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Class and Gender Roles in the Company Towns of Millinocket and East Millinocket, Maine, and Benham and Lynch, Kentucky, 1901-2004: A Comparative History

Betty Duff

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**CLASS AND GENDER ROLES IN THE COMPANY TOWNS OF
MILLINOCKET AND EAST MILLINOCKET, MAINE, AND
BENHAM AND LYNCH, KENTUCKY, 1901- 2004:
A COMPARATIVE HISTORY**

by

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B. A. Widener University, 1992

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A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(in History)

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May, 2004

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Marli F. Weiner

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Company towns were products of nineteenth and early twentieth century attempts to attract and control the labor force needed for industrial production outside of urban areas. A comparison of the paper mill towns of Millinocket and East Millinocket, Maine, with the coal mining towns of Benham and Lynch, Kentucky, explores different management philosophies and methods of labor control employed in towns constructed by corporations in the early twentieth century.

Great Northern Paper built Millinocket and East Millinocket; United States Coal and Coke, a subsidiary of United States Steel built Lynch, and Wisconsin Steel, a subsidiary of International Harvester, built Benham. These towns represent the transitional period in labor relations when corporations responded to pressure from reformers, the government, and workers themselves with welfare management programs designed to improve working and living conditions for their employees. Among the amenities provided were company houses, schools, churches, health care and the payment of a family wage. The family wage enabled corporations to avail themselves of women's unpaid labor, and male workers to enjoy the services women provided. Women

welcomed the family wage because exclusion from waged labor allowed them to devote their time and energy to nurturing husbands and children. However, such exclusion made them economically dependent on male wage earners and guaranteed their subordination.

Company towns allowed corporations to construct social hierarchies that assured the dominance of white, native-born, Anglo-Saxon males over blacks, immigrants, and women. This dissertation examines the power relations inherent in capitalism, the tripartite struggle between government, unions, and big business for control of industry and the labor force needed for industrial production, and the struggle for dominance between competing unions, and the causes and effects of class, gender and ethnic discrimination in unions. It also explores the results of class and gender inequities in the economic and social structures of the town themselves and the consequences for residents when the corporations that built these towns discontinued operations.

Sources include company records, published and unpublished town histories, town records, census records, newspaper and magazine accounts, and oral histories of men and women residents of all four towns.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, David, who graciously accepted the role of sounding board, editor, research assistant, cook, dishwasher and laundryman while this work was in progress.

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in company towns stems from the fact that I was born in International Harvester's coalmining town of Benham, Kentucky, at the height of the 1930s mine wars. My family moved out of the town in the 1940s and I spent most of my youth in the small rural hamlet of Dione, approximately eight miles downriver from Benham. Throughout the forties, we lived in rented houses, but in 1950 my father bought an acre of land and every family member worked to tear down the existing shack and build a lovely new home. My father mined coal for both International Harvester and United States Steel, and the wages he earned after the United Mine Workers of America unionized both mines made it possible for him to buy the house, a car, television, and telephone. The name of John L. Lewis was revered in our house.

My mother, like most coal miners' wives, never worked outside the home; caring for her husband and seven children was a full-time job. Making sure my father was prepared for work, getting the children ready for school and church, cooking and cleaning, doing laundry, growing and preserving vegetables, sewing, and raising pigs and chickens kept her constantly busy. Her social life was limited to church activities when she could find the time, an occasional visit from a neighbor, and sharing food preparation with female relatives when they visited with their families, often unannounced.

The impact of the construction of the Louisville and Nashville railroad through our valley and the towns of Benham and Lynch on the lives of people in the surrounding area was enormous. My parents and other community members lived in a rapidly changing world. Midwives no longer delivered babies; all but one of my mother's children were delivered at home assisted by our country doctor or a company doctor. By

the 1940s most women had their babies in company hospitals. Traditional herbal remedies were replaced by modern dental and medical care provided for the families of miners employed at Wisconsin Steel and U. S. Coal and Coke's mines. When my father was employed at Lynch, my family no longer went to our local doctor for health care; we traveled by bus from Dione nine miles upriver to the company's clinic.

I write about the effect of religion on mountain women's roles from an insider position. While I was growing up, Dione Baptist Church was the center of our community's social life and culture. Friendships were church connected and most courtship took place on the way home from church. Women were subordinates in the church and, other than in song, prayer, or conversations with other women, I rarely heard their voices. My father was a coal miner who also served as a lay preacher and he required his children to attend services regularly, normally three a week. Ours was not a fundamentalist religion like the Old Regular Baptists, Primitive Baptists or the Pentecostals, but a Missionary Baptist church affiliated with Southern Baptists. There was no shouting or other noisy demonstration of emotion except during yearly revival meetings. Participants were normally reserved, but were closely bonded and felt a strong obligation to come to the aid of any member who needed help.

The church had always provided the criterion for proper moral conduct, but the coming of the railroad and the coal industry significantly changed that. Dancing and attending sports events, two of the major forms of entertainment in Benham and Lynch, had been among the worldly pleasures forbidden by traditional Baptist doctrine, and our church leaders, many of them employed by the companies, officially United States Steel and International Harvester by the time I was in my teens, reluctantly relaxed their

restrictions on those activities. Access to education, consumer goods such as ready-made clothing, movies and women's magazines all played a part in changing perceptions of proper women's decorum.

The children in my small hamlet, sons and daughters of farmers and coal miners, attended grammar school in the coal town of Totz and high school in Cumberland, an adjacent town that experienced a boom when Benham and Lynch were built. By the time I was born, consumerism had replaced most home production. Cumberland was the market center for the people downriver from Benham and Lynch; most people purchased their shoes and clothing at Creech's Department Store and groceries at the A & P and East Cumberland Food Market, both fifties-style supermarkets. My mother still made some clothing, but purchased most of it in Cumberland or through mail-order catalogs. Our furniture and appliances were purchased at Benham's company store while my father was employed there. Few people had cars, but there was regular bus service on the twenty-mile road between Harlan and the tri-city area. In the 1950s, the increase in automobile ownership prompted the building of drive-in theaters and restaurants.

Although I know now that we were poor by national standards, we would have been considered middle-class in our community. My mother and father were upstanding, churchgoing people. Our home was modest but scrubbed clean, lace curtains framed the sparkling windows, and the walls and ceilings were freshly painted and papered. There were some lean times when my father was laid off, cut off, or on strike and we had to live on a diet of pinto beans, cornbread, and the vegetables my mother canned from the garden. But most of the time we ate well; my parents raised chickens and pigs so we always had plenty of eggs, fried chicken, pork chops, and bacon. We bartered our

surplus meat for milk and butter from our neighbors who kept cows in the bottomlands by the river. John's Grocery provided sacks of corn meal, flour, pinto beans, salt, baking powder and other staples. It also provided such luxuries as candy bars, "pop," bologna, white bread, mayonnaise, Spam, and the vienna sausages and "snowballs," the coconut coated chocolate and marshmallow cakes my father liked to carry in his lunch, his only indulgence other than Pall-Mall unfiltered cigarettes. We always had a large vegetable garden with lettuce, corn, beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, cabbage, tomatoes, green peppers, peas, onions, cucumbers, and our favorite—okra. Several varieties of apple and pear trees and berries from the woods provided fruit for desserts. The A & P in Cumberland made it possible for us to enjoy fresh fruits such as bananas, oranges, and other citrus fruits and vegetables year round and canned and boxed foods increased the variety of foods available and reduced preparation time. The nature of the mountain diet changed as girls took home economics courses in high school and their mothers experimented with newly available foods prepared according to recipes featured in *Woman's Day* magazine.

Young people learned about the world outside the mountains through magazines, newspapers, and radio, but movies were the greatest influence. Girls copied the hair styles and fashions of the stars seen on the screen at the Novo and Corlee theaters—Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell, Deborah Kerr and Ava Gardner to name a few. By the 1950s, even people who lived in remote "hollers" had embraced the world of consumerism and popular culture. The people in my community and the young people who attended Cumberland, Benham, and Lynch high schools found the stereotypes of mountain people in the media confusing and offensive, because we did not fit that image.

Ours was not a world of backwoodsmen and bluegrass music. Most of us had never heard of a dulcimer, autoharp, square dancing or clogging. Like most American teenagers, we listened to Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, and the Platters and danced the jitterbug at sock hops. We had our own do-wop band, the Bob-o-Links, and our own popular disc jockey, Daddy-O Beal. We wore bobby sox with dog collars, saddle oxfords, and circle skirts with poodle appliqués.

When I graduated from Cumberland High School in 1957, the boom period of coalmining had long past. The town was still surviving, but there were signs of a declining economy. Several businesses had closed their doors, the Novo theater was closed, and the owners of the decaying Corlee theater decided to demolish rather than repair it. Many of the small shaft mines had been shut down and Benham and Lynch were laying off miners in large numbers. Along with most of the students in my graduating class, I had to leave the mountains to find work because no jobs were available locally. Most of us went to Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, or Maryland—to large cities where we could find work in the auto or other manufacturing industries. As secretaries and factory workers, we were subjected to ridicule because of our mountain accents and had difficulty adjusting to the unfamiliar food, noise and confusion of city life. Many longed for home cooking and the serenity and beauty of the mountains.

My interest in Millinocket and East Millinocket was triggered by a visit to Mt. Katahdin shortly after I came to pursue a Masters degree in English at the University of Maine in 1994. When I first saw the towns at the base of this majestic mountain, I was struck by the resemblance to Benham and Lynch in the layout of the towns and the types of home construction. The paper mills, like the tipples in the coal towns, dominated the

skyline. And though not as starkly identical as the houses in Benham and Lynch, there was a uniformity of construction and street layout characteristic of company towns. I could see all too familiar signs of decline such as empty storefronts and *FOR SALE* signs on front lawns that indicate a weakening economy and shrinking population. I also observed a kind of weary acceptance on the part of residents that most of the forces at work were beyond their control. The attempt to understand those forces and their impact on the residents' lives prompted me to engage in the research needed to write this dissertation.

Through research of the history of these four towns, I have attempted to determine the common factors that contributed to the building, management, and maintenance of corporately owned coal and paper mill towns. Because only men were employed in these industries, I focused on four major topics: the company town as an entity constructed for the commodification of men's labor; the implementation of welfare management programs for the purpose of developing loyalty, instilling an industrial work ethic and training women in the domestic skills required to maintain a healthy and productive work force; the effect of the payment of a family wage on women's roles and the successes and failures of unions in the attempt to achieve more equitable labor conditions for workers.

The histories of these company towns provides insight into the dynamics of capitalism and industrial philosophies concerning labor relations. They also demonstrate what happens when corporations abandon the towns. Since competition for profit is the engine that drives industry, when operations no longer produce profits sufficient to attract or retain investors, corporations search for other alternatives. In Benham and Lynch, the steel companies decided it was no longer profitable to mine their own coal, so they closed

the mines and left the region. Great Northern's withdrawal from Millinocket and East Millinocket was an attempt to increase profits by relocating in areas where they had access to cheap labor, lower taxes and fewer environmental restrictions.

Company towns such as these no longer exist in the United States, but many companies such as Dupont and MBNA continue to utilize welfare management principles in their human resource departments. Increased consumerism has made the family wage concept obsolete, and most married women expect to work for wages to supplement the family income. For a time, however, payment of the family wage in these towns made it possible for working class women to enjoy the benefits of a middle-class lifestyle. Despite their subservient status and economic dependence on male support, a number of economic and social factors determined the roles they assumed.

Finding secondary sources about miners in coal towns was relatively easy because historians have done a great deal of research and written a number of excellent historical accounts of coal miners' lives in recent years. Millinocket and East Millinocket's mill workers proved to be a greater challenge and, because I was unable to locate any histories of the men who worked in the mills and their families, I have relied on oral histories and vital statistics to get a picture of men's roles in mill towns and women's daily lives in the towns.

Efforts to conduct oral histories met with varying success. Benham and Lynch women were eager to share their stories, possibly because they no longer have reason to fear compromising their husband's jobs since the coal corporations have left the region and their mines have ceased operation. The women who remain in the towns are mostly native-born and black retirees' wives who lived through most of the boom and bust

periods and have accepted the fact that the coal industry will never again contribute to their families' financial support. Their strong attachment to the mountains and the mining communities where they raised their families is evident in the stories they related to me and in oral histories conducted at Southeast Community College in Cumberland.

Attempts to solicit Maine respondents were more successful in Millinocket than in East Millinocket. Some Millinocket women agreed to be interviewed, but most were wives of retired managers or mill professionals. Though they willingly shared their memories, all praised Great Northern's treatment of workers and stressed the positive aspects of life in the town, but few made any comments that could be construed as negative. In East Millinocket, even after appointments were scheduled, most were cancelled. Only two East Millinocket women agreed to interviews, both as a result of a personal referral.

The difficulty in obtaining interviews in the Maine towns lends itself to speculation that women are reluctant to express opinions that could compromise their families' livelihood since many of the East Millinocket women have husbands and sons still employed in the mill. Perhaps an instilled mentality concerning the propriety of discussing company business may have influenced their comments, since even the Millinocket women were reluctant to make any negative statements about current or previous mill owners. As a result, the interviews with women in both towns reflect a particular point of view that is probably not shared by all Millinocket and East Millinocket women and must be considered in that context. In addition to the oral histories, the *Maine Register*, the *Bangor Daily News*, and United States census records provided the bulk of the information obtained in the attempt to construct an accurate

history of the men, women, and children who lived and worked in Great Northern's sister towns.

The interviews I was able to obtain convinced me that women's lives in the four towns were remarkably similar. All played vital but subordinate roles in both the home and the community. This conclusion became an even more compelling motivation to explore the gendered division of labor characteristic of these towns. I am grateful to the women and men who were willing to share the details of their daily lives, thus making it possible for me to write this history.

Research included investigation of company records where available, town histories, town records, census records, newspaper accounts, as well as over two dozen oral histories of women and men residents. An extensive search for United States Steel's Lynch records revealed that after granting access to their records to Columbia University scholar Charles Gulick, company officials, apparently unhappy with his conclusions, regretted their decision when his book was published. In his preface Gulick wrote that C. L. Close, manager of the Bureau of Safety, Sanitation and Welfare at U. S. Steel rejected the manuscript, calling it, "prejudicial, unfair to the corporation, and in many instances, not in accordance with fact." Close demanded that Gulick rewrite the book in a different "tone" and that he reverse all the major conclusions he had reached. When Gulick refused to do so, he was accused of betraying the United States government.¹

Under new management, the company allowed access to Kenneth Warren, emeritus fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, who published an extensive history of U. S.

¹ Charles A. Gulick, *Labor Policy of the United States Steel Corporation* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 7-10.

Steel's first century in 2001. Though not as harshly critical as Gulick, his conclusions about corporate policies were also less than favorable.² These experiences may provide a partial explanation for my lack of success in attempting to gain access to company records. An e-mail from Christopher T. Baer, Assistant Curator of Manuscripts & Archives at the University of Delaware dated August 18, 2003, stated that "such records of U.S. Steel that survive are held by the company and only made available to scholars in one or two exceptional cases." Apparently company officials did not consider my research one of those cases; a request for access to the company headquarters in Pittsburgh received no response.³

International Harvester and Great Northern's records were readily available, and in addition to the census data, town records, and newspapers, provided factual data. Published and unpublished histories of the region during this time period including former United Mine Workers union organizer George Titler's *Hell in Harlan*; former Lynch coal miner Robert Hugh Collier's *The Conception of Lynch and the Life Thereafter*; Benham church historian Alliegordon Kaylor's *The Half Can Not Be Fancied*; historian Paul F. Taylor's *Bloody Harlan*; and former Harlan schoolteacher William D. Foresters' memoirs provided a diverse collection of points of view concerning Harlan County's history.⁴

² Kenneth Warren, *Big Steel: The First Century of the United States Steel Corporation 1901-2001* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

³ Christopher T. Baer, Assistant Curator of Manuscripts & Archives at the University of Delaware, e-mail, August 18, 2003.

⁴ George J. Titler, *Hell in Harlan* (Beckley, WV: BJW Printers, 1972); Robert Hugh Collier, *The Conception of Lynch and the Life Thereafter* (Nashville, TN: PrintNet, USA, 1996); Alliegordon Park Kaylor, *The Half Can Not Be Fancied: A History of the Benham Church 1910-1983*, (Cedar Falls, IA: The Association for Textual Study and Production, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Northern Iowa, 1999); Paul F. Taylor, *Bloody Harlan: The United Mine Workers of America in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1931-1941* (New York: University Press of America, 1990); William D. Forrester,

It is difficult to assess whether these towns developed a distinct culture because of the absence of first hand accounts written by residents. There is little evidence of the cultural flowering characteristic of economically prosperous societies. Profits earned in Benham, Lynch, Millinocket and East Millinocket financed great buildings and philanthropies in large cities, but none exist in the towns where the workers whose toil produced the wealth lived and died. However, with corporations no longer in control and residents finding their voices, the social history of these towns is beginning to unfold.

Before We Forget: Harlan County 1920 Through 1930; (by the author, 1983); *The Turbulent Thirties*, (by the author, 1986); *From Rags to Riches in Less Than a Decade: Harlan County in the Fifties* (by the author, 1995).

CHAPTER 1: GENESIS

In studying the industrialization of the United States the human factors involved in the relationship of management and labor are as important as technological developments. As the employer-employee relationship changed, evolved, and sought new foundations, an experiment with the philosophy of “welfare capitalism” formed a controversial episode and an important transitional period between the violence of late nineteenth-century labor confrontations and the New Deal’s tripartite arrangement of big business, big labor, and big government.

Marlene Hunt Rickard¹

When president Theodore Roosevelt supported Panamanian independence from Columbia in 1903 and negotiated the purchase of the failed French Panama Canal venture, the United States government was faced with the task of recruiting workers to finish building the canal. The workforce had to be young, strong, and male; even with these advantages, hundred of poorly paid manual laborers lost their lives due to accidents and disease, primarily malaria spread by mosquitoes. In an attempt to create a healthier living environment, engineers drained the swamps of mosquito breeding sites.

Pressure to create a safer, healthier and more livable environment came from the workers themselves. Engineers and supervisors of the labor force hired to build the canal learned a valuable lesson about labor relations and brought the importance of welfare management to the attention of American industrialists. Men without women were not productive employees. They could tolerate the intense heat, insects, sparse living conditions, and scarcity of familiar foods, but lack of access to female companionship dealt a potentially fatal blow to worker morale. The situation came to a head when a

¹ Marlene Hunt Rikard, “An Experiment in Welfare Capitalism: The Health Care Service of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company” (Ph.D. diss. University of Alabama, 1983), 1.

group of West Indian workers held a sit-down strike and proclaimed, “No women, no work,” and the American workers threatened to follow suit.²

Among the reasons the First Canal Commission discouraged American women from coming to the Isthmus of Panama were the unhealthy living conditions and lack of adequate housing and medical care that well paid and presumably tougher male workers tolerated. When it became obvious that the men would not stay without women, the Commission searched for more effective ways to deal with housing and health problems. They purchased two thousand houses from the French and renovated them, turned boxcars and tents into living quarters, and found innovative ways to obtain increased supplies of potable water. Their most important action, however, was to employ a woman, Mary Eugene Hubbard, who, as Superintendent of Nurses, would oversee sanitary conditions and nutritious diets for the men and families who chose to live and work in the region.³

From 1904, when the United States took possession of the property to the completion of the construction of the canal in 1914, the commission depended on dedicated women who accompanied or followed Hubbard to treat patients with yellow fever and other mosquito borne diseases and to try to alleviate terrible sanitary conditions. Despite such efforts, unsanitary and unpleasant conditions prevailed and workers, faced with the choice of bringing families to an unhealthy environment, spending long periods away from their families, or returning to their homes, chose the latter option. So many men left that in 1907, President Roosevelt sent Gertrude Beeks, of

² “Men Dug the Canal . . . But Women Played a Vital Role,” *Panama Canal Review*, Spring, 1976, www.cabrats.com/Builders/women.htm, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

the Department of Welfare of Government Employees of the National Civic Federation, to Panama to assess the situation and recommend solutions. There is little question that she was well qualified for this assignment. Beeks was a pioneer in the field of welfare management and the woman hired by Cyrus McCormick in 1901 as International Harvester's first welfare secretary.⁴

Investors in International Harvester, like other late nineteenth century industrialists, faced a vexing dilemma. Their fortunes depended on immigrant labor to work in their factories and mills but they feared the potential of this growing population of foreigners to disrupt their vision of an American society where elite whites would maintain their position as a privileged class. Historian Lawrence W. Soley maintained that George M. Pullman, designer and manufacturer of luxury railroad cars, set the precedent for considering a company town the solution to the labor problem. In the 1880s, Pullman, who viewed paternalism as the linchpin of the corporate welfare movement hired architects and engineers to plan and construct a model town around the Pullman Palace Car Company on the shore of Lake Calumet south of Chicago. The town, with 1400 dwellings and 8000 residents, a church, school, shopping mall, and public park, was designed for profit, not just by creating a tranquil environment for workers, but also to return a profit on corporate investments by collecting rents and charging for utilities and community services. Rents were relatively high and fees were

⁴ Nikki Mandell, *The Corporation as Family: The Gendering of Corporate Welfare, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 34. The terms *industrial welfare*, *welfare capitalism*, and *welfare management* are, in most cases, used interchangeably.

charged for the use of baseball diamonds, tennis courts, athletic club, theater, and library.⁵

According to Soley, the system contained a number of fatal flaws. Company executives used clever methods to restrict workers' freedom, both on and off the job. They controlled alcohol consumption by providing only one bar and locating it in the hotel where company officials would be able to observe patrons. In order to obtain alcohol in the nearby town of Kensington, they would have to walk out in the open. The town contained only two shopping areas for purchasing goods—"the market hall where prepared and fresh foods were sold, and the arcade, which was essentially the world's first fully-enclosed mall." The company allowed only those businesses it desired to locate on the top floor of the market hall and restricted the use of meeting rooms to company approved assemblies.⁶

Pullman prevented workers from purchasing homes within the town, but rather encouraged them to build outside the town at a convenient distance. In a *New York Sun* article he explained his reason: "If any lots had been sold in Pullman it would have permitted the introduction of the very baneful elements which it was the chief purpose to exclude from the immediate neighborhood of the shops and from the homes to be erected about them." In order to control the selection and behavior of residents, all the homes in the town itself would remain company property. Though he admitted that the company maintained complete control of rentals, he insisted that stores and shops were "rented to

⁵ Lawrence Soley, *Censorship, Inc.: The Corporate Threat to Free Speech in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 43.

⁶ Ibid.

and managed by outside parties free of any control by the company.”⁷ Given his previous statement about keeping out “baneful elements,” such a claim is doubtful.

Entrepreneurs such as Pullman focused their attention on immigrant male workers while women welfare managers such as Gertrude Beeks and reformers such as Jane Addams devoted themselves to the education and uplift of immigrant families. Corporate managers and supervisors could deal with blacks and poor whites on an individual basis because they had little in common but their poverty, but masses of culturally and religiously bonded immigrants were a cause for concern, both in the community and the industrial workplace. As Linda Gordon explained:

In the “gilded age,” as the 1870s through 1890s are often called, in reference to the fortunes amassed by new industrial magnates, charity took on a greater class consciousness—and class fear. In cities like Boston such fears were nearly inseparable from xenophobia as the working class became increasingly Catholic and foreign. A native-born Protestant elite was fearful of losing political and cultural control of their society to the immigrants, largely Catholic, streaming into the cities. The feared sources of social disorder now included not just disease, laziness, and depravity, but also organized resistance: labor unrest, even revolution, threatened, especially after the strike-ridden summer of 1877. As the threat of social order appeared to come not just from random deviant individuals but also from entire social groups, so the response shifted from random individualized acts of charity, persuasion and threat to organized collective action.⁸

While upper and middle-class women addressed their social concerns by forming charitable organizations devoted to teaching poor and working class families middle-class values and both men and women proposed government reform legislation, corporate

⁷ George M. Pullman, “Mr. Pullman Talks Freely,” *New York Sun*, July 5, 1894, reprinted in *The Strike at Pullman: Statement of George M. Pullman and T.H. Wickes, Before the U.S. Strike Commission* (1894), reprinted in *Major Problems in the History of American Worker*, 2nd edition, Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 136.

⁸ Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 1880-1960* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 29.

executives concentrated on ways to maintain control of workers' behavior in the workplace.

Their search led to the development of welfare capitalism. Corporate leaders who embraced welfare management principles were reacting to a number of contentious issues including American nativism, the perception of immigrants as socialist sympathizers, and increasing worker militancy. Historian Tamara K. Hareven argued that such concerns were the prime motivation for welfare programs:

The movement of welfare capitalism was intended to improve employer-employee relationships, socialize new immigrant workers to industrial mores, which were often considered synonymous with Americanization, avert or diffuse employee discontent by providing amenities, and foster workers' loyalty to and identification with the employer.⁹

In 1919, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics referred to this system as "industrial welfare" and defined it as "anything for the comfort and improvement, intellectual or social, of the employees, over and above wages, which is not a necessity or required by law." By this time, many corporations had already created "welfare management" departments. Labor historian Charles A. Gulick found that at United States Steel, expenditures charged to their welfare department from January 1, 1912 to January 1, 1924 included "churches, schools, libraries, clubs, restaurants and lunch rooms, rest and waiting rooms, playgrounds, swimming pools, athletic fields, tennis courts, band stands, visiting nurses, practical housekeeping centers, gardens, and pensions."¹⁰ Such

⁹ Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time, Cambridge: The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 39.

¹⁰ Charles A. Gulick, "Labor Policy of the United States Steel Corporation," *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, 66, no.1.258, ed. Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University, (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 180-181.

amenities were intended not only to attract and retain a reliable and loyal labor force, but also to create a healthy environment for working class families.

In the modern industrial environment, investors and managers were challenged with finding ways to accommodate, but also to control the rapidly growing labor force. Vulnerable industrial giants searching for ways to improve their public image were especially interested in welfare programs. Nikki Mandell is one of many historians who portrayed corporate receptiveness to welfare management as a self-protective measure:

With increasing frequency, corporations found themselves subject to attack from journalists, academics, and politicians. Exposés of unethical business practices, shoddy or harmful products and abhorrent working and living conditions shocked readers of popular magazines. A new generation of economists challenged the classical theory that unfettered pursuit of one's self-interest promoted the common good. Politicians, riding a ground swell of public outrage, frequently weighted in against the large corporation, as well. Corporate efforts to solve the labor problem took place in an environment that increasingly questioned the legitimacy of corporate power.¹¹

Societal pressures to institute more humane treatment of workers prompted industrial employers to take positive steps to improve the work environment. Mandell maintained, “the thousands of employers who adopted welfare work believed they were embarking on a new path toward harmonious labor relations. It was a path that promised to boost productivity, recapture the intimacy of a by-gone era, and legitimize their place in modern society.”¹² Such a path would benefit not only industry but also society as a whole.

To discuss the many labor issues inherent in modern industrial capitalism, in 1902 “prominent employers, labor leaders, government officials and scholars” gathered in

¹¹ Mandell, *Corporation as Family*, 16-17.

¹² Mandell, *Corporation as Family*, 17.

Minneapolis. According to Mandell, participants in the Minneapolis Conference rejected claims that a fundamental conflict existed between employers and employees and attributed most problems to employees' misunderstandings of company goals. The solution the attendees proposed was to promote cooperation between capital and labor by adopting welfare management principles.¹³

Mandell claimed that "progressive businessmen, welfare managers, and wage-earning employees jointly created the corporate welfare system," but not all corporate executives shared the Minneapolis Conference participants' resolve. The first step in promoting cooperation was to convince implacable executives that such reform was in their best interest. Effecting changes in established management policies toward workers tested advocates' negotiation skills. Historian Kathryn Kish Sklar described the nature of the problems reformers faced:

The central dilemma of Progressive Era social justice activism revolved around the need for reformers to embrace many of the values and modes of operation associated with machine production at the same time that they sought to humanize that production. While reformers sought to preserve human agency and other qualities of human individuality from the relentless forces of industrialization, they also had to cooperate with those forces.¹⁴

In order to be effective in their challenge to capitalist values, reformers had to convince skeptical corporate heads that welfare management programs would produce long-term benefits for the company.

The realization that corporations had no intention of relinquishing control of the workplace convinced welfare advocates that the solution to labor problems was a

¹³ Mandell, *Corporation as Family*, 18.

¹⁴ Mandell, *Corporation as Family*; 7; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Two Political Structures in the Progressive Era: The National Consumer's League and the American Association for Labor Legislation," *U. S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 36-62.

“sustainable partnership between employers and employees.” They compromised by proposing a “welfare partnership [that] encompassed a hierarchical relationship in which management retained its traditional powers and prerogatives,” but would take responsibility for workers’ welfare. If companies could persuade workers to accept such a partnership, management would have a socially acceptable way to retain control of the decision making process in labor relations. Though this partnership would be based on the assumption that management was better qualified to determine appropriate welfare for workers than the workers themselves, reformers and workers perceived it as less paternalistic than the old system.¹⁵ Because such suppositions allowed corporations to assign gender, class, and racial roles that would best serve their own labor needs, such a compromise could improve their public image without endangering the hegemonic structure of their operations.

United States Steel’s investors and financiers were particularly concerned about public image because the corporation’s enormous size made it a target of government surveillance and subject to anti-trust laws. These men argued that the corporation should be a “friend” or “patron” of labor, but their actions were motivated less by concern for the welfare of workers than the welfare of United States Steel. The federal government was becoming increasingly apprehensive about the power of the monopolies created by mergers and trusts.¹⁶ The steel industry, in particular, had come under government scrutiny because, as Gulick pointed out, it was “characterized by cutthroat competition between the country’s wealthiest entrepreneurs.” When Theodore Roosevelt became

¹⁵ Mandell, *Corporation as Family*, 21.

¹⁶ Rickard, “Experiment in Welfare Capitalism,” 30-31.

president in 1902, his stated goal was to limit the threat that the growing power of corporations might result in oligarchy. In “The New Nationalism” he said:

Our government, national and state, must be freed from the control of special interests. . . . Exactly as the special interests of cotton and slavery threatened our political integrity before the Civil War, so now the great special business interests too often control and corrupt the men and methods of government for their own profit. We must drive the special interests out of politics. . . . It has become entirely clear that we must have government supervision of the capitalization, not only of the public service corporations, including, particularly, railways, but also of all corporations doing interstate business.¹⁷

Corporate heads soon learned after Roosevelt was elected that he had every intention of initiating government supervision of American business practices. In 1903, his administration established a Department of Commerce and Labor that included a Bureau of Corporations charged with overseeing and publicizing corporate activities and revitalized the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act that had been rendered powerless by a number of Supreme Court decisions.

Increasing violence in the workplace also focused government attention on management practices and increased the possibility of intervention in labor relations. The foreign population of cities had grown dramatically as immigrants flocked to America’s new factories. Industrialist viewed with trepidation this influx of foreigners and the recruitment efforts of labor organizations such as the Marxist International Working People’s Association (IWPA) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) to unite all members of the American working class, regardless of race and gender, into one gigantic union.

¹⁷ Gulick, “Labor Policy,” 18-21; Theodore Roosevelt, “The New Nationalism,” (campaign speech delivered in Issowatomie, Kansas, on August 31, 1910), <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/31.htm>.

They had good reason for their anxiety. Between 1880 and 1900, workers participated in thousands of strikes. The most tragic was the 1892 Homestead Strike prompted by Amalgamated Iron and Steel Workers' fury when Andrew Carnegie's managing partner, Henry Clay Frick, cut wages by 20 percent and refused to improve working conditions. Determined to destroy the union, Frick hired three hundred Pinkerton detectives and tried to sneak them on barges down the Monongahela River into Homestead under the cover of night. The union members, familiar with his devious tactics, were waiting. A furious gun battle ensued in which ten strikers and three Pinkertons were killed. The governor of Pennsylvania called up eight thousand troops from the state militia and the mill reopened under military guard. After this conflict, Frick vowed never to recognize the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Workers or any other union.¹⁸

Frick's former secretary, Thomas Lynch, appointed to head all of United States Steel's coal and coke enterprises, was the man for whom the town of Lynch, Kentucky, was named. His labor policies reflect the influence of his former boss and mentor. While Frick is best known in the coal industry for his stringent safety regulations, he is also remembered as a "skilled union buster." His adamant refusal to recognize workers as having the right to collective action indicates that, despite the pressures brought to bear, some corporate executives fought relinquishing control of either the workplace or the labor force until forced by circumstances to do so.¹⁹

¹⁸ Soley, *Censorship, Inc.*, 43.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Frick's repression of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers in Homestead virtually destroyed the union movement, but steel corporation executives recognized that in order to prevent future strikes they would have to replace autocratic and paternalistic methods with a more effective way to defuse worker discontent. They hoped that welfare management programs would not only portray the company to the public as more favorable to workers, they would build loyalty and reduce the hostilities that led to attempts to organize unions.

Such corporations as International Harvester and United States Steel realized that in order to avoid scrutiny and government intervention in labor relations it was imperative to convince the government that their policies served the best interest of the public and the labor force. Both were part of the powerful J. P. Morgan conglomerate that controlled the bulk of the United States' steel industry, the specific kind of monopolistic organization that the Roosevelt administration intended to control "in the interest of the public welfare."²⁰

Because of the emphasis on keeping production high and wages low in order to increase profits, the steel industry was especially susceptible to labor problems. Judge Elbert H. Gary, chairman of United States Steel, admitted publicly that "from the standpoint of morality" the industry had been "a shame and a disgrace" in its treatment of workers before the merger in 1901 of three of the major steel interests, Andrew Carnegie's Carnegie Steel, W. H. and J. H. Moore's National Steel, and J. P. Morgan's Federal Steel into the giant United States Steel Corporation.²¹

²⁰ Roosevelt, "The New Nationalism."

²¹ Elbert H. Gary, quoted in David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 50.

Workers' angry responses to real and perceived abuses often escalated into violence. While the eight-hour day was the stated reason for the 1886 strike at International Harvester's Chicago factory, workers' resentment of their treatment by management led to the Haymarket Square Riot that followed. The violence was triggered by a protest rally for two workers killed by police during a company lockout. When police tried to disperse the crowd of approximately 300, a bomb exploded, killing one officer and mortally wounding six others. In the melee that followed, policemen and workers in the crowd opened fire on each other. Seventy policemen were injured, four civilians killed and many more injured.²²

An excerpt from an 1886 speech delivered in court by one of the eight Chicago anarchists on trial for their participation in the riot that followed expresses the sentiments characteristic of the more radical groups:

Those who amass fortunes, build palaces, and live in luxury, are doing that by virtue of unpaid labor. Being directly or indirectly the possessors of land and machinery, they dictate their terms to the workingman. He is compelled to sell his labor cheap, or to starve. The price paid him is always far below the real value. He acts under compulsion, and they call it a free contract. This infernal state of affairs keeps him poor and ignorant, an easy prey for exploitation.²³

In response to such expressions of hostility, employers turned to private police forces and to the courts to put down workers' strikes and demonstrations, justifying their actions by

²² Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

²³ Michael Schwab, *The Accused and the Accusers: The Famous Speeches of the Eight Chicago Anarchists in Court* (New York: Arno, 1969), 24-28, reprinted in *Major Problems in the History of American Worker*, 2nd edition, eds. Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 126.

blaming “the peevish discontent of wageworkers” for strikes, branding the groups of strikers “mobs” and labeling all participants, regardless of circumstances, anarchists.²⁴ Recent scholarship suggests that there may have been other contributing factors to labor unrest at Haymarket and throughout industrial America. Mandell argued that workers used strikes and protests to express their resentment of the power of huge conglomerates. In the same manner that individual steel companies had joined forces to create United States Steel, Deering and McCormick had merged into International Harvester. Frustration over the fact that corporations could combine resources to increase their power and profit, but workers were denied the right to join forces in order to defend against the growing power of these giant corporations fueled workers’ anger.²⁵

As the need for laborers to work in their steel mills and coalmines increased, the steel industry turned to welfare management as a way to maintain labor stability. Indicative of its new approach to labor conflict was the creation of the American Iron and Steel Institute, founded in 1908 under the leadership of Judge Elbert H. Gary, in an effort to stabilize the industry after the Panic of 1907. In 1911, the institute created a Welfare Department charged with creating industry-wide programs.²⁶ Gary claimed that this extraordinary move was due to “a simple duty that industry owes to labor” rather than an effort to avoid government intervention, but in light of the turbulent history of the steel industry’s labor relations, his moralistic tone was hardly convincing.

²⁴ Fitz John Porter, “How to Quell Mobs,” *North American Review* 141 (October 1885): 351-360, reprinted in *Major Problems in the History of American Worker*, 2nd edition, eds. Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 132-135.

²⁵ Mandell, *Corporation As Family*, 14.

²⁶ American Iron and Steel Institute Directors Thirteenth Meeting, September 27, 1911, American Iron and Steel Institute Corporate Records, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware; Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 51.

Dr. Thomas Darlington of New York City was selected as director of the department and charged with the responsibility for developing welfare programs for member corporations. Department recommendations influenced not only the design and construction of steel and coal company towns, but welfare policies concerning workers and their families. Its employees monitored water quality in company towns and provided workers' families with access to health care, nutrition education, and sanitary living conditions. The design of Benham and Lynch and the health and safety programs for Wisconsin Steel and United States Coal and Coke employees and their families came under the jurisdiction of the welfare department.

That same year, International Harvester, a Morgan affiliate and Wisconsin Steel's parent company, founded its own welfare department and hired Gertrude Beeks, the Chicago reformer and businesswoman who had gone to Panama, as the first secretary. Beeks was responsible for instituting programs designed to create healthier and more pleasant living and workplace conditions, increase productivity and promote company loyalty. The selection of a woman for this prominent and challenging position would have been unusual had it not been for the Victorian family ideal promoted by reformers that mothers were the character builders of society and better suited than men to the task of nurturing and "civilizing." Mandell contended:

Progressive employers seeking to recreate the intimate and friendly relations they ascribed to a bygone era understood that masculine competitiveness and lack of emotion were ill suited to this task. Instead they believed that the very qualities that traditionally excluded women from the world of business, their assumed selflessness, compassion, and domesticity were just the skills needed to build a happy corporate family.²⁷

²⁷ Mandell, *Corporation as Family*, 33.

The gendering of welfare work insured that for nearly two decades, the profession of welfare management would provide educated women with welcome opportunities to participate in the business world. International Harvester's employment of Beeks provided the maternal model, but welfare work never became an exclusively female field and was replaced by predominantly male personnel departments after World War I.

The time period in which the towns included in this study were constructed coincided with the corporate effort in the United States to devise creative strategies for solving labor problems. Millinocket was incorporated in 1901 and East Millinocket in 1907, while the unincorporated town of Benham was constructed in 1913, and Lynch in 1917. These towns lend themselves to comparison because they represent markedly different approaches to management of the labor force. All four towns were built to house the laborers needed to extract natural resources in isolated locations: in Millinocket and East Millinocket, to turn the trees into pulp needed to make paper for the Great Northern Paper Company; in Benham and Lynch to mine the coal required to fuel International Harvester and United States Steel Corporation's huge steel mills in Illinois and Pennsylvania. All were considered model company towns, the largest and most modern constructed by corporations at the time. Millinocket boasted the largest paper mill in the world and Lynch the tallest tippie. The building of the towns coincided with the construction of railroads into the regions.

The most important similarity, however, was the exclusion of women from waged labor. The denial of access to economic and political participation for women created a gendered division of labor that had a profound effect on the community cultures that evolved. Women of all classes were assigned subordinate roles. Working-class women



Figure 1: Millinocket in the state of Maine

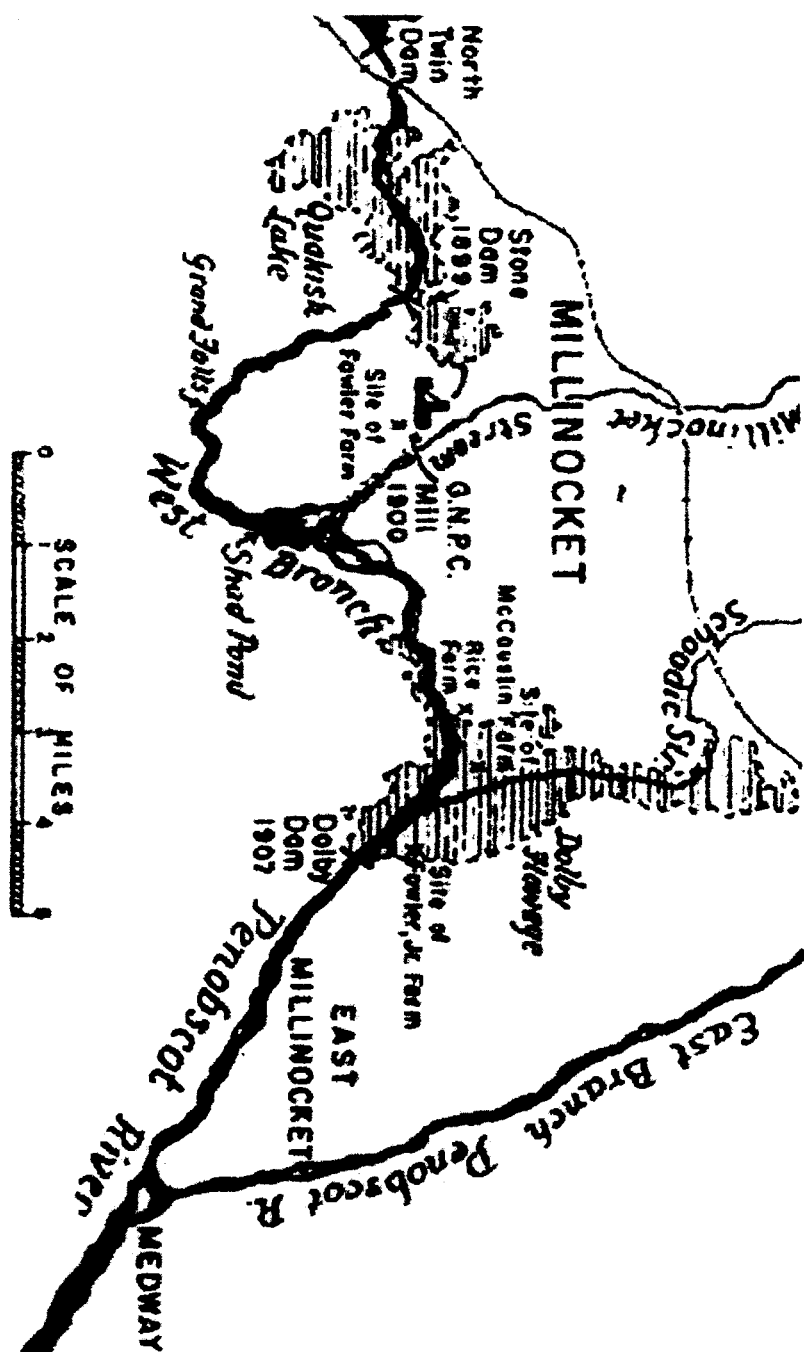
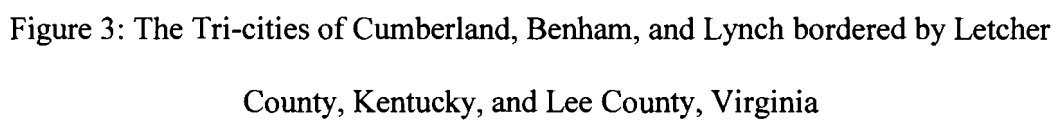


Figure 2: The Tri-cities of Millinocket, East Millinocket and Medway



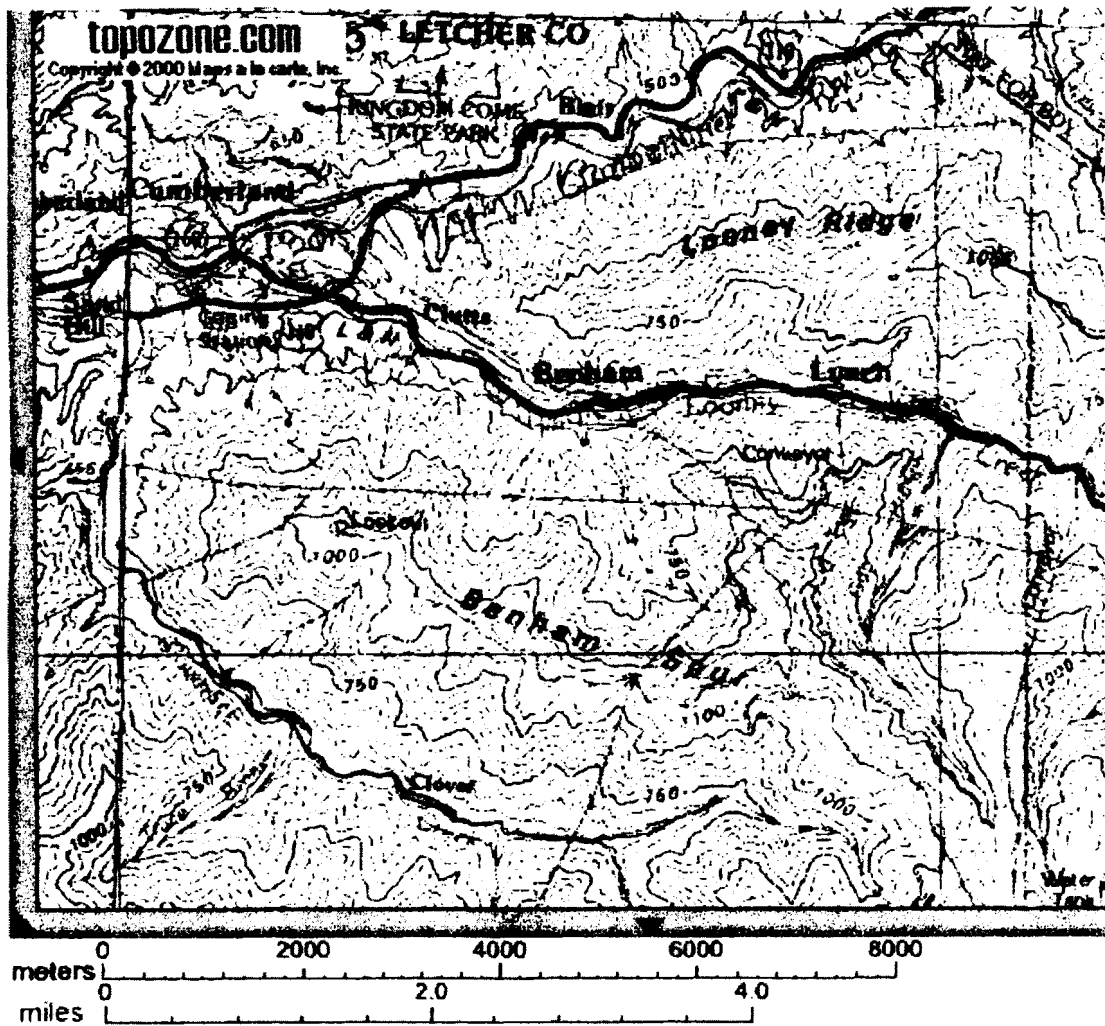


Figure 4: Benham and Lynch Region with Looney Ridge, Looney Creek
and Benham Spur

would not be workers; they would be wives, mothers, and daughters of workers. Middle-class women would nurture present and future managers. Educated single women could pursue a profession but only those that were deemed appropriate and in the corporation's interest. Women could serve the community as nurses or teach the young men who would become company executives, doctors, lawyers, ministers and the next generation of workers. They could also teach the young women who would become the wives of company employees and professionals, but only as long as they, themselves, remained unmarried.

