton viewed the success of the UMWA as a threat to his business: the union had organized his company’s coal and iron mines, and the company relied on the two commodities in its production of steel. In the aftermath of the strike, Walter Scranton searched for a fundamental weakness in labor’s strategy, and he found it  

\textsuperscript{30} Gluck 114  
\textsuperscript{31} Gluck 130  
\textsuperscript{32} Gluck 154  
\textsuperscript{33} Hitchcock 517
in his company’s ability to leverage mobile capital to take advantage of the inherent geographical limitations of the UMWA.

The UMWA’s strength, Scranton realized, derived from its roots in the community. Miners in Scranton had forty years of experience with strikes and unionization, beginning in 1862, and the UMWA had learned from the failures of the Miners’ Benevolent Association, the Workingmen’s Benevolent Association, and the Knights of Labor in the region. This reliance on community and a “sense of place” provided workers with their combined strength, but, in the face of mobile capital, also served “as a pivotal point of vulnerability and exposure.”\textsuperscript{34} To exploit this vulnerability, Walter Scranton decided to relocate his company’s production to Buffalo, New York. The site offered superior access to resources and markets by virtue of its location on Lake Erie, and Buffalo’s workers had little experience with unions. From a corporate perspective, the labor conditions in Buffalo completely vindicated the decision to relocate production.

The newly renamed Lackawanna Steel Company ended its operations in Scranton, and began production in Buffalo in 1904. About 70 percent of the workforce accompanied the corporation from Scranton to the new plant, so the company’s decision to relocate did not lead to the loss of experienced workers. The relocation did erect serious barriers to organization for the company’s employees, as demand for jobs at the Buffalo plant exerted downward pressure on wages, leading the company’s bargaining position relative to its workforce to improve immensely. A newspaper reported at the time that job applicants “line up along the sidewalk and often the line reaches a quarter of a mile down the road. All eyes are on the door of the office and all are awaiting the

welcome words, that help is needed.” The company discouraged solidarity among workers by playing up ethnic differences, since applicants included “Italians, Austrians, Croatians, Slavs, Austrian Poles, Hungarians, and Russian Poles, a few Scandinavians, French and a few negroes and representatives of several other nationalities.” Within this environment the company exercised complete control over production by keeping careful records on the productivity of individual workers, with the implicit threat of replacement for underperformance.

As the Lackawanna Steel Company constructed its new plant in Buffalo, the local press proved so “ostentatious and lavish in their praise of the company and the developments that were occurring that their coverage soon smacked of propaganda.” Within a few years of the plant’s opening, however, local residents became increasingly upset with the poor sanitation, pollution, unpaved streets, shoddily-constructed company housing, job insecurity, cyclical hiring and firing, and poor working conditions brought about by the operations of the Lackawanna Steel Company. As Mark Goldman writes, “the increasingly pervasive feeling was that the community had somehow been had,” and residents of Buffalo slowly realized that the welfare of their city mattered little to the Lackawanna Steel Company.

The history of Buffalo parallels the history of Scranton to an almost eerie extent. In the same way that labor organizers in Scranton were confronted with charges of Molly Maguireism, organizers in Buffalo were accused of communism. When the American

36 Goldman 137
37 Goldman 138
38 Goldman 135
39 Goldman 142
40 Goldman 245
Federation of Labor organized the Lackawanna Steel Company’s plant and went on strike in 1919, striking workers attempted to intimidate those that broke ranks with the union. Echoing the events in Scranton during 1871, the mayor called in the state militia to escort strike-breakers to work, and after company police fired into a crowd of striking workers, the union used the victims’ well-attended funeral as a rallying point.\textsuperscript{41} In 1922, the Bethlehem Steel Company, then the second-largest steel company in the nation after the U.S. Steel trust, purchased the Lackawanna Steel Company, and the widespread consolidation of the steel industry during this time again recalls the combinations formed by the railroad industry during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Probably the most striking similarity between the experiences of Scranton and Buffalo, however, was the decision by the Bethlehem Steel Company to build a new steel mill in Burns Harbor, Indiana in 1964 rather than update the Buffalo plant’s equipment. The cessation of steel production in Scranton and in Buffalo occurred for the same reasons, and after exactly the same period of time.\textsuperscript{42} George Scranton and his partners arrived in Scranton to begin production in 1840, and the Lackawanna Steel Company began construction of its plant in Buffalo in 1900—60 years later. The Lackawanna Steel Company opened its plant in Buffalo in 1904, and the Bethlehem Steel Company completed its Burns Harbor plant in 1964—60 years later. The story is, remarkably, the same.

