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WORKING IN TRENTON:
THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY, OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY, 1877-1904

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Commitee

of Lehigh University

In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in

History

by

Susan Wombwell Clemens

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This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Susan W. Clemens.

December 18, 1989
(Date)

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ABSTRACT

The characteristics of people working in Trenton, New Jersey in the late nineteenth century created the possibility of solid class behavior. The presence of a large skilled work force and the industrial nature of the city were conducive to labor activity. Several factors precluded this eventuality.

The large percentage of native-born Americans kept the organized labor movement conservative. Ethnic groups were evenly divided between the British, the Irish and the Germans. In other recently researched cities one ethnic group predominated. The British aligned more with the native Americans than the other immigrant groups. Their strong presence in the significant Trenton pottery industry, both in numbers and in labor organization, added a unique aspect to the industrial environment. Pottery workers were highly skilled and craft exclusive. Production methods were still largely accomplished without machinery. This gave the pottery workers leverage when dealing with their employers.

Although the pottery industry employed the most workers in Trenton, the city was diverse industrially and occupationally. Industrial diversity divided its workers who faced different constraints in their jobs. Not all workers faced the same technological development within their industries, so that all workers did not feel threatened in the same manner by industrialization. Craft divisions further split the workers of Trenton creating a lack of unity in specific industries.

Although labor organizations existed in Trenton, divisive influences fragmented Trenton's workers. Their inability to unite in a common cause made their attempts at working class action episodic. Industrial workers in Trenton found more to reasons to divide than to unite.

INTRODUCTION

The sign on the bridge spanning the Delaware River between New Jersey and Pennsylvania boldly proclaims "Trenton Makes the World Takes." The old sign shows that pride in New Jersey's capital city stemmed from its expertise in manufacturing. Here was a haven for the workers. Opportunity existed for people with diverse occupations in various industries. It was reputed to be a city of workers sensitive to organized labor.

Many of the elements conducive to labor militancy were present in Trenton in the late nineteenth century. A burst of population growth after 1880 coincided with the city's industrial growth. Manufacturing employed a sizable number of Trentonians, many of whom were skilled. No single industry dominated the city, but in this industrially diverse center, various labor organizations flourished.[1]

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[1]See Trenton Historical Society, A History of Trenton, 1679-1929: Two Hundred and Fifty Years of a Notable Town with Links in Four Centuries, vol. 2, Robert Walker et.al.(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929).

In the late nineteenth century, workers were separated by craft, ethnic, and skill group loyalties. They needed a cause to bind them together. Often the basis for unified action occurred from the readjustment of workers to new technology and factory work systems. While most workers experienced frustration from industrial growth, skilled workers had the most leverage to fight unwanted changes. These skilled workers more often joined labor organizations to help control their employment conditions.

The Knights of Labor became Trenton's most successful organization for workers in the late nineteenth century. The Knights appealed primarily to the skilled workers in Trenton although the organization was not limited to members of a craft. Disparate ethnic and occupational groups united under the Knights banner. The growth of organized labor in Trenton followed the same pattern as other industrial cities, but working class activity lacked more than sporadic harmony.

In late nineteenth century Trenton, workers vocalized awareness of class distinctions and the tensions produced by the process of industrialization. However, class awareness does not guarantee that workers, individually or collectively, can effectively change their conditions, or even sustain an interest in doing so. In Trenton, the expressions of class awareness were more episodic than constant. Trenton's workers differed from those in cities reporting more labor activism and disorder.

Ethnic and occupational divisions of Trenton's working class diminished class consciousness. Trenton's reputation as an active labor city is misleading. Only the industries with a heavy concentration of one ethnic group (British pottery workers, Irish woolen workers, or industries with large numbers of native American workers such as rubber workers, machinists, and carpenters) exhibited distinguishable class behavior.[2]

Three recent historical studies raise issues that sharpen our perspective about the working class of Trenton. Together they consider most aspects of working class life. In an effort to effect their surroundings, workers united not only through labor organizations, but informally on the job and at leisure. Detroit, like Trenton, contained numerous Knights of Labor assemblies.[3] Various ethnic and politically diverse groups joined the Knights in Detroit in the 1880's. The disparate cultural background of their members created elements of class solidarity. Richard Oestreicher examined the success and the failures of the Knights in Detroit.[4]

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[2]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Occupations at the Twelfth Census, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 746-748.

[3]Trenton's population hovered near one quarter of Detroit's from 1880 to 1900.

[4]Richard Jules Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit 1875-1900 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

The national high point of membership in Knights organizations occurred in 1886. The movement for a standard eight hour work day became the rallying cry for Knights across the United States. The popularity of this issue boosted Knights of Labor membership countrywide. Solidarity rallies attested to their strength in Detroit. Publicity about the May 1, 1886 deadline for a legal eight hour work day increased as the prescribed date approached. Numerous strikes followed in Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis. People abandoned old loyalties to embrace the cause of an eight hour day. Prospects for victory diminished suddenly with the news of riots and death in Chicago. By the end of the summer of 1886, the K. of L. was losing its position quickly.

Oestreicher examines the nature of the Knights in Detroit to discern the causes of their demise.[5] Organized labor had provided the most vocal expression of class behavior. Later, a working class "subculture of opposition" continued in Detroit even as the K. of L. faded away. This subculture survived the disparate segmentation of the working class. Their cultural tradition provided the basis for continued labor awareness.[6]

Many of Detroit's Knights, both European and American born, shared the same ideal of a producer's cooperative

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[5]Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, 166-168.

[6]Ibid., 60-67; 112-119; 174-179.

society based on skill, dignity and control over one's production. The roots of this ideal lay deep within the working class experience.[7] Diverse activities created the solidarity that fostered class consciousness. Drinking in the same saloons, attending the same churches, and sharing neighborhood traditions nurtured class awareness in the working people of Detroit. Yet, within these arenas the working class "competing cultural systems" existed. The competition arose from the diversity of the members.[8]

Several factors contributed to the disruption of Detroit's class cohesion. Some members of the Order were "craft conservatives." They valued a long tradition of security found in the skilled trades. The focus of their cooperation centered on higher wages and the "better bargaining position" they had always enjoyed.[9]

German radicals espoused an ethnic centered ideology, demonstrating a lack of interest in a coalition with the other elements of the Knights. Even with their ethnic exclusiveness, a sizable number of the German Socialists joined the Detroit K. of L. by the mid-1880's.[10] Two other groups helped shape the nature of the Knights of Labor in

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[7]Ibid., xv-xix.

[8]Ibid., 76-96; 172-180.

[9]Ibid., 174-175.

[10]Ibid., 175-176.

Detroit. Both of these groups were reformist in nature, with strong fraternal, pietist, and prohibitionist aspirations for their organization.[11] These splinters of the Knights became important to better understand their infighting and competing loyalties. Oestreicher views these fragmenting influences as the primary obstacle to working class unity in the United States. At times they were overcome, but they were always a threat even when the working class achieved solidarity.

Roy Rosenzweig explored class behavior in Worcester, Mass., 1870-1920. Rosenzweig concluded that working class militancy in Worcester was mainly apparent during struggles to control leisure activities. As people experienced diminished satisfaction at work, they fought to gain more say in how much, where and what leisure activities they wanted. Struggles to secure an eight hour day, to stop the anti-saloon movements, and to provide recreational parks in working class neighborhoods provided arenas for ardent collective action from Worcester's ethnic working class.[12]

Rosenzweig determined that the divisive and insular working class of Worcester merged when under attack by the dominant social groups of society. The working class

[11]Ibid., 177-178.

[12]See Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

perceived their leisure as "alternative" to middle class activities, but often industrialists viewed working class leisure as "oppositional" to the interests of factory discipline. When that occurred the middle class tried to make the working class conform to middle class standards of sobriety and punctuality often creating conflict between the two groups. Pressure from the middle class created a common cause for Worcester's workers.[13]

Some ethnic groups in Worcester identified more with their employers than with fellow workers. Swedish wire workers campaigned strongly for temperance. Having little in common with French-Canadian Catholics or Irish Catholics, the Protestant Swedes weakened the potential coalition of ethnic groups in their efforts to unify as a class. Worcester was known as the "scab town" in organized labor circles. In Worcester, as in Detroit, the working class fought continually to overcome the dissimilarities of urban workers.

Chicago, with its imposing meat processing plants, presented a different problem for industrial workers. James R. Barrett studied the work culture of the packinghouse.[14] He found that class behavior developed from the informal methods of shop control. The older immigrants

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[13]Rosenszweig, Eight Hours, 224-227.

[14]James R. Barrett, Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

educated the newer immigrants. "Americanization" developed from the bottom by other workers in the same situations.

In conjunction with teaching the peculiarities of the American industrial system, camaraderie developed creating a bond that transcended skill levels and ethnic divisions. The bond inspired semi-skilled assembly line workers and laborers to join the union. United, the packinghouse employees staged a massive strike in 1904. It was the culmination of a movement based on "common work problems, a core of experienced trade unionists, and a particularly supportive metropolitan working-class community."[15]

Despite the achievements of the movement, it failed. Barrett appraised both concrete and less tangible reasons for the breakdown of the strike. Economic conditions in the recession of 1904 weakened the union, and the unskilled nature of most packinghouse workers easily allowed employers to hire strike breakers. Barrett concludes that Chicago's labor movement was waning in 1904, and the forces of fragmentation in the stockyards finally engulfed the hard fought solidarity. Since it was a defensive strike to save the union, the defeat also crushed the union, a pattern that Barrett observed throughout the country.

All three studies illustrate the problems of unifying the American working class. In Detroit, the Knights of Labor

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[15]Barrett, Work, Community, 165-181.

briefly achieved unity for the working people. In Worcester, pressure from employers on the working class provided a rallying cause. In Chicago, class consciousness was fostered informally on the shop floor. In each, momentarily divisive influences were overcome to produce united class action.

Sustaining the workers' movements became more difficult. In Detroit, competing loyalties weakened the Knights. In Worcester, ethnic groups that identified more with the middle class divided the working class. In Chicago, the weakened trade union movement failed to sustain the coalition with unskilled packinghouse laborers.

This paper will examine the character of Trenton's working class in a twenty-seven year period between 1877 and 1904. Although the city experienced changes in industrial development, the ethnic and occupational character of Trenton remained stable. Compared with Oestreicher's Detroit, Rosenzweig's Worcester and Barrett's Chicago, two differences mark Trenton.

Trenton's native-born of native parents accounted for nearly half of Trenton's workers in the late nineteenth century. Native-born of native parents made up only one third of the working people of Worcester, and accounted for only twenty percent of the workers in Detroit and Chicago. Native-born Trentonians of either foreign or native-born parents constituted two-thirds of the city workers. In Detroit they made up less than half the working people.

Table 1

Selected Cities
Percentage of Skill Levels and Ethnicity
of Workers Recorded in Selected Occupations, 1890

	Chicago	Detroit	Worcester	Trenton
White Collar	31	24	22	23
Blue Collar				
Skilled	29	42	42	44
Semi-sk	24	14	21	21
Unskilled	16	20	14	13
Total	100	100	100	100
Nat/Nat White	19	19	34	42
Nat/For White	24	27	23	23
Foreign White	55	52	42	32
Non-Caucasians	2	2	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Report on Population of the United States, 1890, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897) 650-651; 664-665; 736-737; 742-745.

Notes: White collar includes all professional, managerial, proprietory, and clerical employment. Blue collar includes manufacturing, transportation, and manual labor not included in white collar definitions. Native/Native delineates all native-born Caucasians with native-born parents. Native/Foreign includes all those native-born with one or more foreign-born parents. Foreign covers all foreign-born Caucasians. Non-Caucasians includes both native and foreign-born non-white population.

In 1890, the percentages and divisions of skill were similar in Detroit, Trenton and Worcester. Ethnically, Chicago and Detroit had a preponderance of German immigrants. Worcester had as many Irish immigrants. British, German and Irish immigrants constituted most of Trenton's non-native population, but no single immigrant cultural group dominated.

The largest group in Trenton was native-born.

Table 2

Percentage of Native and Foreign Born Population, 1890

	Total Population	Native Born White	Foreign Born White	Non-Caucasian
Chicago	1,099,850	21	78	1
Detroit	205,876	22	77	1
Worcester	84,655	37	62	1
Trenton	57,458	47	50	3

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Report on the Population of the United States, 1890, vol 1. pt.2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 704.

In other respects Trenton mirrored Detroit more than Chicago or Worcester. The city stayed consistently one-quarter the size of Detroit, thereby displaying relatively similar growth patterns. In industrial diversity and skill levels, Detroit and Trenton were remarkably similar.

In 1900, Detroit and Trenton had similar skill patterns. Worcester by contrast experienced diminished skilled employment. This may be a redefinition of skill levels, but if not diminished skill may account for Worcester workers manifesting united action in leisure activities rather than organized labor. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers joined labor unions less frequently than skilled workers. The continued influx of Irish and French Canadians typically

occupied the less skilled jobs.[16] Trenton's native population continued to be in the same relative percentage even with increased population. These statistics signified two distinct peculiarities in Trenton: there was no single strong immigrant group and a there was a significant proportion of native born workers.

Table 3

Selected Cities
Percentage of Skill Levels and Ethnicity
of Workers Recorded in Selected Occupations, 1900

	Chicago	Detroit	Worcester	Trenton
White Collar	31	29	23	26
Blue Collar				
Skilled	26	38	24	39
Semi-sk	19	20	32	21
Unskilled	24	13	21	14
Total	100	100	100	100
Nat/Nat White	24	19	29	41
Nat/For White	26	37	27	25
Foreign White	47	43	42	30
Non-Caucasian	3	--	1	3
Total	100	99	99	99

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900, pt. 2, (1904), 746-748.

How did Trenton compare to Worcester, Detroit and Chicago as working class cities? Trenton had strong Knights of Labor assemblies, but the membership had trade and ethnic biases.

[16]See Rosenzweig, Eight Hours, 9-32, for a full discussion of the ethnic and occupational conditions in Worcester.

Those biases precluded the Knights from realizing their dream of an equal society of producers whose work allowed them dignity and autonomy. The diversity of the city's economic and social structure required the working class to muster considerable energy to achieve any class unity; the unity, once achieved was hard to sustain because of the range of differences among work situations.

The Trenton pottery assembly of the Knights was significantly British, although representing only thirteen percent of the overall population of the city. Their counterparts were the Germans in Detroit, who made up close to twenty-seven percent of that city's population. Trade and ethnic biases impeded the pottery workers from cooperation with other groups. Essentially, both the Trenton pottery workers and Detroit's carpenters and joiners were craft exclusive rather than class inclusive.[17] The working people of Trenton had many activities to fill the little leisure time available to them. Usually ethnically based, and often of a social nature, their chosen leisure activities did not always perpetuate class activity.

The uneven expressions of class by the workers was partly due to the modifications imposed on the working class by the successive waves of immigration. With each new addition of

[17]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Report on the Population of the United States, 1890, vol. 1, pt. 2 (1897) 664-665.

immigrants, the character of the working class was altered.[18] Yet, cultural input of new Americans was not the only tempering influence on the working class in Trenton. Trade biases, although sometimes linked to ethnic traditions, also delineated the character of Trenton's working people.

Much of Trenton's working class was skilled. Within this skilled work force craft groups affiliated closely. Expressions of class consciousness often became limited to the needs of the craft rather than to the problems of the working class. Craft biases were not a problem for the semi-skilled operatives in highly mechanized industries. But, their lack of skill presented other problems.

Like Chicago's packinghouse workers, the industrial conditions for semi-skilled workers limited the amount of control they could demand in their work, because others trained quickly for their jobs. Semi-skilled workers had little in common with the craftsmen of Trenton. Their situations and work frustrations were of a different nature than problems occurring in the more highly skilled industries. The rubber operative faced far different circumstances than the pottery apprentice. With two weeks of training, someone else could replace the rubber worker. A skilled pottery worker developed and refined his skills over many years, often

[18] Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America," American Historical Review, 78, (1973): 531-587.

adding a personal character to his work. In addition, the skilled and semi-skilled workers often had ethnic backgrounds that made their occupational and cultural worlds very different.

The statistics show the less tangible aspects of Trenton's ethnic and occupational structure. In the subsequent chapters, two population samples reveal Trenton's working class more clearly. One records every tenth household head for 1900 in the entire city, and the second samples all workers in 1900 from two working class wards near highlighted industries. As a check for the samples, published census materials further substantiate the character of industrial Trenton. The moments of class activity will be discussed as revealed by labor reports and newspapers.