Despite the obvious advantages workers and residents gained from welfare management programs they were not without critics or flaws. Some reformers felt that the degree of control exerted over the work force denied workers freedom to choose options other than those explicitly or implicitly dictated by the company. Corporate attitudes toward unions played a crucial role. Union leaders considered the programs a form of industrial paternalism implemented specifically to prevent workers from organizing or joining unions. While the latter proved to be true in Benham and Lynch, it was not the case in Millinocket and East Millinocket. Corporate recognition of unions in the latter towns gave residents a degree of autonomy, while in Benham and Lynch denial of the right to bargain collectively for wages, benefits, and working conditions led to resentment of corporate control.

Company towns emerged early in the industrial era and played an important role in shaping American labor relations. They were among the influences on the character of American workers that conditioned men to work for wages in a hierarchical management system. The combination of abundant resources and capital, industrial technology and

insufficient numbers of laborers prompted small companies and large corporations to build hundreds of camps and towns in every region of the United States.

Size, structure, and construction of these early communities varied considerably. Housing ranged from poorly constructed shacks located in camps near the industrial site and primarily intended for bachelor workers, to sturdy houses built as permanent homes for workers and their families. Historians generally agree that the first company towns were built to house the workers in the New England textile mills, but according to historian L. Martin Perry, company towns were also a vital part of Kentucky's past, with coal towns existing even before the Civil War.²⁸ The towns in this study evolved from these early towns but reflect the influence of the welfare management principles formulated by reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Company towns were an especially viable solution for long-term operations, especially in remote locations, because they provided owners with the means to create an environment where they could maximize profits by housing the workforce on their own property. Perry places the origin of such towns in Europe, evolving from medieval origins where "owners of manorial estates assembled a resident workforce to meet the numerous responsibilities of the property." During England's industrial revolution, the work force shifted from privately owned estates to urban and industrial centers. British factory towns provided models for European, Canadian, and United States mill towns.²⁹

In building company towns, planners looked at existing models and added features tailored to fit individual industrial requirements. Investors often tried several

²⁸ L. Martin Perry, "Coal Company Towns in Eastern Kentucky, 1854-1941: A Historic Context," Kentucky Heritage Council, <http://www.coaleducation.org/coalhistory/coaltowns/home.htm>, 3.

²⁹ Perry, "Coal Company Towns, 3.

approaches until they found one that fit with their own corporate policies. Perry commented:

Throughout the nineteenth century company town owners experimented with a variety of town arrangements. . . . [They] recognized early that employee control was affected not only by tangibles, such as management practices, as well as by the manipulation of tangible public and private spaces. Their effort to influence worker behavior by environmental control expressed itself in many ways, according to the interests of the employer. Paternalistic company owners provided housing intended to develop loyalty and to maintain a healthy work force. Less paternalistic owners made low housing costs the priority, and offered sub-standard accommodations with little concern for the impact on the inhabitant.³⁰

Though sub-standard accommodations required very little investment, the harsh living conditions contributed to labor conflict.

Perry classified company towns into two basic systems. The Rhode Island system refers to small time operations with minimal facilities needed to sustain a work force that often consisted of entire families, including children. The village usually contained the factory, a company store, housing, company schools and churches, and farmland for growing food. This system was usually developed and controlled by individual owners who permitted, and in some cases invited independent speculators to provide such support services as health care. Workers' wages consisted primarily of credit for purchases at the company store, food and housing. These towns usually developed into incorporated towns where company and municipal government shared control. One of the earliest examples of the Rhode Island system is Slatersville, Rhode Island, built by Samuel Slater, often referred to as the father of the Industrial Revolution, and his brother John in 1803. The village originally consisted of the Slatersville Mill, two tenement

³⁰ Perry, "Coal Company Towns," 5.

houses, the owners' house and a company store. This was the most common type of company town until the twentieth century.³¹

The company towns in this study evolved from the second type of system, the Waltham system. These towns were designed to house workers in the textile mills and Perry described them as "large operations with site plans guiding construction, with growth anticipated, and with an array of amenities found in traditional cities." He called them self-contained entities where the investors paid the workers cash wages that they were encouraged to spend in a diverse commercial district.³²

Bostonian Francis Cabot Lowell in 1820 originated this system and first utilized it in Waltham, Massachusetts, then expanded it when he built the textile mill town of Lowell. Concerned with developing loyalty and maintaining a healthy workforce, Lowell designed the town to accommodate young New England farmwomen in boarding houses. His success in avoiding the kind of squalor, degradation, and disease that existed in England's industrial cities made the town the model for subsequent New England textile towns.

Studies of early New England textile and shoe company towns such as Fall River, Lawrence, and Lynn, Massachusetts, provide an important comparison with paper mill and coal company towns, especially in the makeup of the labor force. In the early days of the textile industry, young women and children constituted the bulk of the labor force. Association of women with the production of clothing and the commonly held perception of men as the major economic contributors to family support made women the ideal

³¹ Ibid., 9. Hadassah Davis and Natalie Robinson, "History You Can See – Scenes of Change in Rhode Island 1790 –1910," Providence: League of Rhode Island Historical Societies, 1986.

³² Perry, "Coal Company Towns," 8.

choice for a cheap and temporary work force for factory production. Later, many of the immigrants who fled Ireland because of the potato famine and impoverished French Canadians who came to New England mill towns seeking employment replaced the farm girls as an even cheaper and more plentiful labor force that was more easily controlled because of their desperate economic circumstances.³³

Unlike industrialists who built company towns located near population centers, the investors who provided the funding and the corporate executives who planned and constructed the company towns of Millinocket, East Millinocket, Benham, and Lynch in remote locations did not have a locally available labor supply. In response to the need for labor, executives hired recruiters to search throughout the United States and Europe for stonemasons to build the infrastructures of the mills and mines, construction workers to build the office buildings and workers' dwellings, and men to work in the mines and mills once they became operational. In Appalachia, many of the workers were blacks recruited voluntarily or involuntarily from southern tenant farms and coal mines and Europeans contracted by east coast agents as they entered the country. Trains made transportation of these workers possible. According to historian John Alexander Williams: "The coming of a railroad invariably led to population shifts: from farm areas to mining areas; from north to south in the case of some entrepreneurs and skilled workmen, from south to north in the cases of African American miners and railroad

³³ Some other works that discuss early New England factories are Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2000); Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, 1860-1912* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

men.”³⁴ Both migration and immigration contributed to the population explosions in these isolated towns, but despite the influx of workers from economically impoverished regions of the United States and Europe, the vast workforce necessary for industrial production created fierce competition for laborers.

The labor shortage in the coal and paper industries was due, in part, to the exclusion of women from the work force. In the single-industry company towns class and gender construction differed significantly from rural and urban areas where multiple industries competed for a relatively autonomous and mobile labor force of men, women, and in some cases, children. Two classes existed in the single-industry towns: the dominant professional class made up of superintendents, managers, doctors, educators and ministers, and the dependent and dominated working class. Nearly all women were dependent on male support.

An equally important similarity of the towns is that absentee investors owned all the land and structures, including individual residences. Because they were private property, corporation executives had significant control over workers' lives in the home and community as well as the workplace. The steel industry's violent suppression of union organization had failed to instill order; outright paternalism had also been ineffective. Paternalistic attempts to provide for all the workers' needs had worked relatively well in supervising farm girls in the early New England textile mills, but both workers and reformers increasingly perceived such patronization as a degrading form of charity that was based on the assumption that workers had neither the intelligence nor the

³⁴ John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 239-240.

ambition to provide for themselves, and in the case of women workers, that they needed protection.

Stuart Brandes argued that industrial employees “usually preferred to take charge of their own lives and found paternalism intrinsically demeaning. By regarding himself as a father to his employees and acting accordingly, an employer unavoidably relegated them to an inferior, childlike position.”³⁵ But Toronto historian Peter Carstens argued in his study of company towns of South Africa that managers of the diamond mines consider judicious application of paternalism an essential aspect of successful management of the labor force:

The most efficient administration for every company is a system in which paternalism, as the hegemonic ingredient of company power, can be appropriately extended to all employees in a manner that takes care of their basic needs, according to what is morally acceptable to company directors and materially acceptable to employees.³⁶

This comparison is especially pertinent in the case of the coal towns because of similarities in the work environment and the captive nature of the work force. The issue of material acceptability became especially important for corporations trying to attract permanent workers to an underdeveloped and isolated region. With ample capital to invest, the larger corporations operated on the premise that a contented work force was a productive work force and that providing a healthy and comfortable work, home, and community environment would not only attract suitable workers but would eliminate the

³⁵ Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 140 - 141.

³⁶ Peter Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinzee, and the Control of a Town* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 4.

sources of dissatisfaction that would prompt them to agitate for unions or search for more favorable working conditions.

The economic advantage of providing amenities attractive to families was that such amenities attracted family men perceived by employers to be more dependable than unmarried men. However, men with families considered adequate housing, health care, and education for their children basic rights rather than charity. Operating on the assumption that men with families would be less likely to leave after wives had settled in, houses were furnished and decorated, and children were in school, recruiters emphasized the availability of homes, schools, churches, hospitals, family entertainment, public facilities, and the services of skilled professionals such as principals, teachers, ministers and health care workers.

The wives who accompanied the workers provided additional benefits to the company in that women's unpaid labor relieved them of the necessity for recruiting and hiring employees to provide such support services as laundry and meals for workers. With families to anchor workers and wives to produce a new crop of workers, they would also be spared the expense of recruiting. Once the company had developed a skilled and stable work force, training expenses would decrease and production, and therefore profits would increase significantly.

Ethnicity, position with the company, and race in Benham and Lynch were the major determinants of class. Since investors did not live in the town, they delegated control of both the workplace and the community to the managerial and professional classes. As long as federal and state governments favored pro-business legislation or assumed a laissez-faire attitude in labor struggles, managers were relatively free from

outside government interference. However, methods of control required accommodations to both internal and external forces.

The workers themselves created internal pressures. Managing an ethnically and racially diverse workforce was no simple task in the racist and nativist climate that existed in America in the early twentieth century, and managers were challenged to devise ways for these groups to co-exist with a minimum of tensions. Great Northern's need for skilled artisans motivated the company to provide reasonable benefits and the right to bargain collectively as a condition of employment. The racially and ethnically mixed unskilled workforce in Benham and Lynch presented a different kind of challenge. Managers walked a fine line between keeping the groups separated to prevent union organization and avoiding friction between the groups. One way they attempted to accomplish this was to minimize differences in pay and living conditions.

External pressures came from progressive reformers' disapproval of management practices that resulted in socially disruptive violence. After the 1893 depression, reformers concerned with the "evils" of industrialism kept a watchful eye on corporate policies concerning labor relations. By 1907, progressivism had resulted in the formation of such organizations as the National Child Labor Committee, National Consumer's League, National Housing Association, American Association for Labor Legislation, the Committee of One Hundred on National Health, and dozens more, sometimes working together in ad hoc coalitions to influence public policies and government regulation of labor relations.³⁷

³⁷ Robert Weibe, *The Search For Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 199.

Such Progressive era reform efforts challenged corporations to find socially acceptable ways to transform large groups of dissimilar people into a unified work force capable of performing the labor that industry required to produce its products and profits. Assumptions that this largely immigrant group, perceived by investors as socialistic, posed a potential threat to American Protestantism and democracy prompted the development of programs designed to remold people from many different cultures into good American citizens with Christian values and an industrial work ethic. Public relations departments justified such programs by stereotyping immigrants and blacks as “children” in need of training and protection. Methods used to accomplish such training were remarkably similar in all four of the towns in this study.

However, despite the similarities in their origins and the fact that all four towns reflected the influence of welfare management, the different ways in which individual corporations interpreted the welfare philosophy were major factors in determining management-labor relations and directly affected the stability and future viability of the towns. What was different in each, even those owned by the same corporation, was the nature and degree of control exerted over the residents’ lives. Great Northern’s company towns were incorporated and subject to state laws and regulations concerning their workers and residents, even though the land was private property belonging to Great Northern’s investors. Town residents of both Millinocket and East Millinocket elected a governing body of councilors and sent representatives to the state legislature. While a direct link to the influence of welfare management ideology has not been established, employee satisfaction was crucial because of competition with International Paper’s mill in Rumford, Maine, for laborers.

In the unincorporated or “captive” towns such as Benham and Lynch, corporate executives instituted labor force policies without opposition or debate from outside sources. State and local authorities declined to interfere in corporate affairs, which allowed the corporations total authority on their own property. There were no town councils, mayors or other elected officials and residents had no voice in making community decisions. Historian Lawrence Soley described the type of control exerted in the Harlan County towns as a type of colonization:

Because the housing, land, retail outlets, and even roads were owned by the companies, these towns constituted private property over which the companies exerted total control. To assure their control wasn’t challenged, the companies hired private police forces, banned literature and speech that challenged company dictates, and evicted employees who failed to be compliant.³⁸

In these towns, the companies were responsible for building and road maintenance, fire protection, and health services, functioning as private governments. By providing these services, rather than allowing bona fide governments to provide them, the companies were able to keep out legitimate, democratic governments. Owners of the firms or their boards of directors made all policy decisions.

The towns included in this study challenge the commonly held assumptions that the prime motivation for building company towns was to prevent workers from organizing or joining unions. While this motivation was definitely a factor in the coalmining towns, it does not apply to the paper mill towns, since Great Northern recognized the International Brotherhood of Papermakers in 1902, the same year the union was chartered.³⁹

³⁸ Soley, *Censorship, Inc.*, 2.

³⁹ Dorothy Bowler Laverty, *Millinocket: Magic City of Maine’s Wilderness*, (Freeport: The Bond Wheelwright Company, copyright 1973), 7. xi.

Great Northern's towns also challenge David Brody's conclusion that welfare management ceased to exist after the depression, since Great Northern continued many welfare programs until 1970 when the company merged with Nekoosa Edwards Corporation of Wisconsin to become Great Northern Nekoosa.⁴⁰ It was the case in most corporations, but though such programs were relatively short-lived, they were the forerunners of modern human resources departments that oversee management and employee relations. The types of control exerted had a direct impact on working class formation by establishing a hierarchy based on ethnicity, race and gender. In all four cases, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males occupied the top rung of the ladder and became the dominant class. Over time, immigrant and black men would be able to move up in position through personal initiative but women could only move up through marriage. Daughters of the dominant class were the exceptions. Access to higher education through financial support from fathers or other male family members allowed them to pursue options other than marriage. For the majority of women, however, there were few or no options. The nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and children would remain the preferred economic unit, not only because it served the interests of industry, but also twentieth century cultural and social norms.

⁴⁰ Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 81.

CHAPTER 2: MILLINOCKET AND EAST MILLINOCKET: MAINE'S "MAGIC" CITIES

Among Maine's most successful industrial enterprises were Great Northern Paper Company's paper mills located in the sister towns of Millinocket and East Millinocket. These are classic examples of towns built to accommodate large scale, single industry operations located in a rural setting. Millinocket was the earlier and larger of the two, but Great Northern's management was similar in both.

As early as 1865, paper mills had appeared in Maine and by 1885 twelve pulp mills and nine paper mills were in production. The thriving Bangor lumber industry was in decline because the hardwood trees and tall pines that had made the city the lumber capital of the world were severely depleted, but as historian Richard Judd points out, "The state's abundant supply of water [that] provided cheap log transportation and hydroelectric power . . . huge tracts of spruce, an ideal source of pulp, [that] stood nearby . . . rapid forest regeneration, and nearby markets gave Maine an early edge in the developing pulp and paper industry."¹ However, to turn raw materials into profit, investors had to transform farmland and wilderness into sites of industrial production.

Railroads played a major role in the development of the pulp and paper industry and in attracting corporate investors to the Millinocket mills. Trains transported machines, supplies, and laborers to the worksite and later provided passenger service for executives and residents of the towns that emerged. Railroads also made it possible to

¹ Richard W. Judd, "The Pulp and Paper Industry 1865-1930," *Maine, the Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Richard Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, Joel W. Eastman (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1995), 427-43; Judd, *Aroostook: A Century of Logging in Northern Maine*. (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1989), 173.

transport finished products to national and international markets. Before the railroads were constructed, the only access to the region was the Penobscot River.²

The Maine legislature created the first railway system in Maine in 1834 and, by the 1880s, the one major area without a railroad was the region that extended north from Bangor in Penobscot County to Aroostook County. In 1891, a group of entrepreneurs created the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad primarily to serve agricultural and lumbering interests. The laborers who laid the tracks, primarily Italian sojourners and immigrants recruited by overseers called padrones, were housed in boarding houses or temporary shacks located near construction sites. Though widely criticized for its exploitative practices, the padrone system provided an important link between immigrants in search of work and employers who needed large numbers of laborers at remote sites.³ It was this system that the corporations in this study used to obtain the laborers needed to build the railroads that would provide access to their operations and construct the foundations for their building projects.

The Bangor & Aroostook began service from Old Town to Houlton on Christmas day, 1893, and soon expanded service to Presque Isle and Caribou with branches extending into Aroostook potato country. In that same decade, local Bangor entrepreneurs, incorporated as the Northern Development Company, acquired large tracts

² Richard W. Judd, "The Lumber Industry in an Age of Change," in *Maine: Pine Tree State*, 412.

³ "B&A Ends its Era After 111 Years," *Bangor Daily News*, Monday, November 25, 2002, A2, col. 1; Alfred Banfield, "The History and Ethnicity of Italians in Maine," (M. A. thesis in liberal studies, University of Maine, 1989), 74.

of forest land on the West Branch of the Penobscot, and made plans to build the world's largest pulp and paper mill in the Millinocket region.⁴

Millinocket, a Penobscot Indian word meaning "many islands" had been purchased by the state from the Penobscot Indians in 1833. The region was an ideal site for a pulp and paper mill. In addition to the plentiful spruce trees that grew in the north woods, a 100-foot drop in the West Branch of the Penobscot River provided waterpower. Only a farm, the Bangor and Aroostook Section House and an old hunter's camp existed on the land where the mill and town of Millinocket would stand, so clearing the land was simply a matter of cutting the trees and preparing the ground for the mill's foundation.⁵

Charles W. Mullen, local engineer and graduate of Maine State College (now the University of Maine) got the idea for the mill while working on the construction of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad and was able to convince Garret Schenck to leave International Paper's Rumford Mill and join him in the project of harnessing the river's waterpower by damming the West Branch of the Penobscot River and building a pulp and paper mill on Millinocket Stream, seventy miles north of Bangor. In 1896 they secured investment funds from Bangor lumber barons and in 1897 obtained a charter from the Maine state legislature for the Northern Development Company, capitalized at one million dollars, for the purpose of "creating, leasing, and selling electricity and other power for manufacturing and other purposes." This concept was later discarded in favor of construction of a paper mill that would utilize the electric power.⁶

⁴ Joel W. Eastman, "Transportation Systems in Maine, 1820-1880," in *Maine: Pine Tree State*, 319.

⁵ George W. Stearns, "The First Twenty-Five Years," address at the Quarter-Century celebration in 1926, *Millinocket, Maine: 50th Anniversary, 1901-1951*, Millinocket Memorial Library, reprinted article.

⁶ John E. McLeod, "The Northern, the Way I Remember," *GNP News*, November 2000, 5.

When the original owners realized that the large amounts of investment capital required made the venture too expensive and complex for small operators, they decided that the project would succeed only if they could interest investors with large amounts of capital. The search took them to Boston and New York, and later in that same year, powerful financiers including Colonel Augustus Paine, Maine-born New York industrialist, and Colonel Oliver H. Payne, second largest stockholder and former secretary of Standard Oil, acquired it and renamed it the Great Northern Paper Company.⁷

The June 2, 1900 issue of the *Bangor Daily Commercial*, entitled “Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine,” was devoted to the new mill and town. Among the featured articles was a report that in addition to Payne and Paine, Hon. E. H. Haskell of Boston had become a shareholder. This outside capital enabled Great Northern to buy huge portions of Maine’s woodland properties, including water rights, in anticipation of expanded paper production, and put them in direct competition with International Paper, a giant corporation created by a merger of a score of paper companies in New York and New England.

These land purchases shifted control of local resources from the lumber industry to the paper industry because the damming of the Penobscot for waterpower blocked the lumber industry’s access to the waterway as a means of transporting logs to their sawmills. Ironically, the impact of the Millinocket mill and the dam proved to be disastrous for the Bangor lumber barons who had been the original investors because Great Northern’s control of the waterways led to the economic collapse of the lumber

⁷ “Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine,” *Bangor Daily Commercial*, June 2, 1900, 11.

industry. Northern Maine's forests, formerly logged primarily for lumber for sawmills, were transformed into a source of pulpwood for paper mills; the power of the Penobscot used to float logs to sawmills downriver was harnessed to provide the electricity to run the mills. Before the development of the paper industry, the lumber barons had encountered little competition for the forest and waterways. By 1926 Great Northern owned 1.6 million acres of Penobscot timberland, had created two lakes, and had diverted the waters of the West Branch into Millinocket Stream for waterpower.⁸ Corporate control of the forestlands and waterways would prove to be a major factor in the economic future of both the region and the state.

The new owners, already experienced in corporate organization, moved quickly to get the building project underway. The region's sparse population required that workers be recruited to the worksite to crush the stone and mix the concrete for a dam that would become an integral part of the waterpower system that provided electricity for the mill and the town. In 1898, the newly incorporated Northern Development Company hired padrones to recruit Italian quarrymen to cut stone for the mill foundation and laborers to lay the rails for a spur from the Bangor and Aroostook into the mill site and to begin construction on the mill.⁹

Agents overseas and in seacoast cities recruited stonemasons, quarrymen, and laborers to lay the foundations for the enormous mill and to build the dam needed to power the paper making machines. The *Bangor Daily Commercial* reported in 1900 that approximately 1,000 men were employed in Millinocket, including 400 Italians recruited

⁸ "Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine," 11.

⁹ "Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine," 11.

when Great Northern contracted the James B. Mullin Company to “build the masonry for the mill, track-laying for the railroad, and later, the installing of sewer pipes and water systems for the town.” John Merrill, supervisor of construction, had gone to Boston where he hired Marco Lavonia (Lavogne) to recruit laborers directly from Italy. Merrill then hired Fred Paluso, who became known as the “Padrone, King of Little Italy” to supervise the laborers. The newspaper stated:

These men spoke little or no English, had no understanding of the American monetary system, and had never encountered wilderness. The majority of the Italians reside in “Little Italy” across the Millinocket Stream. They furnish a glowing example of “how the other half live.” Huddled closely together in perhaps half an acre of land are about 100 cabins if they deserve as dignified a name, built of scantling and tarred paper and containing nothing but a shake down in one corner and a few cooking utensils. The inhabitants of the colony are making money, however. They obtain, on the average \$1.50 per day for their services and their meagre menu of bread, potatoes, macaroni, beans and rice does not cost them over 12 cents per diem. They thrive, however, in their rather unhealthy surroundings and are as healthy as you please.¹⁰

The reporter’s assumption about the workers’ health was typical of the local media’s positive portrayal of Great Northern’s operations. No evidence has been located that indicates that professional medical care was available or medical records kept at that point in time. However, these conditions were temporary; Garrett Schenck’s welfare management programs would soon create more comfortable living conditions and provide medical care for the growing population.

The wealth of natural resources available in the Maine woods warranted long term investment in attracting and retaining dependable workers. The town of Millinocket reflected planners’ utilization of welfare management principles in providing the amenities proponents had determined necessary for a healthy and productive workforce.

¹⁰ “Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine,” 11.

The label “magic city” referred to the fact that the city was literally carved out of wilderness seventy miles from the nearest population center and with magical speed had become a thriving industrial complex with its own design, population, culture and transportation system. Dorothy Laverty, Millinocket historian, described the new town:

[The town was a] paradox located all by itself in the vast timberlands of central Maine, yet it was not isolated at all. Its people did not come by ship or covered wagon. They did not have to endure long waits for ocean vessels or wagon trains to supply their needs. The railroad that was constantly bringing construction materials to the mill served its people as well. By its means they traveled to Bangor and beyond. Household goods were delivered as soon as any home was ready for them. The Bangor & Aroostook Railroad set up a train schedule that became part of everyone’s daily routine.¹¹

The railroad was also the town’s link to the outside world, and contributed to workers’ sense of well being by making it possible for workers and residents to maintain important communication with relatives in other locations.

In this remote location, worker satisfaction was a management priority. When Garret Schenk, the man whose vision had made it all possible, became president in 1900, he was well experienced in all aspects of papermaking as a result of working in his uncle’s mills and had an almost fanatical belief in the welfare principles applied to the work force. One of those principles was a belief that fair treatment, competitive wages and the opportunity to develop skills would create a loyal and productive work force. Schenk recognized the need for a well-trained and loyal labor force to run expensive paper making machines that required skill and experience to operate and maintain. By offering higher wages and better positions in the company, he was able to recruit skilled

¹¹Laverty, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 7.

managers and technicians from other paper mills, many from International Paper's Rumford mill, to run the operation.¹²

While financial profit was the primary motive for building the mill and the town, Great Northern's investors seem to have aspired to the *noblesse oblige* principles that Robert Dalzell described as "the duty and prerogative of wealth" that had motivated the Boston Associates a century earlier. According to this model, society charged wealthy and privileged men with the obligation to display honorable and generous conduct toward their workers. Investors from prestigious New England families influenced by this principle made a conscious effort to treat workers well.¹³

Great Northern historian John McLeod argued that Garrett Schenck was responsible for Great Northern's corporate ideology: "It was Garret Schenck who had created the new company and whose personality and policies were to mold its corporate character." Schenck also determined the labor policies. McLeod described him as "an extraordinary man, but . . . very much a human being" concerned with the welfare of the mill's workers. He was "hard-nosed" with traits of "independence, toughness, fairness, and honesty." He had great faith in the mill and the town and believed in spending money to make money. Most importantly, he had seized Mullen's idea and superimposed upon it his own vision of "something big and solid, something he could control and would make him a lot of money." To turn his vision into a reality required

¹² John E. McLeod, *The Northern, The Way I Remember*, Special Collections, Fogler Library, University of Maine, 6, 7, 8.

¹³ Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., *Enterprising Elites: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 77.

both careful planning and decisive action. The principles of welfare management proved to be effective tools in accomplishing both these goals.¹⁴

Once word spread that jobs were available, lumbermen and millworkers came to Millinocket in droves. By June 1, 1899, 500 men were working in the Millinocket area. French Canadians came from the northern border of the St. John River Valley and Fort Kent; the English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh crossed the Canadian border from Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Other immigrants came from Eastern and Central Europe: Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, Germany and Austria. Greeks, Albanians, and Lebanese came from the near East. After the Millinocket mill opened on November 1, 1900, more European and Canadian immigrants flocked to the area.¹⁵

A 1900 *Daily Commercial* article reported: “The settlement now consists of about 100 houses and boasts two grocery stores, a jeweler, four barber shops, a drug store, two men’s furnishing and boot and shoe stores, a house furnishing concern, a hardware concern, two milliners, and a plumbing establishment.” The paper also stated that the presence of the two milliners proved that this was no “Eveless Eden” and that women were arriving as fast as accommodations could be provided. By the end of 1900 over two thousand people lived in the town, which now boasted a Catholic church, St. Martin of Tours, and a Protestant meetinghouse, Union Chapel. As laborers and their families

¹⁴ McLeod, *Northern, The Way I Remember*, 6, 7, 8.

¹⁵ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 23.

continued to pour into the town, housing areas grew within walking distance of the mill and spread to Katahdin Avenue and Penobscot Avenue.¹⁶

When Paluso sent for his wife, Pauline, he paved the way for Italian workers to bring their families to Millinocket after they had paid back the money owed for passage to the United States. Paluso served as liaison, interpreter, and paymaster for the Italians. He placed the men in jobs, wrote letters to family back home, and set up a credit system for the workers. For these services he received fifty cents a week out of wages that ranged from \$1.35 to \$2.00 per day. This financially lucrative arrangement provided the funds to construct a substantial home and a market square styled after the Old Country where the men could purchase imported foods brought in from Boston ports.¹⁷ With Paluso's assistance, the area known as "Little Italy" was soon crowded with new houses replacing the shacks. Lavery describes the emergence of a community with a distinctly Italian culture:

New Italian houses crowded the little square, as though to guard all that was truly Italian. Each family had its garden plot where familiar beans, tomatoes, and peppers grew up into the sunshine; while onions, squash, and cucumbers grew out beneath the poles. Grapevines were coaxed to grow from pole to pole or over trellised archways.¹⁸

Whether or not the environment was as idyllic as Lavery portrays it, such gardens provided a model for later settlements including tenement divisions known as "the Flat," first settled by Greek immigrants and "Tin Can Alley." By 1910, the temporary homes on Shack Hill had been torn down and new homes built; with a population of 3368, the

¹⁶ "Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine," *Bangor Daily Commercial*, 11.

¹⁷ Carmen Brigalli, longtime resident of Little Italy, discusses Paluso in an article entitled "Millinocket Seeks Anniversary Magic," *Bangor Daily News*, June 29, 2001, A1,2.

¹⁸ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 23.

town had become a permanent community with all the benefits and problems associated with large concentrations of people.¹⁹

Paluso was not the only beneficiary of workers' need for housing and services. One way Northern guarded its business interests and insured compliance with the company's interests was to keep a tight rein on who would be allowed to locate in the town and the function they would serve. From the outset, Great Northern profited from rentals of residential and business properties. The company specified the size and design of commercial buildings and regulated the kinds of businesses that could locate in the town, including restaurants, barbershops, laundries, and domestic services for bachelors. According to the *Bangor Daily Commercial*, rooms in company owned boarding houses rented for \$4.00 a week in 1900, a hefty sum considering that the average worker earned between \$8.00 and \$12.00 a week; skilled workmen, \$12.00 to \$15.00 a week; and machine men \$18.00 to \$30.00 a week. Married workers and managers could rent a house for \$12.00 a month. The fact that the company required that all private residences had to cost \$750 or more to build put home ownership out of the reach of the common laborer. Again, the reporter stressed the positive aspects of the company's position: "The houses now erected are solid, substantial structures and already give an air of prosperity to the settlement. The company is taking a very wise course in this direction. It does not desire to rule the town but proposes to use its influence to guard the business interests of the community and guide it to prosperity."²⁰ This statement, like the other news reports, reflected the pro-Great Northern position of the newspaper.

¹⁹ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 23.

²⁰ "Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine," *Bangor Daily Commercial*, 11.

Not surprisingly, since Lavery was the daughter of a company executive, she also maintained a pro-Great Northern stance. She contended that the company had no desire to become “unabashedly paternalistic,” and that it was primarily concerned with the growth and progress of the industry itself. “The civic and economic development of the town was left largely to its citizens’ own enterprise” she insisted, but her inclusion of a quotation from the town’s Fiftieth Anniversary report in her book contradicted that claim:

Homebuilders have had free use of equipment and forms for cement structure. Roads, bridges, and other facilities provided have been deeded over to the town. It [Great Northern] built the Band Stand, furnished seats for the Park, and this year [1951] bought uniforms for the Town Band. It has given generously to charity drives. Added to all this is the fact that at least 73% of the taxes are paid by this concern. Certainly the history of the first fifty years of Millinocket is colored in most of its aspects by the fact that the Great Northern Paper Company is the heart of its industrial life.²¹

In reality, though the people had the option of designing and building their own homes and purchasing food and other supplies from independent merchants, the company exerted effective control over the workers’ lives. The company would employ only male workers in waged labor. No one could buy land and no business could operate without the express permission of the company. A worker or family who proved troublesome found themselves no longer welcome in the town.

Fred Morrison, a former town site manager, argued that the need to attract and retain reliable laborers justified providing houses and assisting workers in building homes. Company architects laid out plots for individual homes and the company leased them to workers at a reasonable cost. As a group, workers laid the foundations for their houses. Each builder gathered lumber from company owned timberlands using horses,

²¹ “Fiftieth Anniversary Report,” quoted in Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 25.

tools, and wagons supplied by the company, and provided refreshments for the neighbors who helped with construction. Such assistance had the desired effect. The opportunity for home ownership not only attracted responsible workers, it involved commitment to the company. While the intent of Great Northern may have been the same as that of other industrial corporations, early welfare management programs were carefully designed to insure only positive reactions.²²

Living conditions varied from area to area within the town. Houses located near the center of town tended to be more elaborate and had more amenities than those on the outskirts. Within the town limits, though some of the houses had outhouses, all had indoor plumbing for drinking water and central heat, and were built along lighted and paved streets. All the people who lived in the town itself were involved in the paper making operation or in providing services for the workers. For the predominantly Canadian and Native American workers employed in the woodlot operations who lived in surrounding areas, conditions were less desirable. For example, Delia Cummings' French-Canadian grandmother lived on Medway Road where there was no electricity, indoor plumbing, or street lights. Some workers lived in crude logging camps located throughout the northern Maine woods.²³

Other than the mill superintendents and managers, top Great Northern executives and their families did not live in Millinocket, but stayed at the elegant fifty-two room Great Northern Hotel when business or social events brought them to the mill. The hotel

²² Fred Morrison, interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, Maine, March 10, 1999, Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, Maine Folklife Center, University of Maine, Orono, Maine. Morrison, a retired town site manager, contended that Great Northern owned all the land and did not sell, but leased lots to workers for building homes.

²³ Delia Cummings, interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, Maine, March 12, 2001, Northeast Archives.

was built to accommodate executives from the company headquarters in Boston, but also businessmen, representatives of other industrial companies, salesmen, engineers and other technical experts. The June, 1900, *Bangor Daily Commercial* predicted the success of the soon-to-be opened hotel:

It will not be long before Millinocket will possess an excellent hotel which is likely to prove the Mecca of all sportsmen visiting that locality. The company is interested in this matter and proposes to have a handsome hostelry erected in the center of the town at a cost of about \$30,000. As Millinocket is in the heart of the fish and game regions and is easily accessible, it is thought that such an investment encouraged by the company's backing must prove a financial success.²⁴

The hotel would provide an additional source of revenue for Great Northern by catering to sportsmen as well as business executives. The construction was timely because of the growth of the tourist industry in Maine and, along with the Kineo House on Moosehead Lake and other huge resorts now accessible by train as well as boat, attracted scores of wealthy tourists, primarily from the Boston area, but as far away as Philadelphia and New York.²⁵ Construction begun in 1899 was completed in the summer of 1900. Laverty described the structure as magnificent:

It was three stories high, with tower bays, long verandahs, and a porte-cochere [carriage entrance]. Its elegant style gave it a grandeur and dignity equal to any summer resort in New England. Spacious lawns with gravel walks and flowerbeds soon surrounded it. A boardwalk led from its back door to "down town," beyond the Ryan home and Dr. Colby's house. A quick-growing species of poplar tree was planted as a border around the grounds. They served the purpose of creating much needed shade.²⁶

Elegant appointments such as polished brass spittoons by the chairs in the lobby, potted rubber plants in the ladies' parlor, a billiard room and bar, sample rooms and writing

²⁴ "Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine," *Bangor Daily Commercial*, 11.

²⁵ Richard R. Wescott, "Tourism in Maine," in *Maine, the Pine Tree State*, 431-438.

²⁶ Laverty, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 40.

rooms, a barbershop, a baggage elevator, and fireplaces that could hold logs three to four feet long were rare in Maine in 1900, and for men considering management positions in the paper industry such accommodations would have served as an impressive symbol of the company's viability and the privileges afforded the managerial class.²⁷

Great Northern's control was even more evident in the emergence of a business community. Individual merchants operated grocery, furniture, appliance and clothing stores, but they had to be approved by Great Northern and could not create competition by duplicating products—in other words, there could be only one grocery store in each area of the town, one men's clothing store, one appliance store, and one furniture store. Great Northern permitted only industries that served the company's needs, such as service companies, merchants, and the foundry (for smelting metals, probably iron for machinery parts) to locate in the town. Great Northern executives and the town's business elites created their own banking system.²⁸

Attempts to establish a company store failed because pressure from merchants outside the community convinced Great Northern to abandon the project in the interest of congenial business relations. Great Northern paid employees in cash, which meant that they were free to buy products from local merchants or in Bangor, but the variety of businesses listed in the 1900, 1910, and 1920 editions of the *Annual Registry of Maine* would have made it unnecessary to go outside the town for supplies or services.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 39, 41.

²⁸ Cummings interview; McLeod, "Northern: The Way I Remember," 57.

²⁹ *Annual Registry of Maine*, 1900, 1910, and 1920, Special Collections, Fogler Library.

Oral histories conducted by the author indicate that Millinocket residents considered the “Magic City in the Maine Wilderness” a special place to live and raise children. The company provided parks and entertainment for families, but the town residents were also involved in providing amenities. In 1909 Great Northern sponsored a baseball team, the Millinocket Tigers, and soon after, built “a baseball diamond, a grandstand, and a large pavilion for an up-to-date ball park.” Baseball became so much a part of the town’s culture that after WWI, the townspeople supported the team by holding a winter carnival to raise funds. Providing emotional and financial support for the sports teams alleviated tensions between competing ethnic groups.³⁰

As in any industrial environment, the amenities that Great Northern offered came with a price. A characteristic of mill towns was that residents’ lives centered on production requirements. They had to accept the fact that the pace of their lives would be dominated by the dictates of the mill, that the air they breathed would be saturated with mill odors and pollutants, and that their ears would have to become accustomed to the constant hum of giant machinery. Meal times, even children’s playtime, would have to conform to work schedules. Traditional cultures would be subordinate to the mill town culture. Most importantly, the men and their families would have to abide by company rules of conduct. Theoretically, if workers could accept these conditions, they could rest assured that Great Northern would provide for their families’ needs from the cradle to the grave.

³⁰ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 52, 56; “Millinocket Seeks Anniversary Magic,” *Bangor Daily News*, June 29, 2001, A1,2.

Class in Millinocket was determined by the position a man held with Great Northern or his profession, and both situations were determined largely by nationality. According to the 1920 Millinocket census, upper level executives, electricians, skilled paper mill workers, administrator, and professionals were mostly native-born Americans. Millinocket's town constable was a native Mainer. Many millwrights came from Scotland, and British Canadians held a variety of positions from high-level administrative and engineering positions to ownership of stores and construction businesses. Most paper mill workers were immigrants; French Canadians and Italians were laborers, woodworkers, or worked in pulp production. Whether by circumstance or design, there were no blacks, only one Asian, a Chinese man who operated a laundry, and the only Jewish residents were merchants from Russia.³¹

The largely immigrant population challenged Great Northern's managers to devise ways to transform European and Canadian immigrants into loyal American citizens, overcome language barriers and minimize misunderstandings created by cultural and religious differences. There is no evidence that an early welfare management department existed, but by 1921 the Spruce Wood Department had established a Social Service Division that used its newsletter, *The Northern*, to educate workers and town residents about proper health, nutrition, and sanitation practices, as well as to promote Americanization. The newsletter proved to be an ideal vehicle for communicating the company's philosophical ideals and expectations for compliance with company policies to those who could read English. The editor and the mill superintendent wrote articles focusing on "red-blooded" men loyal to America and its ideals and stressing the need for

³¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920* (Washington, D.C., government printing office, 1921).

all immigrants to learn to speak, read, and write in English. The company required all children, regardless of the native language of their parents, to go to school where classes were conducted in English. It ran essay contests with cash prizes for the best essays on what it means to be “a good American citizen.”³² The frequency and intensity of these articles in the newsletter and education programs provide evidence that Great Northern considered Americanization of newly arrived immigrants a priority.

While few of the first European immigrants who arrived in 1901 could speak or read English, by 1920 Great Northern was able to direct its Americanization efforts to a literate population. Editorials extolling the value of safety, hard work, good health, good nutrition, cleanliness, and dental care as well as advice on raising children indicate that the emphasis on literacy had produced effective results. Articles on safety that addressed the company’s concern about accidents and illness that resulted in lost work time and decreased productivity were directed at men; articles on proper sanitation and nutrition were intended for women. Many of the articles attempted to educate immigrants living in close proximity to each other about ways to protect themselves against exposure to bacteria and contagious diseases.³³

A 1921 editorial illustrates that the company’s commitment to Americanization was based, at least in part, on nativists’ perceptions of immigrants as socialist sympathizers:

A real Northern man is a red-blooded man and every red-blooded man is a real American. But can’t we all be a little more of an American than we are[?] . . . Let us live America each day. Let us think America each day, and let us help the other

³² *The Northern: A Magazine of Contact Between the Management and the Men of the Great Northern Paper Company*, vols. 1- 8, 1921-1928, Special Collections, Fogler Library.

³³ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*. xi.

fellow, particularly the stranger in our midst, live and think America each day. . . . In order to combat . . . forces which would destroy American government and American ideals, which would drag true manhood and womanhood to the lowest depths, we must all strive in every way to preserve the constitution of the United States, with the representative form of Government and the right of individual possession which the Constitution provides; to stand firm for law and order; to foster among our people high standards of individual and corporate conduct; and to advance the prosperity and happiness of all.³⁴

The company feared socialist ideologies that could pose a threat to American capitalism.³⁵

Though class distinctions clearly existed in Millinocket, they were less obvious than in many other industrial environments. Since all workers were well paid by state standards and unions represented workers at all skill levels, the line between the managerial class and the mostly immigrant working class was less defined. One indication of class was where a person lived in the town. The almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon upper echelon executives who worked on site—superintendents, engineers, managers and professionals with mill-related skills—lived above the mill on Highland Avenue, referred to by locals as “Society Hill.” Business owners and professionals such as doctors, lawyers and real estate agents with offices in the town generally resided in areas removed from the noise and grime of the mill, but in or near their places of business, primarily on Main, Central, Congress, and State Streets. Immigrant families clustered on Shack Hill or streets within walking distance of the mill. Franco-American woodsmen and laborers settled on Medway Road and in the Flat. Some Italians built homes in Little Italy, but others settled on Coal Ash Road and in the upper end populated

³⁴ Editorial, *The Northern*, May, 1921, 5.