Taken together, the anthracite coal strike and the Lackawanna Steel Company’s relocation presaged the nature of the industrial system that later developed throughout the United States. The anthracite strike set two precedents which would come to define labor

\textsuperscript{41} Goldman 206

relations throughout the country over the coming decades: that of the federal government intervening in a strike on behalf of labor, and that of a craft-based labor union entering into a successful, prolonged strike against consolidated industrial powers. The lesson of the strike was clear: by abandoning the social and political goals of the Knights of Labor, the AFL’s ideology allowed for highly-disciplined organizations that earned public and governmental support for their narrow, job-related goals. Put simply, craft-based unions worked—they increased wages for their members.

The relocation of the Lackawanna of the Lackawanna Steel Company also set an important precedent. In moving his company’s steel mill to Buffalo, Walter Scranton leveraged the inherent mobility of the capital his company represented to outflank the apparent success of organized labor. Jefferson Cowie identifies this tendency in his book *Capital Moves*, and argues that employers utilize geographical, gender, racial and ethnic divisions to prevent their workers from successfully organizing and pushing for higher wages.\(^{43}\) When wages get too high, capital moves in search of lower costs of production.

Integrating the lessons of the anthracite strike and of Lackawanna Steel’s relocation leads to an understanding of a system in which labor progresses and capital moves. Those with access to capital seek out a location for production with inexpensive labor, and initially the interests of employees and employers coincide almost completely. As labor fights for higher wages and capital tries to achieve lower production costs, however, the interests of the two groups begin to diverge, and eventually the groups’ interests cease to overlap and production stops. When capital moves to another new production location with inexpensive labor, the cycle repeats. The events in Scranton in

\(^{43}\) Cowie 186
1902 demonstrated these characteristics of the industrial economy before it became evident anywhere else in America.

John Mitchell could function in the new economy because his ideology built on the ideas and experiences of both Terence Powderly and people like Thomas Dickson. As the previous chapter notes, the failure of the Knights of Labor held one organizational lesson and one ideological lesson for future labor leaders; Mitchell learned both. In 1903, he wrote,

The failure and subsequent decline of the Knights of Labor resulted from the fact that it thus disregarded trade lines and was too inclusive in its membership. No trade union federation can be permanently successful unless it respects the autonomy and self-government of the various unions of which it is composed.44

Powderly’s failure led Mitchell to adopt the trade autonomy principle which the AFL adopted at its Scranton conference in 1901, and allowed for tight discipline within the UMWA. Unlike Powderly, Mitchell accepted the legitimacy and permanency of collaborative capital, and built his strategy for the UMWA around this assumption.45

Most interestingly, Mitchell integrated the rationale for industrial combination articulated by Thomas Dickson into Powderly’s belief in the coincidental interests of labor and capital:

Competition in many industries has proved itself wasteful. It has led to the wildest excesses of production, has created alternating periods of exaggerated prosperity and extreme depression...An intelligently directed industrial combination could reduce prices, insure a safe investment for the savings of the people, pay high wages, and grant favorable conditions of labor, while, at the same time, paying to the men in charge munificent salaries...46

45 Mitchell 198
46 Mitchell 197
Mitchell biographer Craig Phelan argued that the UMWA president’s greatest shortcoming was his “unwillingness to place his faith in the militancy of the miners” stemming from a failure to “recognize the irreconcilable conflict between labor and capital.”47 In the context of Mitchell’s life experiences and ideological heritage, however, this reticence makes sense—Mitchell watched uncontrollable militancy tear apart the Knights of Labor, and maintained strict discipline within the UMWA in an attempt to avoid a similar fate. Necessarily, the task of unleashing worker militancy would be left to a subsequent labor leader who had learned from Mitchell’s mistakes.