Labor reports, newspapers, census material and other printed sources will be used to analyze class awareness and class behavior. Blue collar employees, both unionized and non-unionized, constituted the working class and they will be the focus of this study. They consisted of workers in manufacturing, non-clerical workers in transportation, service workers, and manual laborers. White collar employees serve for analysis and comparison with the working class. This paper will examine why Trenton's working class created more disunity than solidarity.

CHAPTER II -- VARIETIES OF WORK SITUATIONS IN TRENTON

Trenton as an Industrial Setting

In the early 1870's, Nicolas McCarty left Easton, Pennsylvania to lead a boat load of coal down the canal to Trenton.[1] Five miles outside of the city along the Delaware and Raritan Feeder canal the slow pace at the head of a mule allowed him a leisurely panorama of the approaching city. Looking to his right, the mansions of Trenton's elite families were visible. Further along the canal he passed the State House which contained the New Jersey government offices. The capital building could be seen at a distance because of its trademark gold leaf dome.

Although Nicolas may have deposited his boat in the basin at Montgomery, walking to the center of town at State and Broad, he may have continued onto Perry Street and North Clinton Avenue where the feeder joined the main canal at the Coalport basin. There the Delaware and Raritan travelled northeast to New Brunswick past numerous potteries. McCarty may have taken the main branch of the canal south where soon he would have entered lock seven at East State Street, perhaps taking a room at the Tremont House near the Camden and Amboy railroad station. If he continued south on the main branch of the Delaware and Raritan, he would have passed John A.

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[1]Annetta Ebling McCarty, interviewed by Deborah Rahn Clemens, January 1978, Tape recording, private collection.

Roebling, Sons and the Trenton Iron Company. Regardless of the canal route, McCarty would have been struck by the industrial nature of the city.[2]

Trenton's industrial growth coincided with its population growth. It never became as large as Chicago, Detroit or Worcester, but its population increased 92 percent between 1880 and 1890.

Table 4

Population Growth
Trenton, New Jersey, 1860-1900

Year	Population
1860	17,228
1870	23,874
1880	29,910
1890	57,458
1900	73,307

Source: Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 786.

The industrial growth of Trenton was due partly to the development of the Delaware and Raritan Canal completed in 1838. The canal offered easy transport for both freight and fuel. Factories and small workshops were built next to the canal as was the Camden and Amboy Railroad. A feeder canal increased the transportation network as well as providing water for the main branch. It cut through the northern part of the city, south along its eastern boarder, and southwest

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[2]Mary Alice Quigley and David E. Collier, A Capital Place: The Story of Trenton, in cooperation with the Trenton Historical Society (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, 1984), 45-55.

back to the Delaware River.[3]

Trenton was linked to New York and Philadelphia by both the canal and the railroad. The city's location and its transport system permitted access to an array of raw materials. Another canal, Trenton Water Power, started in 1830 and opened in 1834, was dug to provide more water power for manufacturing. It drew water from the Delaware River on its course around the western border of the city. It was owned by the Trenton Iron Company which rented out power to shops along the route.[4]

The Trenton Common Council encouraged industrial growth through tax allowances which benefitted industries newly located in Trenton. They also utilized businessmen to recruit manufacturers to locate in the city. In addition to the larger more visible industries, untold numbers of little shops and small manufacturing establishments located in Trenton. Each business produced a small part of the overall integrated system of an urban manufacturing center.[5]

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[3]Jessie Rose Turk, "Trenton, New Jersey in the Nineteenth Century: The significance of Location in the Historical Geography of a City" (Ed.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1964) 153-165; see ward map adapted by Fred G. Wombwell from Map of Trenton and Suburbs, 1905.

[4]Quigley and Collier, Capital Place, 45; Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 111-112; see map.

[5]See Trenton Board of Trade, President's Address (1878); John E. Bebout and Ronald J. Grele, "Where Cities Meet, The Urbanization of New Jersey," The New Jersey Historical Series, v. 22 (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1964), 32-39.

The objective of the corporate leaders in the late nineteenth century centered on "concentration of industrial control and management." New Jersey had very accommodating corporation laws, making Trenton attractive to some of the consolidated firms like the American Bridge Company which located offices and a branch operation in Trenton. Another victim of concentration was the Camden and Amboy Railroad which was taken over by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1871.[6]

Rapid expansion and the canal route caused the working class housing to be concentrated in the eastern section of the city. The western wards encompassed the older and more middle class shopping and cultural areas, while "East Trenton" catered to the cultural activities and necessary trades for a working class population.[7]

The main commercial street within the city was State Street. Moving east past Perry Street and south to Chambers Street the working class district emerged, where the houses decreased in size. Planned mill housing lined the streets while homes with a haphazard look often nestled in back alleys.[8]

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[6]Bebout and Grele, "Cities," New Jersey Historical Series, 35.

[7]See map.

[8]Ibid; Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 108-123.

Most factories were located along the canal route and adjacent to the railroad lines. The city was essentially a walking city, and the working class generally lived near their place of employment. Tightly clustered neighborhoods offered workers opportunities to socialize and cement relationships that were essential elements in working class culture and consciousness. Each neighborhood drinking establishment acted as a workingman's club, and East Trenton had numerous saloons in which to congregate.[9]

Overview of Occupational Differences

Numerically workers concentrated most heavily in the pottery, iron and steel, wire rope, woolen and rubber industries. Using the criteria of total capital, land value and machinery, the picture changes slightly. Foundry, iron and steel, pottery and rubber move to the forefront.

These leading industries often overshadowed the vast number of occupations within the city. From 1860 to 1890, the number of establishments grew in many industries, along with the vertical growth within other specific industries, changing and diversifying the industrial picture in Trenton.[10]

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[9]See Fitzgerald, Directory of Trenton and Mercer County, 1883-1890.

[10]See Jesse Rose Turk, "Trenton, New Jersey in the Nineteenth Century"; Quigley and Collier, Capital Place, 52.

Table 5

Workers in Leading Industries 1890-1900
Total Number of Workers in Selected Industries

	1890	1900
Pottery	3,038	3,775
Woolen	1,651	616
Iron, steel	1,186	1,305
Wire rope	*	1,652
Rubber	*	789

* No statistics given.
Sources: Eleventh Census, 1890, Compendium (1894), 1011-13; Twelfth Census, 1900, Occupations (1904), 746-749.

Table 6

Leading Industries
by Total Capital, Land, and Machinery and Tool Value

Number of Establishments	Capital (dollars)	Land (acres)	Machinery (dollars)
Iron and Steel (3)	7,669,989	302,598	993,304
Pottery (29)	7,096,775	1,216,402	1,480,067
Rubber (6)	1,224,908	50,000	302,151
Foundry (17)	620,757	71,000	191,792

Source: U.S. Census 1900: Statistics of Manufacturies, pt. 2 (1902), 572-573.

By 1900, pottery employment declined relative to the population growth, but was still the largest single industry when combining capital, land and number of employees. The other leading industries employed smaller percentages of the workers. Rubber production expanded through the number of firms and wire rope grew through expansion of the existing Roebling plants. Textile production (in number) and iron and

steel (relative to increased population) declined. These two were older Trenton industries and could not compete with large concerns in other cities.[11]

Trenton's industrial diversity further split into occupational groups within a given industry. Pottery, iron and steel, and rubber employed workers in both direct production and in peripheral jobs. Carpenters, machinists, teamsters, warehousemen and laborers worked in support of the leading industries. Potters, the largest single occupational category, accounted for 4 percent of the work force. "Potter" designated a clay room worker, but was further broken down by craft, such as handlers, platemakers, throwers, and turners. No other pottery trade listed exceeded 1.7 percent of the workers sampled. It is not surprising that Trenton's leading industry minutely divided into numerous occupations. Stern identified thirty-three highly skilled pottery crafts, fourteen less skilled designations, and five general titles.[12]

When grouped together the independent skilled trades comprised a significant portion of Trenton's workers. One likely reason was that urban growth occurred simultaneously

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[11] Figures derived from statistics tabulated by Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 786-787. The numbers for 1890 and 1900 include all clay-working trades, using only pottery trades, the frequency of potters is reduced to 5.5 percent in 1890 and 5.1 percent in 1900.

[12] Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 804. Stern categorizes the designation of "potter" as a skilled clay room worker. Pottery laborer was the most prevalent less skilled worker.

with industrial growth, boosting the building trades. Some independent skilled workers escaped being absorbed by consolidation industries. Their independent strength points to the growth of population in Trenton.

Table 7

Percentage of Heads of Household In Largest Skilled Occupational Categories

Occupation	Percentage
Pottery Trades	
Potter	4.4
Generalware presser	1.7
Kilnmen	1.4
Carpenters	3.4
Wire drawers	1.9
Machinists	1.8
Engineers	1.7
Masons	1.3
Blacksmiths	1.1
Bakers	1.0
Total	19.7

Source: Ten percent head of household sample of the thirteen wards of Trenton in 1900.

Notes: The situation of the bakers and machinists was one of weakened skills and increasing division of labor. This makes the determination of skilled and semi-skilled occupations difficult. See Montgomery, Fall of the House of Labor, 180-213.

Skilled workers accounted for 34 percent of Trenton's employed household heads. Significantly, they represented more than half (55 percent) of the total blue collar occupations. Thus, industrial Trenton manifested a solid base of skilled labor. The blue collar occupations were divided into the categories of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers.

Table 8

Occupational Division of Head of Household by Percentage in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900

Occupation	Percent
Professionals	3
Managers, Proprietors	5
Semi-professional	1
Clerical, sales	7
Petty proprietors	10
Total White Collar	26
Skilled	34
Semi-skilled	14
Unskilled	13
Total Blue Collar	61
No Occupation	13
Total for Sample	100

Source: Ten percent head of household sample for the thirteen wards of Trenton.

Notes: While the thirteen percent listing of no occupation represented some people unable to find work, it also represented retired heads of household, female heads of household who may have taken in boarders but did not list that as their occupation, or female heads of household with working children living at home. This group also includes heads of household of independent means.

With more than half of Trenton's working class in skilled trades, there was a solid labor base for effective class action, especially since nearly two-thirds of the city was blue collar. Other factors must have been involved, therefore, to fragment labor solidarity.

Although the various skilled trades had similar problems and interests, the skilled workers of Trenton aligned more to ethnic and trade needs than to working class needs.

Situations bound them together for a time, such as during a strike, but they found unity difficult to sustain. This may be explained by the craft pride present in Trenton's skilled work force.

Occupational divisions account for some fragmentation that weakened the overall strength of Trenton's late nineteenth century labor movement. Within the city, and even within specific industries workers were not experiencing the same shop constraints, thus having little need for a single unifying issue.

Some trades within industries divided skills into minute detail, while others offered a large measure of autonomy.[14] Some industries had a tradition of organized unionism, while others only showed organized strength when a crisis situation occurred. Skilled pottery workers, iron molders, printers, and stonecutters achieved wage increases through organization since the 1860's. The first Operative Pottery Union was started by skilled pressers in 1862. In contrast, textile workers and canal workers were not unionized and only organized when threatened with cutbacks in pay.[15]

Technology was not a threat to all workers during this period. Barbers, carpenters, and masons had little to fear

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[14]See Appendix B for the divisions of skills in the rubber industry.

[15]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 410-413.

from technological innovation, although they may have been able to sympathize with the changes in other trades. A comparison of work environments in pottery, wire rope, iron and steel, wool, and rubber clarifies the occupational divisions within Trenton's working class. While realizing that none of these leading industries ever represented a majority of Trenton's workers, either individually or all together, those workers were the most vocal and therefore left the most evidence of class behavior.

Because of the skill divisions and technological differences in the various industries workers lacked a sufficient unifying cause to bind them together in a sustained struggle. Workers in various industries perceived inequities and threats to their position but those faced by the skilled potter differed greatly from those faced by a wiredrawer at the huge Roebling plant.

Working in the Pottery Industry

The pottery industry in Trenton operated on a relatively low capital investment for its size.[16] Although table six shows pottery second in capital investment for the city, the

[16] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Report on the Manufactures of the United States, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 76; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Report on the Manufacturing Industries of the United States, vol. 6, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office,1895), 158-161; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Manufacures by Industries, vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 142-145.

capital spread over twenty-nine industries.[17] The low level of capital development in the potteries allowed the potters to function as autonomous craftsmen with a great measure of control over work rules. The potters became the dominant aristocrats of the working class in Trenton. Even when competitive pressure from English goods and western ware developed, and though potteries of the second great American center in Ohio threatened to supplant their work system, the Trenton pottery industry remained competitive by switching from general ware to decorative and sanitary ware. In this manner they were able to preserve traditional hand techniques. Many Trenton manufacturers did not mechanize, bowing to pressure from the potters, although they threatened to increase their investment in machinery during strike activity. The large pottery centers in Ohio and Europe, however, continued to modernize.[18]

Trenton's potteries consistently employed between 33 percent and 50 percent British immigrants and British-Americans. First and second generation skilled labor found a comfortable working environment in which to operate. The waves of workers transplanted from the pottery districts of

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[17]For example, iron and steel had three establishments which averaged $2,556,663 invested per firm, while pottery had twenty-nine establishments which averaged $244,716 per firm. In machinery, iron and steel averaged $331,101 per firm, and pottery averaged $51,036 per firm.

[18]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 35-48; 150-158; 256-257.

England used organized and informal recruitment methods.[19] English trade unions encouraged emigration to eliminate less proficient potters from overstocked trades.[20] Once the flow of skilled labor started, family connections kept channels open for continuation and replacement as needed.[21]

The English potters brought to the Trenton benches their trade customs and traditions as well as trade unionism. At home in England they faced a growing division of labor and demand for the industrialization of production methods. These were not old style workers shocked by the modern industrial nature of American industry, but rather workers with a dream to retain a level of craft autonomy and social mobility already under siege in the trade at home.[22]

In Trenton, potters became a key link to an aspiring middle class since there was little difference between boss and skilled worker in many shops. The immediate superior to skilled pottery craftsmen, the boss potter, received wages similar to the highest paid "skilled men." The names of

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[19]Rowland Tappan Berthoff, British Immigrants In Industrial America, 1790-1950, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1953; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), 80-81; 111-114.

[20]W. H. Shepperson, British Emigration to North America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 95.

[21]Frank Thistlethwaite, "The Atlantic Migration of the Pottery Industry," Economic History Review, 2nd series, 11 (1958): 264-278.

[22]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 62-90.

Young, Speeler, Taylor, Coxen and Maddock stand out as prominent potters who succeeded in becoming owners, often in partnership with established native Trentonians.[23]

Skilled workers in the pottery industry accounted for 40 percent of the work force as late as 1932. The percentage was even greater before 1900.[24] Skilled workers such as throwers, turners, jiggermen, pressers, and handlers employed assistants making each craftsman a partial employer. This responsibility allowed them to retain their dignity and "manliness", a role which late nineteenth century workers so often sought to preserve.[25] Small amounts of machinery did enter the Trenton shops in the early 1880's, although few used them. The "pug-mill" replaced hand wedging (eliminating air bubbles), but many potters tried this mechanical homogenizer, only to abandon it -- claiming the hand method worked better.[26]

The traditional thrower was the most elite craftsman, yet by the 1880's the Trenton throwers faced the limitation of their autonomy through new work methods. They made only bowl and cup linings, jugs and chemical pieces. The thrower

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[23]Archibald M. Maddock, II, The Polished Earth, A History of the Pottery Plumbing Fixture Industry in the United States (Trenton: Printed privately, 1962).

[24]David A. McCabe, National Collective Bargaining in the Pottery Industry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932), 4.

[25]David Montgomery, Workers Control in America (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11-15.

[26]Trenton Sunday Advertiser (TSA), March 1, 1885.

still used his imagination to create new shapes and designs. Essentially, he represented craft continuity from pre-industrial times.[27]

Turners finished the throwers' work using hand tools which they purchased themselves. The initial finishing work was accomplished by a lathe powered by an assistant (later by steam). Turners also employed a female assistant for final scrutiny and sponging to insure that there were no defects or bubbles.[28]

Many Trenton shops employed mold makers rather than throwers and turners. This skill demanded just as much creativity as the previous ones. A modeler created a new piece from clay either by his own imagination or by reproducing existing designs from a cartoon on paper. The next step involved the forming of a clay replica.[29] This was sent to the mold maker, who created a useable case mold from which were made the working molds. Often the modeler worked for many firms on a job basis, but the moldmaker was needed full time to replace damaged molds.[30]

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[27]Charles F. Binns, Story of the Potters (London: George Newnes, Limited, 1896), 196.

