The City with a Bathtub Ring: A Century of Shared Industrial Identity in Belfast, Maine

Michael Munson
University of Maine, michael.munson@maine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd

Part of the Labor History Commons, Oral History Commons, Social History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/3635

This Open-Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.
THE CITY WITH A BATHTUB RING:
A CENTURY OF SHARED
INDUSTRIAL IDENTITY
IN BELFAST, MAINE

By
Michael C. Munson
B.U.S. University of Maine, 2014

A THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
(In Interdisciplinary Studies)

The Graduate School
The University of Maine
August 2022

Advisory Committee:
Kreg Ettenger, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Advisor
Jennifer Pickard, Instructor in Maine Studies
Ian Jesse, Instructor in Maine Studies & Research Associate, Bureau of Labor Education
Belfast, Maine, is a small, visitor-friendly city of approximately 6,700 residents located on that state’s picturesque midcoast. Founded by Ulster Scots descendants in 1770, Belfast’s rich history has allowed its sense of place to evolve as the community’s identity changed from a frontier settlement to a commercial seaport, then an industrial city, and currently a host city for several prominent customer call centers. While now charming, increasingly gentrified and popular with tourists, the city earlier prospered for more than a century as a blue-collar industrial community, which eschewed tourism well into the 1980s. This paper addresses Belfast’s sense of place and identity as a manufacturing culture from approximately 1870 to 1970.

Belfast is notable for recovering from several historic fires in the 1860s and 1870s, in part by repopulating its devastated commercial district with modern factories. Keeping those factories
viable, and retaining the skilled workers who made profitable production possible, created much of the manufacturing culture at the heart of Belfast’s identity. Belfast matured into a city of interdependencies where factory payrolls supported the local economy, and the community reciprocated by supporting those producers with infrastructure targeted to make remaining in Belfast more attractive than relocating to competing communities. Those patterns of reciprocity and mutual support had historical roots that originated with the ancestors of Belfast’s Ulster Scots founders, and in the struggles of their Irish exile over the 1600s.

That legacy later helped the community to be more accepting of similarly challenged immigrants who came to work in Belfast’s factories, as well as numerous workers migrating from neighboring rural communities. Belfast’s manufacturers would come to rely on those rural workers’ diverse skills to sustain increased production and offset local attrition. That rural-to-urban migration, and subsequent abandonment of farms, precipitated fewer but larger remaining farms. After WWII the capacity of those larger farms would be central to the rapid growth of Belfast’s signature poultry industry. In fact, Waldo County’s poultry industry would become so successful, so quickly, that its unchecked growth and associated waste disposal into Belfast’s harbor from its processing plants would make that harbor one of the most polluted in Maine.

That pollution, and not the city as a manufacturing powerhouse which employed thousands of Maine workers for over a century, was the reputation that would curse Belfast as the “city with a bathtub ring.” The proud community which had survived massive fires, bankrupt factories, depressions and wars, was powerless to restore its soiled reputation, even decades after pollution control facilities made the harbor its cleanest in living memory.

The conclusion of this study is that from 1870 to 1970, Belfast, Maine’s success as a manufacturing center, and endurance as a manufacturing culture, lay primarily in the mutually sup-
portive relationships between its community and workforce, which permitted the city’s economy to repeatedly adapt to challenges and change. Not only was the community’s sense of place and identity defined by this collaborative economy, but it was also effectively surrendered with the end of this manufacturing era.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS ................................................................. iv

FOREWORD .............................................................................. x

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................ 1
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ................................................... 12
3. WORKING THE NICHES ......................................................... 26
4. RISING FROM THE ASHES .................................................... 38
5. A STAKE IN THE GAME, AND A SEAT AT THE TABLE ................. 50
6. THE HIDDEN COST OF PROGRESS ........................................ 65
7. THE POLITICS OF PROGRESS ................................................ 72
8. WHEN THE BOTTOM FELL OUT .............................................. 81
9. BROILER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD? ...................................... 92
10. FINAL CONCLUSIONS ........................................................... 111