³⁵ *The Northern*, April through July, 1921.

by both Polish and Italians. The section locally known as Tin Can Alley, now Aroostook Avenue, was considered the “bad” part of town where, apparently exempted from Great Northern’s attempts to control worker’s activities, the “ghetto” bars, gambling houses, and houses of prostitution were located.³⁶

Community was an important component of family life, and for the first generation of immigrants, individual communities consisted of people who shared a common culture and language. Dick Manzo, a second generation Little Italy resident, says that when he was growing up, Little Italy was “predominantly Italian, but there was a Finnish family, the Lennos, and the Parthenons, and there was a French family, the Medores, and Prince Edward Islanders, the Murphys, but we were so thick—we were so close together that we were all family.”³⁷ The neighborhood a person lived in seems to have produced stronger ties than ethnicity or language similarities.

Some interviewees described the different ethnic groups as “separate but equal.” Kitty St. John says she had both German and Lithuanian neighbors and though they did not socialize, there was never any tension between them. Speaking of Italians in Millinocket, she said, “It was natural for them to want to be with their own kind. They spoke the same language. . . . That immigrant community lived within itself—they had their own stores over there—grocery stores, not commodity. They could get just everything they needed [for] day to day living. They made their own alcohol and had their own beer.” St. John recalls that when she was a clerk at an appliance store downtown, the Italian men would buy gifts for their wives on Mother’s Day and

³⁶ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*; Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 35-37.

³⁷ Dick Manzo, Interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, February 19, 2001, Northeast Archives..

faithfully came by every week to make one-dollar payments until the debt was paid. Because the workers had demonstrated that they were trustworthy, storeowners had no problem extending credit to them. Her statements imply that she was conscious that these men were culturally different even though she found those differences not only non-threatening but also admirable. Because her family was Canadian and higher on the hierarchical ladder, she could afford to be magnanimous in her judgment.³⁸

Part of the reason for clustering in ethnic pockets was to avoid conflict. Safety and freedom from conflict depended on the observation of cultural and physical boundaries. Manzo remembers that the people in his neighborhood looked out for each other, but rarely ventured outside the community. He says, “Up until my high school years I wasn’t allowed to go down the street except to get a haircut. I’d go get a haircut and come back home again, and if you went to school or went to church, you went through the town and came back home.” He says the Italian people said, “Stay over here and you won’t get into trouble. If you go down there, they’re going to pick on you and you’re going to fight back and that creates a problem. Don’t make waves.” Such warnings applied only to neighborhoods; the workplace, schools and churches were boundary areas where the company required different nationalities to intermingle and interact.³⁹

Manzo insists he never had a problem with children from other ethnic groups though he acknowledges that the potential for conflict was always present. He describes his experiences growing up in Millinocket:

³⁸ Kitty St. John, interview by author, tape recording, Millinocket, July 10, 2000, Northeast Archives.

³⁹ Dick Manzo interview.

Until I became a high school student, I had no business down street. Your business was here in Little Italy. You played here, you played ball over here and you didn't go across that bridge. You had no business down there. But it was typical of all areas, also. We had what we used to call Shack Hill crowd across the tracks, and then we had what we called the Iron Bridge crowd, which was the flats. And then you had your Nob Hill, Society Hill people. There were different areas for different people. You understood that—you just understood it. We got along and we all grew up together but we knew where we were supposed to be and where we were supposed to play and neighbor and that was it.⁴⁰

Because their continued employment depended on Paluso's relationship with Great Northern, his recruits confined their boisterous, sometimes illegal, activities to their own neighborhoods and did not create problems outside Little Italy.⁴¹

Some residents maintain that because mill superintendents and administrators at the local level as well as workers migrated from other parts of the country or other parts of Maine and their families lived in the town, they shared a common bond that mitigated class differences. Nevertheless, specific jobs were associated with nationality and class. While the mill was under construction, Italians worked as quarrymen, stonecutters, masons, and railroad workers; many stayed on as laborers and millworkers after construction was completed. English Canadians were generally millwrights or in managerial positions, while French Canadians were more likely to work as woodsmen or in the pulp portion of the mill. Occupations immigrants did not work in the mill itself but provided support services. A Danish immigrant ran the pool hall, a Scottish woman was a milliner, and the land agent, physician and the station agent for the railroad were all English Canadians.⁴²

⁴⁰ Manzo interview.

⁴¹ Dick Manzo interview; St. John interview. Although never officially stated, it was common knowledge among workers, especially in the mining towns, that a man had to be in control of his family's behavior.

⁴² Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

The claim that little class-consciousness existed is based on the fact that all workers were relatively well paid, resulting in a relatively narrow gap between the highest paid executive who lived in the town and the lowest paid employee. There was no evidence of extreme wealth; neither was there evidence of poverty. The more highly paid skilled workers were able to buy or lease property and build their own homes. By capping the cost of a new home at one thousand dollars, the company limited the size and elaboration of design that would have made class differences blatantly obvious. The fact that all workers belonged to unions that could negotiate workplace conditions, wages, and benefits with the company gave them a degree of influence in negotiations with Great Northern. Nevertheless, class and ethnic divisions and distinctions clearly existed, especially in the early years.

The focus on the Italian community in newspaper articles, Lavery's history, and oral histories suggests that the Italian population was larger than that of other ethnic groups, but in fact it was quite small. According to the 1920 census, out of a population of 4528, less than 200 were Italian. The largest single group was native-born Americans; the second largest was English Canadian.⁴³ Because Italians were a close-knit group with distinctive cultural traditions, especially concerning food and wine, Americans and Canadians may have viewed them as more foreign and exotic than other ethnicities that responded more quickly to Great Northern's Americanization programs. Alfred Banfield suggested that Italians clung to their native culture much longer than other ethnic groups because "they placed their trust, their economic well-being and their lives in the hands of the padrone while generally living as a group apart from the native and other ethnic

⁴³ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

workers.”⁴⁴ The first generation Italians’ seclusion from the mainstream of Millinocket society and their attempts to duplicate the old country culture challenged Great Northern’s Americanization efforts.

One of the company’s efforts to exert control over workers’ behavior that met stiff resistance in the Italian community was prohibition of the production and consumption of alcoholic beverages. An article in the June 2, 1900 *Bangor Daily Commercial* under the headline “No Liquor In Millinocket” stated:

The company hopes to have the town incorporated at the next session of the legislature. At the present time order is kept by the efforts of the company officials who are doing their utmost, and with very successful results, to maintain a model community. It is proposed to permit no liquor dealing whatever and any parties caught violating the prohibitory law will be promptly turned out of the settlement. This can be accomplished as by the terms of the leases made by the company they can be revoked if liquor is sold on the premises.”⁴⁵

During the construction process the company had depended on a deputy marshal to keep the peace, but in 1902, they hired Fred Gates, former city marshal of Old Town to serve as police and fire chief. Residents still talk about the iron control wielded by Gates and his successor, Allie Picard.⁴⁶ Dorothy Lavery wrote:

Tales of Gates’ handling of stabbings in Little Italy or drunken brawls on Tin Can Alley and in the railroad yards are part of Millinocket’s legends. The churches were busy teaching the fear of God, but parents were teaching the fear of Fred Gates. When he appeared on Penobscot Avenue at curfew time, youngsters scattered like scared rabbits. He had only to sit in front of the fire station to let this town know that law and order prevailed.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Banfield, “History and Ethnicity of Italians in Maine,” 184; *Bangor Daily News*, April 4, 2000, “Millinocket Local Town History Centennial Projects Written by Children About Their Communities.”

⁴⁵ “Millinocket, the Magic City of Maine,” 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xi, 23; Katie Perry, interview with author, tape recording, Togus, Maine, February 21, 2001, Northeast Archives; Ruth and Glenn Wiley, interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, Maine, January 4, 2002 Northeast Archives.

⁴⁷ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 47.

The fact that even Gates' intimidating presence could not stop the stabbings and drunken brawls is further evidence that Great Northern had little success, even during Prohibition, in controlling alcohol consumption.

The signing of agreements forbidding alcohol on any of Great Northern's leased properties had no effect on the residents of Little Italy. Since members of the Italian community were technically "squatters" on the thirty acres of land Great Northern allowed them to occupy because their services were essential to the company's operation, they had not been required to sign such an agreement. Banfield found evidence in 1916 correspondence between Stearns and Schenck that the company was well aware that workers had access to alcohol, but though they considered evicting some of the Italian workers, they never actually followed through.⁴⁸

Efforts to maintain order were not nearly as successful as was claimed in the *Bangor Daily Commercial* article. Banfield wrote about Little Italy:

Although Great Northern placed severe restrictions on the consumption of alcohol and went to great lengths to prevent lawlessness and disorder that one might associate with a Wild West gold-rush or silver-mining towns, the tempers of tired workers, sometimes speaking different languages, occasionally broke the calm of the natural setting. At times tragedy and violence visited the Italian community.⁴⁹

It is unlikely that all tragic and violent incidents can be attributed to alcohol consumption. Overcrowding and male competition for the scarce supply of women may have been contributing factors.

There is no substantial evidence that Italians produced wine and beer for other than their own consumption, but the older residents insist that wine flowed through

⁴⁸ Banfield, "History and Ethnicity of Italians in Maine," 186.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 194.

tunnels underneath the houses and any mill worker or woodsman with cash in hand could purchase spirits in Little Italy. “King” Paluso was at the heart of the problem. Mary Tardiff wrote in her history of the Moscone family:

[Paluso] had a beer parlor and you could go there and have a drink and dance. An Italian family (the Colangelos) built tunnels under the ground that went under the beer parlor. They would order grapes from Massachusetts. The grapes would come in on the train, and the Colangelos would put them in a big horse-drawn cart that would be overflowing with grapes. They would take the grapes over to little Italy and make wine (A little bootlegging operation).⁵⁰

Paluso looms large in almost every account of life in Little Italy; tales of his control of Italian workers’ lives and fortunes have become part of Millinocket’s folklore. The fact that Great Northern continued his employment indicates his value to the company in maintaining a semblance of order in the Italian community.

Another control of workers’ behavior was religion. During the construction period, Great Northern recruited ministers and priests who would teach the work ethic along with religion and provided land and financial support for building churches where both Catholics and Protestants could practice their traditional forms of worship. Most of the immigrant workers, especially French Canadians, Italian, Irish, and other European immigrants were Catholic, the largest religious group, while the company management was primarily Protestant. Despite nativists’ fears concerning the large Catholic population, Great Northern welcomed the church’s stabilizing influence on the work force. Churches also played a significant role in reinforcing gender roles, ethnic divisions and class structure. All Catholic immigrants worshipped together at St. Martin of Tours Catholic church built in 1899; Protestants attended the non-denominational

⁵⁰ Mary Tardiff, “A Great Northern Family: Four Generations of Moscones,” *GNP News*, November 2000, 18. Tardiff said she got her information from interviews with first generation Italian and Irish immigrant family members.

Union Chapel until the Episcopalians built a church in 1901, the Baptists in 1903 and the Congregationalist in 1904, all on lots designated by Great Northern.⁵¹ Both Protestant and Catholic churches were the heart of community formation and as the towns became more established, men and women's organizations connected with the churches became the center of social life.

No Jewish synagogue existed in Millinocket, probably because the Jewish population was too small to sustain a congregation. According to the residents interviewed, a few Jewish merchants lived and worked in the town, but whether by design or circumstance, no Jews worked in the mills. While the Ku Klux Klan's persecution of Millinocket's Catholics in 1924 indicate that tensions existed between the different religious and ethnic groups, both Protestants and Catholics disapproved of the group's violent tendencies and Great Northern had little tolerance for any kind of overt hostilities within the town. According to local folklore, after a series of cross burnings intended to intimidate the Catholic population escalated into the burning of a Catholic immigrant family's home, the company instructed its police chief to run the group out of town. Though the suspicion that local townspeople may have been members persists, the organization was quickly dispersed.⁵²

Churches also provided a common bond that enabled residents to transcend ethnic boundaries. But Manzo credited World War II with the breakdown of the kind of boundaries he had experienced as a boy. "As World War II progressed," he said, "all of those fences came down, because doctors and lawyers, judges, and all of their children

⁵¹ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 25.

⁵² St. John interview; Perry interview. Bob Rush, who grew up in Millinocket and is writing his dissertation on Millinocket history, provided the information about the folklore.

were shoulder to shoulder, so when they came back home, there was no more of this Nob Hill, Society Hill, Little Italy across the tracks, and the Flat.”⁵³ Though he had indicated that class-consciousness existed before the war, he supported other residents’ contention that little if any existed afterwards.

In 1904, after the mill at Millinocket was well established, Great Northern decided to take advantage of the rapid drop in the Penobscot downriver from Millinocket for generating the power needed to operate another mill at the East Millinocket site. East Millinocket lies on the northern side of the West Branch of the Penobscot River ten miles east of Millinocket and three miles from Medway where the East Branch and West Branch meet to form the main body of the river. Huge stands of virgin pine, spruce, and other soft woods graced the area that surrounded the “Burnt Land Rips,” so named because the vegetation in the region had been destroyed in the 1825 Mirimichi fire which burned for hundreds of miles in a narrow belt through both Maine and Canada.⁵⁴

Since the fire had cleared the land at the building site of large trees, Great Northern’s engineers could concentrate on harnessing the river’s power. East Millinocket historian Everett McCann described the methods employed: “Construction included a dam and power development to utilize a 25 foot drop in the river. A second dam to develop a 50 foot drop in the river level was begun simultaneously at Dolby Pitch, a mile

⁵³ Dick Manzo interview.

⁵⁴ Everett McCann, “The East Millinocket Story, 1907-1956,” 8-9, Special Collections, Fogler Library; Clarence I. Chatto and Clair E. Hunter, “History of Cambridge: The East Somerset County Register, 1911-12,” 39-46. <http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/me/somerset/chatto/escr39-46.txt>

upstream.”⁵⁵ The resultant flood created a stump-filled body of water known to locals as Dolby flowage, but identified in the *Maine Gazetteer* as Dolby Pond.⁵⁶

The distance between the two sites made it necessary to construct a separate, self-sustained town. Great Northern’s negotiations with the State of Maine for the acquisition of the land and obtaining legal incorporation for the town indicate that Great Northern was able to exert powerful political influence with the state legislature. The habitable area in question was less than half the acreage normally required for a regulation township. In addition, East Millinocket shared with Millinocket the distinction of being one of only three townships in the state where only part of the township was incorporated into an organized town. As of 1975, Great Northern still held the deed to the grass and timber rights on 640 acres of state-owned land that were part of the original parcel on which East Millinocket was located.⁵⁷

Hardy S. Ferguson, one of the foremost mill engineers in the country who had supervised the building of the Millinocket mill, also supervised the building of the mill at East Millinocket. There were some significant differences in the difficulty involved in the construction of the two mills. No road had existed into Millinocket for the transportation of supplies and building materials, but by 1904 when construction of the

⁵⁵ McCann, “The East Millinocket Story,” 9. Actually this was Great Northern’s third mill since the company also owned and operated a mill at Madison.

⁵⁶ Glenn Wiley, telephone conversation, January 25, 2004; *Maine Atlas and Gazetteer*, 25th ed., (Yarmouth, Maine: DeLorme, 2002), 43.

⁵⁷ Richard E. Barringer, to Walter Birt, February 3, 1975, Great Northern Papers, Special Collections, Fogler Library. Apparently Great Northern, after the merger in 1969 with Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company in Wisconsin made the company a subsidiary, was trying to buy this land outright rather than own just the grass and timber rights.

East Millinocket mill began, a highway had been built from Millinocket to the East Millinocket site.⁵⁸

In 1907 the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad completed a nine and one half mile extension from Millinocket, the Schoodic Stream Railroad to East Millinocket. Railroad accommodations consisted of a two-story railroad station with living quarters for the agent and his family, a dwelling for the section foreman on the opposite side of the tracks, an American Express office, a large freight shed, and a large building to house a locomotive and a turntable for returning the train to Millinocket.⁵⁹

The next step was to recruit the laborers needed to build the mill and company offices, harvest the timber needed for pulp production, and perform all the functions required by the paper making process. McCann wrote: "To the operations swarmed men from the provinces and immigrants recently arrived from Europe, to join forces with natives and skilled construction workers, to rear the dams and buildings needed for the mill." The company hired padrone Dominic Moscone to recruit Italian workers, some from Boston, others directly from Italy, and placed them under his supervision. When Canadians learned that the company was hiring, they flocked to the area. The town soon became "a boom-town host of tar paper shacks and boarding houses clustered about the work sites."⁶⁰

Unlike Millinocket, which had spread out in many directions from the original residential area, East Millinocket was a planned community with the mill separated from

⁵⁸ McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 26.

⁵⁹ McCann, "East Millinocket Story., 27.

⁶⁰ McCann, "East Millinocket Story., 27.

the residential area by the main highway. According to McCann, the builders and planners utilized modern principles of city planning and welfare management in designing and constructing the town:

East Millinocket has the unique distinction of being a planned community from its very beginning. Its layout, conceived by company engineers and adopted by the voters at their second annual town meeting, embodies many features recommended by present day city planners and freed the town from the problems now besetting unplanned communities.⁶¹

Such problems were those normally associated with large worker populations: inadequate housing, little or no sanitation services and worker unrest associated with unhealthy, unsafe, and unattractive living and working conditions. The fact that residents living in temporary quarters had a say in the layout of the town before its construction was completed sets it apart from the other towns in this study.

In 1906, in anticipation of a rapid influx of workers, Great Northern put a notice in local newspapers and trade papers that it would begin accepting bids for property leases, including entire blocks, from businesses interested in locating in the new town, all to be handled through their land agent, C. W. Stearns. The response by business and professionals was immediate and heavy. The first businesses were trading companies: the J. F. Kimball Company, which already had a store in Millinocket, and the A. H. Weymouth Company. These stores carried everything a family might need in the way of supplies and groceries. A hardware store, drug store, lunchroom, bank, hotel, telephone office, business offices, barber shops, boarding houses, pool halls, ice cream parlors, grocery stores, and clothing stores soon followed. A number of doctors and dentists established practices and lawyers and insurance agents opened offices. Even before a

⁶¹ McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 9.

school was constructed, teachers began applying for positions. By the time the town was incorporated on February 20, 1907, it was bustling with activity. By 1908, the town had a pharmacy, post office, train station, and George Ferland's hall, "used for church services, town meetings, social meetings, union meetings, motion pictures and local talent minstrel shows."⁶²

In preparation for construction of homes, Great Northern's town site planners separated the residential area from the industrial area and rail line by running the main highway between the two locations. The next step, most likely in anticipation of the kind of sanitation problems associated with rapid population growth they had encountered in Millinocket, was to construct a sewer system. They then laid out the streets and individual house lots. After the infrastructure was in place, Great Northern allowed workers to lease or buy house lots and build homes along streets named for native trees.⁶³

While the management style appeared to be less paternalistic than that of Schenck in Millinocket, Great Northern executives actively participated in helping workers construct homes. McCann wrote:

Great Northern provided the forms for the foundations with assistance in erecting them, a bulldozer for excavating and backfilling and a cement mixer with operator to mix the concrete. A pouring party of friends, relatives, and neighbors came with shovels and strong backs to shovel gravel, add cement to the mixer, wheelbarrow the prepared mix, and tamp the concrete. Three or four hours of an evening and another foundation was ready to have a new home built on it. After a couple of bottles of beer and a few stories of previous mixing parties, everyone went home with a friendly neighborly feeling of a chore well done.⁶⁴

⁶² McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 48.

⁶³ McCann, "East Millinocket Story, 48, 81; Maine Register, 1913-1914, 762; Michele Millet Warhola, interview by author, tape recording, Orono, Maine, April 3, 2001, Northeast Archives. Warhola claimed that according to local folklore East Millinocket is listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the only town in the United States, perhaps even the world, built entirely on one side of the main thoroughfare.

⁶⁴ McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 75, 76.

Despite such evidence of the company's active involvement in the building process, the personal style and ethics of individual mill superintendents seemed to have played a less important role in East Millinocket than in Millinocket. There is scant mention of the man who may have been the first superintendent except a notation that on May 26, 1915, superintendent Joseph Nevins led the Grand March at the ball celebrating the dedication of the new municipal building. According to McCann, most of the community improvements took place from 1918 to 1947 while Charles Henry Burr was superintendent, but the community itself initiated most of the improvement and modernization projects.⁶⁵

Since Great Northern owned and constructed both towns, management, including welfare management, and labor policies were similar, but it seems there was less emphasis on Americanization in the smaller town, perhaps because fewer ethnicities were represented. But though the immigrant population was smaller, Great Northern continued to promote Americanization through the *Northern* magazine. The newsletter, distributed to all employees, included a special section on East Millinocket in each issue.

Selectman James H. Mack headed the town government from 1907-1919 and 1921-1940. During his first term, the town council collected \$8,645.50 in taxes and allocated \$500.00 to establish a school system, \$3000 for a school building and \$4500 for other purposes, including hiring a contractor to provide a water supply. Great Northern's management left it up to the townspeople themselves to initiate and manage building projects, but made generous contributions to those projects. For example, in 1914, when the town decided to build a municipal building at a cost of \$35,000, Great

⁶⁵ McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 27.

Northern contributed \$10,000 to the building committee's project. The building was used for such practical purposes as a courtroom, jail, town offices and a heating plant, but also contained a theater with dressing rooms and movie projection equipment and a dining hall with kitchen facilities. As the company representative, Nevin's place at the head of the grand march indicated the company's support and approval of the project.⁶⁶

In 1910, the population of 923 was predominately male, but children existed in sufficient numbers to prompt the company to open a two-room grade school in its abandoned boarding house. That fall, students were able to attend a newly constructed grammar school and a two-year high school. Despite accommodations for families men still outnumbered women in 1920. The largest percentage of the 1392 residents came from Canada and the United States, but nearly 200 single men from England, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Sweden, Germany, and Russia lived in boarding houses or boarded with families in the town.⁶⁷

Growth in population and services continued through the 1920s and 1930s and the town added additional modern services as they became available. In 1922, there was a public library, cemetery, pool hall, barbershop, ice cream parlor, a bank, and electricity for homes provided by the Millinocket Light Company. In 1930 the population had grown to 1593 and town had established a public health nursing service, built a public library and dedicated a plot of land for a cemetery. As East Millinocket became an established community, men sought membership in such organizations as the Knights of Columbus, Lions Club, American Legion, and the Rod and Gun Club. Women organized

⁶⁶ McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 27, 67.

⁶⁷ McCann, "East Millinocket Story, 16; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

the St. Anne's Circle of the Daughters of Isabella in 1931 and the East Millinocket Music Club in 1937.⁶⁸

Ethnicity was less important in determining residence patterns in East Millinocket than in Millinocket, perhaps because the town was considerably smaller and there were fewer immigrants. Residents of the boarding houses on Millinocket Road were ethnically mixed. The tendency to group according to occupation was also less apparent. Public school teachers from Maine and New Hampshire, all single women in their twenties, boarded in a hotel near the school run by an English Canadian, his wife and daughter. Four chambermaids, a number of salesmen, electricians, and paper makers, all Mainers or English Canadians, lived at the hotel. Charles Robbins, a high school teacher, and his wife, Mabel, a music teacher, lived up the hill on Birch Street near the high school. Business owners usually resided in their place of business, many on Main Street.⁶⁹

No area of the town was designated "Little Italy," but East Millinocket resident Peter Gaetani recalled that entire families as well as single men boarded in Dominic Moscone's boarding house: "All the families were down there [in one particular section]; the Italians were mostly by themselves." The Italian population was small, less than fifty of the 1392 residents. According to the census, single Italian men lived in a boarding house on Millinocket Road, now Route 157, or on Eastern Avenue. Gaetani says that though Italians introduced other cultures to spaghetti, tomatoes, broccoli, green peppers, and endive, tried to continue certain traditions like eating fish on Christmas Eve and infant christenings, the community was too small to maintain a separate ethnic identity.

⁶⁸ McCann, "East Millinocket Story," 30, 50, 55-65.

⁶⁹ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*. I was unable to determine the name of the hotel, but it may have been the Hamlet, a hotel within easy walking distance of both the mill and the grammar school.

Interaction with other cultures in the workplace, church, schools, and the community required that all ethnic groups communicate in English, so few of the younger generation learned their parents' native language. Pat Federico agreed; he maintained that since most Italians in East Millinocket came with the intention of staying in America, both men and women quickly learned to speak English and spoke only English in the home. He maintained that this would explain why few of the present generation speak Italian.⁷⁰

Many of the workers were already accustomed to the English language and American culture. Some were relatives of workers in the Millinocket mills who came to the region when the new mill opened. And though Great Northern had contracted a padrone, Dominic Moscone, to provide Italian laborers, some men like Peter Gaetani did not come directly from Italy, but from other parts of the United States and Canada. Gaetani had worked on the Canadian Pacific and Grand Truck railroad before coming to Millinocket to work for Great Northern as a mason and as a clerk in Moscone's store. He explained, "I left Italy to find work. Italy was overcrowded and there was not much work. A lot of young men left Italy because their pals were leaving. I left because my friends had. I didn't have to leave. My friends came over and I did the same thing, and I've been working ever since." He says that they did not come with the intention of staying, but to earn some money to take back to Italy.⁷¹

Moscone was Pat Federico's maternal grandfather. Federico says his family ties to East Millinocket began with his paternal grandfather, Pasquale Federico, who had

⁷⁰ Peter Gaetani, interview with Alfred T. Banfield, Jr., tape recording, East Millinocket, April 8, 1985, Northeast Archives; Pat J. Federico, interview with Alfred T. Banfield, Jr., tape recording April 8, 1985, Northeast Archives.

⁷¹ Gaetani interview.

come to work on construction on the East Millinocket mill in 1904. His grandfather returned to Italy when the job was finished but his son, Anthony, came to work as a mason, and was soon followed by Federico's father and uncle. Both brothers left the region for other jobs, but Moscone's father stayed and married Mary Moscone, Dominic Moscone's daughter.⁷²

With all the services needed to make life comfortable and satisfying, East Millinocket residents developed a sense of pride in their own strong identity, totally separate from their more celebrated sister town of Millinocket. Though Great Northern owned both towns and members of the same family resided in each, fierce loyalties developed around the two schools, Stearns in Millinocket, opened in 1923, and Schenck in East Millinocket, opened in 1927, their sports teams, and the mills themselves. It would have been unproductive for Great Northern to discourage such competitive spirit since, if properly manipulated, it could work to its benefit in maximizing production.

Overall, however, the residents shared more similarities than differences. They considered themselves more fortunate than the people in surrounding communities who lacked access to many of the amenities they enjoyed. With each new generation, ethnicity became a less important issue because interaction and intermarriage between ethnic groups created a cultural exchange and blending of traditions that created a distinct culture in each town. Italians clung to their native culture much longer than other ethnic groups, because, as Banfield suggested, "they placed their trust, their economic well-being and their lives in the hands of the padrone while generally living as a group apart

⁷² Federico interview.

from the native and other ethnic workers.”⁷³ The padrone system that isolated Italians from the mainstream of Millinocket society was less effective in East Millinocket, but the Italian community’s attempts to preserve Old Country cultures challenged Great Northern’s Americanization efforts in both towns. Subsequent generations proved more adaptable because they increasingly interacted with other nationalities in the school, church and community.

Among the benefits Great Northern’s modern towns brought Maine were a healthy economy and a positive influence on labor conditions. Other industries were forced to offer amenities in order to compete for the available labor force. Such competition resulted in badly needed health care and educational opportunities in areas that had previously had limited access. Paper markets remained steady and Great Northern’s mills remained productive through World War I, the Depression, and World War II. Management’s recognition of workers’ right to collective action and welfare management programs contributed to stable labor and community relations. In both Millinocket and East Millinocket, Great Northern continued to employ the welfare management programs that had proven to be successful.

⁷³ Banfield, “History and Ethnicity of Italians in Maine,” 184.

CHAPTER 3: THE MODERN FIEFDOMS OF BENHAM AND LYNCH

Incorporation . . . encouraged vertical integration that a few companies were exploring in an effort to simplify transactions. These might lead a steel company, for example, to buy coal and ore lands.

Robert Wiebe¹

The exploitation of the coalfields was motivated by the drive for wealth and power and produced a proliferation of ruthless coal barons who had little or no concern for workers and their families. Their roster includes such entrepreneurs as Cyrus McCormick and his sons, U.S. Senator Johnson Newlon Camden, Sr., steel tycoons Elbert Gary and John D. Rockefeller, automobile tycoon Henry Ford, and coal mogul John C. Mayo. Many of these men were self-made according to the Horatio Alger model; they had worked their way up through the ranks to become the heads of some of America's wealthiest and most powerful corporations.²

Appalachian historian Harry M. Caudill prefaced his critique of the coal moguls of eastern Kentucky with Alexis de Toqueville's prediction about American industrialism:

Between the workman and the master there are frequent relations but no real association. . . . I am of the opinion, upon the whole, that the manufacturing aristocracy which is growing up under our eyes is one of the harshest that ever existed in the world . . . if ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again penetrate into the world, it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter.³

¹ Robert Weibe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 23.

² Alfred DuPont Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 314, 359 - 363.

³ Harry M. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), quotation precedes title page.

It was such an aristocracy that penetrated the forbidding terrain of eastern Kentucky's Black Mountain region at the turn of the twentieth century. Caudill wrote: "So rapidly did the industrial world overwhelm Harlan County that in a mere eight years (1911-1918) coal production increased from 1,440 to 3,201,733 tons, while the number of miners went from 169 to 4,123."⁴ The bulk of the bituminous coal needed by the steel industry was mined in Benham and Lynch mines and the largest percentage of miners lived in these company towns. The company owned everything in the town and governed the workforce with the aid of company police.

Coal was the fuel that provided the power for United States trains, steel mills, factories, and even the foundry at Millinocket, and the Appalachian Mountains contained the largest deposits of bituminous coal in the world. The enormous extent of eastern Kentucky's coal deposits was first discovered in 1838 when the legislature sent William W. Mather of New York into the mountains to conduct a survey. Two subsequent surveys verified Mather's findings that the field "embraced 10,600 square miles and seven identifiable coal beds or seams . . . [ranging] in thickness from fourteen inches to eleven feet."⁵

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, local color and regional writers romanticized the mountains in magazines and travel journals. In 1890, James Lane Allen wrote:

On the Kentucky side of the mighty wall of the Cumberland Mountain, and nearly parallel with it, is the sharp single wall of the Pine Mountain, the westernmost ridge of the Allegheny system. For about a hundred miles these two gnarled and ancient monsters lie crouched side by side guarding an immense valley of timbers and irons

⁴ Caudill, *Theirs Be The Power*, 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-90.

and coals. Near the middle point of this inner wall there lies a geological fault. The mountain falls apart as though cut in twain by some heavy downward stroke, showing on the faces of the fissure precipitous sides wooded to the crests. There is thus formed the celebrated and magnificent pass through which the Cumberland River—one of the most beautiful in the land—slips silently out of its mountain valley and passes on to the hills and the plateaus of Kentucky.⁶

The proliferation of newspaper accounts and magazine articles describing the region's people attracted the attention of missionaries and settlement workers. University of Kentucky historian Ronald Eller wrote:

As early as the 1870s, writers for the new monthly magazines which flourished after the Civil War had begun to develop and exploit a literary image of the region. . . . Between 1870 and 1890 over two hundred travel accounts and short stories were published in which the mountain people emerged as a rude, backward, romantic, and sometimes violent race who had quietly lived for generations in isolation from the mainstreams of American life.⁷

The romantic depictions appealed to the missionaries who came to spread their concepts of Christianity to the “peculiar” mountain people. These reformers, frustrated in their attempts to civilize and Christianize black freedmen in the post bellum south, eagerly turned their attention to the white settlers in the Appalachian mountains, arguing that their isolation had created a need for moral guidance and intellectual stimulation. English professor David Whisnant provoked a storm of protest among supporters of the mountain craft movement in 1983 when he criticized the goals of the elite women devoted to social reform in his book, *All That is Native and Fine*. Quoting Jacqueline Jones, he discussed the reformers' motivations :

As daughters of the upper middle class, the soldiers of light and love “shared with Republicans the vision of a truly unified American society in which competing interests would be cemented together in a national purpose by the tenets of

⁶ James Lane Allen, “Mountain Passes of the Cumberlands,” *Harpers* 81 (September, 1890), 561-576, quoted in Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 86.

⁷ Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), xvi.

Protestantism and capitalism.” They also shared the general Protestant unease about the “dangerous classes” and the stresses in the moral fabric of society arising out of rapid social change. A major goal of the schools they ran, then, was “to effect moral character reform and thereby guarantee social stability in the face of increasing fragmentation based on class, political, religious and racial tensions.” Not surprisingly, the primary mechanisms of both “personal and group advancement” and broader social change were conceived to be education and moral suasion.⁸

In the Kentucky mountains the competing interest with the reform movement was the coal industry. Surveyors’ reports that an abundance of coal existed on Black Mountain in Harlan County drew northern and New England investors such as Warren Delano, grandfather of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, into the region to buy as much of the coal rich land as possible. Such purchases plunged Harlan County into the industrial age.⁹

Eller saw a common purpose in the efforts of the two groups that invaded the mountains of southeastern Kentucky at the close of the nineteenth century:

As capitalists worked to bring the resources of the land into the industrial age, intellectuals increasingly strove to “uplift” and “Americanize” the mountaineers. The two groups occasionally differed over tactics for changing the region--businessmen emphasizing the need for economic development while most missionaries spoke of cultural change, education, and human concern--but ultimately both were components of the larger modernizing process.¹⁰

Southern historian Paul Harvey agreed. Major church denominations sent missionaries into the mountains even before the railroads were built. Harvey explained: “along with the development of mines, coke furnaces, and railroads, came the educated minister, the church budget, Sunday schools, and missionary societies” to the Appalachian region,

⁸ David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 9-10. The quotations are from Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 9-10.

⁹ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 87-90.

¹⁰ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 43.

home to people ‘of the most unmixed Anglo-Saxon stock,’” according to national mythology. The mountain people were the target of an intensive missionary campaign conducted by all the major southern denominations. The Presbyterians beat other groups to the field, but the Southern Baptist Church was not far behind. Their attempts to establish mission schools met with little success; members of the independent Baptist churches that dominated the region proved to be stubbornly resistant to all efforts to influence their traditional beliefs.¹¹

Whisnant used the term “systematic cultural intervention” to describe the conscious and programmatic “action within a culture with the intent of affecting it in some specific way that the intervenor thinks desirable.” In his opinion, the reformers and founders of the settlement schools exploited the mountain people in an attempt to preserve white Anglo-Saxon hegemony. He supported that contention in the introduction to his book with a quotation from the March 1910 *Carolina Churchman*:

Another potent asset, that should appeal to the lover of America and American institutions, is that these southern Appalachian mountains are giving to the nation every year 100,000 citizens of the purest American type, which is no inconsiderable item when we know that fifty per cent increase in many of our large cities is made up of a low type of immigrants from the slums of Europe.¹²

The assumed homogeneity of the population and their isolation convinced nativists intent on instilling Christian values and republican ideals of family, citizenship and community that these “pure” Americans free of “contamination” by association with blacks or immigrants would be able to restore traditional values. Whisnant called such attempts to preserve the presumed “pure” Anglo-Saxon heritage of the original settlers manipulation

¹¹ Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Culture and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 220-221.

¹² Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 3.

of mountain culture and argued that the “traditional” music and crafts they promoted reflected neither the actual ethnicity nor the values of the bulk of the population.¹³

The result was that it would be the coal industry rather than the reformers that exerted the greatest influence on Harlan County’s mountain families. Ironically, despite attempts by Pine Mountain Settlement School founders Ethel de Long Zande and Katherine Pettit to avoid treating the mountain people as curiosities, by characterizing them as needy in their fundraising efforts and stressing the need to “weed out” negative aspects of mountain culture, the school reinforced the negative stereotypes of the Appalachian people that the coal industry used to justify taking their land.¹⁴

Lawyers, land agents, and resident property owners also contributed to the negative stereotypes. Eller argued that it was in the best interest of investors and entrepreneurs to promote the negative aspects of mountain life. He identified the “hillbilly culture” as the “standard means of rationalizing the poverty of an exploited region.” In the late nineteenth century, outsiders justified the swift acquisition of mountain land and resources by arguing that most mountain people lacked the intelligence and skills needed to utilize their own resources.¹⁵

The bulk of mountain land belonged to a few families, many of whom had been given large tracks of land as compensation for military service in the Revolutionary War. Rather than consisting of an egalitarian society as early historians maintained, Eller argued, “the mountains had always contained a small ruling class whose economic power

¹³ Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 3.

¹⁴ James S. Greene, III., “Progressives in The Kentucky Mountains: The Formative Years of the Pine Mountain Settlement School 1913-1930” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1982), 48, 57; Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 221.

¹⁵ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 43.

and political influence were derived from long-standing ownership of large tracks of land.” Some of the original settlers who had expanded their property by buying land from their less fortunate neighbors either formed their own companies to mine the huge coal deposits or sold land at a substantial profit to the large coal corporations. These propertied families constituted an elite class, which, along with corporate executives of the coal companies, controlled the political and economic power in the county and influenced both state and federal labor policies. When they realized the value of land to the coal industry, these elites joined with other Kentucky Democrats “in writing new state constitutions and enacting a new series of land laws” which they utilized to challenge the land titles of their less affluent neighbors. They made their fortunes from coal, either by developing their own mines or by selling the supposedly worthless lands they had acquired after it became valuable to outside investors with sufficient capital to invest in the machinery and equipment needed to mine the coal and build housing for the laborers.¹⁶

According to historian John Hevener, economic manipulation and political control by these outside investors shifted control of the political system from mountain families to coal operators: “Early in the county’s two-decade transformation from an isolated agrarian community of ten thousand inhabitants into an interdependent, semi-urban, industrial society of sixty-four thousand persons, the new coal barons wrested political control from the family factions that had ruled during the county’s agrarian era.”¹⁷ In 1916, all the major coal firms in Harlan County except U. S. Coal and Coke and

¹⁶ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 58.

¹⁷ John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On: The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931-39* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 14, 15.

Wisconsin Steel formed the politically powerful and corrupt Harlan County Coal Operators' Association. Local representatives of the coal companies owned by steel corporations did not join this local association because, as Harlan historian William Forester explained:

The larger mines such as Lynch, Benham, Banner Fork and several others were owned and controlled by the giants of industry and their stockholders. The men employed to run these mines were powerful and while referred to as operators were actually superintendents and could be demoted or fired at anytime and several were.¹⁸

Because these superintendents and managers were not operators, they had little authority to determine corporate policy, but were responsible for its implementation and enforcement. Private mine owners tended to delegate more authority to their superintendents than that afforded their corporate counterparts. Forester referred to the coal operator as "lord of the manor [who] controlled the destiny of all his employees from the lowest flunkies to the highest salaried official just as in a feudalistic society."¹⁹ But more than simply "lords of the manor" these wealthy, powerful men were lords of Harlan County's political system. Eller agreed:

In order to assure the harmony and order of the coal camps and to protect their little kingdoms from outside interference, the coal barons early established control of the local political systems. Under the guise of law and order, the newcomers defeated the family-clan system and replaced it with a network controlled by economic interests.²⁰

Managers, foremen, and guards enforced company control of every aspect of life in Kentucky's corporate mining towns, including the workers' votes in elections. Miners

¹⁸ Forester, *Before We Forget*, 90.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 210.

had little control over economics or politics in the region. Since the only curbs on power are laws, and since government was a system designed and controlled by the same class of men who owned the corporations, the laws were negotiated between powerful businessmen and state and federal legislators.²¹

Changes in land ownership patterns and the economic and political systems created an underclass of poor subsistence farmers and tenant farmers who became wage earners with no other means of support than coalmining. A professional middle class of educators, politicians, school administrators, bankers, merchants, doctors and nurses, lawyers, and ministers came in pursuit of lucrative careers in the booming company towns, but as Hevener explained: “Unlike typical middle-class American society, Harlan County lacked any sizable disinterested middle class to moderate and adjust conflict between the elite and the disinherited.”²² Most of these professionals chose not to live in the company towns, but in spacious homes located in mountainside enclaves or in the towns of Cumberland and Harlan.

The newly disenfranchised native-born whites, along with southern blacks and primarily Eastern European immigrants were the focus of the steel companies’ corporate welfare management programs intended to indoctrinate them with “Christian” and “republican” values and the work ethic needed for industrial production. To that end, corporations built both Catholic and Protestant churches in company towns, hired the priests and ministers, many of the latter recruited through the YMCA, and determined the content of sermons. According to historian Shauna Scott, “coal companies hired men to

²¹ Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers*, 210; Robert Hugh Collier, *The Conception of Lynch and the Life Thereafter* (Nashville, TN: Printnet USA, 1996), 62.

²² Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 22.

take the pulpits of company churches, where they launched sermons against unionism, condemned protest and violence, and emphasized salvation and the hereafter over social justice issues.”²³ The company hired the ministers but the money to pay their salaries was deducted from miners’ wages. According to Collier, a similar situation existed in Benham and Lynch:

Churches of different denominations were built by the company and some of them supplied by the company. Being supplied refers to the Pastors, Preachers and Priests that stood in the pulpits and preached a sermon to the congregation. These sermons may not have all been scrutinized by the company, but they were not allowed to preach anything that could indicate the company as being the cause of any misunderstanding that might come up between management and the miner. Nor could they could preach any sermons that might in some way advocate the organization of miners against the company.²⁴

Though companies built churches and hired ministers for the workers, their executives did not attend those churches. Major denominations such as Methodist and Southern Baptist built stately churches in Cumberland and Harlan for the coal operators, businessmen and professionals who preferred more traditional forms of worship.²⁵

Few mountain natives attended the churches in the company towns; instead they continued to attend local Baptist or Pentecostal churches where they could be relatively free of company control. However, even traditional mountain religion served industry well in that it taught obedience, non-violence and acceptance of one’s “lot” in life. Equating the acquisition of wealth with evil comforted poor people who clung to the belief that people who lived a good Christian life would reap their rewards in heaven. To

²³ Shauna L. Scott, *Two Sides to Everything: The Cultural Construction of Class Consciousness in Harlan County, Kentucky* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 148.

²⁴ Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 25.

²⁵ Scott, *Two Sides to Everything*, 152, 153.

the profit motivated investors in the steel industry, these ideas would have seemed as foreign as those of the blacks and immigrants arriving in railroad boxcars.²⁶

Railroads played a vital role in opening up the coalfields of eastern Kentucky, especially in Harlan County. Prior to the construction of railroads into the region, the only way to take coal out of the county was to float it by barge down the shallow Poor Fork and Cloverlick streams of the Cumberland River. These streams could be navigated only in spring when the snow melted on the mountains. Difficulty of transporting the mined coal was one of the reasons there were no commercial mines in Harlan County before the railroads were built. Some families mined surface coal for their own use, but the operations were small-scale and primitive.²⁷

Financed by some of the same investors who had purchased the land, the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, one of the first major railroad companies in the state, began to extend rail lines into eastern Kentucky's coal fields. T. J. Asher, who owned a sawmill and huge tracts of land in Harlan County, constructed the first railroad to Black Mountain, the Wasiota and Black Mountain, in 1907. He had tried to persuade the Louisville & Nashville to build the railroad but when they showed little interest, he decided to do it himself. When he had completed a few miles, Milton H. Smith, president of L & N, impressed by Asher's determination and ingenuity, contracted him to build the line for L & N.²⁸

²⁶ Scott, *Two Sides to Everything*, 152-153.

²⁷ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 141, 149.

²⁸ Forester, *Before We Forget*, 2, 3.