[28]N.J.Bureau of Statistics, Sixth Report (1883), 272.

[29]Binns, Potter, 202.

[30]Maddock, Polished Earth, 230-232; Binns, Potter, 202-203; TSA, February 2, 1890.

Pressers, although not artistic, required considerable skill. Often they "batted" (worked the clay into a pancake without bubbles) for themselves, pressed the clay into a mold, then used a knife to polish the clay. Pressers were divided into several categories: hollowware (jugs, bowls, tureens, vases, teapots), flatware (plates, saucers and serving platters), and sanitaryware (all types of porcelain toilet articles).[31]

An alternate flatware method used the "jigger", especially to make circular dishes. Essentially it was a potters wheel fitted with a mold, and turned by a youth or operated by steam.[32] Each jiggerman employed several helpers, making the skilled craftsman more like an independent contractor than an operative in a factory.

Even though the craftsmen of the early eighteenth century would not recognize the shop procedures of the 1880's potter, the old skills and the reorganized new skills offered the worker a measure of control on the shop floor. Only two machines threatened to unseat their craft -- the batting machine and the pull-down. The batting machine was seldom used in Trenton, since human labor was cheaper than mechanizing costs.[33] The second machine, the pull-down, helped

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[31]N.J. Bureau of Statistics, Sixth Report (1883), 260-277.

[32]Binns, Potter, 199.

[33]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 214.

the jiggerman speed his work. It pressed a pre-measured bat onto the jigger, and increased the speed of output. Trenton potters, unlike Ohio workers, combatted the pull-down successfully for many years after 1880.[34]

Trenton pressers opposed both division of labor and machinery. They found that the addition of more assistants along with labor saving hardware increased output, thereby decreasing piece rates. The additional employees would compete for lower paying jobs.[35] The resulting debasement of skill meant a loss of control by potters on the shop floor.

Trenton pottery workers increasingly moved toward the production of sanitaryware which helped insure the pre-eminence of hand production.[36] Stern found that 95 percent of the sanitary divisions employed skilled labor using hand production. While the sanitary trade grew in importance in the twentieth century, most potteries continued in general ware production until 1900.[37]

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[34]Knights of Labor, District Assembly 160, L. A. 3573 Minutes, August 26, 1889, 75, Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library.

[35]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 213.

[36]Maddock, Polished Earth, 113-114; 218-219; Trenton Potteries Company, The Blue Book of Plumbing (Trenton: printed privately, 1927) Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library. Sanitary ware included bathroom equipment and fixtures, and was completed by pressing the clay into molds by skilled workers called sanitary pressers.

[37]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 253.

Table 9

Percentage of Wages to Cost of Product

Industry	Product/Wage by percentage	Average Daily Wage Skilled	Average Daily Wage Unskilled
Bridges	12	1.65	1.15
Earthenware	41	2.50	1.25
Iron and steel	22	2.60	1.25
Iron, castings	39	2.25	1.30
Iron, forging	32	2.15	1.30
Iron, wrought	16	1.50	1.00
Lock & gunsmith	36	1.65	1.00
Machinery	30	2.05	1.30
Masonry	32	2.15	1.20
Printing	34	2.00	1.70
Rubber	10	1.65	1.15
Saw	34	2.00	1.00
Wire	25	2.00	1.00
Woolen	20	no figures offered	

Source: New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, Fourth Annual Report (1881), 108-210.

Note: Figures compare the value of the product produced and the value of the worker as expressed in wages.

In 1880, potteries of Trenton employed 2,867 people with a capital investment of $1,902,500. Capital per employee averaged $663. This figure is well below the average capital per worker statistics in woolens, iron, steel, and printing for Trenton at that time.[38]

[38]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Report on Manufacturers of the United States, vol. 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883). The statistics were averaged on capital divided by total employees. Certainly this is not completely accurate since employee figures were sketchy at best and fluctuated considerably in the course of a year.

In a comparison of several industries, as revealed in Table 9, the earthenware workers (potters), iron casters, and precision metal workers made the highest wage as a percentage of the total value of the product. All three of these categories were highly skilled and labor intensive, requiring a large measure of human judgement.

Working in Trenton's Wool Industry

In contrast to the potters, employees of Trenton's two woolen mills worked for the same proprietor. Samuel K. Wilson owned one mill on Fair Street and one mill on Factory Street. He espoused the ultimate right to operate his property in any way he saw fit, simply by virtue of his ownership. In the 1890's his employees finally balked at the arbitrary way in which he conducted his affairs, and refused to take a wage cut amounting to 20 percent.[39] Wilson also had financial interests in banking and pottery. He owned the State Street House (a hotel), and a permanent market on Chancery Street. He wielded considerable influence as a member of the Board of Trade, and also held a position as a warden of St. Michael's Church, the most prominent Episcopal church in Trenton.[40] He was a

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[39]Trenton Sunday Advertiser (TSA), January 7, 1894.

[40]Trenton Historical Society, A History of Trenton, 1679-1929, vol. 2, Robert Walker, et.al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929), 332, 344, 409, 481, 483, 520, 543, 575, 590, 821, 1017, 1032. There are also instances of Wilson's generosity and philanthropy, but paternalistic magnanimity is not precluded in the old proprietor model.

proprietor reminiscent of the mill owners that Philip Scranton and Anthony Wallace found in antebellum Philadelphia.[41]

Table 10

Capital Invested Per Worker in Selected Industries
Trenton, New Jersey 1880

Iron and Steel	1,391
Woolen	1,187
Printing	1,029
Rubber	978
Earthenware	664
Carpentry	395
Tobacco prod.	300
Foundries	204
Masonry, brick	141

Source: New Jersey Bureau of Statistics, Third Report (1880), 78.

The textile industry was the first highly mechanized industry with employers investing heavily in durable goods.[42] In Trenton, the capital per worker in 1880 was $1,187.36.

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[41]TSA, January 7, 14, 1894, February 4, 1894; Philip Scranton, Proprietary Capitalism (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Anthony F.C. Wallace, Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution (New York: W.W. Norton, and Co., 1978).

[42] Fitzgerald's Trenton Directory lists three woolen establishments in 1894, Titus, Trenton and Wilson's two mills one on Factory Street and one on Fair Street. He employed at least eighty percent of the total workers in wool according to the estimates in the Advertiser and statistics on manufacture in the 1890 and 1900 censuses. The Trenton Sunday Advertiser, February 11, 1894 reports 82 in attendance at Titus's meeting to discuss the proposed pay cut at their mill -- 80 were women.

This fails to explain Samuel Wilson's reluctance to start his machinery during hard economic times since he was so heavily capitalized and less dependent on human labor.[43] One employee, interviewed by the Advertiser, was incredulous that Titus's mill workers on the outskirts of Trenton were faced with an estimated 32 percent cut from the previous fall, yet were able to compromise with their owner to reduce the cut to thirteen percent. The Advertiser pointed out that Mr. Wilson was only being asked to meet the workers half way.[44]

Wilson arose from humble beginnings in Burlington County. From a tailor's apprentice in 1834 he progressed to own a small tailor's shop in Mount Holly. Soon he had saved enough to enter into a partnership with another tailor in Philadelphia. The pair sold goods on commission to local manufacturers. After saving several thousand dollars, Samuel Wilson sought a small factory of his own.[45]

An available factory was located in Trenton, and he purchased the small mill on Factory Street in the early 1850's. In 1869, he expanded his operations by purchasing the Crozier Mill on Fair Street. Philadelphia's textile industry was thriving at that time partially because of its system of production from direct orders and numerous small,

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[43]TSA, February 18, 1894; see Table 7.

[44]TSA, February 24, 1894.

[45]Ibid.

specialized firms.[46] Wilson took the counter route of running an integrated operation from spinning to finishing. By the 1890's, he was using steam power and was heavily capitalized which made him less flexible than many of his Philadelphia counterparts.[47]

After the 1870's Wilson enlarged the mills, continuing the expansion of his interests by investing in various properties around Trenton. His tax records indicated to the Advertiser that he was worth over a million dollars in 1894, but how much more they could not determine.[48]

With his wealth diversified, Wilson was less dependent on the textile mills and could afford to make arbitrary labor decisions. Samuel Wilson, when interviewed in 1894, implied a warning to the workers that they were dealing with a man committed to digging in and winning. His way would be the only way, even though it defied the realities of running a textile mill in the 1890's. During the other economic downturns and shifts in public tastes (after the Civil War and the depression of the 1870's) the heavily capitalized mills of New England were hampered by their lack of diversity.

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[46]See Scranton, Proprietary Capitalism, 5-20.

[47]TSA, February 24, 1894; see Scranton, Proprietary Capitalism, (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1983) for a complete discussion of the Philadelphia production and distribution methods.

[48]Ibid.

Wilson likewise bemoaned times of production surplus.[49] Wilson's employees were convinced that they were being paid less than woolen workers in other cities. One worker reported that "... nobody will come here to work for less than they can get elsewhere."[50] The antagonism toward Wilson seemed very personal, not merely a reaction to the diminishing viability of textile production in Trenton.[51]

Nearby Philadelphia had a solid textile industry so that Wilson's operation had to depend on cheap labor in order to stay competitive, especially during the depression years of the 1890's. The Wilson Mills illustrated the growing disparity between workers and employers. Samuel K. Wilson's network of capital concerns cushioned him against any loss in the woolen mills, and his attitude was one of paternalism yet insensitivity. In his own words to the Daily True American, Wilson, when asked if his loss was just as great when his mills were not running, answered:

> I am at a loss if my mills cease running, and I am at a loss at present while they are running, so you see the position I am placed in. But let me say to you, sir, that I take a pride in running my mills and I would like to see them running night and day, but when the supply exceeds the demand, then we cannot run. I employ nearly one thousand hands,

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[49]TSA, February 24, 1894; Scranton, Proprietary Capitalism, 180-220.

[50]TSA, February 24, 1894.

[51]TSA, July 26, 1896.

many of whom own their little homes, and have been in my employ a quarter of a century.[52]

Because of the heavy investment in machinery the individual worker had little autonomy and even less control on the shop floor. Despite their low wages, mill workers may have had somewhat greater autonomy than other factory operatives in Trenton. In many cases the textile workers were unmarried women from the working class helping to supplement and support their families.[53]

Trenton textile workers were often in families of differing occupations. A skilled potter, for example, may have had sons in the potteries and daughters working as woolen operatives. These young girls were often of British, Irish or German extraction. Many were from families with roots in Trenton's labor organizations, but their militancy was situational. They finally struck against Wilson in 1894, when they were faced with a pay cut. This strike, to be discussed later, was one of indignant anger against an employer as much as it reflected the changing economic situation of the 1890's.

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[52]Daily True American, January 8, 1894.

[53]In a ten percent head of household sample the numbers of textile workers were smaller than actual because so few household heads were employed in textiles. Only .5 percent of the sample were employed in skilled textile positions, and no semi-skilled were sampled.

Working in the Metal Industries

A thriving iron industry existed in Trenton in the 1840's. Peter Cooper and Abraham S. Hewitt established the Trenton Iron Company in 1847. The next year, John A. Roebling established his wire cable company; the Phoenix Iron Company commenced in 1849.[54] By 1890, Roebling's massive company with 956 employees had outdistanced the other firms which had a combined work force of 889. By 1900, wire rope listed 1,652 employees, and iron and steel dropped down to 789.[55]

Trenton's metal workers in the 1880's received generally good wages. Wages in 1884, as reported by the New Jersey Bureau of Labor, ranged from $590 average yearly earnings in one plant to $690 in another for an overall average of $630. Except for laborers, who earned an average of $350, the average yearly earnings ranged from $590 per year to $735 per year while the bosses earned $900.[56]

Wire entered a new period of expansion in 1893, when other industries were fighting to survive. Long rope for cable roads became popular, and as Washington Roebling admitted "none too soon." For a while they had a virtual

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[54]Trenton Historical Society, A History of Trenton, 532-537.

[55]See Table 4.

[56]TSA, January 12, 1902; N.J. State Bureau of Statistics, Fourth Report, (1881).

monopoly in roadway cable.[57]

Even so, by 1895 the economic situation finally touched the wire rope business, and the workers faced a reduction. In the Roebling concern, the difference in yearly wages between highest and lowest pay in the various trades was only 12 percent. In the midst of the depression Roebling's workers finally received a cut in wages. One worker commented that the cut would amount to $2.00 a day or more, but it would do no good to grumble because the management would only say that their places could easily be filled. Hardest hit was the rolling mill department which had the least skilled workers, who worked by the ton and faced an immediate wage cut.[58]

After the depression, technological advances decreased wages further. The machinist seemed to have experienced the most change and debasement of skill. These former wizards of gauges and files faced an increasing loss of craftsman status and their wages reflected this fact. In an article written for Iron Age, a former machinist discussed the sweeping changes in the craft from 1851 to 1902. Allowing for glossy nostalgia, there are some salient points to Egbert Watson's article, if only to highlight the attitudes of the time. Watson's bias bent toward the superior overall ability of

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[57]Ibid., 338.

[58]Trenton Sunday Advertiser, January 27, 1895.

American machinists, although partly because of the superior tools produced in the United States, especially the American design of hammers and chisels. The mid-century machinist was painted as a true craftsman, able to perform skills in producing machinery.[59]

In contrast, Watson characterized the machinist of the century's end as a producer of less real work, since increased output was due to machines. In his opinion the so-called skilled machinist could only perform limited tasks. The real craftsman of 1851 had become an operative.[60] What Watson failed to perceive from his closeness to the situation was that although skill definitions change with technological improvement, the machinist of 1900 was still a skilled craft with new skills attached to operating intricate machines. Perhaps the situation mourned by Watson was the loss of the previously leisurely pace of work before machinists used power tools. What was lost in the transition was control of time, pace and the finished product, but the machinists used intricate work rules to maintain shop control.

David Montgomery explored the metal shop rituals according to their degree of formal organization, and the amount of skill and autonomy the workers brought into the shop. Montgomery noted several methods of control used by

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[59]Egbert Watson, "Fifty Years Among American Workingmen," Iron Age, September 18, 1902.

[60]Ibid.

workers in the maturing industrial economy of the late nineteenth century. Autonomous craftsmen tended to use the informal methods such as voluntary control of output known as the "stint". In this situation, "manly duty" dictated cooperation. "Hoggers-in", those who produced more than the agreed output, were treated with disdain and lost personal dignity when they broke the "stint". Employers tried to undermine this process by hiring less skilled workers who would accept less pay, and not be governed by these methods of skilled employees.[61]

Because voluntary control of output often failed, workers formalized their work rules to insure mutualistic behavior. Usually legislated by specific local unions, the rules were often simple, like terms of apprenticeship or the prohibition of helpers in performing journeymen's duties. Sometimes the union dictated every step of the production process, often making the rules too intrusive to management, who would then provoke a strike, or simply "lock-out" the workers in an effort to break the collective efforts of the workers.[62]

Work rules were effective within the venue of the skilled trades, but semi-skilled operators steadily increased in the late nineteenth century. Metal workers in Trenton were generally employed by large, incorporated firms. Skilled

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[61]David Montgomery, Workers Control in America (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9-27.

[62]Montgomery, Workers, 15-18.

machinists worked in industries that employed many semi-skilled workers. Montgomery argued that the mutual support was the only form of redress for these workers. This mutualism among many skill levels and trades in an industry took the form of a sympathy strike. Often the employers tried to break the sympathy strike by catering to the skilled trades in the industry. By dividing the ranks, employers could break resistance, often replacing skilled workers with less skilled counterparts.[63]

In companies like the John A. Roebling's, Sons an increasing reliance was placed on refining the system of production. These companies' systems and management employed trained engineers (at Roebling's, company owners Charles and Ferdinand Roebling were engineers). The Roebling company increased engineering efficiency during several generations of dynastic leadership. Efficiency of production decreased the skilled worker's perception of their own autonomy as craftsmen.

By 1900, John A. Roebling, Sons Co. had completed integration of all manufacturing processes horizontally and vertically. With the company's success in producing steel cables and electrical conductors, numerous government contracts were secured to produce cable for military purposes as well as woven wire fabric. The machines used in production

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[63]Ibid., 21-27.

were built in the Roebling company's own shop, including steam turbines used for powering their operation. By 1904, the company planned to produce their own open hearth steel in a new plant twelve miles south of Trenton.[64] At that point they integrated production from raw material to finished product.