REFERENCES ......................................................................... 124

APPENDICES ........................................................................... 129

Appendix A: Decennial Census & Population Changes, 1860-1980 .......... 129

Appendix B: 1860 Base Occupations by Type & Number of Members ...... 130

Appendix C: Augmented Historical Maps ........................................ 135

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR .................................................. 138
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Burnt District**: Specific to Belfast, Maine, a local term given to multiple city block areas that were so damaged by massive fires in 1865, 1877 and 1887 that nothing could be salvaged within the perimeter defined by the “Burnt District.” (See maps 1&2, Appendix C)

**Common Weal (also commonweal)**: Historically in Scotland, this term emphasized personal and group actions that should prioritize the good of the community over any selfish motivations. Depending on context, the phrase can be affirming, define belonging, denote exclusion, or even be used to cast shame. The term was sometimes specifically brought up in Belfast to remind citizens of the obligations due their common heritage. Commonweal has etymological connections, and shares some of the philosophies with the word “commonwealth.”

**Coupon**: A paper tag cut from a work order that accompanies a product moving through the assembly or production lines in a factory; today these have mostly been replaced by barcodes. In a facility that compensated workers using the “piece rate” system, possession of their work station’s designated coupon cut from the work order validated that the worker had completed their “piece” of the product. See also Piece Rate.

**Dynamo**: A device for generating direct current electricity, which pre-dated the alternator, or alternating current generator. Before the great power debates over DC and AC types of electricity between Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse, dynamos were commonly used in urban areas where power would not (and could not) be distributed more than several blocks away. Before Belfast was connected into Maine’s early (AC) power grid, dynamos were almost exclusive-
ly limited to commercial applications, and usually received their motive power from a steam engine or water turbine.

**Fall Line:** When traveling up a river from the ocean, the fall line represents the first physical barrier, usually a set of rapids or waterfall, which prevents further upstream travel by watercraft without a set of locks or tramway to go over or around the falls. Especially in New England, the “fall line” became the optimum location to set up dams, mills and factories that utilized water power for their machinery. Belfast is noted for numerous streams feeding into Belfast Bay, where the fall lines and industries utilizing them were relatively short distances from the bay, with some even directly accessible by ocean-going ships.

**G.A.R.:** Initials for (The) Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization of former soldiers and officers of the Union Army of the United States formed directly after the Civil War. Operating along lines very similar to today’s American Legion and VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) groups, the organization sought to protect the rights and privileges earned by honorably discharged members of the Union army, navy and marines. While primarily formed as a supportive fraternity for those veterans, the G.A.R. also grew to be a significant power bloc in American politics, as well as a provider of a number of charities.

**Great White Fliers (Flyers):** This name was given to the nearly twin passenger steam ships S.S. Belfast and S.S. Camden of the Eastern Steamship Company. These 320-foot ships carried passengers and freight primarily between Belfast, Maine and Boston from 1909 to 1935. Built in Bath, Maine, they achieved 17 knots of speed, swiftly and reliably transporting passengers and
freight between the two cities for over a quarter of a century. Both ships were noted for their elegance, especially their bright white paint schemes, and for their roles in maintaining a strong link between Belfast and Boston.

**Occupational Pluralist:** In New England history, occupational pluralism traditionally represented the high amount of competency in domestic production of essential and later marketable goods such as timber, hides, fish, farming implements, furniture, textiles and a host of other practical (and even luxury) goods. Embracing both men and women in their respective specialties, complementary and collaborative roles, rural domestic manufacturing mostly followed seasonal patterns of resource abundance or agricultural dormancy, such as farmers harvesting lumber during the winter, or hiring out to fishing fleets once their crops were planted in the spring. Maine’s workers developed a regional reputation for their diversity of skills and work ethic in part due to the transmission of the plurality of occupational skills within domestic and industrial manufacturing, which provided a ready market for Maine workers who joined its young adult exodus between the Civil War and the Great Depression.