The interdependence between the railroad and the coal towns in southeastern Kentucky cannot be overemphasized. Without navigable rivers and containing only crude roads that were little more than paths through streambeds, transporting heavy equipment into the steep and treacherous mountain terrain was virtually impossible. Railroad construction made it possible to transport men and supplies into “remote, rugged, and unsettled areas far from independent towns” and to build the towns needed to provide goods and services for the labor force. Construction crews made up of native-born whites, Italian immigrants, and blacks, many of them convicts, lived in temporary shacks or tents. After deductions for rent, transportation, and food, men often ended the month owing the company rather than receiving pay for their labor. Brutally hard labor, inadequate nourishment, accidents and disease claimed the lives of many workers. In villages along the tracks, unmarked graves attest to the dangers these workers and the women who accompanied them faced. Tiny graves alongside the larger ones indicate that infants are buried there.²⁹

Industrialization transformed both the quality of life for the mountain people and the environment that had instilled in them a strong sense of place. Historian Malcolm Ross assessed the destructive environmental changes that occurred:

In 1910, Harlan County, Kentucky was a backwoods community, dotted with log cabins, roadless, and content with such social life as suns itself in Kentucky courthouse squares, swapping news and squirting ruminative tobacco juice on the steps of justice. The coal seams of Harlan County are thick and of high value. So the wild gorge of Cumberland River was violated by a railroad spur. Engineer

²⁹ Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 34, 35. I have personal knowledge of the fate of some of those women and infants. Behind Dione Baptist Church was a small cemetery with both adult and children’s unmarked graves. After I became an adult, I was told that they were the graves of women, probably black wives or mistresses of railroad workers, who died in childbirth and the infants they delivered. I have never located proof that this was so, but it seemed a logical explanation for a mystery that had puzzled me since childhood.

gangs stripped the laurel from the hillsides. Electrified spurs, tipples, shacks and stores in a few weeks converted farm hollows and wilderness into working mine camps. On the third year of production a million tons were shipped out of the County.³⁰

Throughout Harlan County, operators housed the influx of new miners and their families, 61 percent of the county's population, in unincorporated company towns ranging in size from a few dozen souls to ten thousand residents at Lynch. Ross maintained that it was not the mountain elite but absentee investors who were responsible for the development of the coal industry and the changes that occurred as a result: "Harlan was a wholecloth development by outside capital. The new money built the schools and churches, laid the hardsurfaced roads, hired the police and paid wages to the county people who exchanged the sunlight for the dark of a mine shaft." By the 1920s, that exchange had seriously eroded the mountain culture noted for its self-reliance, independence, and love of freedom.³¹

Benham and Lynch had a number of advantages over the smaller, privately owned coal camps that sprang up in Harlan County in the early twentieth century. Though undeniably paternalistic, both corporations' membership in American Iron and Steel Institute meant that their welfare management programs were under the direction of the Institute's Welfare Department. Public relations staffs boasted about the focus on children's welfare and published flattering pictures of young residents in trade papers and journals. In 1946, International Harvester's trade magazine, *The McCormick Reaper*, published a glowing description of Benham's amenities.³²

³⁰ Malcolm Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 50.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Richard Joyce, "Cities of Harvester . . . Benham," *McCormick Reaper*, June, 1948, 16-19.

There is little question that welfare management policies employed in corporately owned towns brought many improvements in the lives of destitute immigrants who came to America in search of employment and blacks recruited from the Birmingham, Alabama, coalmines and southern tenant farms. The coal industry provided jobs for white property owners and tenant farmers whose mountain farms were no longer productive. Mountain children and black sharecroppers' children who had formerly attended one-room grammar schools without toilet facilities now had access to modern schools, playgrounds, college trained teachers, sports programs and a curriculum that included such cultural studies as foreign languages, music and art. They also provided town residents' children with a high school education, a privilege that had previously been available only to residents of Harlan and Poor Fork.

The black and white company schools observed standards that qualified their graduates for acceptance into higher institutions of learning such as the University of Kentucky for whites and Tuskegee Institute for blacks. Richard Joyce reported in an article about Benham, "teachers are paid in part by the county, partly by Harvester, and partly from a small school fund to which [fathers] contribute. [Benham] school has received the highest rating given by the state accrediting committee." Glessie Parker, a 1929 graduate of Benham High School, supported that claim in her memoirs. She insisted that the educational standards at Benham in the 1920s were far superior to those in Cumberland in the 1950s.³³

Though the quality of education prepared students for college, few were able to afford to take advantage of that opportunity. Most of the students who went on to college

³³ Joyce, "Cities of Harvester, 16-19; Glessie Jones Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs and Letters," author's possession.

were executives' children. Miners sons often chose not to finish high school because they could make good wages in the mines. Requirements for graduation in both the black and white schools included four years in a major elective subject and two years in a minor elective. Courses included history, English literature, science, math, home economics and languages. Young men who graduated were more likely to be hired for the line operation supervisory positions, but for managerial positions, the company required a college degree. Before the days of student loans and tuition aid, few miners could afford to send their sons to college, so the choice jobs remained the domain of the managerial class for subsequent generations.³⁴

All residents benefited from the availability of health services. Both Benham and Lynch built modern hospitals staffed with competent professionals, and established clinics for routine health maintenance. Access to dental care was available to many families for the first time; the lack of such care was responsible for the stereotype of mountain people who had lost their teeth due to untreated decay and gum disease. Miners' wives received prenatal care during pregnancy and delivery of infants by trained physicians. Well-baby clinics provided nutritional education, formula and health-care products for infants.³⁵

³⁴ *Benham Hi* yearbooks; Bobbi Gothard, interview with author, tape recording, Benham, Kentucky, March 23, 2001, Northeast Archives and Appalachian Archives, Southeast Community College, Cumberland, Kentucky. Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs." Parker, then Glessie Jones, was able to attend high school in Benham even though her brother and his family lived in the small village of Clutts, one mile outside of Benham. She belonged to the French Club, the Dotsonian Literary Club, and was editor-in-chief of the yearbook. Her partner in the science contest, the son of a Benham mine executive, received an appointment to West Point, but lack of funds prevented her from continuing her education.

³⁵ Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs."

Whether the amenities provided by Wisconsin Steel and U. S. Coal and Coke were prompted by Progressive Era reformers' scrutiny is unclear, but as long as a miner remained in the employ of the corporation, his family would have access to benefits available only to company employees. Some benefits were not confined to residents of the towns themselves but were available for employees who lived in surrounding communities. As Perry maintained, the corporately owned towns were "giant undertakings whose presence in an area had ripple effects on fringe developments."³⁶ Education, healthcare, and access to purchases at the company store were available to any miner employed by the corporation whether he lived in the town or a neighboring village. Miners' wages supported country stores and small, privately owned dairies in the small villages and hamlets that existed in the twenty-mile valley and on the mountainside between Benham and Lynch and the thriving commercial town of Harlan, the county seat twenty miles downriver. Pressure from residents who wanted the kind of education available for children in the company towns resulted in the formation of the Harlan County public school system. By 1920, the incorporated town of Cumberland had become a bustling market center because of its proximity to Benham and Lynch. In addition, its location on the railroad line made it a connecting point between Harlan and the Benham and Lynch region with stops at many of the villages along the way, providing residents of rural villages convenient transportation to Cumberland's stores.

Town residents had the advantage of living in company houses with electricity and running water, paved and lighted streets, easy access to the company store and company schools, but they were more subject to company control than the residents of

³⁶ Perry, *Coal Company Towns*, 8.

surrounding communities. Because the towns were unincorporated and privately owned the corporation had the legal right to determine how and by whom their property would be used. The result was that corporations were free to hire their own police forces, build and operate their own schools and hospitals, and determine wages and rents without state legislation or outside interference.

Without governmental controls, corporate executives were under no compulsion to tolerate self-governance, personal autonomy or expressions of political opinion. The mine superintendent governed these camps and policed them with deputy sheriffs who were appointed and commissioned by the county sheriff and county judge but paid and controlled by the mine superintendent. The coal operators also chose the precinct committeemen from these camps, which allowed them to control both county party organizations.³⁷

The transformation of the upriver portion of Harlan County began in Benham, “The Town that International Harvester Built.” Benham is today a sleepy little town nestled among the hills and valleys of the Benham Spur of Black Mountain. Neat houses with well-groomed lawns line KY160, the highway that winds its way through the town, the neighboring town of Lynch and across Black Mountain to Appalachia, Virginia. The town is long and narrow with a few side streets climbing the lower elevations of the mountain. Located in the center of the town are the Benham Coal Miners’ Museum, the red caboose and Miner’s Memorial Wall in the Coal Miner’s Memorial Park, the post office, courthouse, and the This and That thrift shop. Across the street, on a hill overlooking the center of the town and the tennis courts, is the Benham Schoolhouse Inn,

³⁷ Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 14, 15.

a high school building converted through a joint effort between the townspeople and Southeast Community College in Cumberland into a gracious and charming hotel. The pace of life is leisurely, the air clean and pure, and only birds' songs break the silence of a spring morning.

But it was not always so. In its heyday, Benham was a bustling, frontier coalmining town populated by native mountaineers, European immigrants, and southern blacks. Benham, originally called Yowell, was located in a valley bounded on the east by Black Mountain, the highest point in Kentucky with an elevation of 4150 feet. The Benham Spur and Looney Ridge formed the northern and southern boundaries. The valley itself is between 1500 and 2000 feet deep. On July 23, 1911, the Yowell Post Office (established in 1900) was renamed Benham. It was the first model coal town in the Kentucky mountains built by a corporation according to the principles of welfare management. In terms of population, Benham was always smaller than Lynch and Millinocket, but larger than East Millinocket.³⁸

Over half a century had elapsed between Cyrus McCormick's invention of the reaper in 1831 and the birth of the town of Benham, but the two events are inexorably connected. In 1902, McCormick's International Harvester Corporation was manufacturing farm machinery on a massive scale and needed coal to fire the furnaces of the steel mill at its South Chicago steelworks. The discovery of coal on the Benham Spur of Black Mountain led to the construction of Benham.³⁹

³⁸ "Historical Material, Benham, Kentucky, Early 1900s to Present, (Benham Town Hall," this information can also be obtained at <http://www.uky.edu/~rsilver/benham.htm>

³⁹ "Historical Material, Benham."

Before the construction of the town, only a few farms existed on Benham Spur. In a 1980 case study on land ownership, the researchers found:

From the days when the Revolutionary War Soldiers received their military payment in substantial grants of land to the decade of the [18]'70's, land ownership in Harlan County has been limited to a small group of people. The coal and land companies became primary owners in the early 1900s when they successfully purchased land tracts of both surface land and mineral rights from Harlan County's old land owning families (e.g., the Turners, Cunninghams, Creeks [Creeches], Basshams). Many of these purchases were made for 50 cents to a dollar per acre.⁴⁰

The largest landowners in the early nineteen hundreds were the Blair family with approximately 1500 acres and the Creech family with slightly more than 1100 acres, and though these were not enormous holdings, their rich coal deposits had great value for the coal entrepreneurs. Mountain farmers were willing to sign broad-form deeds because they believed that since they were not selling the land, but only mineral rights, their homes would be secure. With little knowledge of the value of coal, farmlands no longer productive and the valuable timber already harvested, they viewed the selling of a mineral that had little value to them a sensible way to make a few dollars to pay their taxes. Estimates for the price paid for land range from five cents to one dollar an acre.⁴¹

In 1909, after L & N's board of directors purchased the Wasiota and Black Mountain Railroad, they contracted the Callahan Construction Company to lay sixty miles of track with spurs extending into the sites of rich coal deposits from the town of Tejay into Benham at a cost of \$20,000 per mile. In 1911, the railroad began daily passenger service from the town of Middlesboro to Benham. With the railroad now in

⁴⁰ Linda Johnson, Joey Childers and Mark Middleton, *Harlan County, Kentucky, A Case Study On Land* (St. Paul, Virginia: Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1980); Sue Bassham Cudd, interview with James Goode, tape recording, March 8, 1984, Appalachian Archives.

⁴¹ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 10, 11, 94.

place, Wisconsin Steel was able to start digging the mineshafts and building the tipples needed to move the coal from mineshafts a mile or more up on the mountain to railroad cars down on the valley floor. In order to attract a reliable labor force to such a remote region, company executives knew they would have to provide substantial housing and services geared to families.

Despite the expense involved in such a venture, the huge coal deposits on Black Mountain warranted investment in long-term operation. The steel corporations felt it necessary to build their own towns rather than simply buy coal from existing mines because control of the coal supply freed them from market fluctuations and competition. The physical construction of a railroad, town and company offices in such an isolated and inaccessible region was a Herculean task that required massive outlays of capital and a large labor force. Only investors in large corporations such as the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and International Harvester could raise the amount of capital required for such an operation.⁴²

The early stages of construction before the Wasiota and Black Mountain Branch of the railroad was completed into Benham were extremely difficult. According to Paul Graham, chairman of Benham Church's board of directors in 1999, "Equipment for building a town and facilities related to mining coal was shipped by rail to Appalachia, Virginia, and transported by horse-drawn wagons across Black Mountain to Benham. Lumber used for the building project was cut and sawed from the virgin timber standing

⁴² Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers*, 85; "North Fork Extension: The L & N Extends Its Lines Through the Rich Coal Fields of Eastern Kentucky," *L & N Railroad Magazine*, 1949, 118-125.

on the land the Company had purchased.” Despite the difficulty involved, Eller wrote, construction was completed “almost over night.”⁴³

Accomplishing such an arduous task required the labor of physically tough men. Scientific estimates of the length of time required to mine the huge deposits of coal on Benham Spur was one hundred years, so everything from company offices and mine structures to individual homes had to be built for permanence. The master plan included housing, schools, medical facilities, merchandising facilities, recreational facilities, and churches; everything considered necessary to the establishment of a permanent and self-sustaining community. According to Alliegordon Park Kaylor, Benham Church historian, “from the beginning the Company owned everything in Benham. The Company planned, built, organized, financed, and controlled everything except the railroad depot and the post office. Everything was developed as an organic whole, each element in its own time.”⁴⁴ Nothing would be left to chance in the pursuit of maximum profits for investors.

Initially, labor was recruited from surrounding states. The engineers and some of the bosses were brought from Pennsylvania and Illinois, but almost all the laborers came from the mountains of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. The first immigrants were the Italian stonemasons who constructed company offices from native sandstone and carpenters who built miners’ houses from native timber. By 1920, 1200 men were employed and the population consisted of 2256 white and 718 black residents.

⁴³ Paul Graham, foreward to Alliegordon Park Kaylor, *A History of the Benham Church, 1910-1983*, (Cedar Falls, Iowa: University of Northern Iowa, 1999), I-III.

⁴⁴ Kaylor, *A History of the Benham Church*, 3.

Though the majority of the white residents were native-born workers from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, there were also significant numbers of Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, Italians, Russians, Lithuanians, and Mexicans. A few workers came from Ireland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Bolivia, Scotland, Bulgaria, Austria, Syria, Greece, Puerto Rico and Sweden. Some of the black workers came from Kentucky and West Virginia, but most were from states further south: Tennessee, Virginia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Florida. In the isolated hollows of the Black and Pine mountains where people had little exposure to other cultures such an ethnically and culturally different population may have seemed exotic, perhaps even threatening.⁴⁵

When construction was completed, Benham consisted of approximately 500 sturdily constructed single and duplex wood frame homes, boarding houses, and a hotel. The town itself was small, 1000 feet across and a mile long, built in the narrow Looney Creek valley surrounded by the lushly forested mountains of the Benham Spur. Around the center of town were the mine offices, company store, hospital, theater, clubhouse, school, church, and bandstand. Substantial homes for managers and mine executives stood on tree-lined streets carved into the hills above Looney Creek. Homes for railroad workers and miners were built on the north side of the Louisville and Nashville railroad. Houses for black miners lined the road through the center of town.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 17; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*. Since Benham was not an incorporated town, the residents are included in Precinct 4 B, Supervisors District 11, Enumeration District 90.

⁴⁶ "Historical Material, Benham."

Racial and ethnic segregation characterized the distribution of the population, ostensibly because grouping people with similar languages, cultures, and religions would create a more relaxed environment. Robert Hugh Collier speculated that an underlying motivation for keeping the blacks and different ethnic groups separated was to prevent alliances that might lead to unionization.⁴⁷ According to the 1920 census, Benham's population was divided into two precincts. Precinct 4B was entirely white except for three black women and three black men who worked at the hotel and a janitor at the white YMCA. Even mine executives' servants were young white women from Kentucky, Tennessee, or Virginia. The census does not give street or road names, but a Benham resident recalled that there were four distinct sections of the town, each determined by either race or job status in the mine. These included "Smokey Row," where the blacks lived and "New Benham," where the common laborers and central and eastern European ethnics lived, including one street named for the Hungarians called "Hunky Street."

Another section ranging from Poplar Street to Hemlock Street was called "Middle Benham" where native born whites and middle-income families lived. The large and elaborate homes where the coal officials, superintendents and foremen lived were located on "Silk Stocking Row," a street carved into the mountainside above the town, a comfortable distance from mine entrances and tipples, the noise and grime of the railroad, and the river that posed a constant threat of flooding.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 17.

⁴⁸ Scott, *Two Sides to Everything*, 13, 14. I was born in a house on Cedar Street in "Middle Benham." Note the similarity to East Millinocket in the naming of streets after native trees.

Most married couples who arrived during the first decade of the town's existence were in their twenties and thirties with three to six children. Single men lived in ethnic groupings in boarding houses managed by married couples or widows. Thirty-four Mexicans, consisting of eight married couples, nine children and the rest male relatives or boarders who worked in the mines seems to have created confusion for the census taker who could not decide whether they were black or white. The initials *OK* are written in dark ink over the original entry in the space provided for color or race.⁴⁹

For Wisconsin Steel, the challenge was to mold disparate ethnic and racial groups into a cohesive work force and community. The large numbers of blacks and mountain whites, both perceived as uneducated and morally inferior, prompted company-hired educators to design programs to “civilize” and “uplift” women and children. Wisconsin Steel executives appealed to John R. Mott's Young Men's Christian Association to provide ministers familiar with the principles of social engineering that had proved effective in countries overseas. Two YMCA buildings, one for blacks and one for whites, built in 1912, were among the first structures. Evidence of Americanization efforts is contained in the many photographs of July 4th parades and pictures of workers attending gatherings to hear patriotic speeches.⁵⁰

In addition to racial segregation, the town had a distinct two class system, the managerial class and the working class. At the top of the hierarchical ladder were the more privileged residents who lived in fine homes and had access to a luxurious hotel, a country club with an adjoining par three, nine hole golf course and quality merchandise at

⁴⁹ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

⁵⁰ Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (Canada: HarperCollinsCanadaLtd, 1982), 109.

the company store. For those on the lower rungs, the amenities were less luxurious, but Benham was a decided improvement over the tenant farms and coal camps they had come to escape.

Black and white workers lived in well-constructed houses, earned wages sufficient to buy good quality merchandise and nutritious food, and were protected against racial violence by company police. Unlike many of the smaller mines in Harlan County that paid miners exclusively in scrip, Wisconsin Steel paid miners in cash twice a month, but they also issued scrip that could be acquired in advance of pay to use for purchases at the company store that carried a full line of products from groceries and clothing to furniture.⁵¹

The company recruited doctors and nurses to run the hospital and provide health care for miners and their families. A modern hospital was among the first buildings constructed, along with three churches, a white Protestant non-denominational church, a black Protestant church, and a Catholic church. Employees paid for maintenance of the buildings through payroll deductions.⁵²

A company appointed superintendent of schools hired the administrators and teachers who were required to adhere to company standards and abide by company rules. In response to pressure from the YMCA and the black community, Wisconsin Steel executives decided to provide schools for black as well as white children. In a 1917 letter to H. F. Perkins, President of Wisconsin Steel, F. B. Dunbar, superintendent of Benham mines reported that the “colored” population of the town, represented by Mr.

⁵¹ Joyce, “Cities of Harvester,” 16-19.

⁵² Kaylor, *A History of the Benham Church*, 3.

Diggs, the secretary of the black YMCA had requested teachers for their children and were willing to have money deducted from their pay for the teachers' salaries and other welfare concerns. The first payroll deductions were made for the 1918-1919 school year.⁵³

By 1940, the year that Constance Ellison came to teach in the Benham Colored High School, all residents' children were guaranteed an education through high school long as the father remained employed by the company. She enjoyed the experience so much that she stayed for nineteen years and, unlike most teachers who had to quit when they got married, continued to teach after she married a coal miner. One reason may have been that she never had children. Her sister, Harriet Pickens, also a teacher, stayed only five years and returned to Brunswick where her son was born. Both women insisted that the curriculum and the textbooks were identical for black and white students. In Ellison's opinion, the availability of educational facilities drew many black families to the town.⁵⁴

In addition to health care and education, the company provided entertainment and sports programs for the miners and their families. Like many other corporations at that time, Wisconsin Steel at Benham had its own baseball team that inspired loyalty and a strong spirit of competition against other coal town communities. Residents proudly

⁵³ F. B. Dunbar to H. F. Perkins, September 7, 1917; Wisconsin Steel Company Statement of the Operation of the Benham School for the year 1918-1919, International Harvester Papers, Appalachian Archives.

⁵⁴ Constance Ellison, interview with author, tape recording, May 3, 2002, Northeast Archives and Appalachian Archives. A number of sources, including the town historians and web pages, verify this information. The schools were accredited by the Kentucky Secondary Education Department.

point out that many of the players on the Benham team went on to play in professional and semi-professional leagues.⁵⁵

Few labor conflicts marked the first decade of Benham's existence. Wisconsin Steel found that the most difficult group to acclimate to industrial life was mountain miners. Men accustomed to living by the sun and seasons had a difficult time adjusting to schedules determined by the clock. Despite the many amenities that were effective tools in attracting black and immigrant miners and their families to Benham, many native-born miners preferred to live in dilapidated houses on hillsides and in hollows without electricity or plumbing rather than submit to company control of their families' lives. These workers and those fired or blacklisted because of union activity would prove to be the most combatant during the union wars of the 1920s and 30s that shattered Benham's increasingly tenuous peace.

Lynch was the most heavily populated and the most recently constructed of the four towns included in this study. Nearly six years after Benham mines went into operation, United States Steel Corporation purchased 14,405 acres of coal-rich land three miles upriver from Benham on Looney Ridge from the Wentz Corporation of Philadelphia. The acquisition was the culmination of years of legal maneuvers to acquire the property where the rich coal deposits were buried in Black Mountain.⁵⁶

United States Coal and Coke built the town of Lynch, named for Thomas Lynch, the company's chief executive officer, to house the workers needed to mine the coal for

⁵⁵ T. E. Johnson, "History of Lynch District 1917 –1957," (Lynch, KY: United States Steel Corporation, n.d).

⁵⁶ Johnson, "History of Lynch." The number of acres purchased varies according to different accounts. The best evidence indicates that the initial acquisition was 14,450 acres and that up to 40,000 more acres were acquired through subsequent purchases.

U. S. Steel's mills in Gary, Indiana. The town, completed in 1924, was considered a model of modernity within the coal industry. In addition to the world's largest tipple, it boasted of 400 duplexes, two hundred single residence cottages, and nearly two dozen elegant houses built for company executives, physicians and engineers in secluded neighborhoods on the mountainside overlooking the town. Like their Wisconsin Steel counterparts, this U. S. Coal and Coke elite shared the management philosophies of the parent corporation, but their management style was more detached and rigid. As demand for coal increased, competition for the labor force contributed to a fierce rivalry between the two towns.⁵⁷

The enormity of the undertaking challenged engineers to solve difficult design and construction problems. One of the attractions of the region was the railroad spur that Louisville & Nashville Railroad had built into Benham. It would require only a short extension to provide access to United States Steel's property on the Looney Ridge of Black Mountain. But despite the proven profitability of Wisconsin Steel's Benham operation, when United States Coal and Coke asked the board of the L & N to build a spur to connect their Lynch operation to Benham, the board denied the request. Though approximately 300 railcars on the L & N were consigned to the Lynch operation by 1917, the railroad company, convinced that the demand for coal would diminish drastically after the war, refused to extend a track into Lynch. Undaunted, United States Coal and Coke secured a loan to build its own line, the Looney Creek Railroad, first extending the track to the No. 1 tipple site, about one-half mile upstream from the International

⁵⁷ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 98. A tipple is a tall structure, basically a chute, descending from the mouth of a mine to a loading station in the valley below. It cleans and sorts the coal before loading it into railroad cars or trucks. For high quality coal required for steel production, further cleaning and sorting is done at a cleaning station.

Harvester property line, then on to the end of the town site, with necessary spurs to facilitate the movement of supplies. Construction began in 1917 and was completed on January 1, 1918. The company retained full ownership of the line and the engine and cars that carried out the coal. They also owned and maintained the adjoining property from Lynch to the switching spur at Benham.⁵⁸

Construction of the mine offices, tipples and the town had begun in 1917, before the United States entered World War I, so the company was able to recruit a sufficient number of local mountaineers to clear the forests and prepare the region for construction. Before the railroad was finished, supplies, including mules, wagons, and harnesses had to be shipped by rail into Benham and transported overland to Lynch. When enough men had been employed to start construction, access roads were graded and temporary shanties, bunk houses, kitchens, stables and other necessary structures were built as rapidly as possible. The first erected was a large wooden administration building at the lower end of town to accommodate the mining department, store, bank, post office and hospital. The work force, consisting of fifteen hundred men, was housed in bunkhouses and fed in company kitchens. Women and children would come later, after suitable housing for families had been built.⁵⁹

As production increased, competition with Wisconsin Steel for the available workforce required United States Coal and Coke to look outside the region for laborers. Using similar methods to those employed in the other towns, the management recruited close to five hundred Italian stonemasons through agents with connections in Italy to

⁵⁸ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 94.

⁵⁹ "The Town and People of Lynch 1917 – 1926," http://www.portal31.org/town_people.htm

construct commercial buildings from native sandstone. The company also contracted agents in port cities such as Boston and New York to send immigrant miners, carpenters, and railroad workers to their location. Coal miner Hiram Boggs recalled seeing boxcars full of immigrants and blacks brought in on the train. After they were transported to the site, they were detained by armed mine guards until they worked out the cost of their transportation. Under such circumstances, many stayed rather than contend with the difficulties of trying to leave. Ironically, Boggs said, this was the same way black workers were transported out of the region in times of union agitation—herded into railroad boxcars.⁶⁰

Despite emigrant agent laws in many southern states that levied exorbitant licensing fees on labor agent or prohibited blacks from travel between states, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad brought in thousands of black laborers, many of them convicts, to build the railroads. But unlike the chain gangs of convicts who were forced into labor to build the railroads, black tenant farmers came willingly to work in the coal mines. According to the *Black Miners* website:

Many of these men were recruited from the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Virginia: “transportation Men” company agents did the recruitment of raw, unskilled laborers of black coal miners and sharecroppers to work the mines which was being opened under Black Mountain at Lynch. One of these agents, a legendary figure and remembered by the name of “Limehouse” would sneak these sharecroppers away from the white land owners in the wee hours of darkness, hiding the black recruits behind boxes of collard greens, sugar cane, and potatoes stacked in the trucks.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Hiram Boggs, interview with Louis Marshall, tape recording, Lynch, Kentucky, November 9, 1983, Appalachian Archives.

⁶¹ “Black Coal Miners,” www.geocities.com/Heartland/Meadows/1099/black.htm, 2.

Labor agents, sometimes called emigrant agents, such as Limehouse and R.A “Peg Leg” Williams assisted tens of thousands of African-Americans in their move off tenant farms where they lived in poverty and perpetual debt to white landowners. The 1866 Civil Rights Act provided that:

All persons born in the United States are citizens and all citizens (with designated exception) shall have the same right, in every State and Territory in the United States, to make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, and give evidence, to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold, and convey real and personal property, and to full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property, as is enjoyed by white citizens, and shall be subject to like punishment pains, and penalties.⁶²

The reality was that the Black Codes in most southern states controlled African-American labor mobility through vagrancy laws, the threat of violence, and restrictive emigrant agent laws which prevented agents from recruiting men from the farms to work in industry.⁶³

In the 1870s Alabama and North Carolina’s supreme courts had declared their states’ emigrant agent laws to be unconstitutional so many of the black miners in Benham and Lynch came from those states as well as from Kentucky and its neighboring states, Virginia and Tennessee. Their reports of good wages and a comfortable and relatively safe environment enticed others, sometimes entire families, to follow. Eller maintained that all miners did not come voluntarily, citing Howard B. Lee’s research on the mine wars for evidence that during times of labor shortages, “agents were known to empty entire jails of their black prisoners. Crowded into boxcars for days with little to eat or

⁶² David E. Bernstein, “The Law and Economics of Post-Civil War Restrictions on Interstate Migration by African-Americans” (Texas Law Review, vol. 76 (1998), 3, reprint Northern Light Special Collection, <http://library.northernlight> , 1998), (page reference is to the reprint edition).

⁶³ Ibid.

drink, some men never made it to the coal fields. Prisoners who demanded to be let off or tried to escape were frequently shot.”⁶⁴ Whether they came voluntarily or not, by 1907, black miners comprised as much as thirty-five percent of the work force in some mines. Caudill wrote about the ethnic diversity in Lynch:

The population was the most cosmopolitan in the state, with Italians, Hungarians, Germans, Austrians, Poles, Greeks, Croats, Russians, Albanians, and a few Bulgarians. Nearly half the residents were what the constitution quaintly calls “natural born” white American, while the remainder were blacks, and Europeans. The four main groupings—Northern whites, mountain whites, blacks, and immigrants—could almost endlessly be divided into cultural and linguistic subgroups. In 1920 the population reached 9,200, probably edging up to 10,000 or thereabouts, given the high birthrate.⁶⁵

At the height of the boom period, U. S. Coal and Coke employed ten thousand workers who lived in one of the company’s one thousand housing units.

Caudill described the town built to house this ethnic population as “an example of advanced corporate paternalism.” Although the planning and construction of the town reflected welfare management principles, the corporate attitude of United States Steel and its subsidiary, like the steel industry in general, was anti-union and enforced much more rigid control of workers’ daily lives than in Benham. According to Caudill, every aspect of the town was carefully planned and faithfully constructed according to plan:

Four hundred duplexes and two hundred single-residence cottages lined the streets, and a couple of dozen larger and more elegant building looked down from secluded neighborhood located on the cool, shady heights. Here the managers, physicians, and engineers lived on salaries the miners regarded as princely. These houses contained eight to twelve rooms, whereas five rooms were specified for each miner and his family.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 170.

⁶⁵ Johnson et al., *Harlan County, Kentucky, A Case Study On Land*; Paul F. Taylor, *Bloody Harlan: The United Mine Workers of America in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1931-1941* (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 4; Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 98.

⁶⁶ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 98.

Construction took place in stages, but by the time it was completed in 1924 Lynch had become a bustling town.. First, company architects divided the valley into six separate sections and developed each section in turn, numbering them 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and worked feverishly to accommodate the rapidly growing population. The miners personalized these sections by giving them such names as “Shack Town” and Gobblers Knob.” The street where the mine officials and department heads lived in elegant stone houses was called “Silk Stocking Street.” These houses had central heating with running water, toilet and bathing facilities, made possible by the town’s modern sewerage system and treatment plant, an original and integral part of the town’s infrastructure.

All of the miners’ cottages were wooden frame construction with asphalt shingles. In an effort to avoid the monotony found in the design of other company towns, planners offered five different house designs and trim colors, and encouraged individuality in designing gardens and yards. Every house had electricity, plastered walls, sidewalks and fenced lawns large enough for planting flowers and vegetables. A fire station and hydrants located no more than 200 feet from each house reflected the company’s concern for fire safety. In 1925, miners paid \$8.00 a month rent, \$1.60 for household electricity, and \$.75 for water.⁶⁷

Single men resided in five immense boarding houses, each containing twenty-two bedrooms. Visiting executives, politicians, and other prominent guests stayed at the elegant one hundred and eight-bedroom Lynch Hotel. Because of the limited housing, in

⁶⁷ Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 17.

the black and immigrant communities as many as four families often lived in the same house, with a family in each bedroom and shared kitchen facilities.⁶⁸

Religion was important to Lynch residents and, though the company carefully monitored the content of sermons for inflammatory statements that might contribute to union organization, it recognized the need to accommodate religious differences. By the end of the 1920s, the Community Church for white employees and Mt. Sinai Baptist Church were under construction and plans to build the Roman Catholic Church of the Resurrection for the immigrant population were underway. Deductions from the miners' pay funded the construction and maintenance of these churches as well as ministers' residences and salaries. For example, Mt. Sinai Baptist Church for blacks was founded in 1917 with a black pastor, Reverend R. A. Cobb. The site for the church was leased from United States Steel Company for ninety-nine years. All miners, whether or not they attended services at the churches, were assessed \$2.00 each payday to pay for the church mortgages.⁶⁹

Later, as more churches were built to accommodate different religions and denominations, the upper class in Lynch was likely to attend such nationally organized and recognized churches as the Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Methodist, and Southern Baptist in Lynch or the neighboring towns of Benham and Cumberland. Many mountain whites continued to attend their traditional local churches: Primitive Baptist, Freewill Baptist, Old Regular Baptist, and Pentecostal churches. There were Baptist and

⁶⁸ Otis Atkinson, interview with author, tape recording, Lynch, Kentucky, May 3, 2002, Northeast Archives and Appalachian Archives.

⁶⁹ Clara Clements, interview with author, Cumberland, KY, June 8, 2000, Northeast Archives and Appalachian Archives.

Methodist or African Methodist Episcopal churches for blacks, and a Catholic Church for the mostly Italian, Irish, Czechoslovakian, Polish and Hungarian immigrants.⁷⁰

Profits from coal mining were accompanied by profits gained from services provided for workers. Charges for rent, home heating coal, medical services, schools, and burial services were all deducted from the miners' pay. A consumer economy accompanied waged labor. The United Supply Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel, owned the company store the miners called the "Big Store." This store, patterned after city department stores, sold everything from good quality clothing and shoes to furniture and appliances. Any miner employed by the company could purchase his supplies there, but there were separate entrances for blacks and whites. Although men were paid in cash on a semi-monthly basis, the primary monetary exchange was scrip that could be used only for purchases at the company store.

Ironically, the company store provided an opportunity for U.S. Steel to promote its paternalistic image. According to Johnson, "The United Supply Company [another subsidiary of U. S. Steel] advanced credit, on a controlled basis, to all employees. Surveys were conducted to see that no one suffered for the lack of food, clothing, or fuel."⁷¹ He did not mention the fact that this credit had to be repaid and that many miners spent their entire lives trying to work their way out of debt to the company.

Welfare management also focused on health and safety issues. By careful attention to health issues, the company was able to prevent major disease epidemics that often plagued other immigrant populations. Administrators carefully policed sanitation

⁷⁰ Scott, *Two Sides to Everything*, 151-153.

⁷¹ T. E. Johnson, "History of Lynch District 1917-1958," 11.

conditions and controlled the water supply. Even during construction, a small staff of doctors and nurses was available to care for sick and injured workers. In 1920, the company opened a fifty-four-bed hospital staffed with highly trained surgeons, doctors, and nurses, and equipped with modern hospital equipment. There were separate wards for white and “colored,” but all residents, regardless of race or ethnicity, were guaranteed health care.⁷²

Schools were important institutions for social control, and in keeping with welfare management philosophy, education of children was a priority. In 1919, Lynch established its own school district, independent of the Harlan County school system. Before the elementary school for white children was constructed in 1921, children were educated, first at Benham’s schools, then in company buildings set aside as classrooms. White immigrant children made up seventy five percent of the student body. In 1922, only two students were enrolled in the high school program, but by 1924, modern but segregated high school buildings were completed. Caudill wrote that in Lynch, “The company valued education more than did the surrounding community. In 1928-29 there were thirteen black teachers and at least twice as many whites. The latter received an average of \$1,100, a high wage for that time. Black teachers were paid more modestly—an average of \$800.”⁷³ Such attractive wages may have been necessary to lure qualified teachers to such an isolated and culturally barren environment.

Since the curriculum met the requirements of the accreditation board of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Lynch graduates now had the option of going on to college

⁷² Johnson, “History of Lynch,” 5.

⁷³ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 99.

if they could afford to do so. This presumably made it possible for miners' sons to move up from the working class into the professional class. Proof that such "uplift" measures worked in some cases is a list of Lynch graduates, black and white, who became professionals in a number of fields, published on web sites and posted at Lynch City Hall.⁷⁴

As in Benham, the company had its own segregated black and white ball teams, and hired semi-professional players to play teams from other mining towns. The players were segregated, but the spectators came from both races and all of the ethnic groups who lived in the towns. Men ostensibly hired as miners played on the white football team, the Lynch Golden Bulldogs, and the black baseball team, the Lynch Grays that played only black teams from other corporations. Players who failed to perform were quickly discharged, but professional teams later recruited many of those who demonstrated superior skills. Other entertainment included nationally known bands and entertainers brought in by the company, use of an athletic field for sports and carnivals, and dances at the high school.⁷⁵

Despite the fact that the company controlled everything—every bit of land, buildings, the police force and the lives of the families who lived there, residents of the town in the early years, even blacks who lived in crowded, segregated housing, say it was an ideal place to live. Men made good wages, no one went without food, clothing or housing, and people shared a sense of community. Women enjoyed their roles as consumers of the fine quality clothing and household products offered in the company

⁷⁴ "Black Coal Miners," 3-4.

⁷⁵ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 85- 102; Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 38; T. E. Johnson, "History of Lynch."

store. Dances, sports, movies, and live bands and shows kept families entertained. Children thrived because of the accessibility of health care, playgrounds and schools. When the L & N started passenger service in the 1920s between Lynch and Harlan, twenty miles downriver, residents in the hamlets could travel to stops anywhere along the line. The more affluent residents of the tri-cities could board the train and go to Harlan to shop and have dinner at the restaurant in the New Harlan Hotel.

Among the negative aspects of living in Lynch was the fact that residents were isolated from the rest of the world. The only way out of the mountains was the railroad. The isolation made it necessary for the company to provide entertainment and sports for miners and their families to relieve the boredom that could presumably lead to trouble. The Lyric and Victory theaters were leased to individuals charged with carefully monitoring the movies for content and scheduling showings to mesh with school and work schedules. Movies, mostly westerns and adventure movies, were shown only after school hours and on weekends when children were out of school and would be most likely to be involved in mischief.⁷⁶

Racial segregation was an inescapable fact of life in Benham and Lynch, but for blacks it was a much safer environment than the southern farms and towns they had left behind. There is no record of racial incidents and no lynchings occurred in the coalfields. In fact, before the United Mine Workers' attempts to organize unions, there is no evidence of racial violence. A plausible explanation could be that the company did not tolerate strife among the miners or their families. A miner who created a problem could be fired and his family evicted from the town. As the head of the household, he was also

⁷⁶ Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 36.

held responsible for his family's behavior. Another possible explanation is that, except in the mines themselves, blacks and whites had little contact with each other. Though segregated by both race and religion, all groups were provided with churches, schools, and similar housing. All families had access to health care, education and entertainment.

That does not mean that all miners received equal treatment, or that black families enjoyed equal benefits. Otis Atkinson, one of the first black foremen in the Lynch mines, says that the school buildings for black students were inferior to those for whites, but the texts and quality of teachers were substantially the same. Blacks were not allowed in the white high school, even to play sports. While a housing shortage existed for both whites and blacks, it was more severe in the black section. As many as four families, and in some cases, boarders who slept in shifts, shared a house, and children shared bedrooms with sexually active adults. Women had to cook in shifts to prepare meals for all the male workers who lived in the house. Still, Atkinson insists, decent wages and the opportunity to educate their children were among the advantages that made life in Lynch preferable to the tenant farms most of them had left behind.⁷⁷

Despite segregation, welfare management in company towns ameliorated living conditions for blacks and continued to improve over time. Constance Owens, born in 1910, came to Lynch from Bessemer, Alabama, in the 1920s. She recalled a number of improvements for blacks in the late twenties. Black children who had previously been educated in a small house, then Mt. Sinai, the black church, and the undertaker's shop, finally had a high school, the Lynch Colored High School. They had a YMCA and, even though they had to sit in the balcony, could go to the theater, dance hall, and pool hall.

⁷⁷ Atkinson interview.

She said that while most young people looked to school, home and church for recreation because they felt uncomfortable associating with whites at any level, Lynch blacks fared considerably better than their rural and urban counterparts.⁷⁸

Clara Clements, a lifelong Lynch resident, agreed that life in Lynch was an improvement for most black families, but argued that class and gender discrimination existed both inside and outside the black community:

Ministers, educators, and health care providers were the top rung on the hierarchy in the black community. Except in the mines themselves, Lynch was totally segregated. There was some interaction between the blacks and Hungarians, Italians, and other Caucasians, but it was limited. Both blacks and whites lived on a few streets.⁷⁹

Ethel Faulkner also insisted that a class structure existed within the black community and that degree of color was one determiner of class. Faulkner, who is part Native American, considered herself superior to darker skinned blacks. She referred to women she considered low-class as “coloreds” and “big black women,” and recounted story after story of violence and moral decadence within this “lower” class. Her argument that light skinned and mixed-race blacks are always more refined than their darker counterparts is a classic example of racism that exists even within the black community.⁸⁰

Racial and class inequality were not the only factors that prevented Lynch from becoming the harmonious environment U. S. Coal and Coke desired. Despite its

⁷⁸ Constance Owens, interview by Beverly Owens, tape recording, Lynch, Kentucky, April 5, 1982, Appalachian Archives.

⁷⁹ Clements interview.

⁸⁰ Ethel Winton Faulkner, interview by Ronald Edgar Collier, videotape, Cumberland, Kentucky, February 5, 1999, Appalachian Archives. I heard similar stories from my father and other miners and often heard them say that blacks were not the same as white people—that God never intended for the races to be equal.

reputation as a model town, Lynch never enjoyed the sense of community that Benham residents so proudly claim. As Caudill pointed out:

As a place to live and work it was somehow out of joint from the beginning. It bore a somber and foreboding aura that it could never shake off. The valley is so narrow that the mountains, towering nearly 3,000 feet, are overpowering in their immensity and nearness. They shoulder out the light until the sun is high in the sky, and they bring early shade in the afternoon. The stone walls of the huge buildings are as grim as prisons. Everything is too ordered, preordained, and subdued; the eye of Big Steel is too pervasive. Spontaneity never felt at home there. Lynch was designed by engineers and was as utilitarian and artless as a sledgehammer.⁸¹

Such an environment would present a daunting challenge for the miners' wives and daughters who were charged with the responsibility of turning the town into a community suitable for nurturing families under the cold and watchful eye of Big Steel.

⁸¹ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 102.

CHAPTER 4: GENDER ROLES IN PAPER MILL AND COAL MINING TOWNS

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.

Barbara Welter¹

Women's roles in Millinocket, East Millinocket, Benham and Lynch differed significantly from their roles in other factory and mill towns. Since Great Northern, U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel designated only the male population as deserving of wages for the work they performed, women were totally dependent on male support. In addition, payment of a family wage institutionalized the concept of the nuclear family consisting of a husband, wife and children as the primary economic and social unit and the designation of the man as the primary wage earner.

The impetus for paying a wage sufficient to support a wife and children came from a number of sources. Male workers, especially union members, saw it as a way to keep women out of the workforce. It prevented them from competing for jobs by working for lower wages than men. In the twentieth century work culture, men's inability to provide adequate support for their families was detrimental to masculine pride. In addition, if wives worked outside the home, their husbands would be unable to protect them from exploitation by supervisors or other male workers in the workplace. Such a risk was a threat to a man's honor.

¹ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966) 151-174.

A wage sufficient to support a family was attractive to wives because it provided an escape from the rigors from the workplace and allowed them to devote themselves exclusively to the nurture of husbands and children. Since a man's wages were the only source of cash income, women's contributions to the family economy had more to do with household management rather than household production. Despite the fact that they were not paid wages, women's labor and management skills provided a standard of living substantially superior to that of other working class environments, which in effect created a working class elite. Their acceptance of the family wage principle also worked to the corporation's benefit in that it enabled them to increase their profits by availing themselves of women's unpaid labor.

Women's labor was not considered worthy of wages, but it was the focus of both reform efforts and welfare management programs. Whether administered by Great Northern's Social Services Division or the American Iron and Steel Institute's Welfare Division, the programs were remarkably similar. Wisconsin Steel's programs in Benham are well documented, and Marlene Hunt Rickard's study of a U. S. Steel subsidiary similar to United States Coal and Coke, the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company, provides pertinent information about their programs. Rickard found that because "disease, polluted water, and poor nutrition took a heavy toll on the workforce," health programs were a welfare management priority. Welfare proponents had little difficulty convincing corporate executives that such programs were necessary since accidents and illness were costly in terms of worker morale as well as reduced production. Women's participation was essential to the success of such programs.