At Roebling's, the family and the company insulated themselves from relying on other firms as much as possible.[65] When steel rods became too expensive, they produced their own open hearth steel. When land was denied them at what they thought was a reasonable price, the company built a town twelve miles south of their Trenton plants, then built a rail system to transport goods and people between the Trenton plants and the new company town of Kinkora. Although Trenton's rubber industry was thriving, the Roebling's produced their own rubber.[66]

The American Bridge Company's Trenton plant was part of a nationwide network of shops in fifteen cities and by 1901 was securing international contracts. Their practice of hiring Italian immigrant labor and housing them in temporary shelters near the work site was an effective use of ethnic

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[64]Washington A. Roebling, "An Inside View of a Great Industry," in Hamilton Schuyler, The Roeblings; A Century of Engineers Bridge-builders, and Industrialists (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), 330-366.

[65]Schuyler, Roeblings, passim. See Starr, "Uses of Power", especially 304, 269.

[66]Schuyler, The Roeblings, 367-373; Trenton Sunday Advertiser, January 4, 11, 1903.

seclusion, also eliminating the dangerous influences of the working class neighborhoods.[67] In contrast, the Roebling family had social and business ties to Trenton. Although concentrated in ethnic enclaves, their workers were more tied to the pride of working for the Roebling family than were workers employed by a branch of a national corporation with a board of directors.[68] They identified with the Roeblings' in much the same way one would later identify with a city baseball club.

Metal workers confronted sophisticated technology, nevertheless they reported satisfactory wages in Trenton. This may account for their complacency toward trade unions, which one machinist argued, were "good as far as they go, but the members are apt to think that the interests of their own particular trade are all that is necessary to look after."[69] Their contentment lasted until the late 1890's when they finally realized the relative unimportance of the individual worker. By then the metal industries were able to place labor tightly in the vise of systematic management.

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[67]The Trenton Times (TTT), May 20, 1901.

[68]Fifty Year Commemorative Publication, "Roebling, New Jersey," Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Free Public Library.

[69]See Montgomery, Fall of the House of Labor (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 171-213.

Working in Trenton's Rubber Industry

Jonathan Green, a reformed gambler, started the rubber industry in 1848, but his factory remained small, producing minor mechanical rubber goods. This was followed by another small factory in East Trenton. Charles Mead's operation soon outgrew its accommodations, and some equipment was moved to an old gristmill on North Clinton Avenue. In the 1870's, however, rubber was so insignificant nationally that the U. S. Census report on manufacturing failed to include it.[70]

In 1881, capital invested in the rubber industry reflected a fairly high investment per worker. Using the 1881 statistics for percentage of product paid in wages, the results show the lowest return for any industry in Trenton. The number of workers grew from 312 in 1881, to 1,500 in 1903, and the capital invested increased from $309,800 to $2,900,000.[71]

By 1903, Trenton contained ten rubber plants with two more under construction. The rubber industry in Trenton was run by several different business methods. One was operated and owned by a proprietor. Another plant was incorporated, but most of the controlling interest was in the hands of one man. The rest were fully incorporated. Most of the plants

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[70]TTT, January 11, 03; see also, Trenton Historical Society, A History of Trenton, v. 2.

[71]TTT, January 11, 1903; N.J. State Bureau of Statistics, Fourth Report (1881).

employed between 100 and 200 workers.[72] Rubber workers were more easily replaced than potters or iron and steel workers because most of the operatives were semi-skilled, but during the panic and depression of the 1890's, the rubber industry workers experienced less change, perhaps because their pay was low to start. The rubber companies paid their workers the smallest percentage of the product value.[73]

Trenton's rubber workers were mostly producing belts and rubber hose, although the older industry of producing elastic for clothing was part of their industrial output. While some Trenton rubber workers listed themselves as hose makers, hose wrappers and compound mixers, two-thirds gave themselves no skill title except the semi-skilled designation of rubber worker.[74] The low pay and high ratio of semi-skilled rubber workers in a city of so many skilled workers belied the eventual rubber strike at the turn of the century. During the 1890's the industry was expanding to such an extent that when other workers were idle the rubber operatives were still manufacturing. When the potteries were depressed, and the Wilson's woolen workers were taking pay cuts, Trenton's rubber industry was maintaining a steady pace.

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[72]TTT, January 11, 1903.

[73]Ibid.; see Table 7.

[74]Ibid.; Hose makers and compound mixers comprised .3 percent of the household heads, and the category of rubber worker encompassed .9 percent of the ten percent head of household sample.

Conclusion

The variety of working conditions, technological sophistication and management maturity in Trenton's workshops fragmented any solid, class wide efforts in the 1880's and 1890's. The low paid woolen workers under the thumb of Samuel K. Wilson had little in common with the potters. Boss potters were a small step below their own bosses. In the metal industries, numerous trades were housed under one factory roof.

Carpenters acted as autonomous craftsmen, but often worked for the same firm as a semi-skilled rubber operative, who had the least autonomy. These various work settings fragmented rather than solidified workers. Beyond those divisive influences, Trenton's complex work culture illustrates the struggle for common ground among the working classes of Trenton.

CHAPTER III -- ETHNIC AND OCCUPATIONAL PATTERNS

By 1900, Trenton's industrial development attracted a predominantly working class but diverse population both ethnically and occupationally. This diversity benefited the population through the employment opportunities available within the city.[1] On the other hand ethnic and occupational diversity fragmented the working people into groups hard to unite into class action except in times of crisis.[2]

This chapter will discuss the ethnic and occupational diversity in Trenton using a sample of the 1900 census manuscript, along with government compilations from the 1900 census. The material reveals that native Americans were the dominant cultural group, with the foreign born mainly divided between German, Irish and British. The patterns of specific residential clustering and some occupational concentration influenced workers on the job and cultural activities.

The percentage of foreign born remained amazingly stable in Trenton from 1870 to 1900; therefore, the need to delve

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[1]Rosenzweig, Eight Hours, 9-27. Rosenzweig found similar ethnic and occupational diversity in Worcester, Massachusetts (1870-1920), and argued that class behavior was often evident in the struggle for leisure time and space.

[2]Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, xv-xix; 128-130. The various fragments, or "competing cultural systems" of the working class, had to be united into a "subculture of opposition" to accomplish any class activity.

more deeply into the data is essential to see the distinctive ethnic patterns.

Table 11
Trenton Population by Nativity, 1870-1900

	1870	1880	1890	1900
Native born	17,855	24,191	43,410	56,514
Percentage of total	78	81	76	77
Foreign born	5,019	5,719	14,048	16,793
Percentage of total	22	19	24	23
Total	22,874	29,910	57,458	73,307

Sources: Stern, "Potters of Trenton", 786.

Table 12

Ethnic Concentrations, 1900
Trenton Heads of Household

Ethnic Group	Frequency	Percentage	
Native American	725	49.2	
British born	153	10.3\	13.2
British American	43	2.9/	Brit. stock
German born	143	9.7\	14.2
German American	69	4.5/	Ger. stock
Irish born	111	7.4\	12.9
Irish American	81	5.5/	Irish stock
Hungarian born	30	2.0	
Italian born	27	1.8	
Polish born	22	1.4	
Russian born	20	1.3	
Others	41	2.9	

Source: Ten percent sample of the heads of household for the thirteen wards of Trenton.

Notes: Native American indicates native born Caucasian of native parents.

The statistics show that while the number of foreign born grew sharply, the share of the city's total population remained relatively stable. The ethnic composition is revealed by a deeper look at the population by 1900.

Nearly half of Trenton's heads of household were native Americans with native parents. This group held white collar jobs more frequently than the city average of white collar employees, but even the native Americans were more heavily blue collar than white collar. The high percentage of native Americans listing "no occupation" in the 1900 census was due to retirement or independent means, rather than the inability to find work.

Table 13

Percentage of Distribution
Trenton's Heads of Household, 1900 by Place of Birth

	City	Native/ Native	Foreign born Br/	Ir/	Ger/	It/	Hu/	Pol
White Collar	25	28	24	9	13	18	0	0
Blue Collar	62	55	64	70	75	77	90	86
Skilled	34	35	51	31	36	36	28	7
Semi-sk	14	15	9	18	12	9	19	0
Unskilled	13	8	4	21	27	32	43	79
No Occupation	13	17	12	21	12	5	10	14

Source: Ten percent head of household sample for the thirteen wards of Trenton. "Br" indicates British-born, "Ir" indicates Irish-born, "Ger" indicates German-born, "It" indicates Italian-born, "Hu" indicates Hungarian-born, and "Pol" indicates Polish-born.

Native American loyalties were divided among the numerous social clubs in Trenton, whether beneficial, fraternal or

community service such as fire companies.[3] Dennis Starr has noted the native Americans were most likely to reap the social rewards of the city.[4] Their position in Trenton was most secure, whether they were employed in white collar or blue collar jobs.

Religious activities often competed for the loyalties of the native American working class in Trenton. Sectarian tradition and church activities were strong in Trenton. In 1885, Leo Smith, a local semi-professional baseball player, observed that Sundays were spent quietly with most people in church. The Methodists had a strong network in Trenton, and concurrently three prohibitionist organizations were putting pressure on the city's numerous taverns. Christian baptisms were a regular feature at the Delaware River in the summer.[5]

Of the immigrant groups, the British, Germans and Irish and their children comprised another forty percent of the population, and each group was about equal in size. The British followed the city-wide pattern for occupational divisions between white and blue collar, but had the largest

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[3]Fitzgerald's Trenton and Mercer County Directory, Thomas Fitzgerald, Trenton New Jersey, 1883-1890; Daily True American (DTA), August 3, 1881; Trenton Sunday Advertiser (TSA), June 27, 1886.

[4]Dennis James Starr, "The nature and uses of Economic, Political and Social Power in Trenton, New Jersey, 1890-1917," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1979).

[5]Randolph Linthurst, Journal of Leo Smith (Adams Press: Chicago, 1976) 48-53.

representation of skilled employment among blue collar workers. Over half of all British stock Trentonians in 1900 were skilled workers, almost a 5 percent greater share than among German stock workers who are frequently identified with traditional craft work. The link between the British and Trenton's highly skilled pottery industry significantly accounts for the half of the British population employed as skilled workers.

British ethnic activities flourished in Trenton. A fraternal association, the Son's of St. George, kept alive the traditions and cultures of Britain. The fields of Trenton were just as likely to be filled with games of cricket and soccer as baseball. Numerous Episcopal and Methodist churches dotted the city to serve the religious needs of the British immigrants. The British, especially in the pottery industry, had a reputation as drinkers, but it is unclear how many drinking establishments catered to only British stock.[6] The British identified more with the native born Americans than any other cultural group. They found assimilation easily because their language and Protestantism coincided with the dominant culture, and because American culture was typically transplanted British culture.

Three quarters of Trenton's German population were blue collar. They were represented in skilled, semi-skilled, and

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[6]Fitzgerald's, 1883-1890; DTA, August 3, 1881; TSA, June 27, 1886.

unskilled categories. Both the Germans and the Irish had been in Trenton from mid-century. Their numbers grew to reflect a continuous flow of immigrants from those countries to the end of the century.[7]

Many Germans attended Trinity German Lutheran Church, one of three churches with services conducted in German. They would sing in the various German singing groups coordinated as United Singing Societies, or dance at the various German dance halls such as Leiderkrantz and Reister Halls, sometimes known as beer gardens. Trenton's oldest German social club, the Social Turn Verein owned a magnificent building, Turner Hall, site of many labor meetings.[8]

The Irish occupational patterns were similar to the Germans' but with a high percentage of household heads listing "no occupation." Many widowed females had children living at home and working, supporting the family income, although working children supplementing the household income was prevalent throughout the city and not restricted only to the Irish. Two thirds of the Irish households in Trenton had one or more children over age fourteen working.

The Irish like the Germans had entrenched cultural activities in the city. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the St. Patrick's Alliance and the Irish Land League served the

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[7]The German community was partly due to the Roebling's recruitment of workers from their native Germany.

[8]Fitzgerald's, 1883-1890; TSA, September 20, 1896.

Irish immigrant's need for continuity. The Irish Land League sponsored picnics, lectures and rallies, while the Hibernians and St. Patricks Alliance catered to the social and fraternal needs of Irish Roman Catholics.[9]

The core immigrant groups of British, Germans, and Irish followed a similar pattern in many other industrial cities in the United States.[10] The most exceptional pattern in Trenton's older immigrant groups was the trade tie of the British to pottery. In wards eight and nine, nearly two thirds of the British workers were in the pottery industry, and in these wards, one third of the potters were British.[11] The ethnic/trade link was important in its influence on the history of labor in Trenton.

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[9]Ibid.

[10]Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, 34-60. Trenton was a smaller representation of Detroit during the late nineteenth century.

[11]The two ward sample using all employed people, yielded similar results to Stern, who found a high correlation of Trenton potters to British immigrants, see Stern, "Potters of Trenton", 258-285, 800-801; but, Donald A. Shotliff, "A History of the Labor Movement in the American Pottery Industry: The National Brotherhood of Operative Potters-International Brotherhood of Operative Potters, 1890-1970" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1977), argues that the British influence in the pottery industry has been overstated. This may have been valid for Ohio, but not for Trenton.

Table 14
Percentage of Employment by Nativity
Selected Industries, 1900

	All	Nat/	Br/	Ire/	Ger	It/	Pol/	other
Carpentry	3	63	7	6	18	--	--	2
Pottery	13	26	32	21	13	2	1	3
Machinery	2	41	22	9	15	--	--	2
Iron and Steel	3	23	11	23	13	4	3	4
Wire	6	22	14	12	17	11	3	4
Rubber	3	54	9	20	9	2	1	4
Woolen	1	28	15	28	17	--	--	3
Laborers, unspecified	11	24	3	22	19	7	5	3

Source: Twelfth U.S. Census, Occupations, 1904, pp.746-749.

Notes: "All" indicates percentage of all workers in each industry. "Nat" indicates all native born. For other abbreviations see note with Table 13. Statistics were not available from the Twelfth Census for ethnic stock groupings.

Cultural groupings represented by the various immigrants and their children affected labor activity. People clung to their kinship and cultural groups more tightly during times of economic and social upheaval. They were more likely to seek cultural security during times of rapid population growth, and ethnocentricity was never far from the surface even during stable periods.

Class based activity and specifically organized labor activity required the various groups within a city to put aside other loyalties and embrace a specific cause or principle. In nineteenth century America, this usually accompanied a crisis situation. After the crisis was over people slowly returned to the old familiar activities. If

people were residentially segregated by ethnic group, class solidarity was more difficult to maintain.

Native Americans were scattered throughout the city, but more heavily concentrated in the more elite "west end" in Wards Two and Thirteen, or in the residential areas of the old borough of Wilbur, later Ward Twelve.[12] The older immigrant groups were less residentially segregated than the new groups, and also more numerous.

Table 15
Percentage of Distribution in Grouped Wards
Trenton Heads of Household by Nativity, 1900

	White Collar Residential 2, 12, 13,	North-east and Central Industrial 1, 5, 7, 8	Chambersburg South Trenton 3, 4, 6, 9-11
Native Am.	29	31	40
British	11	44	47
Germans	8	26	66
Irish	16	48	36
Hungarians	--	10	90
Italians	5	19	76
Polish	--	58	42

Source: Ten percent head of household sample for the thirteen wards of Trenton.

Native born Americans with native parents were spread throughout the city, which is not surprising since they constituted half of the city population. Foreign born Trentonians, on the other hand, were concentrated in the industrial areas of the northeastern portion of the city

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[12]Ward 14 was not a part of Trenton in 1900, but rather in Ewing Township.

(commonly called "East Trenton") and South Trenton. Germans, Hungarians and Italians heavily populated the former borough of Chambersburg in wards four, nine and ten. While Wards Two, Twelve, and Thirteen were not strictly white collar, more often they housed middle class occupants.

Of the foreign born the English and the Germans were more active in labor organization. In Wards Eight and Nine the native born and foreign born British dominated the skilled positions in industries.

Table 16
Skilled Occupations by Nativity in Wards Eight and Nine

	Native	British	German	Irish	other
Pottery	47	32	5	7	9
Precision Metal	74	10	16	--	--
Iron and Steel	69	17	14	--	--
Rubber	67	16	--	17	--
Other Skilled Trades	58	16	9	3	14

Source: Ten percent sample of all workers for working class Wards Eight and Nine.

A clustering of Germans in Ward Eleven housed an active socialist group. The Eleventh Ward German occupational levels were either semi-skilled, unskilled, or not working. Even so German unskilled labor was more radical than any other unskilled ethnic group. In their case ethnic ties alerted them to class difficulties and concerns.[13]

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[13]TSA, September 20, 1896. Ostreicher's study of Detroit showed unskilled German support for socialist candidates, although his results also showed little consequence from ethnic residential concentrations. See Solidarity and Fragmentation, 8, 84.