If Mitchell’s was a new labor ideology, then Walter Scranton’s was a new capitalist ideology. The Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company’s move to Buffalo illustrates a profound difference between Scranton’s early businessmen and their successors. One of the only opinions shared by Terence Powderly, Thomas Dickson, early residents of Slocum Hollow, George Scranton, William W. Scranton, and most other residents of the city throughout the nineteenth century was an intense civic pride—every one of these men, whatever his political persuasion, cared deeply about the future of the city. Frederick Hitchcock almost certainly shared the capitalist ideology of Thomas Dickson—he fired into the crowd of rioters in 1877 as a member of the citizens’ corps—but he could not comprehend the decision to move the city’s steel mills to Buffalo. Twelve years after the fact, he wrote “there has never been an adequate explanation of its going.”48 The real reason the Lackawanna Steel Company’s decision perplexed Hitchcock was that those making the decision thought about the matter in a completely different way than he did. By the turn of the century, the emphasis on place had waned.

47 Phelan, Divided Loyalties 360
48 Hitchcock 32
severely among businessmen and decision-makers in Scranton. The children of the city’s most successful citizens did not feel the same civic pride that their fathers did: after attending elite colleges throughout the Northeast, they often secured employment in growing cities throughout the country, and consequently felt less rooted to their parents’ hometown.49

An examination of a specific family clarifies this deterioration of geographical attachment among wealthy residents of Scranton. Dr. Benjamin Throop, who arrived in Slocum Hollow in 1840 and later wrote “A Half Century in Scranton” (which is quoted extensively throughout this thesis) harbored a deep attachment to the city, and his grandson, “Benny,” did not. The following passage from “Like Fathers, Unlike Sons” by Burton Folsom is worth quoting in its entirety:

Some of the sons of Scranton’s early industrialists literally squandered fortunes. Economic leader Benjamin Throop became a millionaire by investing in real estate, banks, and utilities. His surviving son had, at best, modest business skills, and when he and his wife died prematurely in 1894, the eighty-three-year-old Throop undertook the task of rearing his only grandchild, five-year-old Benjamin, Jr. The elder Throop died shortly thereafter, but young “Benny” inherited a ten-million-dollar fortune. Young Throop married into the Connell family, and having no financial worries, he began raising German shepherd dogs. He served in World War I but by that time his wife had divorced him, and he seems to have lost any interest that he might have had in gainful employment or in the city of Scranton. During the 1920s, like a character from an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, he spent most of his time in Paris indulging champagne tastes in cars and women. He married a French movie star and traveled widely during their marriage. Throop died in 1935, in his mid-forties, of undisclosed stomach ailments after apparently dissipating his grandfather’s entire fortune.50

49 Folsom 107
50 Folsom 105-106
The story of “Benny” Throop illustrates the human element of the turn-of-the-century economy: the weakening sense of local community allowed for the system of mobile capital which emerged during the period.

The relationship between workers and employers also continued to change in the early twentieth century, as corporations hired professional managers in the pursuit of greater efficiency and higher profits. The usefulness of employing professional managers to run businesses became obvious in Scranton when the sons of entrepreneurial industrialists proved unable to take over for their fathers. Under the leadership of Thomas Dickson’s son, for example, the Dickson Manufacturing Company was acquired by the American Locomotive Company in 1901, and production at the Scranton works ceased in 1909.51 Professional managers utilized scientific management techniques pioneered by Frederick Winslow Taylor, who in his book The Principles of Scientific Management wrote that successful management “involves the establishment of many rules, laws, and formulae which replace the judgment of the individual workman.”52 At the turn of the century in Scranton, scientific management was quickly eclipsing the last vestiges of the power of personality in the workplace. Taylor also argued that training employees to do “the highest class of work” they could constituted “the most important object of both the workmen and the management,” and Scranton developed an entire industry around educating employees and managers to work within a system of scientific management.53

The Scranton-based International Correspondence Schools originated in 1890 as a means for coal miners to study for state-mandated examinations by mail, but quickly

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53 Taylor 12
expanded to offer courses on a wide variety of subjects to a huge number of students.\textsuperscript{54} By 1914, the International Correspondence Schools employed 4,967 people, including 1,827 in Scranton and 116 throughout Latin America, China, Egypt, France and Spain, and had educated over 1.5 million students in work-related subjects such as commerce, architecture, electrical engineering, steam engineering, mechanical engineering, and locomotive running.\textsuperscript{55}

By 1902, Scranton was the face of industrializing and urbanizing America. The city was closely integrated into the national economy, rules and regulations strictly governed conduct at the workplace, huge differences existed between wealthy capitalists and impoverished workers struggling to make ends meet, the two-party system dominated politics, and over a quarter of the residents of the city were foreign-born.\textsuperscript{56} The city bore almost no resemblance to Slocum Hollow, the town that had stood in its place 62 years earlier.