Recognition of the need for welfare programs preceded the building of Benham and Lynch. Initially, the directors of the American Iron and Steel Institute tried to avoid the responsibility and the cost of providing a healthy work and living environment even though they had created a Welfare Department. They hired Dr. Thomas Darlington, a previous employee of United States Steel, at a salary of \$6,000 a year plus travel expenses to “investigate and report on conditions and to aid the Committee” in examining the conditions and needs of its plants.²

Darlington’s first report to the institute’s board of directors on September 27, 1911 followed up on responses to a questionnaire concerning the drinking water supply at member plants. His recommendations included suggestions to build outhouses in the early steel company towns to prevent pollution of the rivers and streams, control water temperature in storage facilities to prevent bacteria from multiplying, and install water treatment systems.³

There is no record of how the directors responded, but in a similar report on October 26, Dr. Darlington made a connection between contaminated milk and the high rate of infant mortality in all the villages and towns connected with the industry represented by the American Iron and Steel Institute. He had received a report of contamination of milk supplies at the Maryland Steel Company and had advised the company to replace its present barns where their 100 cows produced the milk sold to employees with sanitary new ones. The board, rather than acknowledge their possible

² American Iron and Steel Institute Directors’ Twelfth Meeting, May 24, 1911, American Iron and Steel Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware.

³ American Iron and Steel Institute Directors’ Thirteenth Meeting, September 27, 1911, American Iron and Steel Papers.

culpability in the issue, shifted the focus back to the home. Secretary James T. McCleary wrote in the minutes that the board had concluded: "Health and efficiency of workmen are largely dependent upon home conditions. Contentment and health in the household is one of the most important factors. Serious illness in the household takes a man's mind from his work, he is much more subject to accident, and his efficiency is lowered."⁴ This response indicated that the institute's concern was workers' productivity, and while not explicitly stated, it implied that regardless of conditions beyond women's control such as contamination of the milk supply, workers' health was their responsibility.⁵

Dr. Darlington's reports prompted member corporations of the Iron and Steel Institute to develop health education programs for women in the home and men in the workplace as a means of bolstering productivity and to devise a system for monitoring corporate and worker compliance with guidelines. Wisconsin Steel was one of those member corporations. In 1917, Wisconsin Steel, under the Welfare Committee's supervision, hired nurse Ethel Thompson to assist company doctors A. C. Foster and a Dr. Nash. Thompson was charged not only with the responsibility for monitoring workers' health, but also for teaching wives domestic skills and sanitary practices that would create healthy living conditions.

The need for such services created an interest in nurses trained in welfare work and company executives needed to ascertain how to make the most efficient use of their skills. In a letter dated February 28, 1917, Wisconsin Steel vice president C. F. Biggert

⁴ American Iron and Steel Institute Directors' Fourteenth Meeting, October 26, 1911.

⁵ Ibid.

informed Benham superintendent R. R. Schellenger that the American Iron and Steel Institute had made the following request:

It seems desirable with this increased experience to obtain the opinion of the employer as to the usefulness of the nurse and the range of her work. In your company is the nurse's work simply the ordinary assistance in first aid or in a hospital, or does she visit outside? Does she have conferences with employes' [sic] families and visit them personally in their home and give help and instruction when needed? Does she make any study of the food supply suited to the income of the family? Does she instruct in the purchase of food or in method of preparation in order to do away with ignorant and slovenly practices? Does she study household budgets? Does she instruct in the hygiene of home, in the need of adequate ventilation, in the cleanliness of the person and the household? What is done for the care of women and children? In the proper guidance of the expectant mother, in nursing after confinement, and the relation of hours of sleep or in prevention of infection and correction of physical defects? On the whole, what is your Company's opinion of the value of the trained nurse as a part of its staff?⁶

In addition, the institute requested information about how many nurses were employed and asked that the nurse describe her work, the good she felt she was accomplishing and any incidents she might like to share. While this list was posed in the form of questions, it could also be interpreted as a set of guidelines the institute was suggesting that companies follow.

Schellenger referred the questions to Dr. A. C. Foster who responded that Thompson performed all those duties and more. He quoted her report:

I assist the doctors in cases of injuries and in rendering first aid, also in operations. The greater portion of my work is looking after obstetrical cases before and after confinement, visiting and taking care of mother until she is able to look after child and herself, instructing as far as possible the proper care she should take of herself and child. Instruction in the cleanliness of the person and household, in the need of adequate ventilation and personal hygiene. I am always under instructions of the doctor concerning all cases at all times.⁷

⁶ C. F. Biggert to R. R. Schellenger, February 25, 1917; see also Dr. A. C. Foster, Letter to R. R. Schellenger, March 10, 1917, International Harvester Papers, Appalachian Archives, Southeast Community College, Cumberland, Kentucky.

⁷ C. F. Biggert to Mr. Thomas Darlington, April 5, 1917, International Harvester Papers.

The information was then relayed all the way up the chain of command from Schellenger to Biggert to Darlington himself. That these questions were generated at such a high institutional level indicates that the industry had reconsidered its assessment of the importance of family health to workers' productivity. The obvious connection between sanitary living conditions, proper nutrition, personal hygiene and health made the issue too important to ignore.

Considering the importance both reformers and corporate executives placed on the home as the sustaining unit of society, the focus on women's responsibilities is hardly surprising. An indication that mining towns were under pressure to give account of their programs for women and children is a letter from Wisconsin Steel's Works Auditor at Benham dated December 12, 1917, to Julia C. Lathrop, chief of the Children's Bureau in Washington. He wrote that he was returning a questionnaire she sent inquiring about infant welfare work in Benham and said that though the company did not have such a program, it had a nurse who not only monitored the sanitation of homes but "takes care of all the mothers and babies until the mother is able to look after the child herself." He added that the company supplied all medicine, that the houses were far enough apart to provide plenty of light and air and with ample room for children to play, and that residents were provided with a good sized garden and allowed to own cows that produced milk for their own use and to sell to their neighbors.⁸

A final note made mention of the fact that the company maintained both black and white YMCAs and in addition to their secretaries and assistants, employed "a welfare

⁸ Works Auditor to Julia C. Lathrop, Chief, Children's Bureau, Department of Labor, December 12, 1917, International Harvester Papers.

worker in connection with each Y. M. C. A. and those welfare workers conduct classes in domestic science, hygiene, etc., also have charge of the Camp Fire Girls and “Blue Birds” and do general welfare work in the camp.”⁹ While this company employee may have embellished the facts somewhat, the letter provides ample evidence of an active welfare management program.

Utilization of the physical labor and the persuasive powers of women to keep the workforce healthy provided the means for the company to avoid the implication that they considered residents incapable of providing for their own needs and monitoring their own health. Since men who would tolerate surveillance and supervision by supervisors and foreman on the job were likely to resent intrusion into their homes, the health of the worker in the home would need to be the domain of workers’ wives.

The nurse would be responsible for conveying the Welfare Institute’s expectations to women. There were no written rules or regulations for acceptable behavior, but all residents understood that only those women and children who observed company policies were welcome in the towns. The cultures and traditions that had determined their past behavior would take a secondary position to company policy. There would be no place for the slovenly or self-indulgent wife or the neglectful mother. There would be no excuse for unhealthy, unruly or delinquent children. Families would not be allowed to accumulate trash around their homes as was common in rural areas and were expected to maintain the company property they inhabited in a clean and sanitary manner. They were expected to supplement the food they could obtain from the company store or local merchants by growing gardens and raising livestock. If families experienced difficulty in

⁹ Works Auditor to Julia Lathrop.

meeting these standards, the nurse or welfare worker was available to help them. Though the nurses' intervention was not optional, families generally welcomed their assistance.

Great Northern's major means for disseminating information about the company's recommendations for maintaining a healthy environment and a healthy family was *The Northern* newsletter. There is no evidence of nurses visiting workers' homes but *The Northern* contained hundreds of articles on proper nutrition, sanitary housekeeping methods and health. It included reports of women's social events, including a menu of dishes served, recipes, advice about personal hygiene, cleaning refrigerators, lamp burners and griddles and tips on how to get rid of flies and mice. As in Benham and Lynch, women were expected to maintain clean and well-ordered homes. In addition to the responsibility for raising well-mannered children, they were encouraged to participate in church and community organizations. In Millinocket and East Millinocket control mechanisms were less institutionalized, but were ingrained in the mill town culture.

Private doctors delivered babies and attended to families' illnesses and injuries, but the company assumed responsibility for attending to workers' injuries in the workplace. In 1920, according to a report in *The Northern*, the company opened a hospital staffed by a company doctor and nurse. The hospital contained a ward with beds, an operating room, a first aid room, doctor's office, waiting room, and a bath, possibly for treating chemical exposure cases. These facilities were restricted to employees and at the end of the year the staff reported that they had applied 3,172 dressings and treated 729 cases, an average of two critical cases a day. Though this was a

terrible safety record, it never received the attention paid to mine safety, perhaps because no fatalities were reported.¹⁰

The school curriculum included courses in Home Economics and the women interviewed said that girls were expected to take those courses. All residents were encouraged to improve themselves, to become more highly skilled and safety-conscious workers, better citizens, and better Americans. The March 1924 edition of *The Northern* was devoted to the Bangor Free Evening School that included classes in Americanization, literacy, trade skills, and the domestic arts. The goal of the school, according to *The Northern*, was “to give instruction to wage-earning people, to furnish them an opportunity to obtain practical information required for business and industrial life and thus increase their earning power.”¹¹

In all four towns, the majority of the health care programs were designed to teach women principles of proper childcare, sanitary housekeeping methods, and nutritious meal planning. Since a healthy diet was considered a vital component of health, the company encouraged people to grow vegetables by providing seeds and fertilizer and offering prizes for the best gardens. In Benham and Lynch, visiting nurses conducted some training through the schools but much of it, particularly meal planning and housekeeping methods, took place in the home where they could closely monitor the results.¹²

¹⁰ “First Aid Rooms—Millinocket Plant,” *The Northern*, March 1922, 3-4.

¹¹ “The Bangor Free Evening School,” *The Northern*, March, 1924, 2-5.

¹² Rikard, “An Experiment in Welfare Capitalism,” 74, 75.

Prevailing ideology about women's responsibility for their families' health and welfare determined acceptable standards for women's performance in the home and community. In the company town culture where women did not have to work outside the home, they were judged by their proficiency in domestic skills. No respectable mother would send her children to church or school with dirty faces, uncombed hair, or torn, wrinkled or soiled clothing. Nor would they send them to school hungry, even if breakfast consisted of only a bowl of oatmeal, dry cereal, or biscuits and gravy. Women were expected to attend to their husbands' needs and to maintain a scrupulously clean and ordered household. The most admired were those who could competently manage their households on their husbands' wages. Frugal money managers knew how to "stretch a dollar" but also found ways to supplement their husbands' incomes. Women's labor in growing and preserving food; tending livestock for milk, eggs, butter and cheese; butchering and preserving chicken, pigs and cows; sewing and mending clothing; quilting; and knitting or crocheting warm winter clothing was essential to the family economy.¹³

As consumers, women made important contributions to the local economy. Men's cash wages made it possible to purchase items formerly produced at home, such as clothing, bed linens and furniture. In Benham and Lynch, women could buy these products at the company store or order them from mail-order houses such as Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, or Spiegel that offered an even greater variety of products

¹³ Bobbi Gothard, interview with author, tape recording, March 23, 2001, Appalachian Archives and Northeast Archives; Loretta Manzo, interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, February 19, 2001, Northeast Archives; Euna Mae Caudill, interview with author, tape recording, March 20, 2000, Appalachian Archives and Northeast Archives.

than company stores or those in the neighboring town of Cumberland. Though Millinocket and East Millinocket women could buy products from local merchants or travel to Bangor and beyond to shop, catalogs provided an inexpensive and convenient way to purchase products. Magazines such as *Women's Day* and *Ladies Home Journal* brought women into the American mainstream and created a desire for products by keeping them informed about the latest in clothing fashions, home decorating trends and modern appliances. Being an educated consumer made it possible for women to improve the quality of day-to-day life, but large purchases such as furniture, appliances, car, travel, or sending children to college required savings. Through frugal management, workers' wives were able to put aside money for such expenditures.¹⁴

Whether due to religious beliefs or the lack of access to birth control many working-class families in these towns had eight or more children.¹⁵ The increase in population contributed significantly to the focus on women in welfare management programs. Employers of large immigrant workforces were among the most likely to engage in welfare work because education and socialization programs were vitally important in acculturating the diverse population of families to residence in company towns. But while the corporate emphasis on children's education and welfare was due in part to the need to supervise large numbers of children, it was also a reaction to child welfare reform movements. In 1890, Chicago, the location of Wisconsin Steel's headquarters was among the cities that established a Children's Aid Society patterned after the one founded in 1853 by Charles Loring Brace in New York. The 1893

¹⁴ Glessie Parker, conversation with author.

¹⁵ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

depression led to the formation of the League for the Protection of the Family that called for the compulsory education of all children aged five to eighteen years old to keep them out of factories and mines.¹⁶

By 1907 and 1908 these movements became national in scope and, as Robert Weibe pointed out, organizations such as “the National Child Labor Committee, the National Housing Association, the American Association for Labor Legislation, the Committee of One Hundred on National Health, and dozens more, either planned, founded, or refurbished during this critical transition.”¹⁷ Mandell argued that welfare workers and reformers who organized these movements were convinced that “social conflicts could be overcome by teaching their poor working-class clients to live according to the gendered ideals of the Victorian family” with the father as primary provider and women and children dependent on his wages.¹⁸ This meant that children would have to be properly trained to fulfill their assigned roles. In order to achieve the desired results, such training had to begin in the home.

Feminist theorist Heidi Hartman saw children’s training and socialization as a crucial component in the perpetuation of the twentieth century interpretation of patriarchy:

Rearing children, whether or not the children’s labor power is of immediate benefit to their fathers, is nevertheless a crucial task in perpetuating patriarchy as a system. Just as class society must be reproduced by schools, work places, consumption norms, etc., so must patriarchal social relations. . . . Children are generally reared by women at home, women socially defined and recognized as inferior to men,

¹⁶ Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 94, 98.

¹⁷ Weibe, *Search for Order*, 198-199.

¹⁸ Mandel, *Corporation as Family*, 8, 44, 45.

while men appear in the domestic picture only rarely. Children raised in this way generally learn their places in the gender hierarchy well.¹⁹

In the “Victorian family model,” women assumed responsibility for providing material needs, instilling moral values, supervising activities and training children to become citizens.²⁰ To further insure the quality and uniformity of children’s training as they matured, the training had to be institutionalized. Hartman argued that patriarchal values had to be “enforced and reinforced by churches, schools, sports, clubs, unions, armies, factories, offices, . . . the media, etc.” The speed with which corporations provided for these institutions indicates the priority they placed on establishing such control measures.²¹

Weibe argued that the emphasis on child welfare was a progressive era phenomenon:

The child was the central theme of humanitarian progressivism. He united the campaigns for health, education, and a richer city environment, and he dominated much of the interest in labor legislation. Female wage earners—mothers in absentia—received far closer attention than male, movements for industrial safety and workmen’s compensation invariably raised the specter of the unprotected young, and child labor laws drew the progressives’ unanimous support. . . . The child was the carrier of tomorrow’s hope whose innocence and freedom made him singularly receptive to education in rational, humane behavior. Protect him, nurture him, and in his manhood he would create that bright new world of the progressive’s vision.²²

Children’s welfare had been a central issue in nineteenth century domesticity discussions, but it now became the focus of national attention. Pressure for reform came from many

¹⁹ Heidi Hartmann, “Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 101.

²⁰ Mandell, *Corporation as Family*, 8.

²¹ Hartmann, “Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” 101.

²² Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 169.

sources. Critics of child labor such as William Jennings Bryan and Owen R. Lovejoy, Assistant Secretary of the National Child Labor Committee, were too numerous and important to ignore. In addition, Progressive women and church leaders condemned labor policies that affected children's welfare—low wages, unhealthy living conditions, strikes, lockouts, mobs and violence.²³

Government involvement came in response to such vocal insistence on legislation for children's welfare. The federal government established the Children's Bureau in 1912, and in 1916, Congress passed the federal child labor law. This law set the minimum age for children in most industries at fourteen, sixteen in mines and quarries, and limited the hours they could work to an eight-hour day and a forty-eight hour week. In 1918 the Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional, but by then the corporations in this study had already incorporated children's education into their welfare management programs, and though many of the smaller operations had employed children as young as ten or twelve years old, no children were ever employed in their mills and mines.²⁴

Legislators, company officials, educators and reformers shared an equally compelling motivation to occupy children's time with useful projects: the grave concern

²³ J. W. Hart, "The Church and the Workingmen," *The Christian Advocate* (October 4, 1906); rpt. *The Public* 9 (October 13, 1906) http://www.boondocksnet.com/labor/cl_061004.html, In Jim Zwich, ed., *The Campaign to End Child Labor*, <http://www.boondocksnet.com/labor/> (May 16, 2003); William Jennings Bryan, "William Jennings Bryan on Child Labor," *Chicago Record-Herald* (September 7, 1906), rpt. *The Public* 9 (October 13, 1906). http://www.boondocksnet.com/labor/cl_060907.html In Jim Zwich, ed., *The Campaign to End Child Labor*. <http://www.boondocksnet.com/labor/>, May 16, 2003; Owen R. Lovejoy, "Child Labor in the Soft Coal Mines," *Child Labor and the Republic* (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1907; BoondocksNet Edition, 2001), <http://www.boondocksnet.com/editions/clr/> (May 16, 2003).

²⁴ My father was one of the children employed in a privately owned mine at age 12 and he recalled working with other boys as young as ten. Because he was small, he was able to crawl on his hands and knees through small tunnels.

that unemployed and unsupervised children would resort to mischievous or destructive behavior. Large numbers of children had the potential to create serious social problems if not carefully monitored, but could be a valuable labor resource if properly acculturated to the work ethic. Welfare management proponents argued that the programs they endorsed could provide the solution to these problems.

Though subject to oversight by accreditation boards and the state, the company schools in this study were crucibles where immigrants, blacks and native-born whites were indoctrinated with patriotic ideals, loyalty to the company, and an industrial work ethic. In addition to Americanizing and uplifting the populace as a whole, certified and well-paid teachers in company schools provided a high level of primary and secondary education unusual for the time. Not all workers took advantage of advanced educational opportunity; miners' sons often left school before graduation to work in the mines. In Millinocket and East Millinocket, any young man who graduated from high school was guaranteed a job in the mill, and since the mill paid relatively high wages, there was little incentive to look to other professions or locations for employment. But for students interested in and able to pursue a profession, the quality education prepared them for college training in professions that would benefit the company as well as the town: lawyers, accountants, doctors, and school principals; and women for training to become nurses and teachers.²⁵

Another motivation for the focus on children's education was compliance with state and federal laws. Compulsory school attendance laws had gone into effect in Maine

²⁵ In Benham and Lynch, the white teachers were graduates of accredited teachers colleges and black teachers were hired out of Tuskegee Institute. Most Millinocket and East Millinocket teachers were educated at normal schools or the University of Maine.

in 1875 and in Kentucky in 1896, but the degree of compliance varied considerably.

Maine's constitution contained a mandate for towns to provide, at their own expense, for the support and maintenance of public schools. There is no evidence that such a mandate existed for the unincorporated towns of Benham and Lynch, but building schools would have brought them into compliance with state law.

Women's involvement in school activities was not only accepted, it was welcomed. The company would not have been able to operate a school system without the women teachers and residents who worked together for the benefit of children. Social engagement with other women was both a motivation and reward for participation in school related activities, membership in garden clubs, and other exclusively female and children's welfare related organizations. Within their individual enclaves women formed support groups and sometimes joined with women from other groups to provide the funds and labor needed for community and cultural improvements. Their personal initiative and interaction ultimately created a subculture that worked in conjunction with, though it remained subordinate to the male work cultures of the mill and mines.

In addition, women's friendships provided emotional, physical, and sometimes, economic support. Because men were away from home most of the day and even longer periods when working split and double shifts, women had to depend on each other, especially during periods of illness or crisis. They supported each other by taking care of children when the mother was ill, providing physical assistance during and after childbirth, taking charge when there was a death in the family, and caring for the elderly when they could no longer care for themselves. Shared concerns for their husbands' safety and welfare created an additional bond. Many church and community gatherings

provided a functional purpose such as fundraising for charity or church maintenance and social interaction. Women used such occasions as quilting and sewing parties, gardening, and preserving food for the winter as an opportunity to visit with friends and neighbors.²⁶

In assessing the importance of women's contributions to the culture and economy of these towns, it is important to remember that both men and women assumed gender roles designed to preserve male hegemony. This was true throughout the United States in the early twentieth century, but was more characteristic of these towns because of women's dependency on men's wages. Sociologist Sally Ward Maggard argued that the ultimate success of the capitalistic system depended on keeping women subordinate: "Housework and the reproduction of workers is central to capitalism; and women as mothers reproduce not only laborers and capitalists, but also the psychodynamic of sexuality which underpins capitalism."²⁷ Such a psychodynamic centered on women's acceptance of supporting roles in the family and community.

Women's acceptance of male domination included support of churches that stressed qualities of passivity; willingness to subordinate their own needs to their husbands, families and church; piety; cleanliness; and sexual purity. In the church, women's empowerment was limited by exclusion from positions of authority such as pastors or deacons, but they provided support services such as teaching Sunday School classes, singing in the choir, contributing floral arrangements, keeping the church clean, cooking for church events, and raising funds for charity and church renovations.²⁸

²⁶ Loretta Manzo interview; Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs."

²⁷ Sally Ward Maggard, "Class and Gender: New Theoretical Priorities in Appalachian Studies" *Impact of Institution in Appalachia*, Proceedings of the Eight Annual Appalachian Studies Conference, Berea, Kentucky, 1985 (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1986), 104.

²⁸ Edna Lewis, conversation with author, Dione, Kentucky, March 20, 2001.

Mothers reproduced sexual roles by training their children to perpetuate early twentieth century conceptions of masculinity and femininity and power relations that determined gender and class construction. The most important manifestation of male power was the right to dominate women and children. As sole wage earner and the only family member with the right to participate in the political process, men could maintain their status as heads of household. Though no official or publicly stated rules existed for proper female behavior, all women were subject to economic and societal pressures to avoid any behavior that might harm their husbands' reputation in the community and workplace.²⁹

A primary concern for men was preservation of male authority. Formerly self-employed men who worked for wages perceived unions as an avenue to power. In an essay on masculinity in the nineteenth-century North, historian Sylvia Hoffert wrote:

Wage laborers found themselves increasingly distanced from their supervisors and increasingly unable as individuals to influence the conditions under which they worked. This did not mean they were powerless. It simply became obvious that if they expected to define their masculinity in terms of their ability to support their families and to maintain their dignity as workers, they would have to take collective action rather than rely on themselves.³⁰

Collective action assumed an even greater importance in the industrial environment of the twentieth century. Perceived power may have been as important as actual power and membership in unions and the process of collective bargaining gave the impression, accurate or not, that workers could affect company policies.

²⁹ Howard interview; Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers*, 193-194.

³⁰ Sylvia D. Hoffert, "Femininity in the Twentieth Century (1920-1975)," *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles*, ed. Sylvia D. Hoffert. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 93.

Boys learned that masculinity was linked to independence, self-respect, and the importance of being the sole breadwinner in maintaining their position as head of the family. Aligning with other men in formal and informal associations was one attempt to limit women's moral influence and increasing power in the domestic sphere. Since there was no threat of women attempting to join their unions, men responded to challenges to their traditional methods of patriarchal control by restricting women from the workplace altogether in order to guarantee their financial dependence.³¹

Other measures of masculinity were emotional and psychological strength as well as physical size and strength. Such physically demanding and dangerous jobs as logging, papermaking, and coal mining required that men be not only be physically fit, but emotionally stable enough to face the dangers inherent in the performance of their jobs; men who possessed those qualities considered themselves and were considered by others to be superior to physically smaller and more emotional women. The development of a strong body was a compelling incentive for boys to participate in sports. Michael S. Kimmel maintained that baseball promoted harmony in industrial environments:

Baseball became one of the central mechanisms by which masculinity was reconstituted at the turn of the century, as well as one of the vehicles by which the various classes, races, and ethnic groups that were thrown together into the urban melting pot accommodated themselves to industrial class society and developed the temperaments that facilitated the transition to a consumer culture.³²

The introduction of sports programs represents one of the methods corporations used to stress physical fitness, provide a healthy outlet for aggression, teach discipline, promote

³¹ Allan C. Carlsen, "The Family Wage Problem," *The Family Wage: Work, Gender, and Children in the Modern Economy*, Proceedings from the Rockford Institute Conference, ed. Bryce Christianson (Rockford, IL: Rockford Institute, 1988) 16-17.

³² Michael S. Kimmel, "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920," *A History of Gender in America*, 461.

company loyalty, and provide relief from the rigors of industry. Team sports were also tied to workers' concepts of masculinity. They formed bowling teams, frequented poolrooms, and attended boxing matches. But it was baseball that involved all residents of these towns, including women and children, either as participants or spectators.

The promoters of welfare management understood this vehicle well. Though, as Stephen Pope argued, the baseball tradition was essentially a bourgeois endeavor and that "workers embraced the game at its inception . . . [in part because] it represented a means of social mobility," baseball represented the American dream that any person, regardless of race, nationality, or class could achieve respectability, wealth, and fame. Success as a player in the all-American sport allowed men to gain respect in the company and the community. Players hired by corporations to play in company towns came to symbolize the realization of immigrant aspirations to the possibilities of transcending social class, not only in their towns, but also in American society as a whole. Though ostensibly hired as workers, men who proved to be competent athletes were rewarded with good jobs and excellent pay because of their value in promoting company loyalty.³³

According to Kimmel, as baseball became more and more representative of American corporate values, watching the game came to be considered almost as valuable as playing the game: "The values that were thought to be instilled by playing baseball were now thought to be instilled by watching baseball. And values of discipline, self-

³³ Steven W. Pope, "Patriotic Pastimes: Sporting Traditions and the American Identity, 1876-1926" (Ph.D. diss. History Department, University of Maine, 1993), 152-154.

control, and sacrifice for the team and an acceptance of hierarchy were central to the accommodation of a rapidly developing working class to the new industrial order.”³⁴

Women’s participation in sports was limited to a spectator role. Sports historian William Baker explained that though sports encouraged the development of “masculine” traits, families were encouraged to attend because the presence of women and children among the spectators discouraged such undesirable behavior that often accompanied the games such as heavy drinking, fighting among the fans, and gambling. To encourage family participation, there was normally no admission fee required to attend the games.³⁵

The perception of women as a moderating influence on undesirable male behavior was a defining characteristic of their roles, but though it was considered appropriate to exert influence, they were never to allow themselves to appear controlling. Role models for girls were wives and mothers who taught them the importance of deferring to male authority. Alternatives to marriage were practically non-existent. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, while suffragists and reformers were fighting for women’s political and economic empowerment, women in these towns were excluded from participation in politics. There is no evidence that even managers’ wives were involved with such woman-dominated political organizations as the National Consumers’ League, or that black women participated in such organizations as the National Association of Colored Women. Despite the large numbers of Catholic women who resided in the towns, there is no mention of women’s membership in such organizations as the National Association of Catholic women.

³⁴ Kimmel, “Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity,” *A History of Gender in America*, 464.

³⁵ William Baker, telephone conversation with author, May 8, 2003.

Of the many oral histories obtained for this study, only one interviewee in Millinocket referred to feminism and none in Millinocket, Benham or Lynch. The payment of a family wage succeeded in keeping women out of the workplace, but since few women could afford to hire domestic help, the demands of housework and nurturing husbands and children limited the leisure time necessary to pursue avenues for self-development and self-empowerment. Parker said that to her knowledge few women in Harlan County voted even after suffrage was granted and those who did voted the way their husbands did. There is no indication that they were willing to openly challenge a system that provided economic security, even though it denied equality.³⁶

³⁶ Parker, conversation with author.

CHAPTER 5: A WOMAN'S PLACE: THE WOMEN OF MILLINOCKET AND EAST MILLINOCKET

The women who came to Millinocket can be separated into two groups: those who accompanied the early workers and those who joined their husbands and fathers after the towns were constructed and settled. The women who came with the original group of men lived hard lives trying to make homes for their husbands and children out of the shacks. Peter Plourde's wife was among the first group. The mother of seven children, she traveled from the town of Winn thirty miles away in a horse-drawn buckboard loaded with all her family's belongings and set up housekeeping in two tents, one for cooking and one for sleeping. She was among the first wave of women who faced the challenge of turning temporary housing into a permanent community. Mary Crawford, who joined her husband in 1910 after he was already working at the mill, was part of the second group that arrived sporadically over the next two decades. She traveled by ship from Scotland to Boston and by train from Boston to Millinocket with a one-year-old baby, and two daughters aged three and five. Though conditions had improved somewhat by this time, the town still had all the markings of a frontier town, complete with unpaved streets and buildings under construction.¹

The challenge the early arrivals faced was to bring order to the physical and social environment. Not all the women were married to millworkers. Some accompanied men who wanted to establish businesses in the town. And some, like the two teen-age Syrian girls who survived a number of "misadventures" on their journey from the Old World,

¹ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 14.

did not come to join male family members, but were sponsored by a local peddler. Both girls later married Millinocket men and stayed to raise their families in the town.²

Nor did all women come willingly. Immigrant women often felt displaced and homesick. Serene Mosca and her mother were among the women who came later and settled in Little Italy. Mosca's father was a brick mason who came to Millinocket in the early 1920s when she was only nine months old. She was twelve before her father saved enough money to pay for their passage to America. A friend in Italy told Mosca that her mother had "cried and cried and cried" when she had to leave her family to come to America. Apparently she felt that if her husband wanted her to come, she had no choice as a dutiful wife but to honor his wishes. She made the journey and gave birth to four more children in America. Though they had a beautiful home in Millinocket and raised pigs, chickens and a beautiful flower and vegetable garden, she was never happy. In 1943 she lost her eyesight and the responsibility for her care and the care of the younger children fell to Serene, the oldest daughter. Mosca had just graduated from high school and because tradition in Italian families was that the oldest daughter had to take over when the mother was no longer able, she had to give up her dream of going to college. Mosca believes her mother's unhappiness about leaving her family and homeland may have contributed to the illness that blinded her.³

Like Mosca, many Italians came to Millinocket as children, some with their mothers, but not all. Dick Monza's father was Italian, "born in Italy, come over when he was twelve years old like a piece of baggage with a tag on him, with two brothers" to live

² Laverty, *Millinocket, Magic City*, 15, 16.

³ Serene Mosca, interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, March 14, 2001, Northeast Archives.

with his grandfather. Some families came together as a group rather than leave home and family behind. Delia Cummings recalled that her French Canadian family came to Millinocket looking for work: “They had been like traveling vagabonds . . . they came as a family and settled here.” They never left; her grandfather worked in the mill, her mother married a mill worker, and their son and grandson, four generations in all, worked in the mill. This was a common pattern; once the family put down roots, subsequent generations tended to stay in the town. Sons followed their fathers into the mill and the daughters married mill workers.⁴

In some cases, whole neighborhoods in search of jobs relocated together. After the mill opened on November 1, 1900, ethnic pockets became more pronounced as more and more families arrived. In addition to ethnic separation, there was also a division between single and married men. Single men lived in Dick Levasseur’s boardinghouse, while married men with families clustered on Shack Hill, a temporary housing area near the construction site. This early housing consisted of hastily constructed tarpaper shacks that housed the laborers who would build the mill and the town.⁵

According to Lavery, Shack Hill was literally “lousy” with lice, cockroaches, and bedbugs. Women would set up housekeeping in any dwelling that had a roof to avoid the unsanitary conditions that existed in boarding houses. She wrote, “Every woman moving to Millinocket came to do battle with dirt and grime and ‘varmints.’ Her trusted boiler and tub served as formidable weapons, both for bath and wash day.” In view of

⁴ Monza interview; Delia Cummings, interview with author, tape recording, Millinocket, March 12, 2001, Northeast Archives.

⁵ Lavery, *Millinocket, Magic City*, 14.

such a dismal description, it would seem that women would have been reluctant to stay in such an environment.⁶

Not so, according to Lavery. She described the world of women on Shack Hill as “a veritable beehive” with children playing on the hill above the construction site, happily picking flowers and strawberries and mothers picking greens for the family dinner. Even the peddlers were female, “young girls with shawls over their heads and baskets on their arms” selling “pins, needles, thread, and [other] domestic needs to the neighbors.” She did not explain how women, some of them pregnant or with small children were able to survive Maine’s brutally cold winter in tarpaper shacks.⁷

Many European immigrant workers who came without their families sent for them when they had saved enough money for their passage. When Fred Paluso brought his wife, Pauline, to Millinocket, other Italian women soon followed. Families lived wherever they could find shelter, usually in tents or ramshackle shacks crowded with other boarders, while homes were under construction. Within a decade, sturdy homes had replaced shacks in the ethnic enclaves in the Flat, Tin Can Alley, and on Medway Road. All the while, life continued as usual. Women cooked, cleaned, took care of children already born and carried those not yet born, sometimes without ever being able to communicate with other women in the town because of language differences.⁸

Immigrant groups developed their own methods for coping with their new environment. In “Little Italy” few of the early workers spoke English, so they depended

⁶ Lavery, *Millinocket, Magic City*, 32. Lavery was referring to the copper-lined boilers and washtubs commonly used for laundering during that period.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19, 20. In 1906 the Company ordered the houses on Shack Hill to be torn down.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

on their padrone, Fred Paluso, to act as liaison with Great Northern. Many of the French Canadians had worked in American factories or mills prior to coming to Millinocket and most of the men already had some command of the English language. People who spoke the same language tended to group together and children educated in Millinocket's schools translated for mothers when necessary.⁹

Older residents often had difficulty learning a new language. When young Delia Cummings visited her friend in Little Italy she was unable to communicate with the mother because she only spoke Italian. And when she visited her own grandparents, she said:

My grandfather spoke English—understood French; my grandmother spoke French and understood English. So the means of communication were nil between them. I remember eating at my grandfather's—my grandmother's table, which was a long kitchen table and here were all these kids sitting around, all my aunts and uncles, and when they spoke to my grandfather, it was in English, and when they spoke to my grandmother, it was in French. And they never lost—they [her aunts and uncles] never had an accent in their English—they could speak good French and good English growing up. Both languages were used in the house.¹⁰

Men found it necessary to speak English at work, but women who rarely ventured beyond their home and immediate community were less motivated. Language was not an issue in the Protestant church since most members spoke fluent English, but priests conducted masses in the traditional Latin familiar to most Catholics.

All the women interviewed, Catholic and Protestant, said they attended church services regularly and were involved in women's organizations within their church. Most women's organizations were connected to churches or were auxiliaries of men's organizations such as union locals, clubs, lodges, and associations. The 1910 *Annual*

⁹ Cummings interview.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Register of Maine listed two women's organizations in Millinocket, the Ladies Star Lodge and Natoma Rebekah. The Daughters of Rebecca were an important organization in providing physical assistance and emotional support for both Millinocket and East Millinocket women. Lavery mentioned only one woman's group among those organizations existing in Millinocket in 1903, an Irish Catholic woman's organization, the Loyal Orange Ladies Institution. Information about these clubs' activities is scarce, but oral histories indicate that the major function of most women's clubs was to provide support services for churches and raise money for charity.¹¹

In the auxiliary clubs, women provided the labor and services that insured the successful operation of the exclusively male organizations. They received no monetary compensation for their time and labor and had little or no say in how the funds they had raised were used. The fact that women were willing to donate their time and labor to support these organizations suggests that they performed their services out of a sense of responsibility to the community, and to enhance their husband's reputation with the company and in the community.

Wives of the managerial class had a vested interest in maintaining social networks and membership in such organizations as the Philharmonic Club and the Literary Club. Not all women's interactions were purely social, and not all social activities were organized, but even informal clubs like the Do-Nothings, a loosely organized social group of managers' wives, reflected a woman's economic and social class. It is unlikely that the mill superintendent's wife would cultivate social contacts with mill workers wives, but would choose her circle of friends and acquaintances from wives and

¹¹ *Annual Register of Maine*, 1910; Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 56.

daughters of mill executives such as Lavery, whose father became the head of Great Northern's engineering department when it was formed in 1911. Some women of Lavery's class lived in one of the more elegant homes while others visited only occasionally and stayed at the company's elegant Great Northern Hotel, usually during the summer, where they sat on the veranda or filled their hours with social events and leisure activities. Lavery recalled tennis matches, croquet games, and dressing for dinner. "It became a custom for a group of homesick brides to gather in the sunny rocking chairs [on the verandahs]," she wrote. "The Company" had its own guest house and company table in the dining room set with "the Whitcomb dishes," that Miss Lona, the hostess, reserved for dignitaries.¹²

Lavery's account reflects the privileges of her class. While upper class women's time in Millinocket was filled with social events and leisure activities, the daily life of a mill worker's wife was structured around domestic duties and her husband's shifts at the mill. By 1908, workers had negotiated an eight-hour day and Sundays off. There were three shifts: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m, 4 p.m to 12 p.m. and 12 p.m. to 8 a.m. The town's daily routine included the fire horn and everyone in town knew the whistle codes. Lavery wrote "At 8 a.m. it meant time for school and to mill office workers to begin their day. At 8 p.m., it meant the curfew when all youngsters were to be off the main street. In summer, it obligingly waited until 9 p.m." Horn signals, both at the fire station and at the mill, were used to spur the citizens into action against the fires that were Millinocket's major threat. House fires were common in wood frame houses heated by coal during the cold winters. The town, surrounded by forest, was vulnerable to forest fires, especially

¹² Lavery, *Millinocket, Magic City*, 41-42.

during summer dry spells. The signals also report other emergencies such as children, berry pickers, or hunters lost in the woods.¹³

The fire horn also let the women know there had been an accident at the mill; a code informed them of the nature of the accident. The women would drop what they were doing and listen for the code, then wait and watch to see which house the men in suits would visit. If the 1921 statistics listed in *The Northern* are an indication of how often accidents occurred, the sounding of the horn would have been an every day event.¹⁴

Shift work in the mill required creative scheduling in the home. Women with husbands on night shifts had to keep children quiet during the day so the men could sleep. Women often arranged for children of a father on night shift to play at a home where the father was at work. Mealtimes had to be adjusted to fit the man's schedule. Preparation of the dinner pail was one of a wife's most important jobs; to ensure that the worker had a hot meal, the bottom was filled with hot tea to keep the dinner and pie in the tray above hot. Children sometimes carried the dinner pails to their fathers and stayed to share the meal.¹⁵

The population swelled from eight people in 1890 to five thousand men, women and children in 1910. Contagious diseases became a major problem: in 1902 and 1903 epidemics of typhoid, mumps, diphtheria, chicken pox, measles, and smallpox killed many infants and small children. In 1902, the town created a board of health and appointed two doctors and a deputy sheriff to inspect livestock and to oversee the

¹³ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 47.

¹⁴ "First Aid Rooms—Millinocket Plant," *The Northern*, March 1922.

¹⁵ Polly Segee, interview by author, tape recording, Millinocket, Maine, March 10, 1999, Northeast Archives.

maintenance of outhouses. In 1903, during a smallpox epidemic, the problem became so severe that the town built a number of “pest houses” where they quarantined around 100 people and banned public funerals for those who died of the disease.¹⁶

Fear of such diseases placed enormous pressure on women to keep their homes clean and sanitary, but childbirth was women’s greatest health concern. In 1920 the average woman had five children, but many had eight or more by the time they were in their thirties.¹⁷ By 1920, hospital deliveries were becoming available, but women like Delia Cummings’ French-Canadian mother preferred home deliveries by their own trusted doctors, in her case Dr. Pellitier, also French-Canadian. Usually a family member or hired woman came to help until the woman regained her strength, especially when there were other children who needed care.¹⁸

One of the advantages for daughters in Millinocket was the opportunity to obtain a high school education. Girls were educated along with the boys and the women interviewed indicated that other than Home Economics for girls, the curriculum was very similar. The first two graduates in 1903 and 1904 were girls. Most women, like Kitty St. John and Ruth Wiley, worked as clerks in local stores after graduation to save money for starting a household, then married within a year or two. Schools also provided employment opportunities for a few women. The principal, truant officer, and the janitor were men, but the teachers and nurses were mostly single women.¹⁹

¹⁶ Glenn and Ruth Wiley, interview by author, tape recording, Millinocket, Maine, 4 January, 2002, Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, xi, 51.

¹⁷ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

¹⁸ Segee interview; Morrison interview; Wiley interview.

¹⁹ Kitty St. John, interview by author, tape recording, Millinocket, Maine, July 10, 2000, Northeast Archives; Wiley interview.

The family's economic situation determined young women's options. Those who aspired to a profession other than that of a housewife could go on to college provided their fathers approved and could afford to pay their tuition. Cummings describes the situation for women of her generation:

When I graduated in '37, there wasn't much of view to go on to school. The few that did were few and far between. And what you did for employment was work J. J. Newbury's and the clothing stores—we had a lot of clothing stores, and in the mill office—they hired there too. And the bank, but there wasn't that much work around here although there was work for the young men in the mill. When I came out of school the mill was active.²⁰

Cummings said that girls worked only until they got married. Those who did not marry continued working, but that was not a desirable option. She remembers a few married women who worked to supplement their husbands' incomes, like the milliner, Mrs. Ryan, who made hats in the back of her brother's clothing store on Main Street, seamstresses who worked out of their homes, and women who took in roomers and ran boarding houses.

When Cummings graduated from Stearns High School, she had no opportunity to attend college even though she had taken college preparation courses. The reason, she said was "No money! In the depression years, I remember my father bringing home \$11.00 to feed 5 children. \$5.00 bought enough food for the week. The other five went [for] wood [for heating and cooking]" even though he cut wood for the winter during the summer months. After graduation Cummings stayed in Millinocket, worked in Newbury's and the clothing store, and after five years, married and started raising her own family.²¹

²⁰ Cummings interview.

²¹ Ibid.

Cummings' story is typical of the conditions that influenced working-class women's aspirations in Millinocket and East Millinocket. Those who went on to college or normal school were unlikely to return to the town unless they planned to pursue a teaching career. Only unmarried women could realistically expect to pursue a professional or business career and all but one woman interviewed married and had children. The one who remained unmarried went into business and has prospered financially. Girls were expected to marry and once married, became the financial responsibility of their husbands. It made more sense for fathers to provide a college education for sons who could benefit economically from attaining management jobs in the mill than to educate daughters beyond high school if they envisioned no future other than marriage. The only avenue for advancement for women who chose marriage was to marry a man with a promising economic future.

A woman who married a mill worker could expect to be pregnant most of the time and give birth to many infants. Mill workers tended to have large families for a number of reasons. The first was cultural: many mill workers had been farmers and large families had been assets to subsistence farm families since every member of the family contributed to the family economy. The second was religious: Italians and French Canadians subscribed to the Catholic belief that contraception was sinful. But, regardless of religion or culture, no reliable form of contraception was available. If a woman married a hard worker and good provider, she and her children would live a relatively comfortable life. When husbands could not provide, wives had to depend on their own labor, the kindness of family and friends, charity, or government welfare. With limited access to employment that paid wages sufficient to provide adequate economic support

for their families, women's dependence on males, community assistance, or company pensions became ingrained in the culture.

Arguments used to justify women's exclusion from millwork were a complex mix of biological determination, company rules, concepts of masculinity and perceptions of a woman's proper place. Kitty St. John described her experience of going into the mill:

I worked at Great Northern, in the office in the fifties, early fifties. On occasion I went down into the mill—it was a very uncomfortable situation to be in. . . . There was just no women there—I would be the only one. There was an office down there that I used to go down—I can't tell you anymore than it was just not fun to be there. It was definitely a man's world and women had no place in it. I was married at the time and I got no encouragement from my husband to venture down into that job [even though] there was a job available in that area and would have been a much better job for me.

St. John's husband discouraged her from accepting the job because he did not want her exposed to the crude remarks and what she described as "catcalling" of the men who worked there. In her opinion, even though it was company policy not to hire women, the pressure to keep women out of the mill came from the workers as well.²² Her account suggests that a major reason for keeping wives from working in the mills may have been to spare them from harassment by male workers.

Pressure to stay out of the workplace also came from women themselves. Because of the prevailing ideology, most married women considered work outside the home degrading. Even if the company had been willing to employ women, community disapproval rooted in the conviction that "married women who worked outside the home were selfishly depriving . . . men of their ability to fulfill their manly obligations" would have been a deterrent.²³ Officials of the American Federation of Labor, the parent

²² St. John interview.