Table 17
Percentage of Laborers by Nativity
in Wards Eight and Nine

	Italian	Hungarian	Polish	German	Native	Other
Pottery	36	--	9	--	45	11
Iron and Steel	42	14	--	--	43	1
Rubber	6	--	--	7	69	18
Wire	37	25	2	9	14	
Unspecified	28	10	20	12	16	14

Source: Ten percent sample of all workers in working class Wards Eight and Nine.

Hungarians, Italians and Poles had little in common with either native Americans or the older immigrant groups in Trenton. Their non-industrial background made them less active in labor organizations of Trenton. Occupationally they comprised 61 percent of the wire mill laborers, and were concentrated near the John A. Roebling's Sons Upper Works. Although the Italian community showed a higher percentage of white collar workers, they were petty proprietors and hucksters, centered in their own ethnic neighborhood.

The language barrier was another incentive for the Hungarians and Italians to cluster. They often reported no English spoken in their households. The Roebling company had little labor unrest in the late nineteenth century, but were employing less skilled workers from southern and eastern Europe by the beginning of the twentieth century. The large numbers of each group employed at Roebling's offered little

incentive to assimilate into the larger American culture.[14]

Trenton's labor movement was limited not only by its ethnicity, but by its occupational diversity as well. Trenton's heads of household engaged in at least two hundred and seventy-five occupations in 1900. Most occupations employed no more than .1 percent to .5 percent of the household heads.[15]

The two largest clusters of employment in Trenton were wire workers and pottery workers. These two industries illustrate the significance of ethnic and occupational patterns in Trenton. A significant number of potters lived in ward eight, and numerous wire workers resided in ward nine. A sample of every tenth worker in those two wards supplies a closer look at the groups living and working in those wards.

Table 18

Percentage of Skilled and Semi-skilled Wire Workers by Ethnicity in Wards Eight and Nine

Ethnicity	Percentage
Native Americans	42
Germans	35
British	7
Hungarian	7
Irish	3
Italian	3
Other European	3

Source: Ten percent sample of all workers in working class Wards Eight and Nine.

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[14]Hamilton Schuyler, The Roeblings, 367-374.

[15]Few tabulated above .1 percent, but of those which did, only two clerical occupations, four petty professional, twelve skilled, one semi-skilled, and two unskilled occupations.

Of the wire workers living in ward nine, the more skilled positions were either native American or German. Statistics were significantly different for the unskilled wire workers. The newer ethnic groups were heavily represented as wire laborers.

Table 19

Percentage of
Unskilled Wire Workers
by Ethnicity in Wards Eight and Nine

Ethnicity	Percentage
Italians	37
Hungarian	24
German	12
Native American	11
Irish	9
Other European	7

Source: Ten percent sample of all workers in working class Wards Eight and Nine.

The unskilled wire workers had little in common either culturally and occupationally with the more skilled wire workers. Wire workers influenced the working class movement less than the potters. There were several reasons. Wire workers were not represented by a union, although within the Roebling company, machinists were organized.[16]

There were 1,395 potter household heads using the sample statistics. The total number of Trenton potters in 1900 was 3,775 leaving two thirds of the potters as younger members of household groups many of which were contributing to a family income. Stern's sample of the potters in the 1900 census

[16] TUA, May 11, 1900.

indicated the mean age of Trenton potters at thirty years old for men, and twenty-two for women, with 44 percent of the potter household's having one or two potters per household and 54 percent having more than two potters per household.[17] Trade concentration within the household groups helped to educate the younger members as to the craft traditions of the trade.

Fourteen percent of Trenton's households had boarders, and in the case of the potters, those boarders were primarily other potters.[18] Wire workers were significantly clustered, but their non-union background made them more likely to show class consciousness in ethnic activities.

Table 20
Percentage of Pottery Workers
Ward Eight and Entire City

Ward Eight		Entire City	
Native Americans	22	Native Americans	24
British	44	British	36
Irish	20	Irish	19
other	14	other	22

Source: Ten percent sample of all workers in working class Wards Eight and Nine. Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 801.

Notes: Both the statistics for potters of ward eight and Stern's statistics for the entire city were for first and second generation immigrants.

A slightly higher percentage of potters lived in wards eight and nine than in the city average, but 82 percentage of them lived in Ward Eight. The ward housed the Cook Pottery

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[17]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 812-813.

[18]Boarders were only recorded for those head of household's not listing boardinghouse as an occupation.

Company, the Elite Pottery Company, American Porcelain Works, the Bell Mark Pottery, the Enterprise Pottery Company, the Imperial Porcelain Works and the Keystone Pottery Company.[19]

The pottery industry had a different ethnic structure than the wire industry. Pottery laborers comprised a small proportion of those working in the pottery industry, but again they were mostly Italian, and three quarters of the semi-skilled and unskilled pottery workers were in ward nine; many of whom were younger family members of wire workers.

Yet there were divisive tendencies within this elite industry of skilled workers. Crafts within the pottery industry were divided by ethnic groups. The kilnmen and handlers were more likely to be native American, while the moldmakers, jiggermen and turners were more likely to be British.[20] Ethnic and skill divisions, even among the potters, created a city-wide reality that Trenton's working people were as dissimilar as they were alike.

The residential patterns of the city showed some clustering, although ethnic groups with the highest skill levels lived throughout the city. Ethnic concentrations were found among the newer immigrant groups, but these groups

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[19]Twelve more potteries were close by in Ward Five. These two wards acted as the pottery center for the city.

[20]New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries, Twelfth Annual Report,(1889), 126-127; 130-131. The potters were divided into craft divisions in both the Knights of Labor and later the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters.

occupied the less skilled jobs and were fewer in number.

The occupational distribution of Trenton in 1900 shows a diverse city with some occupational clustering of the potters and wire workers. The wire workers were tied to their ethnic divisions, had language barriers, and represented a large percentage of Trenton's unskilled laborers. They were not ready to become involved in the interests of organized labor.

Industries with the heaviest concentration of specific cultural groups included carpentry, machinery, and rubber. In 1890, the pottery industry showed heavier concentrations of British. Likewise, in 1890, more Irish were employed in the woolen industry. Concentration of cultural groups in one industry enabled the workers to rally to a cause more easily.

The wire industry, specifically Roeblings, housed numerous occupations in one company. The firm included a rolling mill, a machine shop, and a wire drawing operation, among others. This accounts for the remarkably even distribution of employees, and explains the inability or effectiveness in union organization.

The potters, while essentially the key to union strength in Trenton, were divided by crafts, and still held on to old biases and traditions. The craft centeredness of the potters deprived the city of a true working class leadership. The many voices of labor were sporadically joined in a united front against employers, but Trenton's working class did not

sense one binding issue to sustain class solidarity throughout the late nineteenth century.

The large numbers of native born in the city further divided labor strength. While the British born pottery workers had a tradition of labor leadership since 1870, the pottery industry no longer had the British domination it once enjoyed. The large numbers of native born Americans in Trenton compared to other industrial cities weakened working class efforts to sustain labor awareness.

CHAPTER IV -- RHETORIC AND REALITY

Overview of Trenton's Labor Activity

Trenton's labor organizations reflected some typical late nineteenth century ethnic, occupational and industrial patterns, but in other ways they were unusual. British immigrants in Trenton's pottery industry during the late nineteenth century directed Trenton's labor movement to suit their own needs. Outwardly they fostered class behavior, whereas in reality solid working class unity rarely existed. In the early 1880's, some Trenton workers embraced the Knights of Labor, especially those employed in the pottery industry. Although the Knights were the first group to successfully unite Trenton workers under one banner, labor unions existed in Trenton from at least 1850.

Evidence of the early unions is sketchy, with available references revealing some militant behavior with mixed results. Skilled stonecutters, typographers, iron molders, cordwainers, and builders organized in the 1850's on the local level. The only radical activity was carried out by unskilled and unorganized canal workers. This largely Irish immigrant group rioted during the unsuccessful 1852 strike. The iron molders, printers and stonecutters struck in the 1860's for a wage increase and won. In contrast to the strikes by

unskilled canal workers, strikes by the skilled workers were reported as non-radical.[1]

Organization in the potteries started with the skilled pressers who formed the Operative Potters Union of Trenton in 1862. In 1864 the union demanded a ten percent raise on piece rates. Two firms acceded to the demand to raise piece rates, but other firms offered price lists to the pressers which the pressers claimed actually lowered wages. The Potters National Union struck and within three weeks the employers agreed to the increase in wages. This victory should have been a benefit to the union, but it seemed to promote complacency and apathy among the workers. The union's subsequent decline stemmed more from lack of interest than from any efforts by employers to destroy it.[2]

Craft loyalty divided these early pottery unions, illustrated by the formation in 1868 of separate unions for kilnmen, pressers, and moldmakers. Each held their own fundraisers since they refused to share funds with one another. Clay room workers (pressers, throwers, turners, moldmakers) and oven men (kilnmen, saggermakers) perceived differences that they found hard to overcome. Workers in the pottery industry as well as other industries of Trenton

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[1]N.J. Bureau of Statistics, Ninth Annual Report, 1887, 155-156; TSA, October 7, 1888; Stern, 409-410.

[2]N.J. Bureau of Statistics, First Report, 1878, 158-158; N.J. Bureau of Statistics, Ninth Report, 1887, 157; TSA, October 7, 1888; Stern, 414.

maintained an interest in overcoming the issues that divided them.

Labor and general publications educated Trenton's working people to the benefits of organization.[3] Strikes showed at least episodic outpourings of class unity. The Knights of Labor offered a hopeful outlet of action for workers in the 1880's, but not until the trade unions united in Trenton's Central Labor Union under the auspices of the American Federation of Labor did Trenton's workers establish the basis for labor solidarity.

Although the outward means for unity existed in Trenton before the twentieth century, labor activity generally followed the dictates and needs of the pottery workers. The pottery workers as Trenton's labor elite became increasingly divided among British, Irish and native born workers. Ethnic divisions only exacerbated the problem of ethnic labor leadership in a city with a large percentage of native Americans. By the twentieth century, labor power shifted from the pottery workers to industries with a predominance of native Americans.

Pottery Strike of 1877

By 1877, national events had occurred to make employers

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[3]The American Potters Journal and the Trades Union Advocate educated the working class. A general weekly publication, the Trenton Sunday Advertiser, sympathized with the problems of labor.

fear organized workers. An illustration of this apprehension occurred in the midst of the 1870's depression. Two dramatic strikes occurred that were significant enough for national attention. The Long Strike of 1875 and the Railway Strike of 1877 created in the public a fear of violence by angry workers.

In Trenton, the depression became locally aggravated by competition from other pottery centers. Slower than normal Christmas sales in 1876 caused the manufacturers, or "pottery bosses" to impose a wage cut. They presented a united front to force a unified wage cut on the skilled craft potters. Once the skilled men received the cut they decreased wages for their own apprentices and helpers.[4]

The manufacturers hoped to gain a competitive edge against the western pottery centers. They claimed that they needed a ten to twenty-five percent reduction in piece rates, otherwise they would lose money. The three year old manufacturers association held fast to the absolute necessity of a rate cut. Opposing the list was the Operative Potters Beneficial Association (OPBA), a local union of clay room potters headed by John Brammer.[5]

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[4]Stern, Potters of Trenton, 433.

[5]The Operative Potters Beneficial Association started as an industrial union similar to those in Staffordshire, but it soon represented the skilled workers of clay. Another union of ovenmen, Kilnmen, Dippers, and Saggermakers, existed at the same time. Stern, 431, 435.

Brammer was a transplanted English potter from Burslem, Staffordshire. Working in East Liverpool, Ohio before settling in Trenton, he quickly became a respected member of the British pottery community. As a founder of the Sons of St. George, he helped perpetuate the British pottery connection and British cultural associations.[6]

Brammer's union compatriots argued that tariff protection for the industry compensated for the reduced price of Trenton pottery, thus obviating the necessity of a wage cut. Brammer vowed to circulate anti-tariff petitions hoping this would be enough leverage to reduce the employers demands. However, introducing the tariff issue only served to increase partisan conflicts between Republicans and Democrats and ethnic conflict between Irish and British- born workers. British-born workers aligned more with Republicans who supported the tariff, and Irish-born workers usually supported the Democrats who fought the tariff.[7]

These divisions were quickly eradicated when the employers singled out the highly skilled mold makers for their most stringent cuts. Potteries shared the services of the mold makers, and usually both manufacturer and fellow worker

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[6]TSA, January 19, 1890.

[7]DTA, January 13, 1877.

valued the mold makers significantly. Out of respect for the mold makers, another union, the Kilnmen, Dippers and Saggermakers agreed not to work at the new list. Even the kiln foremen were in sympathy with both groups. The kilnmen were hearty proponents of collective action and decried the practice of separate unions among the many trades in the pottery industry.[8]

In early January, 1877, the clay room workers offered to submit to arbitration in the hope of averting a strike. The Manufacturing Potters Association refused, since arbitration would lend legitimacy to the skilled potters unions. This refusal to arbitrate resulted in a four-month lockout. With 2,000 men out of work, the rest of the city residents became nervous. Newspapers implored the workers to submit rather than continue in their disastrous decision.[9]

The OPBA advised skilled potters with limited savings to return to Staffordshire. A chain of communication was still strong between the British and Trenton pottery workers, but expected financial support from Britain never materialized.[10] However, the other American pottery centers did contribute to the recalcitrant workers. Eventually other strikes and

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[8]DTA, January 13, 1877.

[9]DTA, January 10, 13, 1877; Stern cites the hostility of the Daily State Gazette in their pressure on the workers to return, 440.

[10]DTA, January 10, 1877.

lockouts dried up support. Locally, a benefit ball helped sustain the pottery workers, and a cooperative store was established, but the union rejected the idea of a cooperative pottery even with the offer of a loan for the undertaking.[11]

The progress of the strike took on the typical ritual of employer verses employee. The posture changed when the manufactures proposed to fire any employee that refused to accept the terms offered. At that point the mood of the workers changed. Some workers demonstrated by parading at work with an American flag, while collecting the tools of the discharged employees. Some workers returned to work to insure their jobs. One worker and his wife were burned in effigy. A crowd attacked another returning worker.[12]

Although manufactures resorted to threats, and some violence occurred on both sides, the real danger to the workers were strikebreakers, mechanization and other production changes. The most notable innovation was the pull-down machine. Touted by the manufacturers as their savior, it allowed them to bring in "a better class of American born workers." Even so, the "green hands" using the pull-down reportedly turned out inferior work.[13]

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[11]DTA, April 13, 1877; TSA, October 15, 1899.

[12]DTA, February 13, 20, 1877.

[13]DTA, February 27, March 22, 1877.

By April, 1877 the workers were beaten. The union advised them to return to work. The manufacturers accepted them back as individuals but did not fire their new employees. This meant that only one quarter returned immediately. Reports of discrimination against union leaders were rampant. Local newspapers reported the events according to their own biases. The Republican Daily State Gazette lambasted both the union leaders and the Democratic Daily True American for believing that the working man might dominate the decisions of the manufacturers.[14]

The pottery struggle of 1877 illustrated several weaknesses faced by workers at that time. Individual craft unions were hard to organize, as the editor of the American Potters Journal, John D. McCormick recalled in 1890. He noted that branch and ethnic prejudices limited unity during crises. Although there were few signs of disunity during the strike, strike breakers tended to be Irish or Irish-American, which only added to growing ethnic discord. In addition, the strike and the pull down allowed native American workers to enter the industry in larger numbers. By 1900, the Irish and native Americans were a factor in the employee pattern of the potteries.[15]

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[14]Stern, 452-456.

[15]Knights of Labor , District Assembly 160, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Session of the Operative Potters National Trade, D.A. 160, K of L, Trenton: Frank Smith, 1890, 26, Trentoniana Collection; Stern, 459.

Without the British ethnic unity of the earlier years in Trenton's potteries and the continuing problem of craft divisions, the need for a unifying body became evident. The potters needed an organization with strength to fight the manufacturers on an equal footing. The skilled pottery workers were in a perfect position to embrace the Knights of Labor.

The Coming of the Knights

The Knights of Labor started as a secret organization of Philadelphia textile workers in 1869 lead by Uriah Stevens. They abandoned secrecy in 1882 making them more accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, but the accompanying publicity brought in members without the same convictions of the earlier inductees. They appealed most to workers who identified the detrimental effects of the wage system on American workers.