\textsuperscript{54} Hitchcock 355
\textsuperscript{55} Hitchcock 355
\textsuperscript{56} For an excellent example of rules and regulations governing conduct in the coal mines, see A Treatise on Coal Mining. Scranton, PA: The International Correspondence School, 1900. For statistics on the foreign-born population in 1900, see Jones, William. Wales in America. Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1998.
Conclusion: Behind the Times; Ahead of its Time

There was plenty to represent the luxury of today; there was simplicity and mutual confidence, where now we have the complexity and questioning which the problem of modern social and commercial life, with all of its ceaseless activities, brings. Who can say that enjoyment of life did not reach the full measure of capacity as well then as now?

Dr. Benjamin Throop, reflecting on the progress of Scranton between 1840 and 1895

You like coal mines and you want to see ‘em?
Well check it out, yo, the anthracite museum!

-Michael Scott, The Office
Dr. Benjamin Throop arrived in Slocum Hollow in 1840, at almost the same time that the Scrantons arrived and began the process of industrialization that would dominate the area over the next century. In the conclusion to his 1895 work *A Half Century in Scranton*, he reflected:

>The record I have made of the pluck and indomitable perseverance of the founders of the city, the contrasts that I have drawn of the valley to-day and half a century ago, the experiences, the vicissitudes, the failures and the achievements, all carry with them lessons, which, I trust, may be of profit to the younger men, all of whom can accomplish as much in the next half century as has been done in the past.¹

The transformation of the frontier village of Slocum Hollow into the city of Scranton was a period of extraordinary change: the board of directors replaced the independent craftsman, child labor replaced the apprenticeship, company rules and regulations replaced the power of personality in the workplace, enormous wealth was created, but little of it was shared, and institutionally organized political parties, unions, and businesses took the place of a republican community of equals. In Scranton, these changes happened within sixty-two years, and transformed the worldviews of area residents so completely that by the end of the period, the principles that informed their views of themselves within society bore almost no resemblance to the principles held by the previous generation.

Historians generally view the confusion in late nineteenth century America that accompanied these changes as ideological fragmentation; a period of chaos that confounded those living through it. Robert Wiebe argues:

>As men ranged farther and farther from their communities, they tried desperately to understand the larger world in terms of their small, familiar environment. They tried, in other words, to impose the known upon the unknown, to master an impersonal world through the customs of a

¹ Throop 355
personal society. They failed, usually without recognizing why; and that failure to comprehend a society they were helping to make contained the essence of the nation's story.\footnote{Wiebe 12}

Wiebe is correct that people can only impose the known upon the unknown, and indeed the way that Scranton’s residents thought about and organized themselves did not evolve in step with technological and economic progress. Rather, those living through these changes slowly and painfully adapted extant modes of thinking and social organization in light of their new life circumstances. What Wiebe understates is the degree to which the imperfect ideologies of those living through the industrial revolution made their mark on the development of society.

Scranton allows the observer to witness the ideological transformation of industrial America as a progression of distinct and interrelated ideologies, each of which builds on the previous one according to the experiences of those trying to apply aging ideas to a changing world. The reason many historians have passed over the dialectic of this progression is that everywhere else in America, confounding local factors obscured the continuity that characterized the development of ideologies shaped by industrialization. Scranton provides, in a sense, an ideological laboratory, in which the raw ingredients of industrialization—land, labor, and capital—combined with new technology for the first time in America. The city presents an ideal lens through which to understand the progression of ideology and self-definition in response to industrialization because the city was the first purely industrial city in the country. Scranton’s precocious industrial development meant that residents of the city were among the first to face the industrial challenges which later confronted the entire nation.
By 1902, vastly different perspectives on society caused by the split between labor and capital had produced two competing, seemingly irreconcilable ideologies. In fact, both ideologies originated in the uniquely American way of thinking that characterized Slocum Hollow, and much of the country, in 1840. This thesis refers to that way of thinking as the *Village Blacksmith* ideal, but Longfellow’s artisan is the town-dwelling cousin of Jefferson’s “yeoman farmer”, the “new man” Crevecoeur identified in the first years of America’s existence, exhibits the “frontier individualism” lauded by Frederick Jackson Turner, and subscribes to the “republican tradition” of an “independent, virtuous and roughly equal citizenry” described by historian Kim Voss.3 Two trends contributed to the decline of the *Village Blacksmith* ideal: industrialization and the receding frontier.