²³ Hoffert, "Femininity in the Twentieth Century," *A History of Gender in America*, 363.

organization of the Papermaker's Union, went so far as to voice the opinion that women's presence in the workforce was "an assault upon the home."²⁴ Under such conditions, and given the fact that most women had no desire to add waged labor to demands of housework and childrearing, it is unlikely that the women themselves would have considered seeking such employment. As Ruth Wiley put it, "Women simply didn't work outside the home unless they had to." This was true of all women in Millinocket, regardless of nationality or old country tradition.²⁵

Wiley suggested another reason for men's objections. When she was questioned about whether she worked for wages after marriage, she said that except for the one year she worked for Sears Roebuck her husband objected to her working as a clerk in any of the stores. When asked why, she said she did not know because he never gave her a reason except that he just did not want her to. She even suspected that he went to the places where she had applied for a job and told them not to hire her. Her husband vigorously denied this, though he said he did object to her working because she did not need to. He was able to provide whatever she needed and it was his responsibility. He admits that many men, including him, felt that if their wives worked for wages, it would be a negative reflection on their role as provider and an insult to their masculinity.²⁶

Even when it might have been considered appropriate or desirable for women to work, there were few opportunities for women in the workplace. The mill employees interviewed remembered a few women as shadowy figures enclosed in management

²⁴ Edward O'Donnell, "Women as Breadwinners—the Error of the Age," *American Federationist* 4 (October 1897): 186-187.

²⁵ Wiley interview.

²⁶ Ibid.

offices, probably secretaries or bookkeepers. The implication was clear; man's place was in the mill and woman's was in the home, but when women were employed they were safe with male managers but had to be shielded from contact with less refined working-class men.²⁷

It was acceptable for single women to work for wages temporarily, but they were expected to leave these jobs when they married. Those who chose not to marry or could not find suitable husbands could become nurses, domestic servants, or live-in companions for widows. Women with sufficient education could become teachers, but only while they remained single. Cummings recalled:

There was a time [until the mid-1900s] that teachers couldn't marry and teach. That was the law—not just here—that was the law. But there were quite a few of the girls here in town that taught, because in those days you only needed two years of grammar [normal] school. And I remember a friend of mine was a teacher. She went to grammar school so poor, she said, "I had a change of clothes and that was it." And said, "Didn't we have a fire in the dorm and I lost my clothes." She said it was a struggle to get more clothes.²⁸

That it was a struggle even to buy clothing indicates that women received little financial assistance to pursue higher education even to prepare themselves for one of the more "respectable" occupations.

Even those occupations were considered inappropriate for married women whose first obligation was to devote their time, efforts, and talents to providing nurturing environments for their own families. Most of the jobs considered respectable for married women were centered in the home. It was acceptable for even middle-class married women with children to work at such jobs as seamstresses or milliners as long as their

²⁷ Segee interview; Morrison interview.

²⁸ Cummings interview.

work did not interfere with family duties and could be considered self-fulfilling, in no way suggesting that the men in their families could not provide for them.²⁹

Exceptions to this pattern were woman who had to provide economic support for their children because their husbands were killed, disabled or had abandoned the family. Widows with small children usually worked out of their homes in order to take care of their children while earning meager wages. Great Northern paid a small pension to disabled workers and to the wives of workers who died while in their employ, but women often had to work to supplement those pensions.

Even widows or abandoned wives found the kinds of work available demeaning. Katy Perry's mother lived a comfortable life as a wife of a Millinocket businessman in the 1920s, but after he left her with two children to support, she had to turn to her brother and her husband's family for assistance and suffer the indignity of doing domestic work for her former peers for 25 cents an hour. Perry said: "The women were very kind to her, but you see, they were still on top of the heap because their husbands were working in the mill." Her mother never acknowledged that she felt degraded by her domestic servitude to other women, but Perry believed she simply did not admit such feelings, at least to her daughter:

Mom was always the kind that no matter what anybody said she turned the other cheek. And I used to be angry with her. I'd say, "You don't really have to put up with that." But that was the kind of woman she was. Never, never did I hear her say anything unkind about my father. . . . I must say that his family—his mother, his father, and his brothers and sisters were uncommonly kind to my mother. They always included her, so she had a larger family on that side even though she didn't have a husband.³⁰

²⁹ "Up at Millinocket," *Industrial Journal*, August 31, 1900.

³⁰ Katie Perry, interview by author, tape recording, Togus, Maine, February 21, 200, Northeast Archives; Morrison interview, St. John interview, Northeast Archives.

Even though Perry's mother suffered through some difficult times, both emotionally and financially, the fact that her husband's family stood beside her and provided a modest home for her and her children enabled her to continue to live in the Millinocket area where the children attended school. She maintained her self-respect by believing that sacrificing for her children was a noble cause. Despite daunting hardship, she was fulfilling her responsibility as a mother.³¹

Though men's wages were generally higher than in other industries, they were not always sufficient to support a large family and some women had to work to contribute to their family's survival. And despite the presumption that the family wage was adequate to provide for a family's needs, wives often had to devise creative methods to supplement their husband's income. Loretta Manzo's father-in-law was a common laborer whose wages were not sufficient to support his family. Manzo, who preferred to be called "Tib" for her maiden name Thibideau, recalls her mother-in-law's ingenuity with great admiration:

Dick's mother raised chickens . . . and when they killed the chickens she would take the meat and bottle that meat. She'd take everything from the garden and put it in jars, so all winter they had their vegetables and their meat. If the boys shot a deer or anything, she'd put the venison up in jars and my mother used to do that too. She was a very good cook, and she . . . did a lot of cooking for the Great Northern executives. And she'd do a big basket—a clothes basket that was larger than this [dining room] table and she'd have raviolis and a great big tossed salad and homemade bread, and she'd have a great big roasted turkey.

Manzo possesses the same qualities of ingenuity and resourcefulness that she admired in her mother-in-law. From her spotless home in Millinocket, she related the details of her activities while her husband was at work and she was at home with their six children:

³¹ Perry interview.

I was mother and father. I had to be. There were times that Dick would work three and four days in a row with perhaps two hours sleep. It was very difficult because the children were young, but I managed, and when they got to be ten or twelve years old, I made them help me with the housework. They were taught to do their housework, and they did it, and they helped me, and I could not have done it otherwise. When he was around, he would help. He was never one to change diapers, but he would sterilize bottles and mix formula, and he wouldn't pick them up until they were about six months old. He was always afraid of hurting them. So it was very difficult because I didn't have any help. I didn't have any hired help.³²

She had been hospitalized with tuberculosis when she was eighteen, and had to leave her only child at that time with her mother, but she recovered sufficiently to give birth to five more children and devote her life to caring for them. She described her daily routine:

I had a ritual. I was up early morning. I tended to their doings during the day and at night I did my work and I went to bed at ten o'clock so that I could be up with them the next morning. If they laid down in the afternoon for a nap, I napped with them. In our home, I did all the seam filling in the home, all the painting. Dick would do the carpenter work and we would finish one room at a time. When we moved in the kitchen was finished and that was it. Every year we'd finish a room. My house was very small but we managed with the six children and my basement is finished and there was a bedroom down there. So we got by, but it was difficult.

Manzo and her husband are typical Millinocket residents in that they have a strong belief in the rewards of industrious work and conscientious parenting:

He [Dick] always worked so that they had everything that they wanted—they had bicycles when other children didn't have bicycles. I sewed. I had a fabric and yarn shop in my basement. I made all their clothing. I knit their sweaters. They were always very well dressed, very well mannered. They went to the Catholic school at first, and then we put them in the Granite Street School at the end of the street, because it was nearer. They were well-behaved children and I'm thankful for what has happened.

Her story also typifies the domestic patterns of millworkers' wives and the emphasis on good housekeeping as a measure of a woman's self-worth. She spoke with obvious pride about her drive for perfection:

³² Manzo interview.

I always had a washer—at first I had an old spin dry washer where you had to put the clothes in and empty the water, and then put the rinse water in—it took me all day. If I wasn't at my clothesline at eight o'clock in the morning the neighbors would call. They thought I was ill. . . . Every single day of my life, I did laundry and the lines were full and the whitest wash in town.

Her laundry and housework schedule was a more than source of pride; it was a ritual that gave meaning and purpose to her life. The sense of community in Little Italy also gave meaning to her life:

This was a great community. When I moved here—we lived about a mile out of town in Mattawamkeag, and we had dear friends and neighbors, but when I moved into Little Italy, this section . . . every morning you went to another home for coffee—that was a ritual—even if you bundled the children up and went, and I had nice neighbors across the street that were raising children, and we neighbored back and forth. But if you were ill, even for two days, they would come in with soup and take care of your children and help out in that way. It was marvelous. There was a great feeling here. A lot of love in this community. And then as the older generation died, it faded . . . it's still here in a sense. . . . When my son died, immediately the house was filled with food and people consoling you. . . . I've always felt very thankful.³³

The theme of community resonated through many of the oral histories. Individual communities composed of residents with similar economic circumstances and cultural or religious backgrounds provided security and a sense of belonging.

Like Manzo and her mother-in-law, women who worked within the boundaries of societal approval were greatly admired for their industry and skills. Polly Segee's husband was a laborer whose mother was one of these women. Leatha Morrison's mother ran an upscale boarding house for professional men, mostly company executives, schoolteachers and managers of town businesses. Perhaps because the company needed housing for its single and temporary employees, Millinocket residents considered running a boarding house a respectable occupation for women. However, both Segee and

³³ Manzo interview.

Morrison insist that whatever other responsibilities a woman might have had, home, family and the man's job always took priority.³⁴

Access to education and male encouragement enabled some middle and upper class married women to transcend prescribed roles. Dorothy Bowler Lavery, daughter of a Great Northern executive and the historian who wrote the history of Millinocket is one example. Other women were milliners, dressmakers, sellers of dry goods, manicurists, teachers and music teachers. One of Millinocket's most prominent women was Josepha Virginia Sweetser Wheeler Evans. Born in Wakefield, Massachusetts, she came to Millinocket to live with her uncle when she was twelve. She apparently returned to Wakefield where she graduated from high school, then went on to Wellesley College. After graduation in 1890, she went to New York where she took instruction in first aid and was certified by the New York Mission and Tract Society as a teacher and home missionary. After her first husband, a minister, died in 1913, she married Walter Marley Evans, an executive for Great Northern, and returned to Millinocket where she remained until her death.³⁵

Evans, who wrote under the name of "Portia" for the *Bangor Daily News* and the *Millinocket Journal* had a profound influence, not only on her granddaughter, Ruth Wiley, but on other Millinocket women who saw in her a model of accomplishment. While she was an excellent cook and seamstress, she could and did mount the pulpit to preach a sermon at the Baptist or Congregational Church when one of the ministers was

³⁴ Segee interview; Morrison interview.

³⁵ Annual Register of Maine, 1901, 1904, 1910; Josepha Virginia Sweetser Wheeler Evans papers, property of Ruth Wiley.

ill or away. Magazines and newspapers published her poetry. The children remembered her as the lady who came to the Millinocket library to read to them.³⁶

Evans was also known for her strong will and opinions. According to her granddaughter, she was notorious for her disagreements with the local priest and the chief of police. Wiley stated with pride that neither of these men nor Great Northern could intimidate Evans and everyone in town knew it. The role model she provided for Millinocket's young women was very different from that of the subservient housewife, but there is no indication of how her husband felt about her independence or how it affected the way the other men in the town perceived him.³⁷

Clearly, Millinocket's women experienced life in the town in a wide variety of ways. Marriage to a man employed by Great Northern offered a degree of financial security unavailable in many of Maine's towns and rural areas. Access to education and health care for their children added to the town's attraction. What the town did not offer women was a viable alternative to marriage through economic and political empowerment.

Great Northern's archived documents contain ample information about the construction and operation of the East Millinocket mill but practically nothing concerning the town and its residents. Information contained in the town's only written history indicates that women arriving at East Millinocket in 1907 found a town under construction. Like Millinocket, the population consisted primarily of immigrants. First generation women such as Amelia Willette's mother spoke little or no English and rarely

³⁶ Wiley, Mrs. Evan's granddaughter, is in the process of preserving her grandmother's papers and plans to donate them to an appropriate library.

³⁷ Wiley interview.

left the confines of their own homes except to attend mass. Willette was born in East Millinocket to Lithuanian parents. Her father was one of the workers hired by Great Northern recruiters in Lithuania to work in the East Millinocket mill. He quickly learned to speak English, but her mother who followed him later never learned the language. Despite the fact that she spent her entire life in the confines of her home caring for her husband and children, Willette insisted that her mother was happy.³⁸

Willette considers herself totally American. She speaks only English and is unfamiliar with Lithuanian foods or customs. She attended East Millinocket schools, graduated from Schenck High School and married a French mill worker. She retained her Catholic faith and belongs to a Catholic women's organization, the Daughters of Isabella. She praised Great Northern's treatment of employees, but though her husband was promoted to a supervisory position, his wages were not sufficient to support their family of four and she had to supplement them by working as a domestic for the mill superintendent.³⁹

Michele Warhola represents a later generation of East Millinocket residents who no longer identified with Old Country cultures. She was born in Lincoln, Maine, to parents from mixed French, Irish, Dutch and English backgrounds. In 1962, Warhola's parents came from the neighboring town of Medway to East Millinocket in search of employment. They built a modern ranch home in East Millinocket's new housing development no longer identified by ethnicity, but "in a neighborhood that was all

³⁸ Michele Warhola, interview by author, tape recording, University of Maine, April 3, 2001, Northeast Archives.

³⁹ Amelia Willette, interview by author, tape recording, East Millinocket, Maine, March 12, 2002, Northeast Archives.

millworkers.” Like Tib Manzo’s mother-in-law in Millinocket, Warhola’s mother exemplified domesticity:

She got up every morning, fixed a big breakfast for us, saw us off to school—she did all the housework. For a long time we went grocery shopping as a family and went out to supper that particular night at Joe’s and Mary’s in Millinocket, the restaurant. It was very domestic—my mother was just very, very domestic. She kept the house clean and did the laundry.⁴⁰

Though a generation existed between Willette and Warhola’s mothers, both women’s worlds were confined to home, family and church.

As in Millinocket, the church was the locus of social interaction. When the town was incorporated it did not have a church so the Maine Missionary Society sent Rev. J. C. Gregory, pastor of the Millinocket church to conduct Protestant services. Since there was no church building, the services took place outside until cold weather forced them to use “the Granite Hotel, the company boarding house, and Ferland’s Hall on Main Street for their weekly meetings.” In 1909, the congregation was able to worship in its own church building, funded by donations, loans, and grants.⁴¹

There is no record of women’s organizations in East Millinocket until 1931. McCann’s history of East Millinocket lists two women’s organizations founded in the 1930s, Saint Anne’s Circle of the Daughters of Isabella and the East Millinocket Music Club, organized with sixteen charter members who met bi-monthly and engaged in activities designed to “promote the study of music and instill a desire for it in the community.” This was a lofty goal indeed for women in a working-class town.⁴²

⁴⁰ Warhola interview.

⁴¹ Everett McCann, “The East Millinocket Story: 1907-1956,” Special Collections, Fogler Library, 35.

⁴² McCann, “East Millinocket Story,” 62, 63.

Interviews with Peter Gaetani, Pat Federico and Amelia Willette provide little information about women's roles in East Millinocket. Some information, however, can be gleaned from the census. In 1920 padrone Dominic Moscone lived with his wife, Julia, their two daughters and two sons, a brother, and six boarders, all from Italy. One of the daughters was Mary Moscone who married Federico's father. Most of the other Italians in the town were single men who lived in a boarding house on Millinocket Road. A mixture of Swedish, Canadian, Irish, and American men lived in boarding houses on the same road, Greeks boarded on Eastern Avenue, and Russians on Birch Street. The census shows that more boarders than families lived in East Millinocket at that time, but as Gaetani pointed out, entire families as well as single men sometimes boarded in Dominic Moscone's boarding house. Most working class men and women were in their twenties and thirties and the children were under ten years old; mill managers and millwrights, mostly Americans and English Canadians, were forty or older.⁴³

What the census shows is that the number of women in East Millinocket in 1920 was relatively small compared with men. The interviews with Gaetani and Federico reveal little about women's lives except to say that they were good cooks, though Gaetani, whose wife was Italian, claimed that it was he, not the women, who taught people how to cook Italian food. The few women's occupations listed in the census were teachers, milliners, boarding house operators, clerks, salesgirls, and a few domestic servants at the Cumberland hotel and in mill executives' homes.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

⁴⁴ Ibid; Gaetani interview.

Interviews such as those with Gaetani and Federico support the contention that in both towns Italians made and sold beer and wine, even during prohibition, and houses of prostitution existed in some areas of the town. Gaetani said Italians did not want to come to Maine because it was a dry state, so they were given a permit to make a specified amount of beer and wine in the boarding houses—in his case 200 gallons a year—as long as they did not sell it. But they “gave” it to friends; in Dominic Moscone’s store beer cost six cents a glass and “temperance beer” (whiskey?) ten cents a glass. Gaetani said “the authorities shut their eyes, and we gave everyone the real [laughs]. That’s the way it was at that time.” The social aspect of beer and wine consumption seems to have been as important as the drinks themselves to East Millinocket Italian community because even though they could drink at home, they would travel to Millinocket to drink together in Paluso’s beer parlor. Mary Tardiff insisted that sales of alcoholic beverages also took place outside the Italian communities and that Paluso’s beer parlor and Moscone’s store were not the only place where they were available. Her older relatives told her that during the 1920s and 1930s the woods workers would take their pay to the Mountain View Hotel where both liquor and prostitutes were available. Katy Perry said she has seen evidence that liquor sales and prostitution existed in one of the poorer sections of Millinocket called the Pines. She and other residents interviewed claim that one of the major functions of police chief Fred Gates and Allie Picard was to round up drunken workers and take them home or to jail until they were sober.⁴⁵

Such access to alcohol and the many references to alcohol abuse coupled with unequal power relations in the home raises questions about the possibility of domestic

⁴⁵ Gaetani interview; Mary Tardiff, “A Great Northern Family: Four Generations of Moscones,” *GNP News: Celebrating 100 Years*, November, 2000, 18, 19; Katy Perry interview.

abuse, but such suspicions remain speculative. Although a few women hinted that abuse occurred, only one woman, on condition of anonymity, related her father's abuse of her mother and herself. Domestic abuse is less likely to occur when women live in close proximity to extended families, and though some women came with family member, others who were removed from the scrutiny of fathers and other male family members would have had no such protection. Given the cultural ideology at the time that gave men the right to "discipline" wives and children, it is unlikely that such abuse would have been reported to authorities. Even when injured women or children required hospitalization, their injuries would have been attributed to falls or accidents, and hospital attendants would not have pursued the matter. Few women were willing to discuss the subject, even hypothetically and on condition of anonymity. Perhaps they fall into the category of victims Alessandra Portelli described as considering admission of exploitation personally demeaning.⁴⁶

All Millinocket and East Millinocket residents interviewed stressed the positive aspects of life in their towns. Women praised husband's good wages, the opportunity to own their own homes, educate their children, health care provided for their families, and scores of other amenities Great Northern provided that would not have been available in other towns. Free to devote themselves full time to the welfare of their husbands and children, they were able to subscribe to middle-class American norms of femininity and motherhood, and to join the ranks of the consumer society.

⁴⁶ Alessandra Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 203.

CHAPTER 6: STAND BY YOUR MAN: THE WOMEN OF BENHAM AND LYNCH

The coal industry brought dramatic changes to the lives of mountain women as well as men. For those who left family farms for the smaller coal camps, it could be a life of hardship due to inadequate wages and struggle with poor sanitary conditions, shoddy housing, unpaved, muddy streets and soot. Benham and Lynch, however, offered modern conveniences that made life easier for women who had barely managed to produce enough food from depleted soils to feed their families. But the transition to the twentieth century industrial world was not easy. Unfamiliar living conditions in coal towns required major adjustments in lifestyle.

In Benham and Lynch, a significant percentage of the original laborers and miners were native mountaineers from Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky firmly entrenched in mountain values. Prior to the coming of the coal industry, most mountain residents were subsistence farmers. Mountain farm life was characterized by hard work with schedules determined by the sun and seasons. Families depended on all members for survival and gendered labor roles were fairly flexible since women sometimes worked alongside their husbands and children in the fields, especially during the planting and growing seasons, and helped their husbands with construction projects. In the fall, women preserved the harvest and the animals slaughtered for winter meat, including wild game. They made their families' clothing and pieced quilts during the winter months. In general, women trained daughters to be farm wives and men trained sons to be hunters and farmers, but

both shared in the raising of children. The family, community, church, and local schools where they existed determined moral and ethical values.¹

The pre-industrial mountain cabin was a two to four room wood frame or log structure with a wood shingled roof, a stone fireplace, and few, if any, windows. Families spent most of the warmer months outdoors. In winter, the source of heat was a central fireplace and a wood or coal burning stove in the kitchen. The only light came from the fireplace and kerosene lamps. In the summer, women cooked seasonal vegetables, often flavored with salt pork or ham hocks, and canned or dried the surplus for winter. Most families raised chickens and pigs and the more affluent owned cows, primarily for milk, butter, and cheese. Pigs not only provided food for the family through the winter, but could also be used to barter for dairy products and winter crops. Pinto beans and corn meal could be purchased in 50 and 100-pound bags and, in addition to potatoes, were staples of the mountain family's diet.

The extended family was the basic social and economic unit; in fact, some communities consisted entirely of members of one or more families that migrated to the region as a group or followed the original settlers after they established their claim on the land. Families were close-knit units bound by the need for mutual protection and support in times of need or crisis. Women attended each other in childbirth and took care of each other's children in times of illness or incapacitation. The entire community was involved in the training of children. Historian Ronald Eller wrote:

What formal education the mountain youth acquired . . . usually occurred in the small community school, which was often taught by an aunt or an uncle and attended primarily by neighbors and kin. Opportunities for higher education were always available outside the mountains (and in some cases within), but with few

¹ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 30.

exceptions only the wealthier families could afford such luxuries. For most mountaineers, education took place within the familiar setting of the family and community, and this type of education provided continuity for the culture, reinforcing traditional values and beliefs.²

Most schools were one-room buildings with a pot-bellied stove for heat, windows for light, and outhouses. One teacher taught children in grades one through six, sometimes one through eight. Students in the higher grades were expected to help teach the lower grades, often their own brothers and sisters.³

Mountain churches served an important social function in the life of the community, especially in providing services for weddings and funerals. Several generations of a family often attended the same church. Gladys Dixon, a Harlan County native attended the Cumberland Pentecostal Church in the early 1900s. She said:

We went to church all of our lives. Dad seen to that. He was one of the first deacons in the church up there and helped build the church. Him and mom got saved when I was about two years old. I never did know nothing else but going to church. That's been my life. Then after I've grew up that's still my life and I still enjoy it.⁴

Church buildings tended to be small, one-room structures with wooden pews and a podium or altar. Eller called the mountain church "an extension of the family" and argues that without a formal system of law enforcement, churches played a valuable role in social control. Members who transgressed social mores were held accountable for

² Ibid., 29-30.

³ This was my family's situation. I attended a one-room school in Nolansburg. The older children taught the younger ones. My two older brothers taught me, and I taught my younger brothers and other children. Later, when we attended Totz School, located in a mining town but part of the Harlan County school system, there were separate classrooms and a teacher for each grade.

⁴ Gladys Dixon, interview by Delois Ealy, tape recording, November 10, 1983, Appalachian Archives.

their actions to fellow church members and, in some cases, shunned by the rest of the congregation and the community.⁵

The church was the most important determinant of gender roles and the most common religious denominations were the Primitive and Old Regular Baptists. Although women could become church members, a literal interpretation of the Bible, especially the writings of St. Paul, determined that they could not be preachers, must be silent in church and defer to men. They could not be deacons, but could be secretaries, pianists, and teachers for the early grades of Sunday school and vacation bible school.

Edna Lewis, a graduate of Pine Mountain Settlement School, was the secretary for Dione Baptist Church, a Missionary Baptist Church in Dione, Kentucky. Lewis said women served the church by cooking for church events, cleaning the church, providing and arranging flowers, and raising money for charity through bake and rummage sales. They held Bible study and prayer group sessions and taught children's Sunday school and Bible school classes. The church took responsibility for its own members and even provided economic assistance during times of illness. It was an extension of the family that helped people through hard times and shared their rejoicing in the good times. Evidence of the importance of these connections to women is that it was often the women who first joined the church and then persuaded their husbands and children to join.⁶

⁵ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 30.

⁶ Edna Lewis, conversation with author, Dione, Kentucky, June 5, 2000. I was surprised to learn that my family had been the recipient of such charity at one time when my father was cut off from the mines. Lewis was the secretary/treasurer of Dione Baptist Church in Dione, a small Harlan County settlement of farmers and coalminers, when I started attending that church in 1945 and is still active in the church at the age of 90. I tried to get her to agree to a taped interview, but though she answered a few questions, she refused to allow a tape recording, saying she would take her "secrets" with her to the grave.

Sexual temptation was a major concern of church leaders, and women bore the burden for that particular sin. Eve was held responsible for the “fall” of man because she tempted Adam to disobey God and eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Her weakness and vanity were projected onto all women and men had to stay constantly on guard against being tempted by women’s wiles. Because of the perception of women as potential temptresses, most churches had strict rules concerning acceptable female behavior. Expectations for girls included modesty, which prohibited makeup, revealing clothing, and short hair. Courting took place during church activities and serious young men walked young women to their door under the watchful eye of the father. The church’s prohibition of divorce made it difficult for women to escape loveless or abusive marriages and contraception was considered sinful. Even when the board of deacons approved divorce in the case of adultery or incest, remarriage was a violation of church rules.

After marriage, women’s roles were also determined by the demands of the large numbers of children typical of mountain families. Men worked from sun to sun, but after sundown women continued to work well into the night, attending to necessary domestic chores such as cleaning, mending, and preparing food for the following day. The major chores in winter were gathering fuel for heating and cooking, preparing food, tending livestock, and quilting. Women accomplished these tasks even when pregnant or caring for infants. Despite the hardships, the beauty of the natural environment instilled in the people a love of place. Mountain people were rugged individuals who treasured their freedom and held themselves accountable only to God and kin.

The Progressive era social gospel movement was one of the first outside influences on mountain women's lives. In 1899, before the building of the railroads that opened the Harlan County coalfields, women reformers and educators funded by the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Presbyterian Church came into the mountains to conduct summer industrial camps for men, women and children. In 1902 Katherine Pettit, May Stone, and other women from elite eastern colleges founded the Mountain Settlement Industrial School, renamed Hindman Settlement School in 1916, on the north side of Pine Mountain near the coalmining town of Hazard. In 1913, two years after International Harvester established the town of Benham, Pettit left the school and with Ethel de Long founded the Pine Mountain Settlement School in a secluded valley on Line Fork. The school was located on the south side of the mountain approximately fifteen miles from Cumberland, Benham's neighboring town in the valley between Pine Mountain and Black Mountain. Its stated mission was to provide education and "moral uplift" for mountain families, but its focus was women and children.⁷

The founding of the Pine Mountain School marked the culmination of years of unsuccessful attempts to establish a Presbyterian stronghold in the Kentucky mountains. In an essay on the Presbyterian Church in Appalachia, H. Davis Yeuell and Marcia Clark Myers refer to the Presbyterian movement into Appalachia in the 1870s as an "essentially feminine enterprise." Nearly thirty years later, it was in large part due to the influence of Rev. E. O. Guerrant, a Presbyterian minister, that Katherine Pettit became interested in the mountain settlement movement. However, because of the mountain people's

⁷ Greene, "Progressives in The Kentucky Mountains;" Betty Parker Duff, "The 'Quare' Women: Reformers and Settlement Workers in the Kentucky Mountains," *Conference Proceedings*, The Women of Appalachia: Their Heritage and Accomplishments, Ohio University Zanesville, October 28, 1999, entry #82 in ERIC research database.

resistance to organized religion the settlement founders were careful not to claim affiliation with any religious organization. The curriculum was secular but included strong doses of moral teachings.⁸

One goal of the settlement workers was to preserve the mountain culture as it was before the onset of industrialization. They “intended for Pine Mountain to be a school for rural, mountain, white children.” The group that the settlement workers wanted to reach was the relatively prosperous and self-sufficient propertied class. As James Greene points out, “They saw in that group the potential for attaining their vision of a revitalized mountain population immune to the stultifying effects of industrialization.” The location far from the railroad and the new mining towns would simplify the task of instilling the proper middle-class values in the locals who had not yet learned the “bad habits” that accompanied industry. The settlement workers also explicitly excluded the lower tenant class because they were “just barely hanging on, and seldom had an adequate amount of the basic tools needed for survival.” They believed that the children from these families gain little benefit from “uplift” efforts and would end up living back in the hollers or in the coal camps.⁹

Though the mountain people might be pure and uncontaminated by the outside world, the settlement workers were concerned about flaws in their culture and moral condition. According to James Green III, Pettit focused on women because she saw them as the “underdogs” of mountain society. In a letter to a friend in 1899 she wrote:

⁸ H. Davis Yeuell and Marcia Clark Myers, “The Presbyterians in Central Appalachia,” *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism*, Bill J. Leonard, ed., (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 189 - 207.

⁹ Greene, “Progressives in the Kentucky Mountains,” 73-74.

It is the deplorable condition of the women that appeals so strongly to me. Their condition is truly wretched. The domestic life of the mountaineer is crude. They know absolutely nothing of decent living. How can they when the women who should be fitted for housekeepers and homemakers are doing the work of men, who think their duty consists in hunting, fishing and sitting on the fence talking politics. While the women hurriedly cook their meals and spend the rest of the time in cultivating crops, building fences and milking cows. . . . The women and children do all the work. They plow the fields or hoe them when the hillsides are too steep for plowing, put in the crops, tend them, build and repair the fences, make the garden, keep the house, cook, wash, sew, milk, and everything else done at all.¹⁰

She reported that men contributed little to the work of the family, only “occasionally engaging in logging, moonshining or running a country store.”¹¹ It is not surprising that she was unable to appreciate men’s contributions; the perceptions of masculinity for women of her class were vastly different from those of the mountain people.

Ironically, the two groups that Eller describes as “invading” the mountains came from the same entrepreneurial class but worked at cross-purposes. While the reformers were trying to prevent outside influences from entering the mountain culture, the coal companies were actively engaged in bringing them in. By 1920, reform women must have realized the futility of their efforts as the coal industry continued to attract into Harlan County the very people they were trying to exclude. In fact, the schools perhaps unintentionally served as tools of the industrialists in teaching an industrial work ethic, Christian moral values, patriotism, submission, and obedience.¹²

Other connections with the coal companies were more direct. Though there is no evidence of connections with local management in either Benham or Lynch, at least two

¹⁰ Greene “Progressives in the Kentucky Mountains, 20, Jess Stoddard, ed. *The Quare Women's Journals: May Stone & Katherine Pettit's Summers in the Kentucky Mountains and the Founding of the Hindman Settlement School* (Ashland, KY: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1998), 43.

¹¹ Greene, “Progressives in the Kentucky Mountains,” 20.

¹² Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 70.

of the founders of the mountain settlements had connections with high-level executives in both companies. According to Caudill, May Stone, co-founder of Hindman Settlement School was the daughter of “an official of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and a member (one of six) of Hindman’s advisory board.” Hindman School teacher Ethel DeLong apparently had connections as well. She and another teacher visited coal baron John C. Mayo at his mansion in Paintsville, Kentucky, and returned with glowing praise for their accommodations. Elizabeth Watts, one of Hindman’s founders, wrote in a letter to her mother:

[The settlement school teachers] had a glorious time staying at the home of John C.C. Mayo, a self-made millionaire, a coal company being the cause of it. They have just moved into a \$500,000 house that has taken seven years to build and is perfectly wonderful. They had sense enough to have interior decorators who knew [their] job and both Miss Rue and Miss DeLong say it was wonderful. They had beauteous things to eat with three butlers to wait on them.¹³

DeLong left Hindman to found Pine Settlement School with Katherine Pettit, and in 1918 married Luigi Zande and became one of the few settlement workers who ever married. As Ethel DeLong Zande, she was able to convince a connection in the Chicago office to contribute coal for their construction projects. Greene stated in his dissertation:

Corresponding with an official whom she knew in the Chicago office of Wisconsin Steel, she made what she called an “audacious request for a free carload of coal for the [road construction] project. After pointing out that Wisconsin Steel was not currently receiving an adequate supply of coal itself, her acquaintance nonetheless granted her plea. Later she successfully got a second carload free from U. S. Steel, and the following year wrangled an additional one from her first benefactor.”¹⁴

¹³ Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 76-78.

¹⁴ Greene, “Progressives in the Kentucky Mountains,” 355. Greene refers to her marriage in a footnote, but gives no information about Zande. Their marriage in 1918 suggested that he may have been one of the Italian stone masons recruited U. S. Coal and Coke to build the foundations for Lynch’s tipple and mine offices.

This may have been the same official who contacted the school about training Pine Mountain shop students to repair mine machinery in Benham's repair shop. In a letter dated February 4, 1929, Angela Melville suggested a meeting with Wisconsin Steel vice president C. F. Biggert, to visit the Benham shop. Such collaboration would have been beneficial to both the school and the company, providing badly need funds for the school and skilled technicians for the mine shop. It is unknown whether this plan ever materialized.¹⁵

The implications of these connections is that both the settlement teachers and the mine executives were influenced by progressive ideas and assumptions and the values they taught in the schools may have influenced welfare programs focusing on women's management of homes in Benham and Lynch. But despite the many educational benefits the reformers brought to the mountain people, their focus on moral uplift and educating women and girls in domestic skills reinforced the cult of domesticity and the concept of separate spheres for men and women. The settlement workers privileged middle-class values over mountain ways of mothering. Karen Tice argues that the teaching of middle-class ideology and modern theories of child-rearing contributed to mountain women's feelings of inferiority. Rather than relying on the wisdom of their mothers and other women, mountain women were told that "a good mother was no longer merely loving but also knowledgeable, paying heed to expert advice regarding child development, health, mental hygiene, and housekeeping."¹⁶ Such ideology that charged women with

¹⁵ Angela Melville to C. F. Biggert, February 4, 1929, Appalachian Archives.

¹⁶ Karen Tice, "School-work and Mother-Work: The interplay of Maternalism and Cultural Politics in the Educational Narratives of Kentucky Settlement Workers, 1910-1930," *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall 1998, 208.

responsibility for the moral values of their husbands and children conflicted with the tradition of men as the unquestioned rulers of their households, but served industry in that it contributed to women's civilizing influence in Benham and Lynch.

There is little question that settlement workers had a significant influence on a small segment of the population by providing access to health care and education, but it was the transportation and communication advances that accompanied the coal industry that brought sweeping changes to the entire population of Harlan County. Consumerism replaced the barter society. Theaters in Benham, Lynch, and neighboring Cumberland showed the latest movies featuring popular fashions, dances, and music. Harlan County residents listened to country and popular music on radio, bought records to play on their Victrolas, and learned to dance the latest dances. They listened to radio commercials and saw advertisements for exciting new products in newspapers and magazines. Benham and Lynch women could buy these products from the company store and in privately owned stores in the nearby incorporated town of Cumberland, but women from surrounding areas also eagerly embraced the latest styles of clothing and modern appliances sold in these stores.¹⁷

Mail-order houses also had an important influence in the coal-mining towns of Harlan County. A scene from *Coal Miner's Daughter* provides an example of the excitement the arrival of packages containing mail orders generated within coal mining families. In this scene, country singer Loretta Lynn's father, a coal miner in Butcher Holler, Kentucky, brings home a mail-order package containing shoes for the family and her first "store-bought" dress. This scene illustrates the point that mail-order houses also

¹⁷ Author's personal recollections; Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs;" Frances King, interview by Ronald Edgar Collier, videotape, Lynch, Kentucky, February 8, 1999 (Collier's possession).

provided greater variety and an alternative for poorly paid coal miners unable to afford products available at company stores.¹⁸

Economy was not the only advantage mail-order houses offered. Gilbert Fite explained why they were important in isolated areas:

The mail-order houses had an important influence on farm and rural living. Farmers, often portrayed as poorly dressed and living under backward conditions, could now turn to mail-order houses for stylish goods and modern conveniences. This contributed not only to their comfort but to their self-esteem. The ability to buy goods by mail helped break down farm isolation and played a major role in homogenizing American society.¹⁹

They also played an important role in breaking down isolation and homogenizing societies of native-born whites, immigrants, and blacks in company towns.

Since the mining work force, like the paper mill workforce in Maine, was exclusively male, women had no way to earn wages. In addition to the perception of coal mining as an unsuitable occupation for American women, there was also a taboo about women entering the mines. It is unclear where the taboo originated, since both women and children worked in British, Scottish and Welsh mines during the late middle ages, but in the United States, miners believed that if a woman entered the mines, bad luck would follow, and would refuse to enter the mines if they thought a woman had been there. Betty Howard, whose father and grandfather were coalminers, said that her grandfather took her into his privately owned mine when she was a young girl, but rationalized that she was no threat because she was not yet a woman.²⁰

¹⁸ *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 1980, directed by Michael Apted, Universal Studios.

¹⁹ Gilbert C. Fite, "Mail Order Houses," *American History Files*, www.myhistory.org/historytopics/articles/mail-order_houses.html

²⁰ Crandall Shifflet, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 81; Betty Howard, interview by author, tape recording, Benham, Kentucky, March 23, 2001, Appalachian Archives.

Like their paper mill counterparts, the steel corporations that built Benham and Lynch recognized the necessity of providing housing and substantial wages in order to attract strong young men and women to nurture them. The idea of the family wage appealed to native-born, white immigrant, and black women trying to escape the poverty of tenant farms and crowded cities. For women with large families, often the case in mining communities, freedom from the necessity to work for wages was a luxury. Most of the women interviewed spent the greater portion of their adult lives pregnant or caring for infants. Although no records specifying births in Benham and Lynch have been located, Harlan County census records indicate that the population escalated from 10,566 in 1910 to 31,546 in 1920 and 75,275 by 1940. Since no immigrants were recruited after WWI, it is reasonable to assume that the population increase was due to internal migration and natural increase.²¹

The high birth rate worked to the advantage of the coal corporations in that women were producing a new generation of workers. Religious beliefs were partly responsible. Both the Catholic Church and mountain religion condemned contraception. As Mattie Collins, a miner's wife who lived in the company town of Elkhorn, explained, "my mama raised us that that [birth control] was a sin. She always thought it was wrong. . . . That's why God made male and female." Collins was married in the early 1920s at the age of 13, and had her first child at 14. By the time she was 39, she was the mother of 17 children, all delivered at home by the company doctor.²² Families of this size were not uncommon. Carrie Johnson, whose husband worked in both Benham and Lynch

²¹ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

²² Mattie Collins, interview by Jenny Collins, November 18, 1980, Thornton, KY, Appalachian Archives.

mines, had eleven children. Euna Mae Caudill, a Benham coal miner's wife, was also the mother of eleven, and her mother had twenty-two children. Glessie Jones Parker had seven children. There were twenty-two children in the Ray family. In the early days midwives, country doctors, and later company doctors, delivered babies at home, but by the 1940s most were born in Benham and Lynch hospitals, delivered by company doctors and cared for by company nurses.²³

Overall, the quality of life for women in Benham and Lynch was a considerable improvement over that of women in the small coal camps and in rural areas, but some similarities remained. Women and children's lives centered on work schedules. Women had to manage the household around the men's shift work and the children's school schedule. Monday was the traditional laundry day for mountain women because that was the day they washed the clothes they wore to church on Sunday. By the 1940s, all Benham women had established a regular routine of washing, cleaning, and cooking, because although all the houses were wired for electricity, to conserve it the power was turned off during the day except on Mondays and Tuesdays so that women could use their electric washers and irons. This combination of factors determined the weekly schedule: laundry on Monday, rain or shine; iron on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, sew and mend clothing, tend gardens and preserve food. Saturday was devoted to heavy cleaning, cooking, and preparation for Sunday. Sunday was reserved for worship, family dinners, and general rest and relaxation. This routine became part of mountain women's culture even in communities outside the town.²⁴

²³ Carrie Johnson, interview by Ronald Edgar Collier, Hiram, Kentucky, tape recording, October 23, 1983, Collier's possession; Caudill interview; Parker, conversation with author.

²⁴ Howard interview.

Despite the many advantages over their rural counterparts, women in Benham and Lynch worked very hard to take care of husbands and children. Cynthia Allen described a typical day in her life in Lynch. She says her husband worked shift work, leaving the house at 5:30 or 6 o'clock in the morning and returning home at 4:30. After making breakfast and seeing her husband off to work and children off to school, she would go to an elderly couple's house, fix their breakfast, make their beds, take out their ashes, clean the kitchen and bathe them. Then she would return to her home to do her housecleaning, laundry, and prepare supper for her family. She did this for ten years until the old couple died. This account contradicts statements that only working miners were allowed occupy company houses, since this old couple was allowed to remain in theirs in the 1930s and 1940s. Allen did not indicate whether the old man had been a miner or a company executive.²⁵

The boom or bust nature of the coal business meant that during strikes and layoffs, the family depended on women's work for survival, and women worked incessantly to prepare for such an eventuality. They learned to be extremely resourceful and to make do with what they were able to produce themselves to see the family through the lean times. The produce from gardens, properly preserved, would feed their families when there was no income. All the while, they lived with the fear that their husbands would be killed or injured and they would be left with no home or income and children to raise.

Though segregated by race and ethnicity, in the mines and the community the multi-cultural and interracial population learned to co-exist in close proximity. Allen said she was aware of many black and immigrant women in Lynch:

²⁵ Cynthia Allen, interview by author, tape recording, Lynch, Kentucky, March 22, 2001, Appalachian Archives and Northeast Archives.

They was with their husbands, you know. They used to bring them in here from Alabama. They used to bring them in truckloads, like, foreigner people, bring them in here. And you know, they knowed nothing about the mines. They had never seen the mines before. That why they got killed, so many of them. I've knowed two or three to get killed in one day.

She said some of the residents shunned the foreign workers because of language problems and religious differences. With the coming of these immigrants, the residents of Benham and Lynch were exposed to Catholicism for the first time and they feared the foreignness of this new religion. By the same token, immigrant residents who had never been exposed to blacks avoided contact with them. The coal corporations exploited these fears and suspicions to prevent miners from forming close associations that might contribute to union organization.²⁶

The percentage of black workers in Benham and Lynch was sometimes as high as 33 percent. These workers were not “scabs” or “union busters” but full-time and permanent employees who worked side-by-side with white miners. The black women who followed their husbands and fathers into the coalfields assumed the same roles as the white women, nurturing husbands and raising children. A fascinating but unverified story is reminiscent of slavery. Black miners without wives and families in the company town of Tulus were unstable workers who often got involved in fights or showed up drunk after the weekend. To combat this situation, the company decided to recruit a group of black women for them to marry. The women were brought in from Alabama on a boxcar and lined up in front of the commissary for the miners to observe. They were then told to take their pick and after the first tenuous miner made his selection, the others followed suit. A minister waited on the sidelines to marry the couples. The sad

²⁶ Allen interview.

conclusion is that many of these women were prostitutes picked up off the Birmingham streets and when the miners learned of their wives' pasts they beat them unmercifully. No one, and especially not company officials, intervened on their behalf. Similar stories circulated in towns throughout the region, including Benham and Lynch.²⁷

When the black women interviewed talked about the early days in Benham and Lynch, most described life there as a vast improvement over the hard life on tenant farms in the south. Frances King, a black coal miner's widow born in Georgia in 1901, spoke with obvious pride about Lynch's amenities in the 1920s. She described Lynch as a wonderful place to live and insisted that segregation did not affect the quality of life as long as everyone observed his or her "place."²⁸

Lynch resident Clara Clements argued that the company store system contributed to miners' dependency. She said that in the black as well as the white community, "Men worked but the women were in charge of how the money was spent. Women often overspent and that was to the company's advantage since men were paid in scrip and the men would have to work until their debt to the company was paid." There were other similarities in the lives of black and white women. Except for a few who worked at the Lynch hotel and hospital or as domestics, black women did not work outside the home. Black babies were born in the hospital, delivered by company doctors. Women and newborns were taken care of through the recovery period by older children, neighbors, and relatives. Though Clements agreed with King that black families fared better in

²⁷ William D. Forester, *Before We Forget: Harlan County—1920 Through 1930*, (by author, 1983), 7.

²⁸ Clements interview.