The Knights identified the wage system as preventing workers from receiving their fair share of wealth as created by production. Non-producers such as bankers, lawyers, and stockbrokers controlled the wage system. Many employers were considered producers by the Knights' definition, therefore not necessarily in conflict with their workers.

As succinctly stated by Bruce Laurie, the Knights of Labor represented a middle ground between "individualistic

libertarianism of bourgeois America and the collectivism of working-class socialists." The Knights rhetoric tied them securely to the radical Republicanism that was a part of the American worker's tradition, not to European socialist or Marxist thought. The Knights were as suspicious of the encroachment of centralized government as were the artisans of the early Republic. European socialists believed the savior of the working class was a strong, activist, central government.[16]

The Trenton Knights of Labor expressed the general ideology of the national leadership. Yet, the structure, composition, and activities of local assemblies varied, and reality often bore little resemblance to the idealized philosophy of the parent organization.[17] The rhetoric of the Trenton group was consistent with the ideology of the Knights of Labor. In practice, the activity of the local Knights was more akin to trade unionism. Laurie notes that contrary to opinions of early labor historians (influenced by the writings of American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers), the Knights practiced a trade union style by the mid-1880's.[18]

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[16]Bruce Laurie, Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America, advisory ed. Eric Foner, American Century Series, (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989) p. 152.

[17] Stern, 474.

[18]Laurie, Artisans Into Workers, 163-164.

In accord with the philosophy articulated at the Knights national convention at Reading, Pa. in 1878, the Trenton assemblies sought to unite the productive classes of society to fight the pernicious effect of wage labor. A local Knight "Boycotter" expressed these ideals in a letter to the Trenton Sunday Advertiser when he remarked: "We are the people, we are the nation. Those who attempt to trample upon our rights are unmistakable enemies of 'brave, liberty-loving America.'"[19]

Leon Fink noted that the Knights essentially expressed the values of skilled workers, although they were "expansive in action."[20] Methods they espoused were similarly more effective with skilled workers. Nevertheless, their effect on all working class groups in the late nineteenth century should not be diminished. New Jersey labor economist Leo Troy pointed out that the Knights were influential in the formation of state and local associations and that their influence on modern labor unions was a positive legacy.[21]

The Trenton assemblies slowly established by the end of the 1870's; two of them began sometime before 1873. Local Assembly (L.A.) 22, Stonecutters, and L.A. 52, Bricklayers,

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[19]TSA, October 18, 1885.

[20]Fink, Workingmen's Democracy, 14; Fink was referring to the efforts of the Knights as an industrial labor organization.

[21]Troy, Organized Labor, ix.

dissolved during the depression.[22] In the late 1870's, the Knights reestablished in Trenton and sent delegates of the first State Labor Congress in 1879. There were three pottery assemblies in Trenton at that time.[23]

A mixed assembly of mainly skilled men, L.A. 1362, formed in 1879, collapsed and reformed in 1882. It included carpenters, clerks, iron workers, journalists, merchants, printers, plumbers, potters and rubber workers. Within six months, this local had grown to 317 members, and was influential in starting L.A. 2185, an all-potter assembly for general ware workers.[24] L.A. 2185 represented the first attempt to unify all skilled pottery workers in a single organization. This assembly gave the pottery Knights the unity they lacked in 1877 and added leverage in their dealings with the unified Manufacturing Potters Association.

The Potters: Arbitration and Settlement

During the 1880's aided by the well organized potters, the Trenton Knights of Labor established the Federation of

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[22]TSA, December 20,1885.

[23]Troy, 52, 54-55.

[24]TSA, December 20, 1885; David McCabe, National Collective Bargaining in the Pottery Industry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932), 28.

Trades and Labor Unions, affiliating with the state organization of the same name. Originally the Trenton Federation, like the State Federation, embraced both the Knights and the trade unions in New Jersey. The Trenton Federation was short lived and the state group dropped the Knights and aligned solely with the A. F. of L.[25] In the mid-eighties, however, the only effective unifying body for the working people in Trenton was the Knights of Labor.

The pottery assemblies became influential in Trenton, Ohio and West Virginia, and the national leadership created a national trade association for all pottery Knights. It was called District Assembly (D.A.) 160, National Trade Association. Although D.A. 160 attested to the strong efforts of the pottery workers within the Knights of Labor, it resulted in the Trenton pottery workers becoming more industry exclusive.

D.A. 160's finest effort occurred in an arbitrated wage settlement in 1885. In January, the potters met with the manufacturers to discuss a new wage list posted. The result was an eight percent reduction for the most highly paid crafts in the industry and no reduction for the most poorly paid workers. The Advertiser viewed the negotiations as a "triumph for organized labor." The triumph was gained not from a more willing group of manufacturers, but from lessons learned in

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[25] See Troy, Organized Labor in New Jersey, for a complete discussion of the Federation; TSA, April 8, 1885.

the difficulties of 1877. Employers tried to break the cooperative spirit of the pottery workers, and fought hard before the negotiated settlement took place.[26]

The manufacturers first package offered an across the board cut, which they argued was an attempt to stabilize a severely competitive market. The Manufacturing Potters Association (MPA) issued a new price list with the proposed cut and invited one worker from each pottery to review the list to correct errors. Offered as a conciliatory measure, the price list was not as prominent in the minds of the potters as the proposed pay cuts.[27]

The pottery Knights preferred a temporary shut down rather than the pay cuts, arguing that cuts often become permanent even after the crisis past.[28] The potters believed that the public would support them, and in fact received considerable support from newspapers and citizens of Trenton.[29] The fight commenced with the manufacturers accusing the potters of expecting excessive wages, and the workers countering with accusations that the cuts caused hardship for

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[26]TSA, February 1, 1885.

[27]TSA, January 4, 1885; <u>Daily True American</u> (DTA), January 1, 1885.

[28]<u>The Trenton Times</u> (TTT), January 3, 1885, December 31, 1894.

[29]TSA, January 4, 1885; DTA, January 3, 1885; TTT, January 3, 1885.

their families and the entire community.[30]

Seeing the staunch resistance, the manufacturers tried several measures to divide the potters. First, they offered English rates, plus the protection of the tariff, trying to divide the workers ethnically and politically.[31] The potters rejected their offer. Next, the MPA tried to negotiate separately with each craft, hoping to divide the workers and weaken resistance.[32] At the last minute the MPA agreed to negotiate with the Knights if they used members from other industries in the talks.

The pottery workers accepted and formed a powerful negotiating team made up by Terence V. Powderly, Grand Master Workman, K. of L.; John Hayes, Executive Board Chairman; Frederick Turner, General Secretary; Charles Simmerman, of both the Knights of Labor and the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry; and John Carminade, State Assemblyman from Trenton.[33] The group attests to the strength of the pottery industry in both Trenton and the Knights of Labor.

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[30]DTA, January 6, 1885.

[31]The potters followed the tariff situation closely. Many believed it helped the workers, although two kilnmen wrote to the Daily True American that the tariff was creating two distinct classes in Trenton--rich and poor (January 21, 1883).

[32]DTA, January 12, 13, 15, 1885; TSA, January 11, 1885.

[33]DTA, January 22, 23, 24, 1885; TSA, January 25, 1885.

Negotiations began with a request to open industry records, and the employers countering that a request to reveal all their records was un-American. Nevertheless, both sides agreed to seek a mutually acceptable solution. One week later a new pathway for settlement was found. Certainly the result was not a panacea, but rather a small step in settling disputes between the two groups with dignity.[34]

The potters agreed to a solution centered on adjusted cuts in an attempt to equalize wages and which showed a cooperative spirit among the potters. The highest paid pottery workers would be more heavily cut than the lowest paid ones. The solution shows sensitivity that all were mutually dependent in their production in the industry. Still this cooperation was more tied to pride in the pottery industry than to any outpouring of class consciousness. Ethnic tradition was involved: British workers had traditionally united several crafts in amalgamated labor unions. Cooperation among the crafts and skill divisions permeated the British unions and it seemed natural to continue the tradition in D.A. 160. Although the pottery workers could not claim a victory for the working class in Trenton, it was a pottery trade victory.

On the wings of their arbitrated settlement, the pottery Knights elicited funds to purchase a union hall. Trenton's

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[34]DTA, January 22, 23, 24, 1885; TSA, January 11, February 2, 1885.

Knights hosted a state industrial exhibition, making 1885 an exceptional year for the Knights of Labor in Trenton.[35] When the Knights in other cities were gathering momentum for the eight hour movement, the Trenton Knights especially the pottery workers were basking in the glow of success. The real strength of the Knights in Trenton was in the pottery industry and was dictated by their aspirations. Complacency had a high price.

Trenton During the Great "Upheaval"

By 1886, the Trenton Knights comprised twelve assemblies, seven of which were exclusively pottery workers and operated much like craft unions. Hodcarriers, iron workers, stonecutters, and two mixed assemblies constituted the rest of the Trenton Knights.[36] At the height of its membership in 1886 Trenton's Knights numbered 3,300 or about 12 percent of the work force.[37]

Although the numbers indicate a thriving organization, the Knights of Labor in Trenton initiated little agitation

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[35]TSA, December 20, 1885, January 3, 1886; New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, 10th Report (1887).

[36]TSA, January 31, March 21, July 11, 1886. N.J. Bureau of Statistics, Ninth Report, 248.

[37]Stern, 525.

when compared with Chicago and Detroit.[38] Trenton's efforts seemed ill begun and half-accomplished.

To combat mechanization and economic concentration, the Trenton Knights began several cooperative ventures. They founded cooperative stores offering "fair prices," unadulterated products, and return on net profit at the end of a three month period. This and other cooperative ventures promised a place "where workingmen can invest savings more profitably than in the bank."[39]

Trenton's Knights also discussed profit sharing as a method for insuring the working person their due. Although Laurie notes many Knights applauded profit sharing efforts by employees, Trenton Knights were less amenable because they suspected profit sharing to be a ploy to weaken cooperation. Some employers toyed with the idea of profit sharing, however, most employers used the old proprietorial argument that profit sharing would come about when loss sharing was as heartily embraced by workers.[40]

Labor leaders of Trenton worried that any management benefit scheme would only sidetrack the workers, instead Trenton Knights called upon members to "crush" all unfair

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[38]See Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, 144-168; Barrett, Work and Community, 119-131.

[39]N.J. Bureau of Statistics, Third Report, 63, Fourth Report, 95.

[40]TSA, June 13, July 4, August 1, 1886.

employers.[41] One employer cited as particularly unfair was the Star Rubber Company. It was the practice of Star Rubber to identify the employees who belonged to the K. of L. In January, 1886 a group of workers at Star asked management to end the practice of overtime for extra pay. The Knights believed overtime took work away from others who needed it. Several Knights were fired for being a part of the protest. Their positions were given to other Knights in the hope that they would quit in protest.[42]

One by one the Knights were eliminated from the company roles. Seventy employees were fired and all were Knights. The Order protested the event by asking for the manager's resignation, but instead the manager tried to force an "iron clad" agreement from the remaining workers not to join the K. of L.[43]

At the same time, the national K. of L. campaign to establish an eight hour day intensified. The chosen day was May 1, 1886. The Grand Master Workman of the Knights, Terence Powderly expressed ambivalence about the cause, but in many cities local Knights assemblies embraced it wholeheartedly. The movement was girded with the slogan, "eight hours work,

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[41]TSA, January 31, 1886.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

eight hours pay, eight hours sleep, and four dollars a day." [44]

There were no reports in Trenton newspapers of massive solidarity rallies or marches as in other cities. Trenton's activity in the spring of 1886 was a reflection of their conservatism. Trenton workers left little record of any concerted effort to bring "possibilities" that Oestreicher described to fruition.[45] Reports of efforts toward the May 1, 1886 establishment of the eight hour day in Chicago were recorded in the Trenton newspapers. Strikes in Chicago and St. Louis filled the daily Trenton Times as the May deadline approached but the local scene remained quiet.[46] Advocates presented provocative arguments for cutting the work day to eight hours from the usual hours. This decrease allowed more people to work, thereby spreading opportunity for employment of more people. Another worker cited the measure of improvement gained from the added time to view theater, art collections, and other intellectual pursuits. Eight hours would diminish job competition and help to increase wages, since workers no longer would need to undercut other workers to get jobs. This would lead to "labor emancipation" and

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[44]Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, 145; TSA, May 27, 1883.

[45]TTT, May 3, 4 1886; DTA, May 3, 1886; TSA May 2, 1886 (missing from records); Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, 144-171.

[46]See especially, The Trenton Times, March 25 to May 3, 1886.

dignity.[47]

The eight hour movement was supported by the Central Labor Union as well as the Knights of Labor in Trenton. Workers discussed the strategy to institute the eight hour movement during its formation. Information on the Central Labor union is vague but it apparently dissolved in the depression of 1893, although it reemerged in 1900. In 1886, most urban organizations by that name were tied to immigrant German Socialists.[48] This first attempt toward a central organizing body of trade unions attracted little attention in the city.

The language of Trenton's organized workers was heavy with exhortations for solidarity and cooperation but little concrete action was taken in 1886 when Knights in other cities were participating in rallies and demonstrations.[49] In 1886, the Knights in Trenton especially read one newspaper, Trenton Sunday Advertiser. Editor Andrew M. Clarke kept labor issues prominent through comment and featured articles. His exhortations reflected the reforming nature of the Knights, as he implored the workers to stand "shoulder to shoulder" in crisis while:

denying no man what they claim for themselves, but

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[47]Ibid.; Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation, 65-66.

[48]Laurie, Artisans, 164.

[49]TSA, August 1, 1886.

> merely demanding their fair share of the profits of their labor, and demanding it firmly, but quietly and peacefully, with the calmness which is begotten of a consciousness of right...[50]

Clarke published a series of lectures written by Victor Drury, a labor advocate of some note. Titled "The Labor Question, Considered as a Polity and a Philosophy", the lectures intended to educate the working man on the merits of organization in a united effort to defeat "overwhelming power of combined capital." The paper brought other issues to the attention of the working class readers, such as the plight of the working women, the eight hour day question, cooperation, and the Blue Label on cigars.[51]

Clarke invited articles from readers, especially those who worked by the "sweat of their brow." He requested local news, trade notes, and short items of interest regarding "the wrongs, the miseries and the trials of wage workers."[52] The Advertiser supported the tariff for its protection of those who "produce more than they consume," while arguing that free trade protected those who "consume more than they produce."[53] Clarke also decried the practice of various Knights of Labor

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[50]TSA, August 8, 1880.

[51]TSA, August 8, 1880, May 27, June 3, July 22, August 12, 19, 1883.

[52]TSA, May 27, 1883.

[53]Ibid.

districts that offered an independent slate of candidates but rather urged the support of candidates sympathetic to working class needs, whether Republican or Democrat.[54]

On May 3, 1886, while workers in Trenton benignly debated theoretical problems of capital accumulation, in Chicago a clash between police and angry strikers at the International Harvester plant resulted in the death of one striker. The following night a small demonstration to protest the killing was held at Haymarket Square on Randolph Street. After some lengthy speeches the crowd began to disperse. Suddenly a bomb was thrown near the police killing one and wounding others. Seven anarchists who organized the rally were convicted of murder; one of that group held membership in the Knights of Labor. The national Knights leadership never disassociated the organization with the bombing, even when the surviving members of the group were later pardoned. The negative publicity permanently damaged the union's reputation.

In Trenton, the Knights consolidated more power in the pottery assemblies. On July 20, 1886, the pottery locals of the Knights met in Trenton, and created Operative Potters National Union, District Assembly 160 (D.A. 160) as a National Trade Association within the K of L. It included

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[54]Ibid.; N.J. Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, Third Report (1880), 65.

the Ohio, West Virginia and Trenton pottery industries.[55] Trenton's K. of L. divided into two districts, the pottery assemblies were in D.A. 160 and the general assemblies in D.A. 90. The move benefited the potters, but seriously weakened the general labor coalition in Trenton because it tied the pottery Knights more tightly to their own industry needs and the needs of other pottery workers outside the city, such as the lengthy strike at Knowles, Taylor and Knowles pottery in East Liverpool, Ohio.[56] Although the Knights of Labor never regained the same nationwide strength and membership as in the peak year of 1886, D.A. 160 prospered in Trenton until the 1890's, while D.A. 90's membership faded away quickly.