During the early years of the American Republic, the frontier served as a sort of safety valve for the nation, allowing discontented citizens the perpetual option of moving West. In this sense, the frontier enabled the stability inherent in the *Village Blacksmith* ideal by providing an outlet for potentially destabilizing forces that could threaten a quiet town. The egalitarianism which characterized Slocum Hollow in 1840 depended on the availability of free land and the resulting absence of serious economic conflict between members of the community. As the frontier gradually receded throughout the nineteenth century, however, ambitious Americans had to pursue their economic goals through the emerging industrial system. Necessarily, these industrial pioneers initially viewed the world through the lens of the *Village Blacksmith* ideology.

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As the first chapter describes, in 1840 residents in the area that would become Scranton subscribed to two major principles: egalitarianism and hard work. The area, like much of America, was “a leveled democracy…divided by innumerable, fine gradations.”\(^4\) In other words, the economy of the region reinforced egalitarianism and hard work, as the difference in wealth between financially successful community members and their less successful peers were of a quantitative, not qualitative nature. While a farmer or artisan might live in a larger house or own more horses than his neighbor, his concept of personal worth was a function of his membership in a community of equals.

With the advent of the capital-intensive industrial economy, however, the difference in wealth between financially successful individuals and their less successful peers became qualitative. While successful capitalists and business operators built mansions and vacationed in Europe, many laborers struggled to make ends meet and hold a steady job. This new system posed a fundamental challenge to traditional values: everyone worked hard, but financial inequality divided society in an undeniable way. Both workers and capitalists responded to this development by refining their conceptions of egalitarianism, and in the process generated two competing notions of equality.

Financially successful individuals generally channeled their egalitarian preconceptions into a framework based on equality of opportunity, through which individuals could achieve status within the community through success. Within this framework, material success naturally rewarded hard work, discipline, and ingenuity. For example, Thomas Dickson viewed his origins as a mule driver for the company where he later became president as evidence of a society in which those born without means could rise to the highest levels. Within this system, businessmen viewed their employees as

\(^4\) Wiebe 3
equals, in the sense that both employers and employees entered into an arrangement freely, and as such either could withdraw from the arrangement at any time. This thinking provided justification for employers to hire and fire at will, pay their employees the lowest possible wages, and maintain dismal working conditions. As the importance of community waned, this thinking also led corporations to relocate their operations in search of the lowest costs of production.

Conversely, individuals like Terence Powderly who worked hard but never achieved financial success, questioned the industrial system itself, and translated their egalitarian preconceptions into notions of distributional equality. According to Powderly, the industrial system did not adequately reward laborers for their work, but instead allowed idle capitalists to grow rich off the toil of those who truly produced value. Workers first expressed their frustration with this system through violence, but were soundly defeated by an alliance between capital and the state during the riots of 1877. In the wake of their failure, workers tried assert themselves through political activity and broad societal change, but could not manage the broad-based coalition necessary to achieve these goals. Workers finally settled on pursuing narrow, job-related strategies in pursuit of greater job security, higher wages and better working conditions.

By 1902, the competing labor and capitalist ideologies interacted with each other in Scranton through a rigidly institutionalized system in which the government mediated relations between labor and capital. Within this system, labor constantly worked to gain concessions from employers, but capital could move to a different location when labor had gained so many concessions that the interests of capital no longer coincided with those of organized labor. On the surface, this system seems like a complete break from
the *Village Blacksmith* ideal of the previous generation, but in reality it was the result of a six-decade process through which Scranton’s residents continuously adapted their preconceptions to understand the world around them.

Scranton’s development holds a fundamental lesson: human progress builds on itself, and no matter how rapidly change seems to occur, the way that people view themselves and their role within society tends to draw on the past. Both social organization and the factors that shape people’s economic activities progress continually, but social reality always lags behind economic reality as people reconcile previous ways of thinking with new circumstances.

Presidential candidates flocked to Scranton in 2008 because the city’s residents represented “anxious, white, working classes” throughout America who often felt like the world was leaving them behind. A candidate familiar with the history of the city would have recognized that their concerns echoed those of the residents of Scranton a century and a half before, and that their anxieties reflected the fundamental experience of anyone living through a period of extraordinary change. The candidate could have translated his knowledge into this message of hope: if the history of Scranton teaches anything, it is that Scranton’s residents are an adaptable people.
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