Lynch than in many other locations, she also agreed with Otis Atkinson that conditions were not ideal.²⁹

Despite racism and segregation, daughters of black miners employed in Benham and Lynch could take advantage of the opportunity to attend college and after graduating, return to the towns as professionals. Dorothy Morrow graduated from Benham High School, studied nursing at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and returned to the mountains as a nurse in Lynch in the 1940s. Other black women came to accept professional jobs. Constance Ellison, also a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, came to teach at Benham in 1944 and never left because she loved her work and the region. Now in her 90s, she is highly respected in her community.³⁰

Access to education did not always result in pursuit of a profession for black or white women. Parker, a white woman, came to live in Harlan County with her half-brother in 1928 in order to attend Benham High School. Arthur, a mine foreman, had moved his family to Clutts, just one mile from the town and within walking distance of the school. Parker graduated in 1930 and though she desperately wanted to go to college, lack of funding and family obligations prevented her from pursuing higher education. In 1935 she married a coal miner with a sixth grade education.

Because of the lack of employment opportunities, Parker's education did little to improve her economic situation. But it was her influence that caused her husband to pursue a job in Benham rather than work in one of the smaller local mines. When he was

²⁹ Clements interview; King interview; Atkinson interview.

³⁰ Dorothy Morrow, interview by Tim Bullock, tape recording, November 13, 1989, Appalachian Archives; Constance Ellison, interview by author, tape recording, Benham, Kentucky, May 3, 2002, Appalachian Archives and Northeast Archives.

employed in a small mine in the coal town of Splint, they could not afford to rent their own place so they moved in with his family, his father, sister, and her husband, all crowded into a small house. She convinced him to apply for a job in the Benham mines and when Wisconsin Steel hired him, the Parkers moved into a company house, a duplex with two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs.

Parker said that times were good during most of the time they lived in Benham. Wisconsin Steel paid good wages and miners were able to buy furniture for their houses and clothes for their children at the company store. The company supplied medical care and free Pablum baby cereal and cod liver oil for all the infants and children in the town. When she and her husband requested permission to move to a house with a fenced-in yard where their two boys could safely play, it was granted without question. After her husband got cut off from the mines during one of the bust periods, they had to move. He worked in a number of small mines, and each time he got cut off they moved to a location near his work because they had no means of transportation. During the next boom, Wisconsin Steel called him back to work at Benham and they were able to move back into a company house. They had a comfortable home, money to buy new furniture, and health care for their two children and two more children delivered by a company doctor. Such amenities made living in these towns especially attractive to families.³¹

Living conditions were even more attractive for professional women and wives of the professional middle-class. They could afford to hire young Appalachian girls, wives of injured miners, or widows to do their domestic chores, freeing them to play golf or to join one of the women's clubs in the area. Aside from these few jobs, the only

³¹ Parker, "Glessie Parker Memoirs." I was the third of those children. The house, painted bright blue, still stands on Cedar Street in Benham.

employment opportunities available to single women even with a high school education were as clerks in local stores or businesses.³²

But even during the “good” years, neither middle class women nor miner’s wives could ever feel totally secure. The volatility of coal markets meant that men, whether superintendents, managers, foremen, or miners had little job security. For miners’ wives, even more than strikes and layoffs, mine safety was a major issue. When fathers or husbands were killed or seriously injured, families forced to live on women’s wages suffered extreme hardship. The possibility of such tragedy was something women had to live with every day. Sociologist Helen Lewis argued:

Women have always been a part of the history of mining in this country. In early days, coal was mined entirely by hand—miners worked 12 to 14 hours a day. Shoveling tons of coal in cramped rooms as low as 30 inches, miners never knew when a roof would give way, breaking a back, cutting off a leg or leaving men buried alive. Women have had to live with death and disasters. The coalfields have been filled with widows and women who have cared for the sick and disabled.³³

From 1911 to 1939 over 700 men were killed in Harlan County mining accidents, not just in the smaller mines but many at the more modern and supposedly safer Benham and Lynch mines.³⁴

Miners’ wives suffered extreme stress while their husbands were down in the mines. Cynthia Allen talked about some of women’s fears:

You worried yourself to death, afraid that he’d get hurt in the mines, which he did. And you had a big responsibility. You had your children, and some mornings, I

³² Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*.

³³ Helen Lewis, *Coalmining Women*, CD4025, Rounder Records Corporation, One Camp Street, Cambridge, MA 02140, 1997, liner notes.

³⁴ Appalgen: Ronald Edger Collier, *Appalachian Historian/Genealogist*, copyright 2000. Information was taken from the Annual Reports of the Kentucky Department of Mines & Minerals and Casualty Bulletins, newspapers, & coal camp cemetery records of Harlan County.

couldn't hardly make it because they'd scare me to death. So one morning I was in there washing dishes. The kids had gone to school. A policeman knocked on the door. . . . He said, "I come to tell you that your husband was hurt, seriously hurt in the mines," and I said, "Well, wait just a minute." I said, "Where's he at?" He said, "He's over at the hospital." And we went over there and he was, oh, he was hurt real bad.

She did not believe her husband could survive his injuries, but he did and even returned to work in the mines. She said, "It was just worry all the time" not just about her husband but also her neighbors' husbands.³⁵

Like Allen, Parker worried each time her husband left that she might never see him again, but she felt that she was one of the lucky ones who never had to face raising her children without a man to support her. She was reluctant to talk about how it felt to see her husband go off to work every day, knowing the dangers he faced. And like the women in Kathy Kahn's *Hillbilly Women* and Carol Giesen's *Coal Miner's Wives*, she says she just tried to put it out of her mind; if she thought about it she'd go crazy. Most of the women said they relied on their religious faith for comfort.³⁶

Denial and a deep religious faith were not always enough to alleviate the stress. The constant worry took about husbands' safety, lay-offs, and strikes took its toll on a woman's health, contributing to the fatalism, depression, and ill health suffered by coal miners' wives. In 1951, Parker was diagnosed with tuberculosis and had to leave seven children without a mother to take care of them while she underwent treatment at a sanatorium in Tennessee, and again when she underwent a lung operation at London,

³⁵ Allen interview.

³⁶ Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs," Kathy Kahn, *Hillbilly Women: Kathy Kahn Talks to Mountain Women About Their Joys and Struggles in Southern Appalachia*, (NY: Avon, 1972, 1973), 4; Carol A. B. Giesen, *Coal Miners' Wives: Portraits of Endurance*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 25, 54, 129-30, 139. Geison's interviews revealed that the determination to keep their sons from becoming miners was a motivating force in women's lives.

Kentucky. The hopelessness she felt about her ability to control what happened to her family and a sense of guilt because of the extra burden of childcare on her husband slowed her recovery. When threatened with the removal of the children from the home, she left the hospital against her doctor's advice. In her weakened state, she was unable to resume her normal duties, but with the help of her children, they managed to assume a somewhat normal existence again. Despite such difficulties, she maintained that she was lucky. Her husband was still alive, healthy and working, she had been able to keep the family intact and the United Mine Workers paid all her medical expenses.³⁷

The insecurity surrounding coal mining made family networks outside the towns vitally important to native-born miners' wives and may have been one reason immigrant families left the region. Immigrant populations in coal mining towns were small compared to those of northern cities and they may have migrated to those locations because they had friends, family, or people with similar cultural and religious backgrounds there. As Carol Giesen learned in her interviews with coalminers' wives, "Among the values and attitudes that remained strong across the years was the importance of home and family as the central structures in the lives of mining families." This was especially true in the case of women whose husbands were injured or killed in the mines.³⁸

Other women also provided support and friendships formed in stressful circumstances tended to last a lifetime. In an interview by Giesen, "Mary," a coal

³⁷ Parker, "Glessie Parker's Memoirs."

³⁸ Giesen, *Coal Miners Wives*, 15.

miner's wife and resident of a coal town in West Virginia, said shared experiences led to these strong bonds:

Sometimes you don't even have to talk about them [the shared problems]. My friend knows what it feels like to worry about if the money'll hold out and what if he gets black lung. . . . And she knows what it's like when my husband's late and you don't know why. . . . She knew what I felt like when my husband got hurt. I didn't have to say anything when T. got his fingers smashed. My friend just came over and sat here. . . . She knew what I was feeling like. My friends are friends because they're miner's wives.

Miner's wives were like a family, Mary said. They played cards together, cooked together for the men's ball team, took care of women whose husbands were killed by helping them with cooking and cleaning, and helped each other with child-rearing problems. They served as a support system to help each other through the hard times.³⁹

Benham and Lynch women were aware that they fared far better than the women in the coal towns and rural farmwomen, and were, in fact, an elite among the working class. They were spared the often crowded and unsanitary living conditions of city life. They lived in a relatively safe environment in substantial houses and could afford to dress in the latest fashions, buy modern appliances, own automobiles and enjoy entertainment at local theaters. Their children were educated in public schools, and they could send their sons and daughters to college. Many educated miners' sons became managers, engineers, doctors, and other professionals rather than coal miners and black and white daughters became teachers or nurses. Even women who talk about the hard times say that most of the time living in Benham and Lynch was a good life and maintain a strong loyalty to their respective towns. In light of such statements, the events that occurred in the 1930s warrant special attention and detailed explanation.

³⁹ Giesen, *Coal Miners' Wives*, 19.

The mine wars that took place in Harlan County in the 1930s did not originate in Benham and Lynch, but in the smaller mines throughout the county that fought to survive in rapidly declining markets. While the depression brought hard times to all America, it was especially disastrous in the bituminous coal region. At first, the deteriorating conditions had little effect on the large operations at Benham and Lynch, but during the late 1920s and 1930s as many of the smaller mines closed or curtailed operations, the United Mine Workers increased efforts to unionize the miners throughout the county. During the miners' attempts to unionize, wives of laid-off or fired miners wrote songs, led rallies, and helped to organize coal-mining families in support of the union.⁴⁰

The large corporations that owned Benham and Lynch mines mined coal primarily for their own consumption so they were relatively unaffected by market conditions. They were able to keep their mines open and their miners employed and as a result, the women whose husbands were employed in these mines were not directly involved in the early union conflict. It would have been impossible for them to ignore the plight of miners' families in the smaller camps but there is no indication that they offered either financial or moral support.

Wives of unemployed or blacklisted miners grew increasingly angry and resentful of such privileged women as food, clothing, and shelter for their families became increasingly difficult to obtain. Actress Patricia Neal's autobiography suggests that the privileged women of the owner and managerial class were either unaware of or unconcerned about their less fortunate sisters' plight or of their resentment and this may have been the case of women in company towns as well. Neal's father was a manager

⁴⁰ Kahn, *Hillbilly Women*, 39-44.

for the Southern Coal and Coke Company in Packard, Kentucky, on the north side of Pine Mountain. Her comments support the theory of a strong “us” and “them” mentality:

Everyone had his or her place [in Packard]. The railroad tracks separated the sheep from the goats among the townsfolk with a biblical severity. Women were never permitted to enter the mine shafts, a primal territory of the male. The church unquestionably chose sides. The whites sat on the ground floor and the blacks were restricted to “nigger heaven.” My family did not venture firsthand into the mine shafts, but the aura was there—dark miner, covered with soot—white miner, covered with the details of management.

She acknowledged the colonial nature of the town: “My father moved through our town like a white god in a native village” enjoying the “good life” afforded such colonial rulers. The local people deferred to her father by bringing him the best of their produce and allowing him to hunt on their land. Her family also enjoyed such privileges as a substantial home and electricity long before it became available to the general population because of her father’s position. Women in these families had little reason to concern themselves with their father or husband’s workers.⁴¹

Harlan County women especially resented the coal operators’ wives and daughters who were able to drive their children around in expensive cars while miners’ wives struggled to clothe and feed their hungry children. James Goode, former director of the Appalachian archives at Southeast Community College, interviewed Sue Bassham Cudd, daughter of Harlan County’s most outspoken anti-union mine owner Pearl Bassham, about her life in Harlan. Cudd made no apologies for her father’s treatment of the miners who tried to organize a union. In fact, she stated unequivocally that she hated unions as much as her father did. She said her father worked his way up through the ranks and made his money without help from a union and that other people should have

⁴¹ Patricia Neal, *As I Am: Autobiography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 1, 2.

to do the same. She recalled with great pride that in 1931, at the height of the depression, her father was making \$1,000 a month and was able to buy Harlan Wallins Coal Corporation from the American National Bank for one million dollars.⁴²

While the miners who worked for Bassham lived in drafty shacks and cabins and had to watch their children starve, Cudd's father bought land in Baxter for \$7,000, hired men to grade the property and hired an architect to design an elegant home which was completed in October of 1931. The children in her family had their own cars and owned stock in their father's several companies. The family traveled extensively to Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, and New York where they shopped for clothing, stayed at elegant hotels, and ate in fine restaurants. Her mother had a maid and at one time or another, all the children attended private schools. In 1949, after her father's fortune increased because of World War II, he spent over \$100,000 to remodel the house. There was a bathroom in every bedroom and her mother replaced all the furniture with specially designed mahogany from Millers in Kingsport, Tennessee. They felt this was necessary because they needed better facilities for entertaining Kentucky's governor and other high-level Republican politicians.⁴³

Cudd seemed oblivious to the desperate situation of miners' families during this period, and it was such obvious class differences and attitudes that contributed to militancy of coal miner's wives after 1930. It infuriated miner's wives that their children were cold and hungry while the mine owners' children ate the best food available and

⁴² Sue Bassam Cudd, interview by James Goode, tape recording, Cumberland, Kentucky, March 8, 1984, Appalachian Archives.

⁴³ Cudd interview.

slept between silky sheets in warm beds. Florence Reese lived in Molus, one of the mining towns Cudd's father owned, and described the conditions there:

It seems like a bad dream when you think about it, that it happened to your own children. They didn't have no clothes, nor enough to eat, they was always sick and you could see they was hungry. . . .I've seen little children, their little legs would be so tiny and their stomachs would be so big from eating green apples, anything they could get.⁴⁴

Benham and Lynch families did not suffer such hardships, and as a result the women remember the labor wars as being more dreadful than the depression. They lived in constant fear that their husbands would be injured or killed, not by mine accidents, but by bullets from guns fired by company guards or other miners.

The violence escalated as the United Mine Workers of America increased their efforts to make all of Harlan County mines union mines. It was inevitable that the miners of Benham and Lynch, despite their membership in "company" unions, would be drawn into the battle, and with them, their wives and families. The union wars of the 1930s would threaten the stability of their communities and contribute to the eventual departure of the companies that owned the towns.

⁴⁴ Kahn, *Hillbilly Women*, 5.

CHAPTER 7: ACQUIESCENCE AND RESISTANCE: RESPONSES TO CORPORATE CONTROL

The United States in the late nineteenth century offered a peculiarly inviting field for coarse leadership and crudely exercised power. Inhibitions that restrained a man in his own community scarcely applied when his decisions involved distant, invisible people.

Robert Weibe¹

Despite their similar beginnings Millinocket and East Millinocket developed in significantly different ways over time from Benham and Lynch. The first and most important factor was the corporate labor policies of absentee investors and corporations. Company historian John McLeod attributed the relatively smooth labor relations in Millinocket and East Millinocket to the appointment of Garrett Schenck as the first president of the newly incorporated Great Northern Paper Company. Schenck derived his authority from the fact that the Millinocket mill had been his brainchild and as long as the mill continued to produce substantial profits for investors, they had little reason to interfere with his individual management style. Schenck had seen first hand the effects of labor conflict in International Paper's Rumford mill and apparently considered resistance to unions counter productive. Schenck hired managers and supervisors and gave them the authority to hire the paper makers and machinists for their departments, since they were the ones who worked in close contact with these men.²

Workers in the paper industry organized unions from the beginning of the industry and by 1965, according to economist James Gross, "roughly 80 percent of . . . 4,449,000 production employees in the mills . . . [were] covered by agreement with labor

¹ Weibe, *Search for Order*, 37.

² John E. McLeod, "The Northern the Way I Remember: Condensed from a history by John McLeod," Special Collections, Fogler Library, University of Maine, 96.

unions; craft, industrial, or semi-industrial.” Due to Schenk’s influence, Great Northern’s union policies were decided at the time the company first began production. The first union in the Millinocket mill was the International Machine Tenders union organized in 1901, followed by Local 27 of the International Brotherhood of Papermakers and Local 69 of the International Brotherhood of Firemen, Oilers and Helpers Union in 1902. Unskilled workers who were not accepted into these unions organized the Laborer’s Protective Unions. When these unions applied to the American Federation of Labor for a separate charter in 1902, their request was denied and they were transferred without their consent to the International Brotherhood of Papermakers. The unskilled workers’ resentment of their inequality in the national organization led them to break away from the AFL and to form a separate organization, the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers. Bitter disputes and struggles for the dominant role in union negotiations between the Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers and the Papermakers led to Millinocket’s only strike in 1907.³

Unlike executives at International Paper and other Maine paper companies, Schenck cultivated cordial relationships with unions. He recognized the need for skilled chemists, electricians, machinists, paper makers and pulp workers to operate the mill profitably and took active steps to retain this group of employees. Educated and well-trained workers, especially those who operated expensive machines, were respected and valued for their skills and experience, and their unions operated much the same as

³ James A. Gross, “The Making and Shaping of Unionism in the Pulp and Paper Industry,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, April, 1964. Reprinted from *Labor History*, Vol. 5, no 2, (spring, 1964), 183-188.

artisans' guilds in protecting their members' interests. Corporate recognition of these unions meant that members felt they could influence company policies and felt no need to develop defense mechanisms because they did not perceive such policies as exploitative. As a result, Great Northern was able to maintain a stable work environment and workers had a vested interest in creating stable, secure communities.

On March 6, 1912, company representatives, three international union presidents, and representatives of four Millinocket locals, three East Millinocket locals, and four from Great Northern's Madison mill convened in Boston to sign a twelve-point labor contract. The "working agreement" established a union shop requiring that all non-management mill employees belong to one of the represented unions and required newly hired employees to join the union representing their job categories within fifteen days. Negotiations included access to collective bargaining for wages, work schedules, and holidays. More importantly, all parties signed a no strike, no lockout pledge. Such negotiations enabled Great Northern to avoid the kind of labor unrest that existed in other paper companies and other industries. An agreement with the unions as a group worked to the company's benefit, since the fact that workers in all three mills were bound to the same contract minimized conflict between employees and contributed to the stability of the company's overall operation.⁴

The entry of the United States into WWI brought few changes in the paper industry. There was no draft and few workers enlisted, possibly because they were reluctant to leave good paying jobs. Those who did were gone only a short period of time because the United States entered the war near the end. The state archives list the names

⁴ Lavery, *Millinocket: Magic City*, Chronology, xi; *Labor Agreement*, March 5, 1912, Labor Conference, Boston, March 5, 1912, Great Northern Papers, Box 540, Special Collections, Fogler Library.

of 213 men out of a total population of 4,528 men, women, and children in Millinocket who enlisted in the military in WWI. Many of these volunteers served for less than a year; most were single, in their late teens and early twenties. Almost all returned safely to their jobs; Millinocket's young men suffered only two fatalities and one serious injury.⁵ Rather than hire women to replace workers as other industries did, the paper industry dealt with temporary labor shortages by assigning the men who did not enlist extra hours. Given the relatively few enlistees and the short length of time the men were away, the war probably had little direct effect on the majority of Millinocket residents. When the soldiers returned in 1918, they were given back their original jobs and normal scheduling resumed. Unlike other industries and paper companies, Great Northern never adopted the "American plan" intended to create "open" or non-union shops, and the fact that the company continued to honor its unions contributed greatly to the uninterrupted production of paper at the mill and the stability of the town.⁶

Even during the 1930s depression, though the demand for paper declined, Great Northern was able to keep all workers employed by scheduling a shorter work-week for each man. According to Millinocket historians J. Fred Tingley and Roy Hayes, "In the depression era when many men were without work, the workmen requested voluntarily that the priority system be set aside and that work be apportioned to everyone needing it."

⁵ Maine Archives Reference Services, February 20, 2003.

⁶ Charles Scontras, *Organized Labor in Maine: War, Reaction, Depression, and the Rise of the CIO 1914-1943*, (Orono: Bureau of Labor Education, University of Maine, 2002), 50. Scontras discussed the adoption of the American Plan, but made no mention of Great Northern.

It meant a pay reduction, but such cooperative efforts between the company and the workers made it possible for all residents to provide food and shelter for their families.⁷

Such joint decisions are examples of the company's willingness to work with its employees and a reason for workers' loyalty to the company. In addition to alleviating the kind of suffering people in other towns experienced, the fact that men were still able to provide support for their families helped to preserve their masculine pride. To attribute Great Northern's attitude toward workers to altruism or paternalism would be an oversimplification; in fact, such cooperation was good management. The company needed a skilled and experienced labor force and providing them with a means to survive a national crisis was a hedge against the future. Apparently, the whole town assumed the company's attitude that the crisis would be temporary and everyone could weather it by helping each other.

The town's women made important contributions to the community's well-being during the depression. Dorothy Lavery attributed the relative lack of suffering to the fact that Great Northern's workers shared a common bond and a spirit of cooperation that extended beyond the workplace. A number of federal relief programs helped to alleviate the economic difficulties, but one of the complications the town faced was that many of the immigrants who had not yet become citizens were not eligible for federal relief funds. While workers' wages may have been sufficient to provide food and shelter, these families also needed clothing. Lavery credited women with finding creative solutions to

⁷ J. Fred Tingley and Roy Hayes, "The Second Twenty-Five Years, 1926-1951, *Millinocket, Maine: 50th Anniversary, 1901-1951*, Millinocket Memorial Library.

the problem; they collected and cleaned clothing for redistribution and organized a sewing exchange to provide new clothing for needy residents.⁸

Such actions by women were not unique to Millinocket. Sylvia Hoffert described women's role in the home and the community all over America as "the glue that held families together." Domestic skills and resourcefulness enhanced women's femininity; "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without" was the motto of the day. In the same way that men were able to retain their sense of manliness by continuing to earn wages, women retained their feminine pride by resourceful management of their homes and communities.⁹

Laverty wrote, "Millinocket weathered the stormy depression days fairly well and soon moved into a period of construction beneficial to the town and its industry alike." To accommodate the renewed growth, Great Northern built new hydroelectric plants to supply electric power to their mills at Millinocket and East Millinocket and to residents of the two towns. In 1936 the Great Northern mill at Millinocket was the largest newsprint producing mill under one roof in the world. Old buildings were modernized and new ones built.¹⁰

World War II ushered in a new era. One tenth of Millinocket's population, 600 men and women out of a population of 6,223 joined or were drafted into the military.¹¹ Once again, Millinocket women's services were needed on the home front, but unlike other corporations, Great Northern did not hire women to replace the male work force in

⁸ Laverty, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 68.

⁹ Sylvia Hoffert, "Femininity in the Twentieth Century," *A History of Gender in America*, 364.

¹⁰ Laverty, *Millinocket: Magic City*, 70.

¹¹ Maine Archives Reference Services, February 20, 2003.

the mill. Using the same kind of creative management employed during the depression, it negotiated with the available workforce to arrange work schedules to insure that production, though somewhat reduced, would be uninterrupted.¹²

To find woodsmen to replace temporarily those lost to the military, the company looked to Canada. Under the terms of the 1941 Hyde Park agreement, a bilateral arrangement between the United States and Britain negotiated by Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King and President Franklin Roosevelt, it was able to negotiate with the Canadian government to hire Canadian workers for the duration of the war. Though primarily designed to step up U. S. defense purchases in Canada and for the U. S. under lend-lease agreements to supply to Canada component parts of goods destined for Britain, Great Northern's shortage of woodsmen provided a way for Canada to pay off a 400 million dollar debt owed to the United States.¹³ At that time, Canadians were not allowed to work in the U. S. because of border restrictions. Through negotiations made possible by the Hyde Park agreement, on October 19, 1943, the border opened to 4200 Canadian workers. Single men aged 19-40, and married men 19-25 had to pass a rigid physical examination to prove they were capable of the hard physical labor required of woodsmen.¹⁴ As a result of these arrangements, the women of Millinocket and East Millinocket, unlike women in other industrial towns, continued to be excluded from the workforce.

¹² Lavery, *Millinocket, Magic City*, 77-78.

¹³ Joseph Tohill, e-mail message to author, September 5, 2003.

¹⁴ Hyde Park Agreement, Box 839, F9, Great Northern Papers, Special Collections, Fogler Library.

Great Northern continued to provide amenities in the 1940s. It purchased a farm across Millinocket Stream for a new athletic field and built a bridge to provide access to the new field. After WWII ended the company recognized the need for additional housing for returning soldiers, some with European and Asian war brides and others who married local women when they returned. The cooperative home building project of 1947 and 1948 attracted nation-wide attention; newspaper articles and a featured article in the August 1948 *Ladies Home Journal* extolled both Great Northern's paternalism and the cooperation between workers.¹⁵ Such recognition was a source of pride and strengthened the communal bond between residents.

Millinocket and East Millinocket had become stable, self-sustaining communities by the end of World War II. Workers and their families found little to criticize or complain about in an environment where the company made substantial provisions for their needs. Immigrants who had come to America to participate in the American dream were not disappointed. The thriving paper industry promised job security, unions negotiated benefits and pensions, and wives no longer had to struggle to earn wages while attending to their families needs. Families were now able to own homes, cars and modern appliances and had the means to provide a better life for their children.

The situation in Benham and Lynch was dramatically different; demand for Harlan County's coal dropped rapidly after the war and the inevitable layoff of miners contributed to an already volatile labor situation. Labor problems that contributed to the decline were inherent in the management systems from the beginning. Much of the labor problem in Benham and Lynch stemmed from the fact that centralized management

¹⁵ Tingley and Hayes, "The Second Twenty-Five Years;" Margaret Hickey, "Homes . . . Millinocket Builds: Housing Hopes," *Ladies Home Journal*, August 1948, 23.

provided little or no contact between corporate executives and the coal miners who worked for them. Autocratic parent organizations located in Pittsburgh and Chicago dictated the management policies of U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel. Executives in the home office delegated the authority to hire and fire to locally based mine superintendents who were not allowed to exercise personal initiative in the administration of their duties but were expected to comply with company directives.

Both United States Steel Corporation and International Harvester were basically holding companies that administered their many subsidiaries through very small general offices until the 1930s, but the labor policies of their subsidiaries were designed to maximize profits for the parent company.¹⁶ With the exception of electricians, machinists, and a few other skilled positions, the coal industry placed more value on strong backs and brute strength than on skills and this made miners extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Miners injured or killed and those involved in union activity could be easily replaced. The common perception was that mules, which had to be purchased, were more valuable to the company than miners.

The isolation of the coal towns made workers vulnerable to corporate control. *United Mine Workers Journal* editor Ellis Searles' description of coal miners' lives in the coal regions of West Virginia can also be applied to conditions in Harlan County. He described miners as "cut off from the rest of the world, entirely dependent upon a single industry for their living." He argued that the miners themselves were property. Their civil liberties were abolished "because coal companies employ hundred of armed men . . . to coerce and intimidate the miner and his family into strict obedience to the will of the

¹⁶ Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 361.

operators.” One reason steel companies and coal operators preferred foreign labor to native labor was that foreigners were a captive work force. The following advertisement appeared in Pittsburgh newspapers on July 14, 1909: “Wanted—60 tin house men, tanners, catchers, and helpers to work in open shops, Syrians, Poles, and Roumanians preferred; steady employment and good wages to men willing to work; fare paid and no fees charged for this work.”¹⁷ The problem was that once they had arrived at their destination, these men were under the absolute control of the employers who had paid for their travel. If they were laid off or discharged they could be evicted before they had earned enough money to pay for transportation to another location.

Attempts by the United Mine Workers of America to organize Harlan county miners in 1917 met with fierce resistance from coal operators and the miners called a general strike. Rather than negotiate, Wisconsin Steel, like other Harlan County coal operators, resorted to violence to break the strike. George Titler, famous as the man who organized the UMWA in Harlan County, reported: “At the mining property of the Wisconsin Steel Company at Benham, armed guards were employed and strikebreakers were imported.” The resultant violence culminated in the murder of an unarmed miner, Luther Shipman, and the mortal wounding of a relative, Frank Shipman, by a Harlan County posse employed by the coal companies.¹⁸

Competition for miners created conflict between U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel. The entry of U. S. Coal and Coke as a player in the field in 1918 and the demand for coal prior to and during the United State’s entry into World War I

¹⁷ Ellis Searles, “Wrongs of the Soft-Coal Miners,” *New York Times-Current History*, 15, (March 8, 1922), 961; Stanley Hearings 1911, vol. 4, 3074, quoted by Gulick, *Labor Policy*, 129.

¹⁸ Titler, *Hell in Harlan*, 4.

exacerbated an already critical labor shortage. Efforts to retain their miners was a constant source of tension between the superintendents of the two mines. In his history of Harlan County, William Forester wrote:

Most of the French coal fields were in the hands of the Germans and coal was badly needed for export to the allies as well as to supply the needs of our country. The mines were hampered by the manpower shortage since many of the young miners volunteered and others were drafted. To compensate for this loss of manpower, many inexperienced men, attracted by high wages the mines were paying, entered the pits. Many of the miners worked twelve hours a day and sometimes six or seven days a week.¹⁹

Mine fatalities and the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 that swept Harlan County contributed to the shortage of workers. It is difficult to determine the exact number of fatalities from 1916 to 1920; no reports are available for 1916 and 1917 and though U. S. Coal and Coke filed the only report in 1918-1919, there were seven fatalities in that mine alone.²⁰

Attempts by U. S. Coal and Coke to lure Benham's workers to the Lynch mines created hostilities between the two companies and an atmosphere of mistrust between the managers. Wisconsin Steel's major concern was that it would lose its skilled laborers or that the Benham miners might strike for the higher wages paid by U. S. Coal and Coke. On March 12, 1918, after receiving a report of a number of work stoppages and miners not showing up for work at the Benham mines, B. W. Batchelder, general superintendent of mines in Minnesota, wrote to F. B. Dunbar, superintendent of Wisconsin Steel's Benham mines, with two major concerns:

¹⁹ Forester, *Before We Forget*, 40.

²⁰ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 209, 264; Ronald E. Collier, "703 Coal Miners Who Lost Their Lives in Harlan County Coal Mine Accident 1911-2001" (Cumberland, KY: AppalGen Publishing, 2001).

Continual rumor has come from the Union organization that they would put men into the mines at Benham and Lynch and get them organized. I have not been able to trace any of this trouble to the United Mine Workers, however I do believe that most of our trouble this morning was caused by the U. S. Coal & Coke Company offering our men, especially machine runners and mechanics, more money than they are now making here.

He first suspected that attempts by United Mine Workers to organize both Benham and Lynch mines might be instigating trouble, but then came to the conclusion that U. S. Coal & Coke's management was the cause of the problem. Dunbar replied that he had been to see Kearns, the mine superintendent at Lynch, to ask him "whether he expected to stay within the bounds of the rates as agreed upon by Mr. Garfield in this district," and that Kearns had said "they were not paying either Union or Non-Union rates, but they were paying whatever they damned please."

Batchelder replied: "It is hard to believe that they intend to assume the attitude as expressed by Mr. Kearns. . . . They are disregarding entirely usual and reasonable business relations when they take the position that they intend to pay any rate necessary to get the men whether or not it may effect [sic] their neighbors." His instructions were to hold the line until he had a chance to talk to officials at U. S. Coal and Coke. He said the company was paying the men "all they are worth," compared their wages to those being paid in other parts of the country, and said he had no intention of becoming involved in a "cut-throat" battle. On the other hand, he said to do what was necessary to hold onto the company's skilled men.²¹

Such labor issues continued to create tensions between the two towns throughout the war years, but the major labor conflict began in the coal towns outside Benham and

²¹ B. W. Batchelder to F.B. Dunbar, March 16, 1918, International Harvester Papers, Appalachian Archives.

Lynch and at first did not directly involve the miners who worked there. By 1918, the UMWA had organized most of the smaller, privately owned mines in Harlan County, but Wisconsin Steel and U.S. Coal and Coke refused to recognize the union. When the union contract expired, the smaller companies refused to renew it. After the war ended, demand for coal decreased and all of the coal companies in Harlan County began to lay off workers. The resulting worker surplus led to fierce competition among mostly mountain white and black workers for the available jobs and enabled the companies to cut wages drastically. The increasingly desperate employment situation and deepening poverty made miners more receptive to new attempts to organize unions.

In anticipation of organizers' attempts to contact their workers, U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel carefully monitored miners' activities, both on and off the job. Though company control was intrusive in both towns, it was more rigid in Lynch than in Benham because union agitation was already occurring at the time the Lynch mine opened and the company had no intention of permitting the United Mine Workers to organize their miners. The presence of company police who guarded the entrance to prevent movement in and out of the town gave it the appearance of an armed camp. Miners could not simply pack up and leave; purchases made at the company store through the scrip system had left most deeply indebted to the company. Robert Hugh Collier, Lynch historian and miner, wrote: "It was to the company's advantage to keep the miner in debt to them. In the clutches of the Ogres, the miner would be more regular on his job and have the drive to load more coal so he could pay off his debt."²²

²² Collier, *The Conception of Lynch*, 47.

After the war ended, Harlan County coal operators once again refused to recognize the UMWA and brought in mine guards to prevent union organization. Because United States Steel and International Harvester needed to continue steady production of coal to fuel their steel mills, their subsidiaries tried to placate the workers by convincing them to form or join existing “company” unions; in Benham the Works Council and in Lynch, the United Lynch Employees. John A. Dotson, former principal of Benham High School, wrote:

A Works Council was organized by the International Harvester Company in 1919 in all of its plants, including Benham. This council provided equal representation for the men and the company in deciding all matters involving labor. The company representative was appointed by the officials and the workers’ representatives were elected by the men. The company does not belong to the Harlan County Coal Operators Association and is not a party to any of its contracts. It has consistently paid union scale wages or better.²³

Dotson’s reference to the Harlan County Coal Operators is recognition of Wisconsin Steel’s attempt to avoid association with the notoriously anti-union association.

Wisconsin Steel produced coal primarily for use in its own steel mills and was less susceptible to market fluctuations and free to attract reliable employees by paying higher wages than its competitors.²⁴

Company unions could never be truly representative because they were sponsored by the coal corporations and could be disbanded if their decisions did not win company approval. They were only marginally effective in negotiating better wages, benefits and safety conditions for miners. Before United Mine Workers representation, miners

²³ John A. Dotson, “Socio-Economic Background and Changing Education in Harlan County, Kentucky,” (Ph.D. diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, June, 1943), 169-170. Many of Dotson’s observations were based on personal interviews with Benham residents and his own experience as principal of Benham High School from 1920 to 1943.

²⁴ Caudill, *Conception of Lynch*, 55.

suspected of union organization and their families were evicted from company houses, and though no positive evidence has been located, residents insist that the families of men killed or injured in the mines were evicted to make room for working miners. They claim that company guards escorted women and children with only the possessions they could carry on their persons outside the town limits and unless these families had someone they could turn to for help, they found themselves without a home, income, medical care, and education for their children. Whether accurate or not, the prevailing belief in such corporate practices created anger, bitterness, and mistrust, even in families not directly affected, and set the stage for the violence to come.²⁵

Throughout the 1920s, according to Titler, other than the company unions, no union-management relationship existed. By 1921 even the wage provisions of the previously signed UMWA contract were openly ignored by the operators, a clear breach of contract and indicative of the attitude of local mine operators. The smaller Harlan County mines remained non-union and their operators continued to lower wages in order to maintain a competitive pricing advantage in markets. In response to the deteriorating conditions for miners, the UMWA seized the opportunity once again to attempt to recruit miners facing potential wage cuts, lay-offs or cut-offs. Abuses of the labor force throughout the county provided fertile ground for labor organizers. The anti-union stance of parent companies which had already demonstrated their violent anti-labor practices in Haymarket Square and Homestead contributed to the labor conflict that destroyed the

²⁵ Kahn, *Hillbilly Women*; Parker, conversations with author. Almost of the women Kahn interviewed told similar stories.

tranquilly of Benham and Lynch and put Harlan County into the national spotlight during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶

During the depression, the situation in Benham and Lynch worsened. As steel mills decreased production due to soft markets, there was a decreased demand for coal production. All of Harlan County experienced a bust period caused by competition from northern markets and the replacement of coal with cleaner burning and more easily transported oil as the preferred fuel for homes, factories, and transportation. In response, coal operators throughout the county, including U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel, cut wages, laid off miners, and abandoned attempts at mine safety in order to sustain a profit. Without jobs, miners could no longer afford to pay rent or buy food or supplies for their families.

Food shortages reached crisis proportions. With no market for their products, subsidiary supply companies stopped their usual shipments, and in some towns food became unavailable at any price. A Benham miner wrote in a letter to the *UMW Journal* that even though the mines were operating every day, living conditions for the miners and their children were “deplorable.” The UMWA, in response to “wage cuts, long hours of labor, and miserable working and living conditions” that left miners and their families destitute, urged the miners to rebel against a system that was “half free and half slave” by joining the union. Miners who did so were taking a terrible risk. Even attending an organizational meeting could result in dismissal and eviction, leaving their families without a place to live or food to eat.²⁷

²⁶ Titler, *Hell in Harlan*, 10.

²⁷ Titler, *Hell in Harlan.*, 18, 19.

Charles Gulick, the historian who so angered United States Steel's management, found ample evidence of the company's hostility toward unions in his research. Gary's comments at the annual stockholders' meeting, April 18, 1921, were enlightening:

As stated and repeated publicly, we do not combat, though we do not contract or deal with, labor unions as such. Personally, I believe they may have been justified in the long past, for I think the workmen were not always treated justly; that because of their lack of experience or otherwise they were unable to protect themselves; and therefore needed the assistance of outsiders in order to secure their rights. But whatever may have been the conditions of employment in the long past, and whatever may have been the results of unionism, concerning which there is a least much uncertainty, there is at present, in the opinion of both employers and employes [sic], no necessity for labor unions; and that no benefit or advantage through them will accrue to anyone except to the union labor leaders.²⁸

Previous statements indicated that Gary and U.S. Steel were less concerned with the protection of employees than of the corporation. Corporate resistance to the unionization of workers was not, as this statement claims, based on the belief that only union leaders would benefit from unionism. It was more likely that it was based on the fear that collective bargaining would result in higher wages for workers that would limit investors' profits.

Gulick listed ten methods that steel corporations *admitted* using in their attempts to combat unions. The first six were interactions with employees and control of the workforce: closing operations in a specific location after signing a wage scale applicable only to that location; using convict labor; engaging spies to report on "labor agitators" in the workplace and community; engaging non-union strikebreakers, called "scabs" by the union supporters; discharging men for union activities and evicting them and their

²⁸ Charles A. Gulick, *Labor Policy of the United States Steel Corporation* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 93-94

families from company property; and blacklisting men for union activities so they would be unable to find employment in another mine.²⁹

While corporate officials may have admitted that they had attempted to control the press and public officials and had inaugurated welfare management programs for the express purpose of preventing unions, they did *not* admit using of violence against striking employees. However, all of the methods except the first were implemented in Benham and Lynch. Since these towns were located at the site of the resource, it would not have been possible to transfer operations, so protection of property was a prime concern.

The well-documented tales of violence against miners in the 1930s are some of the most shocking in American history. Most historical accounts have focused on the war between owners of the smaller Harlan County mines and miners who were attempting to join the UMWA. Titler, Taylor and Collier described the conflict between miners and union organizers in the 1930s that resulted from the UMWA's attempt to recruit union organizers and members in Lynch. Collier related his own experience with the paranoia that reigned in Lynch: "Company police would patrol the neighborhood, trying to catch someone promoting the union. Occasionally someone would be fired and moved out of the camp [town]. The police would actually come onto one's porch and attempt to eavesdrop on the people inside." Visitors were met at the entrance to the town and had to show identification before they were admitted in. Guards confiscated any

²⁹ Gulick, *Labor Policy*, 7.

literature found on their person. Persons deemed suspicious by guards were escorted out of town and told that if they returned, they would be arrested for trespassing.³⁰

As the corporations in Benham and Lynch tightened security, conditions were growing worse in the small coal towns and camps. Miner's wives, already stretched to the limit to provide basic necessities for their families, resorted to desperate tactics in order to survive. During times of crisis, women became the protectors of the community and stood guard over their makeshift homes at night so the men could get some rest. Mothers pooled limited resources to try to provide food and warm clothing for children. They joined their husbands on the picket lines and sometimes picketed as a group. Some carried guns; others attacked "scabs" with sticks, broom handles and switches and blocked the road to the mines with their bodies. They wrote and sang protest songs and spoke at rallies. Some of them achieved hero status: Mother Jones, Florence Reece, and Hazel Dickens to name a few. Some, like Sarah Ogan Gunning and Aunt Molly Jackson used their songs to raise funds for the Communist Party because of the aid they had provided for fired and blacklisted miners and their families by running soup kitchens and providing clothing and shelter for families evicted from mining camps and towns.³¹

Methods used to prevent miners from joining the union were clear violations of constitutional rights and public outrage after the events that occurred in 1931 forced the Federal government to intervene. The tension that had been building for years finally exploded on May 5, 1931, in the "Battle of Evarts." A gun battle between carloads of deputies and blacklisted and unemployed coal miners that left three deputies and one

³⁰ Collier, *Conception of Lynch*, 17, 55, 57.

³¹ Kahn, *Hillbilly Women*, 2, 3; *Coal Mining Women*, Rounder CD 4025 ® © Rounder Records Corporation, One Camp Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140 USA.

miner dead made national news. Benton J. Strong, staff correspondent for the *Knoxville New Sentinel*, a Scripps-Howard daily, published interviews with miners as well as company and county officials in six United Press articles after the battle. After that, members of the press were regarded as spies in Harlan County. Bruce Crawford, a member of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, wrote:

While the class war began early in 1931, war on representative of the press did not start until the middle of the summer. On August 17, Boris Israel, a Federated Press writer was “taken for a ride from the steps of the Harlan courthouse, thrown out at the county line, and shot through the leg. This incident took place two weeks after a bullet hole occurred in my own leg as I was crossing a bridge in the town of Harlan. I had gone there to investigate for my own newspaper. While I did not get to talk to the sheriff, I believe I got his point of view.”³²

The fact that neither the state nor federal government intervened on behalf of the press or the coal miners indicates that the coal operators had political influence in high places.

When Jessie Lloyd O’Conner, Smith college graduate, daughter of a wealthy family of social reformers and a labor journalist for the Federated Press, came to Harlan County to cover the story, she received a threatening note at her hotel the day she arrived. The note read: “Madam: You have been here to long already and remember to other red neck reporters got what was coming to them so don’t let the sun go down on you here. If you do it will be just to bad. We got your number and we don’t mean maybe.” The note was signed “Hundred percent americans.”³³ She decided to appeal directly to Kentucky Governor Klem Sampson for protection and for the rest of the time she was there she was not harmed. The discovery that relief had been denied to miners designated “not willing

³² Bruce Crawford, “Harlan County and the Press,” in *Harlan County Miners Speak: Report on Terrorism in the Kentucky Coal Fields*, ed. Theodore Drieser and Members of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company), 75.

³³ Quoted in Crawford, “Harlan County and the Press,” 75.

to work” for protesting anything from working conditions to inflated prices in company stores prompted her to donate her own money and to write fund-raising letters to her wealthy friends urging them to contribute to the Kentucky Miners Relief Committee in Pittsburgh and to send food and clothing to the Miners Warehouse in Pineville.³⁴

Following O’Conner’s letter, the sheriff, County Judge H.H. Howard, William Turnblazer and Kentucky Federation of Labor Secretary Peter Campbell petitioned the governor to “restore order and to protect the citizens of Harlan and Bell counties.” It was impossible for the governor to ignore the situation any longer; fearing even more bloodshed, he decided to dispatch 300 troops into the county to preserve order.³⁵ It was obvious to the miners that the troops were not there to protect them; they were there to protect the coal operators and their property. And although Judge Davy Crockett Jones empanelled a grand jury to investigate the incident, most of the men charged and indicted were union leaders and coal miners.