The demise of D.A. 160 was precipitated by several inter-organizational struggles centered in the pottery industry. The growth of the Knights in Trenton was tied to the need for a stronger organization for the pottery workers, and the rise and fall of the Knights in Trenton coincided with the fortunes of the pottery industry.

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[55]Stern, pp. 507-509; American Potters Journal (APJ), March 9, 1889. The Potters National Union (N.T.A. 160) included the following locals: L.A. 2185, Hollowware and Generalware Pressers; L.A. 3566, Flat Pressers and Jiggerers: L.A. 2474, Kilnmen, Saggermakers, and Dippers; L.A. 3549, Printers and Transferrers; L.A. 3561, Sanitary Pressers; and, L.A. 3524, Throwers, Turners and Handlers. Other Trenton Knights of Labor locals were grouped under D.A. 90 including: L.A. 52 Hod Carriers; L.A. 5578, Ironworkers; L.A. 22 Stonecutters; and, L.A. 3848, Mixed Assembly.

[56]APJ, January through June, 1889.

The Trenton Knights: A Period of Repose

In February 1887, the Knights met at Cooperative Hall in a show of solidarity, but cooperation was not on the agenda for the two Trenton bodies of the K. of L. Several conflicts ensued. Policy over political endorsements split the two groups. The general assemblies, D.A. 90, espoused the practice of endorsing candidates and the pottery assemblies, D.A. 160, sided with Powderly in opposing any political endorsements.[57]

Other cities with strong Knights of Labor organizations had been successful in presenting a slate of independent candidates, but most were not victorious at the polls. The Trenton Knights' leaders were more likely to use their membership in the organization as a preliminary to regular party politics. Stern argues that the local Knights' tie into the tariff and the "fragility" of the Order made conventional politics more likely than independent labor politics.[58]

The majority of Trenton's members of the Order were either immigrants or children of immigrants; ethnic loyalties also contributed to D.A. 160's views in politics. Most of its

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[57]TSA, February 4, 1887, September 13, 1886; New Jersey Bureau of Statistics, Ninth Report,159; and Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 525-526.

[58]Fink, Workingmen's Democracy, 25-35; Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 532-533. Fink notes five New Jersey cities with independent Knights political tickets between 1885 and 1888. The only successful slate was in Paterson.

leaders were either British, Irish, or children of those immigrants. Although British workers had a tradition of radical independent politics, most notably the Chartist movement, the Trenton pottery Knights' leadership was conservative. British leaders included nine of the most prominent local Knights. Among them were Thomas Mathias from Hanley, Staffordshire, and John S. Wilkenson from Trenton, Staffordshire. Wilkenson only emigrated in 1882, making him ineligible for political office. Even the native leaders like Edward Tindall were so involved in social and beneficial organizations that any politicized energies were precluded.[59] No independent political action gained favor among the Trenton assemblies.

The trade centeredness of the potters, and the philosophical difference about political involvement caused a split in the Order. Andrew Clarke, editor of the Advertiser, and Charles Simmerman, potter and New Jersey statistician, had a serious squabble over Clarke's editorials on the Irish Land League causing Clarke to withdraw his support of D.A. 160, finalizing the split. D.A. 90, the Knights district encompassing all the non-pottery assemblies discontinued supporting the maintenance of Cooperative Hall. This attests to the growing dissention that weakened the

[59]Potters National Union, N.T.A. 160, Official Souvenir, 1893, Trentoniana Collection, n.p.; Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 527.

Knights in Trenton. Potters concentrated on maintaining shop control within their trade, and the other branches of labor entered a period of inactivity.[60]

In 1890, the western pottery assemblies broke away from the Knights and the west created the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, while the Trenton pottery workers still clung to the weakened Knights until 1892. Trenton's potters broke from the K. of L. after a sanitary ware strike in 1891 that ended in severe pay cuts for the sanitary division of the industry. After the withdrawal, the Potters National Union (P.N.U.) formed, and the east and west remained divided. The now localized industrial pottery union was in a weak position to face a major depression.[61]

As the Knights were in decline, the trade unions were in ascendancy. The legitimacy of strike action as a form of work protest acted as a demarcation between the methods of the Knights of Labor and the trade unions in Trenton. Strikes were a factor before the Knights became the major voice in Trenton's organized workers and after they were seriously weakened.

The Potters: Strike and Agreement

The industrial situation in January, 1894 was bleak. The country was in the grip of a severe depression. The New

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[60]Ibid.

[61]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 630-702.

Jersey Steel and Iron Company reported few work prospects. One contract to the Park Avenue railroad was delayed by an injunction. Eight hundred and nine families were receiving relief, for an estimated total of 4,000 people[62]

The Trenton Sunday Advertiser reported that the sole topic of East Trenton was a proposed cut across the pottery trades. The manufacturers announced a 10 percent pay cut, but the workers contended that this was an underestimate. The jiggermen and pressers wrote to the Advertiser that the cuts ranged from 12 percent to 37 percent, depending on the piece. One platemaker figured that he would lose $2.00 a week after paying his helpers. The main objection of the potters concerned no change in the selling list. Arguably, they understood that the economics of the times were dismal. But, if the manufacturers were able to sell at the same price, why cut? A strike ensued, but with less enthusiasm than in 1877.[63]

One kilnman offered a fresh perspective on the cut. He contended that the previous year he could work sixty-six hours and make $16.50. With the proposed wage cut, he claimed it would take eighty-three hours to only make $14.50.[64]

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[62]TSA, January 21, 1894

[63]Ibid., January 28, 1894.

[64]Ibid., March 4, 1894.

Although they refused to meet the deadline for work resumption, the potters lacked the solid cohesion witnessed in 1885. Printers and transferrers had agreed to decorate goods previously made.[65] The sanitary trade, reporting half as many workers employed, refused to strike. The workers lacked the unity shown in the negotiations of the mid-eighties.[66]

The reports in March concerning Trenton's general industrial health showed that community support previously enjoyed by the potters would be necessarily more restrained during the struggle.[67] Roeblings had laid off 1,000 workers and Wilson's Mill had just returned after accepting the 20 percent reduction. The Trenton Iron Company revived briefly after receiving a large engine to repair, but the Mackenzie Machine Works reported running with half the usual workers. The East Trenton Machine Works pinpointed the pivotal situation for the city as the end to the pottery strike.[68]

The negotiations between the manufacturers and operative committee took a new twist in April. Declaring the piecework system "pernicious at best", the committee proposed hourly rates instead of piece rates. Some of the men were reported

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[65]Ibid., February 18, 1894.

[66]Ibid., March 18, 1894.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid., April 22, 1894.

working, having gone back to work using this system. Essentially the workers would receive a certain daily wage providing that they produce the same amount of ware each day to equal that salary under the old price list.[69]

The Crockery and Glass Journal, reporting for bosses, said that the operatives were giving up the fight when they agreed to the day wage system. The major problem facing the manufacturers was that with the uncertain tariff situation (reduced since the depression), it would be most difficult keeping all hands at work. They also predicted "when the clouds are all rolled away, and the clear sky of prosperity is seen once more, a new order of things will begin in the potteries of Trenton; and every factory of any importance will have new and improved machinery that they have been debarred from having years ago for fear of a strike."[70]

One suggestion by several manufacturers was the day wage system. They claimed that both machinery and day wages were essential to the health of the industry in the future, and they were determined to "make their factories pay a profit."[71] The plan was quickly abandoned since it required too much supervision, and the manufacturers were not willing to solidify to that extent.

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[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Ibid.

The strike itself was essentially a lockout, although it was called both at times. The manufacturers saw no reason to open the potteries under less than their own conditions, since business and orders were at a standstill.[72]

Mutual support was evident during the dire economic crisis, but it fell short of sympathy strikes. The potters thanked the merchants who had extended credit, and allowed them not to lose "their manhood and their self-respect." The potters proclaimed that this was "the only way and the best way of showing their sympathy for us."[73] Typographical Union, No. 71, with the Bricklayers' and Plasterers' Union marching along, staged a benefit ball and parade to support the pottery workers. McGowan's "Rubberworkers" played the "Unemployed Potters" in a benefit baseball game, but the monetary support offered failed, as the strike lingered.[74]

Several rumors and half truths circulated. One claimed that the bosses started filling their orders with English ware.[75] By July 1, a rumor circulated that the MPA started advertising for men. This was denied by the manufacturers, who stated that the MPA had no authority to advertise. Various manufacturers admitted to advertising to no avail.

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[72]Ibid., April 1, 1894.

[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Ibid., June 3, 1894.

They contended that many men wanted to return, but were prevented from doing so by their union.[76]

On July 11, a breakthrough occurred when the Board of Trade President Edmund C. Hill convinced the unions to send a committee to Washington. The group was to include seven journeymen, one from each branch of the trade. Negotiations would be conducted by New Jersey State Senator Smith, whose proposal called for a 12.5 percent cut across the board.[77] The agreement also forbade blacklisting of strikers, and Senator Smith promised to limit the tariff reduction for one year.[78]

The kilnmen and packers formed a separate union and refused to sign the agreement.[79] The pressers refused to return to work until the kilnmen and packers settled, disregarding an order from their Executive Board.[80] The result of this holdout was a better agreement for the kilnmen, but the warehousemen and packers fared poorly.[81] With these final agreements, the strike was over, and a city-wide sigh of relief was uttered.

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[76]Ibid., June 17, 1894.

[77]Ibid., July 1, 1894.

[78]DTA, July 10, 1894; TTT, July 11, 12, 1894.

[79]Ibid., July 12, 1894; TTT, July 12, 1894.

[80]Ibid.

[81]TSA, July 22, 1894.

The debris after the strike included a $1,283 debt for the P.N.U., loss of the kilnmen in the parent organization, and the purchase of more pull-down machines in some shops.[82] The potters solidarity of 1885 took a brutal blow in 1894. In 1885 potters had craft strength, but in 1894 a weakened union and the depression fragmented their efforts. While the strike was neither a total victory for either workers or employers, the result was to move the clay room workers back into a skilled craft union eliminating the industrial nature of the Potters National Union.

As prosperity returned to Trenton by 1898, the potters reunited with the western branch of the industry in the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters. They had more in common after the strike. The sanitary pressers formed their own organization, the Sanitary Pressers Union, cooperating somewhat as craft unions.[83] The lessons of the strike focused some of the workers consciousness toward a more class wide struggle at the turn of the century. The potters became one trade in a growing trade union movement in Trenton and the entire country.

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[82]DTA, July 26, 1894; TTT, July 23, 1894. The Potters National Union (PNU) was the organization representing the eastern branch of the pottery trade. The western portion centered in Ohio, had formed the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters. All crafts in the Trenton potting trade had joined the N.B.O.P. by the turn of the century.

[83]Stern, "Potters of Trenton," 760-761; 780.

Textile Strike at Wilson's

In 1894, Trenton witnessed a major strike at its largest textile firm, Samuel K. Wilson's. The outcome of this strike by workers whose skills had been debased over the years was quite different that of the pottery conflict. As in the pottery industry, workers faced a pay cut ordered by the proprietor.[84] Six hundred workers struck when the second wage cut of 10 percent was added to a previous cut of 10 percent. Wilson argued he would be forced to close down his mill until times improved unless the workers would agree to the further cut. The various departments were called together. Between five and six hundred employees decided that they would rather shut down than accept the second wage cut. Charles McGurk, of the dye house, was chosen to act as chairman. A motion was entered by the mill hands to elect a group of employees to arbitrate with the management to reach a more equitable solution.[85]

The arbitration committee was composed of eight men and four women. The 1890 enumeration of Trenton occupations lists 338 men and 511 women employed in textiles. Many families included several members employed by the mill, amplifying any

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[84]TSA, January 7, 1894. Trenton could not compete with Philadelphia in textiles. Since Wilson had other capital interests he was caught in a bind between his attitudes as a proprietor, and the pressure to compete in a changing society.

[85]TSA, January 7, 1894.

hardship incurred by the pay cut. The "Germantown" room, was a department run independently by a job superintendent on a percentage basis. Mr. Foster, the superintendent, intended to maintain the old rate. Wilson's workers were evidently not used to any standard wage rates or collective work rules. The show of collective strength only manifested in extreme conditions such as this 20 percent wage cut.[87]

The Trenton Sunday Advertiser published several angry letters decrying the events at Wilson's Fair Street mill. The paper said they had received enough correspondence to fill an entire page. The major complaints of the workers centered on the low pay received by all of Wilson's workers, and the need for intervention by state arbitrators. One correspondent compared the situation to a disease infecting 1,000 of Trenton's citizens. Surely governmental help would be offered in that situation, he suggested.[88]

After the proprietor claimed he would shut down, however, he reneged in three days. First, he allowed his Factory street plant to run under the auspices of it's management on a sub-contracting basis. Then he paid weavers $1.25 per day to make up samples, claiming that he would never be able to get orders if he had no advanced samples to send out. Finally, he lowered the pay cut for those "boys and

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[87]TSA, January 7, 14, 1894.

[88]TSA, February 4, 1894.

girls" who made less than five dollars a week, to only 15 percent, halving the second ten percent rate cut.[89]

The fragmented work force did not sustain any formal collective behavior. The large number of female first or second generation Americans may account for the passivity of the workers, who by the 1890's were more "Americanized" and ready to assert themselves.[90] Like the mill workers of Lowell at mid century, they depended on class struggle for dignity.

By February 25th, the workers were united in their efforts against Wilson. At one of their meetings held at Bricklayer's and Plaster's Hall, an article was read from the Woolen Reporter citing a Massachusetts manufacturer's opinion that cuts were not necessary. The enthusiastic reception the article received was enhanced by the news that Foster's workers would also be faced with the proposed cut or cease operation. In a show of solidarity, the finishers agreed to stop producing samples, nearly forcing Wilson's operations to

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[89]Ibid. The Advertiser reported vividly the scene of Samuel Wilson's arrival to post his second offer at the factory door. The reporter questioned him as to the way he reported the pay cut for those under $5.00 a week. Wilson told him he had gotten the information wrong, and dragged him back to the sign, only to discover that the sign actually reported a 5 percent additional cut for the lowest wages, and only a 10 percent cut totally for all others. When he realized the mistake, he ripped the sign down, and rode away in his big carriage to his big house on Greenwood Avenue.

[90]In 1900 Trenton's textile workers comprised 150 native born of native parents, 411 native born of foreign parents, and 207 foreign born.

shut down.[91]

One worker, when questioned as to the reality of Wilson getting workers to take the place of the strikers, said "I don't think he has a ghost of a chance...nobody will come here to work for less than they can get elsewhere."[92] The employee was right, by July the workers were out again for nine weeks. Certain departments disagreed on whether to go back to work. One contingent from the Factory Street operation called the Advertiser to say they could not hold out any longer, but another delegation vowed not to succumb, for the original offer was to shut down for three months. Since they had held out for nine weeks they reasoned that they should attempt to last the remaining three weeks.[93]

Hampered by the economic situation, the united efforts by the mill employees fell apart. Beside the depressed economy, the concurrent strike by pottery workers, and the divisive techniques used by Wilson doomed the strike.
The composition of employees also added to the demise of the strike. Young employees had little in common with Wilson's older workers. The high percentage of females, but their low representation on the strike committee shows less agitation potential from the women. Ostensibly the workers needed their

[91]TSA, February 25, 1894.

[92]TSA, March 4, 1894.

[93]TSA, July 26, 1894.

paychecks more than Samuel K. Wilson needed to run his mills. The workers returned at the reduced rate under Wilson until the mill was sold at Wilson's death several years later.

The Trades Are Heard

Between 1898 and 1899 the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics found that most workers increased their wages.[94] Finally, Trenton had loosened the grip of the depression. As the economy moved forward, labor activity in the trades resumed. With restored prosperity, a new labor organization emerged, the Mercer County Central Labor Union. It's main objective was to educate the working man to situations that would further their interests. Union labels, boycotts, and other pressure tactics were encouraged. Its stated purpose was:

> to unite the various trades and labor unions of the county and to assist in the formation of trades and labor unions where none now exist; to act as a board of arbitration in trade disputes, and to use every honorable means in its power to adjust difficulties which may arise between workmen and employers.[95]

The Central Labor Union was tied to both the American Federation of Labor and to the interests of the socialist party candidates by 1903. The Socialist Party nominated many men from various trade unions and often representatives to the

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[94]New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, Twenty-second Report (1900), 159-161.

[95]Trades Union Advocate (TUA), January 26, 1900.

Central Labor Union. For state assembly, William Wooten was the Financial Secretary of the Sanitary Workers' Union and a delegate to the Central. Nominated for Mayor, Clinton Carty was a member of the Carpenters' Union, and the ex-Financial Secretary of the Central. George Kirk, Secretary of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, and representative to the Central Labor Union was running for city council. The Advocate summarized the long list of candidates as mostly well known union men and worthy of the positions for which they were nominated, but sadly with little likelihood of being elected.[96]

The Central Labor Union had some success in organizing the semi-skilled and in promoting union labels. Their mass meetings were poorly attended, but member groups grew between 1900 and 1904. The major trade unions represented included the Bakers, Barbers, Bartenders, Boot and Shoe Workers, Bottlers, Brewers, Carpenters, Carriage and Wagon Workers, Chainmakers, Cigarmakers, Coopers, Funeral Coach Drivers, Hodcarriers, Horseshoers, Hotel Waiters, Kilnmen, Lathers, Machinists, Metal Polishers, Moulders, Musicians, Painters, Paperhangers, Plumbers, Printing Pressmen, Retail Clerks, Rubber Workers, Sanitary Workers, Steam Engineers, Street Pavers, Tile Roofers, Tin and Sheet Metal Workers, Turners and Handlers, Typographical and Woodworkers.[97]

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[96]TUA, October 30, 1903.

[97]TUA, September 5, 1902.

In March, 1900 the Cigarmakers' Union with the Central Labor Union, appointed an agitation committee to insure that cigars carried the blue Union Label.[98] One month later the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners #31 demanded of the master builders a minimum wage of $.38 an hour with a nine hour week day and eight hours on Saturday. Overtime would be paid a minimum rate of $.48 an hour, except on Sundays which would cost at least $.64 an hour. The union gave until May 1 for the bosses to comply.[99]

The Trenton Times reported that most builders agreed that an increase was in order, but they felt that too much was being demanded. Those demands were not met and the carpenters struck. This was the beginning of several other actions throughout the city.[100]

On the same day jiggermen at Mercer Pottery went on strike because of a new wage list, but returned the next day saying that they had acted in haste. Concurrently, twenty-five tinsmiths demanded $2.50 a day or vowed they would stop. Most of them received their demands.[101]

The next day, ten "girls" at the Stanley Shirt factory staged a defensive action since they only received $.07 for

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[98]TUA, March 9, 1900.

[99]TTT, April 20, 27, 1900.

[100]TTT, May 2, 1900.

[101]Ibid.

a batch of shirts when the rate was $.10. The superintendent explained that the batch of shirts could be ironed by machines, therefore, the cut. In a telephone interview, the superintendent's final words were, "We let them go."[102] The outcome illustrates the difference between skilled and unskilled, organized and unorganized workers.

By May 5, the striking carpenters met with the newly formed Master Builders Association but neither side would budge. The Central Labor Union pledged moral and financial support for the carpenters. The paper reported several peaceable efforts to convince some carpenters who had not stopped work to do so.[103]

The strike dragged on until January, when the Master Builders offered to meet the men half way.[104] The following April 1, at the beginning of the busy season, the carpenters tried again for a total victory. This time the other building trades struck in sympathy. Bricklayers, masons and plumbers walked out with the carpenters in a show of solidarity. The same month the machinists struck for a nine hour day. One by one the employers submitted to the machinists, part of a nationwide nine hour effort.[105]

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[102]TTT. May 3, 1900.

[103]TTT, May 5, 1900.

[104]TTT, January 25, 1901.

[105]TTT, May 21, 1901

In June, the Trades Union Advocate proclaimed a victory for labor in Trenton. The carpenters best leverage point was that during the summer months they could find plenty of work at the New Jersey seashore. The surrounding towns supplied so much work that "scabs" could not be brought in to work for the master builders.[106]

The success of the machinists and the carpenters created renewed interest in organization throughout the city. Semi-skilled barbers organized and devised a program for blacklisting non-payees. The Central Labor Union extracted a public statement that the city would only hire union labor on municipal work. Trolley operators tried to organize, but were met with spontaneous discharges, a fact brought before the public by the Trenton papers.

With the successes of the trade unions, a new era of promise seemed eminent for Trenton workers.[107] Although the Central Labor Union achieved the organization of some semi-skilled workers, a success on the shop floor would be a moral victory for organized labor in Trenton. The Central Labor Union received that chance in 1904 with the newly organized rubber workers of Trenton.

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[106]TUA, June 14, 1901.

[107]TTT, April 20, 1901; TUA, June 14, 21, 1901, July 27, 1901.

The Rubber Strike

Between 1902 and 1903, the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry reported fourteen work actions in Trenton. Nine of these efforts were aggressive and five defensive. In July, 1902, the Potters adopted a published uniform wage scale.[108] Workers made strides in the first three years of the twentieth century, yet the voices still silent were the semi-skilled.

The influence of the striking carpenters within the large rubber plants of Trenton must have been compelling to the 1,500 rubber workers. On January 4, 1904, 750 employees affiliated with the Amalgamated Rubber Workers Union, Local #4, struck for a minimum wage and overtime.[109]

Although some of the manufacturers admitted nothing unreasonable was demanded, they feared one stipulation added to the demands.[110] The union label was hated by employers because they believed it signified a closed shop.[111] The employers had little in common with their employees, and the action by rubber workers helped unite the company leaders.

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[108]N.J. Bureau of Statistics, Twentieth Report (1903); Wage Scale Adopted by Sanitary Manufacturing Potters Association and National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, to take effect July 7, 1902, (Trenton, N.J.: Grant Press, 1902) Trentoniana Collection.

[109]DTA, January 25, 1904.

[110]See Appendix B for a complete wage list.

[111]Ibid.; TTT, January 20, 23, 1904; TUA, March 18, 1904.

The strike action was instrumental in the organization of the Manufacturers and Employers Association of Trenton (MEA). One hundred seventy-five representatives of Trenton industry met to fight employee unrest.[112] The Trades Union Advocate analyzed the MEA organization as a group formed solely to "fight labor union power".[113]

The rubber workers faced overwhelming odds. The MEA warned the workers "it does not take much to teach bright men the trade of rubber worker," and by bringing new people, the work pool will be increased."[114] Strike breakers brought in by the MEA were protected by police. Rubber employers widened the gap between man and master. Strikers were warned that anyone who shouted "scab" would be arrested.[115]

The largely native born American work force reported that they received little support from family members. Letters to the paper were filled with dismay imploring the city fathers to "end the suffering." An ambivalent smell permeated the effort almost from the beginning. The wife of one worker wrote to implore the strikers to show their manliness toward their families and return to work.[116]

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[112] TTT, January 23, 1904.

[113] TUA, February 26, 1904.

[114] DTA, January 27, 1904.

[115] DTA, January 25, 1904.

[116] TTT, March 3, 1904.

Some of the usual support systems were present. The <u>Daily True American</u> reported "almost every man woman and child in East Trenton is in sympathy with the strikers." To show their support, 3,000 to 4,000 people assembled one night outside the mills.[117]

The A. F. of L. encouraged and supported the effort along with the Central Labor Union. The A. F. of L. sent Samuel Prince, a New Jersey Legislator to address the workmen. Prince assured the workers they would win for "divine right and justice would triumph."[118]

The union leadership thought they could outlast "green hand" production, but the situation was compounded by another general economic slump.[119] The strike was expensive. With weekly expenses of $4,000, but a union treasury of less than $5,000 in total, the workers became dependent on the promised grocery credit by local merchants. That and a benefit staged at the State Street Theater maintained the men.[120] The recently formed master barber's union promised one percent of its proceeds, and the CLU orchestrated a blacklist of any merchants who traded with strike breakers.[121] All these

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[117]DTA, January 29, 1904.

[118]TTT, February 1, 1904.

[119]TUA, February 12, 1904.

[120]DTA, February 11, 12, 1904.

[121]DTA, February 9, 1904.

efforts did not produce a victory.

Local American Rubberworkers Union leaders shunned any unorthodox methods of strike action. The sad ending was the disintegration of the ARWU and the blacklisting of strikers. Over the next two years the MEA strengthened its pressure on Trenton workers with a concerted fight against organized labor.[122]

As elsewhere, skill levels dictated the outcome of strikes in Trenton. Because the semi-skilled operatives of the city could not muster the leverage needed to press their demands, semi-skilled strikes weakened the labor movement. Trenton workers could only cooperate to a point. The fragments of the working class in Trenton showed more militancy than any time since the 1877 pottery strike, but even with the coalition of native born American workers in Trenton, other issues still fragmented Trenton's working class.

The variety of skill levels in Trenton's workshops acted as another divisive factor in Trenton's working class. The labor intensive industries, like carpentry, masonry, pottery, and intricate metal working, offered the employees the most leverage in bargaining with employers.

Employers who had invested heavily in machinery, like Wilson, were less tied to the wishes of the employees. Their

[122]TUA, February 19, 1904.

investment had to be protected, and consequently, they had to make a choice between profit and company morale.

The rubber industry used extensive machinery, and was involved in systematic production methods. Working in the rubber factories involved little training time to learn how to operate the machinery. Workers had almost no leverage and bargaining power when trying to change conditions at work. Their only hope was to involve other industries in sympathy strikes, in an attempt to cripple the commerce of the city.

Although Trenton was known as a city with a high degree of awareness for the needs of working people, the segments of the work force would cooperate on a limited and occasional basis. The potters were the key to the labor strength in Trenton. Their no strike agreement helped them retain strength within their industry, but it eliminated their sympathetic strength for other industries in the city. British immigrants tended to identify with native Americans, and both groups were more conservative unionists than radical.[123]

A general trend of conservatism enveloped the trade union movement after 1904. Native born American and British-stock workers slipped easily into the trend. The more radical groups moved outside the mainstream of American labor never taking hold of workers movements to any great extent.

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[123]Berthoff, British Immigrant, 104-106.

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of people working in Trenton, New Jersey in the late nineteenth century created the possibility of solid class behavior. The presence of a large skilled work force and the industrial nature of the city were conducive to labor activity. In Trenton, certain factors precluded this from becoming a reality. Trenton's labor force was divided by ethnic and occupational differences, and disunity was compounded by the industrial diversity of the city. While other cities such as Detroit, Chicago and Worcester experienced divisions in their late nineteenth century work force, at times the workers were able to overcome their differences to further the interests of their class. Trenton's workers, on the other hand, never achieved that modest degree of unity found among workers in other cities.

The unique factor in Trenton's working class in the nineteenth century centered on two cultural groups. Native-born Americans and the skilled British immigrants, especially in the pottery industry, lead the city in organized labor. Between 1877 and 1894 the British pottery workers predominated in labor activity. Their large representation among Trenton's Knights of Labor focused Trenton's organizational thrust on the needs and aspirations of pottery workers. British unionists were traditionally limited in their political and

ideological goals.[1] The British pottery workers enjoyed a honored spot in industrial Trenton, and they identified more with the native-born Americans than with the other immigrant groups.

The large number of skilled workers, heavily native born, was both a bonus and detriment to class unity. Skilled workers were more active in labor organization than the unskilled. Furthermore, the large numbers of skilled workers divided into competing craft and ethnic loyalties that made their moments of solidarity short lived. Trenton's primary ethnic groups were evenly divided among Germans, Irish and British. In Detroit, Chicago and Worcester one immigrant group predominated creating an ethnic bond that could be expanded to working class unity. On the other hand, Trenton's ethnic community seriously fragmented into divisions of ethnicity, occupation and industry making their efforts at class unity momentary and digressive.

The key to Trenton's working class activity in the late nineteenth century was the influential pottery industry. Although the numbers of potters declined relative to the total number of workers in Trenton by 1900, it still was the largest industrial employer. The potters were ethnocentric and trade centered. Consequently, the pottery workers weakened working

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[1]See Berthoff, British Immigrants, 88-106, for complete analysis of the characteristics of British immigrants in industrial America.

class activity. The economic health of the city rose and fell with the fortunes of the potters. When they were on strike the network of suffering was enormous. When they were in a period of successful arbitration, their satisfaction rendered them ineffective for overall working class strength. Unlike the Chicago packinghouse butchers, they never used the strength of their numbers or their craft to unionize and improve the conditions of the unskilled.

During the Knights of Labor era, the pottery locals grew so strong that the Order granted them the distinction of National Trade Association, which in reality made them a trade union. The action tied them to the Knights for a time but also played to their existing craft and ethnic biases. When the Trenton pottery workers left the Knights and formed the Potters National Union, they became a local trade union in actuality even though the Potters National Union started as an industrial organization. When the skilled Trenton potters finally rejoined the western pottery workers in the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, they agreed to a no-strike policy to keep their work rules secure. By doing so they eliminated an effective trade union tool.

Continuously shifting cultural patterns added to the episodic nature of working class consciousness in Trenton. Ethnic, neighborhood and religious loyalties absorbed working class energies, as did the reliance on party politics to solve problems of the tariff and labor legislation.

The divergent nature of working class activity in Trenton may also be attributed to occupational diversity. Workers unified more easily in single industry towns or neighborhoods, such as "Packingtown" in Chicago, Pullman, and Homestead. Technological advances, loss of shop control, and wage cuts failed to threaten uniformly. This may explain the heightened strike activity in Trenton during economic downturns. Depressions tend to equalize suffering.

By 1900, organized pottery workers were more sure of their role as trade unionists, and native-born workers threw themselves back into trade unionism with more vigor. The early twentieth century labor movement in Trenton was directed toward people in industries that employed many native-born American workers, whether skilled or semi-skilled, thereby overshadowing the influence of the pottery industry. The pottery workers became a willing ally of this group especially since they identified culturally with Americans. In 1904, skilled craft unionists tried to form a coalition with semi-skilled rubber workers, although the resulting strike was a dismal failure. The conservative nature of the trade union movement and the large numbers of semi-skilled workers in the rubber industry failed to produce enough leverage against the manufacturers association. Technological advances added to the lack of effectiveness in the rubber workers strike. It is doubtful, without an outpouring of sympathy strikes in the city, that the rubber employees could have staged a successful

work action. Even though the industry contained a large number of native Americans, their unity was lost in the new era of technological expansion.

The role of ethnic, occupational and industrial diversity on working class Trenton was not unique in sum, but in substance. Ethnic restructuring acted as a fragmenting influence in most late nineteenth century cities, but Trenton's large percentage of British workers added a unique dimension to Trenton. Specific workers in an industry acting as a pivotal labor group was not rare, but such a well organized, low mechanized craft trade was unusual.

Diverse industrial situations existed in late nineteenth century cities which make broad generalizations about the working class dangerous, Trenton included. The fairly comfortable workers in Trenton's leading industries rarely found a cause to bind them together. Their record of militant behavior meanders through the late nineteenth century never tightening to crisp, angry action of a group that truly believed they were a part of a permanent industrial working class.

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APPENDIX A

Trade	Reason for Strike	Aggressive or Defensive
Bridgeworkers	To protest overtime without pay	Defensive
Bridgeworkers	To force recognition of union	Aggressive
Cigarworkers	To increase wages	Aggressive
Contractors	To enforce union rule that forbids subletting	Aggressive
Engine builders	Alleged discrimination of unionism	Defensive
Furniture makers	Compel employer to recognize union	Aggressive

Source: New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, 25th Annual Report, 1903. The analysis of aggressive strike or defensive strike is my own.

APPENDIX B

Wage List presented by

#4 Amalgamated Rubber Workers Union of America

	$ Per Week
Stock calenders man in charge	18.00
Hose wrappers	13.50
Tubing machines man in charge	13.50
Hose machines both ends	13.50
Friction calenders man en charge	13.50
Cotton hose man in charge	13.50
Lathe men	13.50
Shoddy cookers	13.50
Belt machine	13.50
Mill warmer up	12.00
Men in charge of small heaters	12.00
Hose makers	12.00
Tire makers	12.00
Compound weigher	12.00
Man in charge of duck and gum table	12.00
Piston packing cutters	12.00
Belt makers in charge of table	12.00
Mat punchers	12.00
Light work men	12.00
Mill men	11.00
Stock calenders helpers	11.00
Helpers on large belt press	11.00
Packing table man in charge	11.00
Hose machines middle men	11.00
Belt makers	11.00
Shoddy cookers helper	10.50
Stripping table man in charge	10.50
Hose roller up	10.50
Stripping table helpers	10.00
Friction calenders helpers	10.00
Packing table helper	10.00
Cotton hose helpers	10.00
Baler up in shipping room	10.00
Light room helpers	10.00
Gasket cutters	10.00
Men putting on hose tubes	10.00
General laborers	10.00
Men in charge of large belt press	3.00

Source: Trades Union Advocate, February 26, 1904.

VITA

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