Following the Battle of Evarts, a rash of strikes involving 1,574 miners produced no concessions from the coal operators and the UMWA, convinced that strikes at that time were futile, withdrew completely from Harlan County, leaving the field open to organizing efforts by other unions. The desperate plight of Harlan County miners focused more than news media attention on the region, it caught the attention of the National Miners Union, part of the Communist dominated Industrial Workers of the World. In 1931, abandoned by the UMWA, desperate miners joined the communist

³⁴ Jesse Lloyd O’Conner Papers, The Sophia Smith Collection, Agents of Social Change Exhibit, www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/exhibit/oconnor.html

³⁵ Paul F. Taylor, *Bloody Harlan: The United Mine Workers of America in Harlan County, Kentucky, 1931-1941* (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 18.

sponsored “Save the Union Movement.” The NMU attracted potential members by forming women’s auxiliaries to set up soup kitchens and provide aid for starving miners and their families. Titler wrote that miners anticipated trouble from the mine operators and it soon came: “On July 26, 1931, the union held a picnic attended by 2,000 miners, their wives and children, at which open speeches were made.” Eleven heavily armed deputies came to the picnic but left after they discovered the miners had armed themselves. The deputies returned on August 10 to dynamite one of the seven soup kitchens maintained by the NMU and shoot and kill two miners in the soup line “in cold blood.”³⁶

In November 1931 a committee sponsored by the International Defense League and headed by Theodore Dreiser and John Dos Passos came to the region to investigate reported violations of constitutional rights, to center national attention on conditions in the coalfields and to attempt to “dispel some of the ills being suffered by the miners there.”³⁷ Harlan County lawmen hired by the coal operators were quick to retaliate against this outside interference in their affairs. Dreiser left Harlan to avoid an investigation into an adultery charge after it was made known that a female secretary had spent the night in his room. He was later arrested in Pineville, Kentucky, on a charge of criminal syndicalism. Though he later testified before the LaFollette Commission and co-authored one of the most vivid accounts of the terrorist tactics employed against

³⁶Titler, *Hell in Harlan*, 24-26, 36-38.

³⁷ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 27-28.

miners, neither he nor Dos Passos were able to accomplish their mission to effect justice for Harlan County miners.³⁸

Taylor referred to conditions in Harlan County in the 1930s as “a reign of terror.”³⁹ Between 1931 and 1932 there were eight murders connected with union activity. By 1932 the NMU as well as the UMWA had been driven out of Harlan County. Roosevelt’s New Deal did little to ease the situation. When President Roosevelt in 1933 signed the National Industrial Recovery Act that guaranteed workers the right to organize into unions and bargain collectively, it precipitated the crisis that led to the most violent confrontations between the coal operators and the miners. This act also established a minimum wage and the eight-hour day in most industries. Just as the steel and coal companies had refused to abide by the 1919 rulings of the Bituminous Coal Commission to increase miners’ pay and shorten the work week to forty-eight hours, they refused to obey the NIRA directive to honor miners’ unions and negotiate such issues as mine safety, the closed shop, wages, and checkweighmen. A checkweighman elected by the miners was a vitally important issue since miners were paid according to the weight of the coal they mined in a shift and were convinced that their loads were consistently shorted by company employees.⁴⁰

The passage of the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) in 1935 gave workers the right to choose their representatives democratically and to

³⁸ Theodore Dreiser and the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, *Harlan County Miners Speak; Report on Terrorism in the Kentucky Coal Fields* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932).

³⁹ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 91.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*., 43.

negotiate the “terms and conditions of employment or other mutual aid or protection.” As organizers increased their attempts to establish a union, the coal companies increased efforts to prohibit miners from joining.⁴¹ More violence erupted and in 1935, the Kentucky governor sent in the National Guard to restore order three times.

Despite sporadic violence in Benham and Lynch, the experience of women in these towns during the mine wars was far less brutal than that of women in the coal camps. Benham and Lynch women’s husbands remained employed and they maintained company benefits. Lynch resident Cynthia Allen said that when the United Mine Workers first tried to organize the county in 1935, some of the Lynch miners decided to show their support for striking miners in some of the smaller camps. For their wives, even those aware of the danger involved, joining their husbands on the picket line was a more a social event than a protest. She recalled:

We’d all get together and have a lot of fun especially when the union came in here, the United Mine Workers. Our husbands would go on the picket line. Us girls, women, would pack a lunch, fix hot coffee and we’d go, too. They stayed on the picket line all day. We did, too. And that was fun for us, but it was dangerous. . . . You was afraid to get in a car and ride to Cumberland, afraid somebody would kill you as you went through Benham or wherever.

She could not say for certain who the “somebody” was, but she suspected it was “gun thugs” hired by Wisconsin Steel because the Lynch miners had to pass through Benham to get to Cumberland, and she had heard stories of Lynch miners being shot as they tried to travel through the town. Allen said company guards watched the miners’ every move:

One night as my husband and me was sitting here and our cousin was laying on our porch a-trying to see who was in here, if anybody was organizer or anybody was in here. And my husband opened the door and there he was. And he said, “You get

⁴¹ “Preamble of the National Labor Relations Act, 1935,” *Public Laws of the United States*, 74th Congress Session 1, 1935, (Washington, D. C.: government printing office), 449-450.

off of my porch or you won't be able to go." And the police was standing out there waiting on this guy, to see what was going on in here. Now that's how they worked.

Benham and Lynch women had little involvement with the women from the mining camps, but Allen recalls the one time she and some of the other wives joined their husbands in an attempt to support the striking miners at Chad, a coal camp about five miles downriver from Lynch:

When they [their husbands] got on that United Mine Worker thing, four or five of us ladies went with them one morning down to Chad. They was going down there to picket or do something. Well, in come the police—they call them tin cans—come out there and they had their rifles with them. Well, we didn't take no guns or nothing like that. [There were] four or five [policemen]. And they said, "Get on that railroad track and walk back where you come from." And them right behind us. "Honey, we laughed." [They said it to] the men, too. To all of us. Honey, we laughed till we liked to died. I tell you, we laughed. And I told my husband, I said, "You can go picketing all you want to. I ain't going no more." And I didn't never go no more. I'll tell you, people got killed on that picket line, too. They killed them, honey.⁴²

Allen's account of their uncontrolled laughter indicates the relief they felt about emerging unharmed from the encounter, especially since it was common knowledge that participation in picketing involved great risks. Her decision to stay away from such confrontations in the future also indicates that, unlike the women whose desperation left them with little choice, she had the freedom to make that decision. Unlike reformers such as Jessie Lloyd O'Connor whose influence and wealth provided a degree of protection and whose livelihood was not threatened by conflict with coal operators, Allen's involvement could cost her husband his job and she would be in the same desperate situation as the other women.

⁴² Allen interview.

U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel's managers tried numerous tactics to avoid unionization. Paul Taylor described the tension between the companies and the miners:

The stage was set for all-out warfare in Harlan. The union had expressed determination to organize the county while Harlan operators and officials had resolved to bar organizers and hold the miners in check through the use of gunmen masquerading as deputy sheriffs. But if the union countered with its own gunmen, it could not expect to match the power of the coal barons.⁴³

In 1937, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Republican Senator Robert M. LaFollette as head of the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee and charged it with investigating charges of coal corporation abuses. In testimony after testimony, the committee heard shocking reports of callous indifference, violence against miners and their families, and corruption. In 1937, while it was in the process of preparing a report, the Federal Bureau of Investigation sent twenty agents into Harlan County to conduct an investigation into the charges made in the testimonies. The combination of the LaFollette Committee findings and the FBI investigation prompted the Justice Department to ask the federal grand jury at Frankfort for indictments against twenty-two coal companies, twenty-four of their executives, and twenty-three police officers. A total of sixty-nine indictments were returned for an alleged two hundred acts of violence committed against miners in violation of the Wagner Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1870.⁴⁴

The nearly continuous labor conflict diminished the luster of amenities afforded by U. S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel. Titler remarked:

In 1937 its [Lynch's] unhappy inhabitants were isolated from the rest of the world by a system of company surveillance that can only be compared with Russian

⁴³ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 162, 176-179.

prison-work camps in Siberia. . . U. S. Steel wielded absolute power over its employees who lived in Lynch and could deprive them and their families of job, home, and purchasing power.⁴⁵

Benham and Lynch miners were in a precarious predicament, caught in the conflict between the United Mine Workers' determination to organize all of Harlan County and the corporations' efforts to prevent them from doing so. Measures employed by both corporations included attempts to play one race against the other, planting spies in the workplace and community, firing and eviction of miners suspected of union sympathies, and the importation of company guards known by miners as "gun thugs." These guards, trained by Baldwin-Felts, the Pinkerton Agency, and a school near Washington headed by a former industrial policeman in the employ of the H. C. Frick Company in Pittsburgh, were famous for their brutality and ruthlessness.⁴⁶

They were also caught in the struggle between competing unions for the right to represent them. In 1939 the UMWA returned to Harlan County in full force. After forcing out the NMU, it set out to organize the entire county, including Benham and Lynch miners. This time, it was the UMWA miners who were on the attack instead of the receiving end and their violence was directed at non-miners that they called "yallerbacks" and "scabs." As the UMWA stepped up its attempts to organize the two major groups of employees, Benham and Lynch became pressure cookers. A 1938 law passed by Kentucky legislators controlled the power of company employed gunmen , but no such law governed the miners themselves. Most of Harlan County's 12,500 miners had joined the UMWA and resentment of the Benham and Lynch's nonunion workers

⁴⁵ Titler, *Hell in Harlan*, 65.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 69.

created such tension that Governor “Happy” Chandler decided to dispatch over 1100 troops and 65 officers under the command of Brigadier General Ellerbee W. Carter to protect the non-union miners and keep the mines open. Despite the military occupation, union and non-union miners continued to fight and Harlan County remained a war zone.⁴⁷

In reaction to the UMWA's determination to organize the Benham and Lynch miners, Wisconsin Steel, International Harvester's only coal mining operation, agreed to negotiate with the Illinois based Progressive Miners Union, but U. S. Coal and Coke stuck to their determination to prohibit any union other than their own employees union. Wisconsin Steel's recognition of the PMU led to violent confrontations between the two unions as the UMWA fought for total control of the labor force.

Historian Paul Taylor argued that Ben Unthank, one of Sheriff Theodore Middleton's notorious deputies on the coal companies' payroll, instigated the violence in Benham and Lynch. His evidence was an affidavit published in the *United Mine Workers Journal* that described a meeting between Unthank and three PMU organizers. According to the article Unthank had asked, “Are you in any way connected with the United Mine Workers of America, for if so, we don't want you in Harlan County?” When the PMU organizers responded that they were not, Unthank said, “There are thirty miles of mines and the field is yours, providing you will wage a fight to exterminate the United Mine Workers of America.” Taylor says that when the PMU organizers accepted the offer, Unthank “placed about five PMU members from Illinois in various mines and

⁴⁷ Joe Daniel Carr, “Labor Conflict in the Eastern Kentucky Coal Fields,” *Filson Club History Quarterly*, v47, April 1973, 179-192.

on several camp baseball teams.” Despite these efforts, the AFL affiliated PMU was able to unionize only Wisconsin Steel during 1935.⁴⁸

U. S. Coal and Coke was the first to capitulate to the pressure to recognize the UMWA. On May 18, 1939, company representatives signed an agreement but whether due to pressure from Harlan County lawmen or because International Harvester had contracts with the AFL in other locations, Wisconsin Steel remained stubbornly committed to the AFL-affiliated PMU. After U. S. Coal and Coke signed the agreement, Wisconsin Steel remained the only holdout.

The violent conditions created by the competing unions complicated the already stressful lives of miners’ wives. Glessie Parker described conditions in Benham in 1939. In the morning before her husband left the house he would turn their heavy cook table on its side against the wall and she would huddle inside with her children in case a bullet should penetrate the wall of the kitchen. Her husband would seek cover behind trees until he reached the safety of the miners’ outpost. “It was like being in a war,” Parker said. That is precisely what it was but the struggle between corporations and the miners had shifted to a war between the miners themselves. She said it was a terrible time for women. Added to the worry about their husbands’ safety in the mines, they now worried about them being shot or having themselves or their children hit by a stray bullet.⁴⁹

The dilemma for Benham and Lynch women was that if they showed support for the wives of the unemployed miners and their families, they ran the risk of compromising own husbands’ jobs and causing their families to be evicted from the towns. Given the

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 90-91..

⁴⁹ Parker, conversation with author.

possibility of such drastic consequences, it is no mystery why women like Allen chose to stay at home. Unfortunately, choosing to stay away from picket lines and close to home afforded only limited protection from exposure to violence. Allen recalls two murders in Benham:

They killed that boy coming through Benham—I don't know who killed him, but somebody killed him. [Another] guy from Hazard come over—he was a president of the United Mine Workers—and he came over and brought a crowd with him. When he got to Benham, somewhere there in Benham, they shot him two or three times. He crawled into the Benham hospital—Dr. Mullins and there was another one . . . pulled him in there and took care of him until they could get him out of there. They had to get him out of there as soon as they could, because Benham was not going to fool with the United Mine Workers.

She never learned if the two men were murdered by company police, Harlan County sheriffs, or rivals from the PMU, but one fact was clear to all Lynch residents: traveling through Benham could be very dangerous. As a result, most residents stayed in Lynch until the danger subsided.⁵⁰

Significant disagreement exists about when the mine wars actually ended. Taylor maintained that though there were still sporadic incidences of violence into the 1940s, the mine wars in Harlan County officially came to an end on July 22, 1939, when “one hundred seventy delegates representing twenty-seven local unions unanimously ratified the first two-year contract covering *all* [my emphasis] of Harlan County's coal mines.” He claimed that miners throughout the county returned to work on July 24, and working and living routines in Benham and Lynch returned to normal.⁵¹

George Titler maintained that the struggle continued much longer. He wrote: “on April 1, 1941, the nation's mines were shut down when operators, including those in

⁵⁰ Allen interview.

⁵¹ Taylor, *Bloody Harlan*, 228.

Harlan, refused to sign a contract with the UMWA.” During that brief strike a company guard at the Crummies Creek mine in Harlan murdered four miners, but Titler attributes the end of the coal operators’ resistance to unions to an incident that occurred at the Fort Ridge mine across the Kentucky border in Tennessee. A fierce gun battle between union members and mine officials resulted in the death of the company president and general manager, vice president, and guard. One miner was also killed and nine hospitalized with injuries, but the incident demonstrated that the struggle had become dangerous for mine officials as well as miners.⁵²

At the time Dotson published his dissertation, he maintained that Benham’s miners were still affiliated with the PMU:

A strike was called in the rest of the county in May, 1941, to force the Benham miners into the United Mine Worker Union. This resulted in conflict in which one or more persons were killed. The community is seriously disorganized because of this. The people belonging to different unions refuse to cooperate with each other and, in many cases, even to speak to each other. The Progressive Miners Union now has a contract with the company. There has been no open conflict since August, 1941.⁵³

The facts contradict Dotson’s statement. Despite industry’s pledge to support the war effort, John L. Lewis called the UMWA out on strike in 1943. This action so angered members of Congress that they overrode President Roosevelt’s veto to pass the War Labor Disputes Act which authorized “the seizure of plants involved in labor disputes, made strikes and lockouts in defense industries a criminal offence, required 30 days’ notice of a pending dispute to the NLRB, and required the NLRB to monitor strike

⁵² Titler, *Hell in Harlan*;

⁵³ Dotson, “Socio-Economic Background and Changing Education,” 169-170.

votes.”⁵⁴ And though Constance Ellison may be mistaken about the date, she insisted that shortly after she came to Benham to teach at the Benham Colored School in 1944, relations between the two unions were, as Parker described, “like a war.” When the UMWA called a strike, Lynch miners resented the fact that Benham miners continued to work and tried to intimidate them into honoring their strike and join their union. She said that every night PMU union members and the company police would station themselves on the roofs of buildings to watch for UMWA organizers who would come in carloads to try to stop the Benham miners from working. She vividly remembered the murder of the last group who dared to attempt such a dangerous mission: “They got the last ones that came in here . . . down where the hospital is, the Benham hospital. . . . They killed them—killed them right there in a car, right by that hospital.” She and another teacher went down to see the car, “all smashed up and shot,” and were told that two or three men had been shot.⁵⁵

Regardless of when and how the mines wars ended, they left a terrible scar on Harlan County. Titler maintained that as costly as they were in human life and suffering, incidents like the one at Fort Ridge had produced important results. When the men who had organized the pickets were brought to trial, the Tennessee court acknowledged that the picket line had been a legitimate protest of the company’s refusal to recognize the union. Determining that the men were acting in self-defense, the court found them not guilty of murder. The importance of this verdict, Titler said, was that:

The feudal coal barons learned a valuable lesson from this encounter, namely that times were changing. They could no longer murder miners like dogs with impunity

⁵⁴ John A. Fossum, *Labor Relations: Development, Structure, Process* (Dallas, TX: Business Publications, Inc., 1982), 43.

⁵⁵ Ellison interview.

and with the protection of state governments. They had been taught that working men, for the first time in American history, were thought of as first class citizens.⁵⁶

The lesson was not lost on the Harlan County coal operators. The combined efforts of union organizers, reformers such as Dreiser, Dos Passos, and O'Conner, miners and their wives had not been in vain. Focusing the nation's eye on the coal operators' abuse of miners had forced recognition of the union.

As the nation entered World War II, there were indications of prosperity in Benham and Lynch. In 1941, the increasing number of automobiles purchased by mountain residents prompted the Kentucky State Road Commission to pave Route 160 from Cumberland to the Virginia state line, a boon to miners who commuted across the mountain from Virginia. In 1942, the increase in the number of cars owned by Benham employees made it necessary to provide a parking lot. During this same period, the company continued to make improvements to the town's infrastructure and purchased a modern fire engine and ambulance.⁵⁷

In 1942, the Lynch mines lost 1,168 men. Despite the fact that deferments could be secured for men in critical industries such as coal mining, many of the younger men had been inducted before deferments could be secured and others sought more secure employment in the defense industries. As a result, the number of miners employed at Lynch plummeted from an all-time high of 4,500 in 1941 to 1,793 in 1945. During the war, the coal needed for the war effort focused government attention on the minefields and miners took advantage of the situation by striking for higher wages and increased benefits six times between 1942 and 1943. In 1943, Federal safety inspections of the

⁵⁶ Titler, *Hell in Harlan*.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *History of Lynch District 1917-1957*, 16, 17.

mines began. When John L. Lewis called a strike that year, people across the nation considered the action traitorous. It was largely in response to public outrage that Congress passed the War Labor Disputes Act authorizing the government to nationalize the mines.

Unlike other industries, the mine companies did not bring women into the workplace to relieve the wartime shortage, but attempted to attract male workers by increasing wages. The advantage to the union was that in addition to higher wages the need for workers enabled it to negotiate the nine-hour portal-to-portal day, payment for tools and other benefits to attract new miners. At the war's end when demand for coal decreased, the high wages paid to retain workers combined with post-war labor legislation cut deeply into investors' profits. In addition, the amount of coal produced at the Lynch mines declined from an annual output of 2,718,389 tons in 1939 to 1,878,146 tons in 1945.⁵⁸

Mechanization and decreased production required a smaller workforce and the exodus of unemployed workers and their families out of Harlan County began. Caudill wrote:

When the coal boom of World War II was history, when strip-mining and new technologies became dominant in the pits that continued to operate despite the competition of floods of foreign oil, the shovelers and timber setters vanished from the tunnels. They vanished from the hills, too, as a million people moved off to the cities. The showplace town of Lynch, the pride of the industry in the 1920s, became a white elephant in the 1960s.⁵⁹

The coal towns had become an economic liability rather than an asset, and investors no longer had any interest in maintaining them. Benham was incorporated in 1961 and

⁵⁸ Johnson, *History of Lynch*, 15, 18 19, 43.

⁵⁹ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 130-131.

Lynch in 1963; U. S. Steel and International Harvester sold their houses to the residents and turned the responsibility for maintaining and governing the town over to them. The fate of workers who had invested their lives and their futures in the industry was not their concern. Their concern was profit and there was nothing to prevent them from salvaging materials that still had value, selling the properties and closing the mines, leaving the towns without funds to maintain schools and other services and infrastructures, and their former employees without a way to provide a living for their families.

It would be another fifty years before the people of Millinocket and East Millinocket would have to face such a threat. For more than a century, Great Northern's mills and towns prospered. Their centennial celebrations focused on their colorful past and optimism for the future despite the fact that the mills had been purchased by Inexcon Papers, a Canadian company owned by two men locked in a power struggle for control of Great Northern's assets. Even in light of the increasingly unstable conditions affecting the mills, their closing caught workers and their families by surprise, and shook their faith in the capitalist system that promised prosperity for workers as well as investors. For workers too old or without the skills to seek other employment, corporations' abandonment of the towns they built marked the end of their American dream.

CHAPTER 8: WHEN THE LEASES EXPIRED AND THE MAGIC DIED

In Lynch what was once the world's largest tippie stands silent and starkly silhouetted against Black Mountain. Portal 31, one of the entrances to the mine, has become a tourist attraction. The bathhouse has been converted to apartments. All the grand homes are gone and all that is left are forlorn little houses, now owned by residents, lining the road that runs through the valley. The railroad tracks that had made the construction of the tippie, the company offices and the dwellings possible are gone, ripped up all the way back to Benham and loaded onto railroad cars there. Appalachian historian Harry Caudill described the carnage:

U. S. Steel tore down most of the town when they left. The mammoth tippie was stripped of its machinery and abandoned. The hotel and boardinghouses were demolished. The power plant gave up the ghost. The doors of the great store were boarded up. What was left of the place was "set free" and became a tiny incorporated village whose chief worry became the financing of schools for the handful of children who still lived there.¹

U. S. Steel no longer needed the laborers it had worked so diligently to recruit, since the few remaining deep mines had been automated and strip mining required few laborers. It left behind the devastating environmental damage it had created. Pollution by acid mine run-off and outhouses built over streams had killed all the fish long ago. Deforestation as a result of strip mining of Black Mountain has lead to erosion and caused mudslides and flooding of mountain streams and the Cumberland River.

The main attraction in Lynch and the one that draws tourists to the town is Portal 31 and the lamp house that has been turned into a museum and gift shop. According to Bob Lunsford, the overseer, it is the only mine portal open to the public in the Kentucky

¹ Harry M. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1983), 131.

coalfields. Despite the efforts of Lynch residents to make their town more attractive to tourists, its uniform houses and stark gray buildings surrounded by steep mountains seem dark and foreboding. Nonetheless, residents and former residents of the town feel a strong attachment to their home and to each other. Black people from Lynch maintain ties to relatives who still live in the town and their coalmining heritage through an organization called Eastern Kentucky Social Club that maintains a web site and sponsors an annual Labor Day reunion of its members. They consider themselves different from (and in some ways superior to) other blacks because of their mountain values and strong kinship ties. As a group, they are well educated and politically active. Many went college and became educators and business and community leaders in their mountain communities or the towns and cities where they relocated after the mines closed.² The town of Benham has managed to survive primarily through the efforts of women residents to preserve their community.

When International Harvester closed operations in 1960, the women of the Benham Garden Club, affectionately known as the Petticoat Mafia dedicated themselves to saving their community from extinction. The common bonds shared by these women, wives and widows of black, white, and immigrant coal miners, are their husband's employment in the coalmining industry and their love for this quiet mountain town. In 1961, when the town was incorporated and the company began selling its houses to the residents, the

² Bob Lunsford, conversation with author, March 23, 2001; "Welcome to the Eastern Kentucky Social Club," <http://eksc-ca.com>

population had shrunk from 3,000 residents in 1948 to 700. By the 1980s when the mines shut down for good, the town's infrastructure and economy were in shambles.³

Faced with the challenge of rebuilding, the town's women forged their long friendships into a force for change. With the assistance of administrators and faculty of Southeast Community College in Cumberland, they rebuilt the schoolhouse into an elegant inn. They raised funds to erect a \$30,000 statue to coal miners, turned a dump into the Coalminers Memorial Park, established a museum, refurbished the existing Veterans' Park with new benches and flags, and bought a \$140,000 fire truck, two police cars and a garbage truck for the town. They funded all these projects and improvements with limited taxes and the sale of used items at a "This and That" shop. Such ingenuity has helped to preserve the past and promises future vitality.⁴

The towns of Millinocket and East Millinocket are still intact, but they have lost their magic. The East Millinocket mill is still operating, but with a drastically reduced labor force. The Millinocket mill stands silent, waiting for the current owners to decide if it would be profitable to restart the papermaking machines. In the meantime, businesses that depended on workers' expenditures have been forced to close down. Unemployed workers, unable to pay property taxes, have been forced to sell their homes, sometimes for less than they paid for them, and many find it difficult to find a buyer at any price. Years of investment in homes and property are lost. Financially, the towns struggle to survive without taxes previously paid by the industry, property owners and wage earners.

³ Betty Howard, interview with author, tape recording, Benham, Kentucky, March 23, 2001, Appalachian Archives and Northeast Archives; Roy Silver, "Benham, Kentucky: The Town that International Harvester Built," <http://www.uky.edu/rsilver/nc/c04.JPG>

⁴ Silver, "Benham, Kentucky."

As the leases on Great Northern's property expire, the company has agreed to sell the land to residents, but few can afford to buy.⁵

It would be simplistic to attribute the decline of Benham and Lynch to labor conflict, although some historians attribute the gains made by the UMWA as a factor in shrinking profits for investors. In his study of the rise and fall of the eastern Kentucky coal moguls, Harry Caudill discussed the influence of the United Mine Workers. The union's victory had resulted in what Caudill referred to as a "tenuous peace," negotiated by union president John L. Lewis and extending from 1933 to 1959:

If coal had a king in those years, he was not a mogul with diamond rings, lordly mansions, and gleaming trains: he was John Llewellyn Lewis, who commanded a mighty host of disciplined and faithful miners. He loved nothing more than to castigate coal operators for what he perceived as their varied and serious shortcomings. Under "John L." the organization gained the nation's highest wage scale and the first industry-financed health and welfare program.⁶

Investors concerned that these benefits were seriously depleting profits encouraged managers to invest earnings in new labor saving machinery to minimize dependence on workers.

Although wage increases, other labor concessions and government legislation of labor policies concerning the workforce may have hastened the steel companies' departure from the Harlan County coalfields, neither was responsible for their decline. Had there been no union and no government intervention, dwindling profits due to weakened markets and the increasing popularity of oil as an energy source would have caused investors to discontinue mining coal. The difference in the longevity of

⁵ Pamela Ferdinand, "Where More Than Jobs are Lost: A Maine Paper Mill Closes, and the Town it Created is on the Brink," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sunday, August 17, 2003, <http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/nation/6548590.htm>

⁶ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 128.

operations in the two industries that built these towns can be attributed to such factors as competition for labor, labor relations, availability and quality of resources, market conditions, technological advances and management philosophies.

Benham and Lynch, the last constructed, were the first to feel the negative impact of changes in a number of these areas. One reason for the curtailment and eventual end of coal mining operations in Benham and Lynch was that even the huge coal deposits on Black Mountain were limited and non-renewable; once the major lodes were mined, access became more difficult and labor intensive, and the coal was of lesser quality. As a result, the coal industry was constantly searching for richer and more accessible deposits, such as those located in Wyoming and other parts of the west. Since the expense involved in opening a mine was minimal and railroads already spanned the west, there was little expense or difficulty involved in relocating.

Unstable and shrinking markets contributed to the decline. Market instability had less impact on United States Steel and International Harvester's mines than on the smaller mines since the coal was mined for use in their own steel mills, but as the steel industry increasingly switched to oil to power its mills, the need for coal diminished and made operating its own mines less critical.

U. S. Steel's refusal to allow scholars access to corporate records makes it difficult to reconstruct the exact events that led to the closing of the Lynch mines, but there is evidence that as early as 1950, the company began taking steps to curtail operations. In order to simplify internal corporate structure United States Coal and Coke merged with the parent company. In 1952 United States Steel Company became U. S. Steel Corporation and the Lynch operation was designated a district of the corporation under

the direction of a district superintendent. Retirements, transfers and promotions of executives reduced the number of employees required as the corporation attempted to adjust to a more mechanized operation. On May 1, 1956, the staffs of Lynch and Gary districts were separated, and U. S. Steel Corporation, rather than have their staff move into houses that had been occupied by miners, built ten houses east of town for Lynch's new personnel. The following year the company divested itself of 66 dwellings no longer needed because of the reductions in the number of miners employed. The final step in the company's withdrawal occurred in 1957 when the company began to sell its assets.⁷

During that time period, International Harvester also began the process of curtailing its operation in Benham. In 1960 it started selling company residences and office buildings, piece by piece, and slowed coal production. It abandoned any pretence of concern for workers' welfare, and Dotson's description suggests that the company's influence as well as their interest had greatly diminished by the 1940s:

The churches seemed to have been built for the teachers, the bosses and their families, and a few others who braved the criticism of their fellows. The library was little used. The clubs became a resort for noisy boys. A Sunday afternoon cock fight was more desired than anything that could be provided to give it competition. . . . The Y.M.C.A is no longer a presence in the town. The lodge hall is open to all fraternal organizations which desire it. There are several storage rooms for confidential equipment. The club house was formerly designed as a recreation center for the men and their families and was operated by the Y. M. C. A. It is now under the control of the company and has facilities for games of pool and soft drinks. A beauty parlor and barbershop are operated in this building.⁸

Though the schools continued to educate the children until 1963 when they were integrated and young people from all three towns were transferred to Cumberland, it

⁷ T. E. Johnson, "History of Lynch District, 25, 26.

⁸ Dotson, "Socio-Economic Background and Changing Education in Harlan County," 185.

seems that the ideals that motivated Wisconsin Steel's welfare management programs had surrendered to the realities of day-to-day life. Since the company no longer paid salaries for YMCA employees, they had departed. Dotson also indicated that though International Harvester still owned the town, the government system had changed. He wrote, "Benham is an unincorporated town and functions under the county government. The magistrate of the district lives in Benham and holds his court there. The five police officers are appointed by the governor, commissioned by the county judge, and paid by the company." Reference to law enforcement officials as police officers rather than company guards indicates a change in designation, or perhaps residents' perception of the role of the police force in the town.

The closing of the Benham and Lynch mines marked the end of an era that had lasted less than half a century. Big Steel had determined the way of life for the first generation of mountain whites, immigrants, and southern blacks who came to live and work there, but the second generation had already begun its exodus even before the mines closed. The population and depopulation of Harlan County occurred in stages and were a direct result of the boom and bust cycles. The first exodus began after WWI and the second during the mine wars. The third began after WWII and has been constant since that time. Exact figures for Benham and Lynch are difficult to assess because they were not incorporated as towns until the 1960s and are listed as districts until the 1970 census. Census records show that the population of Harlan County decreased from its peak of 75, 275 in 1940 to 33, 202 in 2000, a loss of more than half of its residents.⁹ Much of the

⁹ Harlan County Census data, <http://ukcc.uky.edu/~census/21095.txt>

county's population loss can be attributed to Benham and Lynch since they were the largest employers of miners in the county.

Conditions in Millinocket and East Millinocket during this period can be attributed to significant differences in the way the factors that affected conditions in Benham and Lynch came into play in the paper industry. Paper production required a skilled and well-trained labor force to operate and maintain expensive machinery and Schenck's early recognition of unions created a relatively conflict free environment in both the workplace and the town. Workers could feel secure in their jobs because they recognized that the company was unlikely to move operations to another location; the original investment in building dams and mills and expensive machinery would have made such a move economically unfeasible.

During the world wars and even the depression, demand for paper either remained constant or increased so there were few fluctuations in requirements for labor. As the country's businesses and population expanded, so did the need for paper. According to former Great Northern chemist Glenn Wiley, over the years Great Northern expanded its initial production of newsprint to include coated paper, specialty papers, catalog paper and paper for carbonless forms. Because of this, Great Northern was able to weather fluctuation in demand and retain an experienced and skilled workforce, sparing it the expense of training new recruits.¹⁰

The stability of the towns reflects the strength of the industry, but also the success of Great Northern's welfare management programs. Cultural differences that could have proven divisive became less obvious with each new generation. Dick Manzo, the

¹⁰ Glenn Wiley, telephone conversation with author, January 25, 2004.

Millinocket resident who discussed ethnic divisions in the early years, said boundaries became less and less pronounced over time. “As World War II progressed,” he says, “all of those fences [that existed in for the first generation] came down, because doctors and lawyers, judges, and all of their children were shoulder to shoulder, so when they came back home, there was no more of this Nob Hill, Society Hill, Little Italy across the tracks, and the Flats.” Great Northern’s Americanization programs had produced exactly the result they were designed for—a stable, culturally bonded community and a loyal, self-perpetuating workforce. In 1970, the company reached a peak of 4,400 employees in the two mills.¹¹

This point marks the beginning of a major change in conditions at the mills. Labor relations in Great Northern’s mills had remained remarkably stable while other industries experienced strikes, work stoppages and slowdowns. In 1969, investors, in an attempt to increase profits by consolidating resources, diversifying products and increasing market share initiated a merger with Nekoosa, a Wisconsin based paper company. The merger ended GNP’s managerial autonomy and marked the beginning of Great Northern’s decline as control of operations became centralized in the Wisconsin headquarters. As many of the older GNP managers retired, Nekoosa’s managers stepped in to take their place and control of operations shifted from GNP to Nekoosa.¹²

In 1978, when the Nekoosa board of directors vetoed a Maine plan to diversify and construct a wafer board mill for making wood composites, the majority of workers at

¹¹ Manzo interview; Tom Bell, “Mill Towns Weigh Independence Versus Savings,” *2003 Blethen Maine Newspapers Inc.* <http://news.maintoday.com/indepth/taxreform/030629millinocket.shtml>

¹² Misty Edgecomb, “GNP: Magic to Misfortune,” *Bangor Daily News*, Saturday/Sunday, January 25-26, A2.

the two Maine mills went on strike for the first time in the company's history. In 1980, Great Northern sold its lumber interests and in 1986 a major restructuring resulted in the loss of 2,000 jobs. In 1989, when Georgia-Pacific acquired the company in a hostile takeover, the new owners laid off fifteen managers.¹³ When the last of GNP's original managers left the company, labor relations changed significantly. The new management honored only those workers' benefits required by law or by contract. When the old contracts expired, the company used the threat of closing the mills to intimidate workers and diminish their bargaining power.

In 1991 Bowater Corporation of South Carolina purchased the original mills and the timberlands, and in 1998 started divesting itself of forest properties. The loss of available jobs in the woods and the mills meant that young people who had counted on working for Great Northern after graduation would have to look elsewhere for employment. The death knell sounded in 1999, when Inexcon, a Canadian consulting firm, purchased the two mills, the hydro-power system and 380,000 acres of land for 250 million dollars. Its owners, Lambart Bedard and Joseph Kass, reduced the labor force to 1200, sold the hydropower assets, eleven dams and six power generating stations in April, 2002, for 156.5 million dollars to Brascan Corporation's Great Lakes Group, a Toronto based conglomerate. In January 2003, Bedard declared bankruptcy and shut down both mills. On July 25, 2003, the company, renamed Katahdin Paper Company, restarted the modernized East Millinocket mill with a workforce of 390 workers. The older Millinocket mill has not yet reopened and its workers remain unemployed.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Katahdin Paper Holds Grand Opening of Mill," *Bangor Daily News*, July 25, 2003, <http://www.bangornews.com/editorialnews/article.cfm/ID/404956>

The beginning of the exodus from Millinocket and East Millinocket coincides with the departure of the original Great Northern managers and the reorganization of the company using fewer employees. Millinocket's population decreased from its peak of 7,742 in 1970, right after the company's merger with Nekoosa, to 5,203 in 2000, a loss of nearly a third of its residents. East Millinocket lost around 26 percent of its residents from a high of 2,567 in 1970 to 1,828 in 2000.¹⁵

The towns in this study came into existence for one purpose—to provide housing and services for the industry's labor force that would produce profit for the investors who financed them. As long as workers produced sufficient profits for investors, they maintained welfare management programs sufficient to retain those workers. The labor elite of these towns enjoyed privileges unavailable to other working-class families. Workers were able to provide a better life for themselves and their children. Welfare programs that provided families with modern schools and health care enabled workers' children to escape the drudgery of tenant farms, coal camps, factories and mills. The family wage gave women the freedom to devote themselves to their homes and families.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute purely altruistic motives to the investors in any of the four company towns. Ultimately it was the corporation itself that gained the greatest benefit from welfare management policies, and similar programs are still administered by modern personnel departments. Unions provided the means for workers to gain a share of the profits they earned for investors through collective bargaining with corporate executives for higher wages, better benefits, and safer working

¹⁵ Maine Census Data Population Totals, Minor Civil Divisions, <http://www.library.umaine.edu/census/townsearch.asp>

conditions. They also prevented the kind of abuse of workers that occurred in Harlan County. But when companies ceased operations as they did in Benham and Lynch or declare bankruptcy as they did in Millinocket and East Millinocket, unions had no way to protect workers' jobs. When severance packages expired, workers were left without wages, health benefits, and in many cases, the pensions they had counted on for retirement.

For people who have neither known nor expected any other way of life, the loss of the only industry has been traumatic. The specialized skills workers had acquired were of little value in other industries, even if such industries had existed in the region. Retraining programs were of little value in regions where few jobs existed. Women who had never worked for wages were especially vulnerable to the loss of their husband's wages. When the Benham and Lynch mines closed down in 1960, women whose lives had been focused on keeping house and raising children had not acquired the skills needed for clerical work, one of the few employment opportunities available to women. With no restaurants other than fast food places and no hotels, no jobs existed even in the service industries. The result has been a population dependent on government welfare for its survival. The gendered culture shaped by the coal industry remained relatively unchallenged until the 1970s when, under pressure from the union and the women's movement, women first entered the mines. By that time, however, advancements in technology had drastically cut the number of jobs available and the exodus out of the mountains into the cities to find employment had long been under way.

Millinocket and East Millinocket women are now beginning to experience similar problems. Without their husband's financial support, they are economically stranded.

Women who have devoted their lives to raising a family are unlikely to have acquired marketable skills. Since they have never worked for wages, they are ineligible for Social Security benefits except those earned by their husbands.

If the measure of the success of company towns, welfare management, and the family wage is profit for investors, they were unquestionably successful. If quality of life for residents is the measure, evaluation depends on consideration of differences in management philosophies and changing market and technological forces. Clearly, employment by the corporations that built the towns enabled the working-class population to enjoy a privileged existence in relation to other working-class environments, but the permanence of that existence depended upon the employers' continued operation.

The company town concept is no longer feasible in the United States; few isolated regions exist because of improved transportation and increases in population density. Welfare management programs have been replaced by personnel departments and social programs financed by taxpayers. Employees no longer expect to work for a single company throughout their careers. As Caudill said about Lynch, these model company towns, so full of excitement and promise at their conception, have become "white elephants."¹⁶

¹⁶ Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 131.

Epilogue

The fate of the towns in this study is uncertain. It is impossible to predict what will happen to Benham and Lynch when the retired miners and their wives are gone and there is no new generation to continue. The love of place that motivated men and women of Betty Howard and Bob Lunsford's generation to fight for their town's survival does not exist in subsequent generations.

The exodus of young people even before the closing of the mines and mills suggests that they saw little promise for a satisfactory existence in these company towns. While some young people accepted the way of life as inevitable, many felt suffocated and sought escape from the shift work and deadly sameness of routine that marked their parents' lives. The regions' isolation contributed to a feeling of being trapped. High school graduates saw fewer and fewer job opportunities as companies mechanized and downsized. Choices for women graduates were limited to clerical work, marrying a local man, leaving home to find employment or, for the fortunate few, attending college. Most who left never returned.

Mining and mill towns lend themselves to comparison because of the similarities of conditions that exist for workers and residents. David Francey's song about growing up in a Canadian mill town expresses the sense of hopelessness and powerlessness that is a common theme in literature about company towns and in interviews with town residents, especially those in coal mining towns.

After hearing Northern Ontario's Grievous Angels
I started thinking about the similarities between
Mining towns and mill towns such as Cornwall,
Ontario, where I lived for a time as a boy,
I heard a voice call down from the lonesome north

Singing songs of work and worth
Hard edged stories from the hard rock towns
And I can picture the Saturday nights
Hear the tires squealing from the Main Street lights
Hear the creaking of the cables on the cage as its
Lowered down
Hard luck stories from the streets of the mining towns.

I was raised by the Seaway side
Staring out at the river wide
Rode my bike up the bridge, looked back
At the paper mill
Through the window I'd try and see
What the future held for the like of me
And I can hear the shift change siren still
In the Seaway City, by the stacks of the paper mill

And the towns that rose with the mines and mills
Watch the future pass like they're standing still
And the kids all leave, like the light when the sun
Goes down
When you go back now and you walk the streets
There's parking lots where buildings used to be
Night still falls but it doesn't make a sound
Long shadows fall on the streets of the cold mill towns¹

The chorus, "Don't follow me down, boy," cautions young people to seek their fortunes in a place that offers greater opportunities for self-expression and fulfillment.

Harlan County graduates went to Dayton, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Detroit, Flint, and elsewhere. They left because there were no jobs, no way to support themselves or a family. Some left because they saw no future in the mountains, others because their parents begged them not to become miners.

The exodus out of the coal fields is the subject of much recent academic exploration. At a 1999 conference in Ohio on the women of Appalachia, Nola Hadley

¹ David Francey, "Don't Follow Me Down, Boys" ©David Francey (Ayer's Cliff, Quebec, August 7, 1999).

Torres, an Appalachian woman who is now a college professor in California, presented a paper on the migration of Perry County families to Cincinnati, Ohio. At the same conference Joyce Dyer from Hiram College in Ohio presented a paper about Appalachian migrants in Firestone Park, a company town in Akron.

Mining of Black Mountain's coal continues but it is now mostly strip-mining that employs few workers, creates serious ecological damage to the streams and lakes, and is destroying the beauty and serenity of the mountain environment. By the time women entered the mines, advancements in technology had drastically cut the number of jobs available and the exodus out of the mountains into the cities to find employment was well underway. Women who were fortunate enough to be hired for well-paid coal mining jobs still have to face harassment from male co-workers and the disapproval of the mountain society.

It is readily apparent that even the relatively powerful pulp and paper industry unions provided little protection for workers when companies ceased or moved operations. When the corporations left the region, it was disastrous for the economy of the towns they left behind. People who had become dependent on corporate security and protection were ill prepared for the loss of economic security due to lost wages and benefits such as health and life insurance, and the depreciation of property values because potential buyers were not interested in purchasing property in a town in economic decline. Financially, the towns struggled to survive without taxes paid by the industry and wage earners. Businesses that depended on workers' expenditures are forced to close down. When the severance packages expire, workers are left without wages, health

benefits, and in many cases, the pensions they had counted on. Many were forced to sell their homes at a loss, sometimes for less than half their market value.

The extent of the tragedy for Maine's working class population is difficult to assess because of the radiating effect on the state's overall economy. Recent statistics show that Maine has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. Though displaced workers are eligible for federal and state unemployment funds and corporations pay for a certain amount of retraining for eligible employees, families displaced due to mill shutdowns have become an economic burden for surrounding communities, forcing religious and charitable organizations to try to provide relief by donating food, clothing, and cash.

It is equally difficult to assess the extent of the environmental damage caused by the paper industry at this time because the fear of losing even more jobs has made state officials reluctant to pursue a vigorous investigation of environmental issues. It will require intensive research to determine levels of pollution from mercury and other chemicals, landfills, and such little known problems as bark piles that continuously smolder and threaten to self-ignite, endangering homes and forestlands, at least in the immediate vicinity.

The history of these company towns provides valuable insight into capitalist and industrial philosophies. Competition for profit is the engine that drives industry. When an operation no longer produces profits sufficient to attract or retain investors, the company is faced with the choice of discontinuing operations, declaring bankruptcy or moving to a more profitable location. Such volatility means that workers in factories, mills, and mines cannot depend on the permanence of their employment or permanent

residence in towns built specifically to provide housing and services for the single-industry labor force.

Without government legislation designed to limit the power of corporations to manipulate the labor force, workers are vulnerable to exploitation and their future well being dependent on forces beyond their control. Unions have been effective in bargaining for higher wages, better benefits, and safer working conditions, but unable to protect workers' jobs when companies relocate or declare bankruptcy. In order for unions to function effectively, they must be strong enough to bring the operation to a halt, but competition for jobs by a large population of unemployed workers has made that virtually impossible. Another complication is that union negotiators and corporate managers often fail to agree on what constitutes a reasonable wage and benefits packages for workers that coincides with what investors consider a reasonable profit margin. The role of unions in determining the success or failure of the industries that built company towns merits much further investigation.

The fact that these regions so rich in natural resources contain some of the highest poverty rates in the nation suggests that unregulated capitalism has failed and continues to fail to provide an acceptable degree of social and economic equality in a democratic society. I am not suggesting that alternatives such as socialism or communism are the answer, but I am convinced that the key to maintaining world order is to improve the human condition. Nations need to search for workable solutions to problems stemming from labor relations that contribute to social and economic inequities. One solution is to curb unbridled exploitation of resources and workers.

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