**Pale (‘the’ Pale):** The fortified areas of primarily Belfast, Londonderry and Donegal, Ireland where English (and later Scottish) colonist or “planters” considered themselves relatively secure and safe from attack by native Irish factions hostile to the usurpation of their lands. The phrase “beyond the pale” refers to traveling beyond this safe zone into the unprotected territory controlled by those hostile groups.
**Pariah (Capitalist):** Outcast, or belonging to a cast or demographic often associated with doing labor too demeaning or difficult for more privileged classes. In the context of this thesis, the term denotes Ulster-Scots laborers who specialized by default in doing many difficult operations in the manufacturing of textiles, leather goods and butchering animals, occupations that were intensely labor-intensive before the industrial revolution. Ulster-Scots moved from being laborers in these manufacturers, to business agents, importers and exporters of these goods, especially flax and flax seed. The Belfast ancestors emigrated to New England in 1719, when these “flax fleets” often made profits both shipping flax seed from North America to Europe, and transporting emigrants from Europe to North America.

**Piece Rate:** A practice of compensating labor in domestic and industrial manufacturing on a per-item or unit-completed basis, depending on a contract’s specifications. Domestically produced items such as nails might have a piece rate by the pound, or by the keg; cloth could be compensated by the yard or the bolt, tool handles by the dozen or the gross etc. In factories such as Belfast’s shoe factory, the complexity and time consumed of the production step completed dictated the piece rate. Some jobs, such as stitching uppers or soles, often had a piece rate of by-the-pair. Other jobs, such as buffing heels or gluing in shank supports, sometimes paid a piece rate figured on a dozen pairs.

Different factories had many variations on this basic system; however, in a practice that almost universally caused labor-management conflicts, employers would change the way piece rates were factored with little or no notice. Pay for piece rate work was tallied from “coupons” clipped or plucked from the work order that traveled with the product through the factory. A re-
verse system was also sometimes used, where an employee-specific coupon was affixed to the work order at each station as the product moved through the factory.

**Planter:** English and Scottish colonists who were “planted” in the northern counties of Ireland during the reign of King James IV of England, Scotland and Ireland. This planting of those colonists was intended as a political instrument that would displace native Irish who remained loyal to Irish chieftains who resisted English rule during the 1594 to 1603 Nine Years War.

**Put-out system:** A System of contracted rural domestic manufacturing in exchange for cash, credit or finished goods. In many areas, rural occupational pluralism evolved into supplemental manufacturing of a host of value-added goods under contracts to area and regional merchants for retail sales. This contracted domestic production was also known as the “put-out” system, “out work,” and “Boston System” if that work was designated for a Boston area merchant.

**Schmaltz:** Yiddish word for the rendered chicken fat sometimes used to add richness or savory notes to certain foods. In the context of Belfast, Maine, “Schmaltzport” was a term applied by *Newsweek* magazine in a 1972 article lampooning the city for a layer of putrefied chicken waste products that polluted Belfast’s harbor and clung tenaciously to its shoreline, harbor fixtures and watercraft. The semi-permanent stain from that waste formed a ring from the low tide to the high tide reaches of that shoreline, and became the source of the slur “city with a bathtub ring.”

**Ulster-Scot:** Colonists recruited from Scotland for the plantation campaign for Ireland under King James IV, who eventually settled in one of the nine counties in the district of Ulster, Ire-
land. Many of these colonists were landless tenants from estates in Scotland’s lowlands who emigrated both voluntarily and involuntarily as their conditions changed. Ulster-Scot and Presbyterian-Ulster-Scot are terms sometimes used by cultural geographers, social and political scientists to specify a lack of assimilation of members of this demographic into either the English or Irish populations in Ulster. It also sometimes referred to a distinct retention of their Scottish culture by those colonists, including retention of their religious beliefs and practices. Because of those distinctions, Ulster-Scots should not be confused or misidentified as “Scots-Irish” or “Scotch-Irish.”

**Undertaker:** Not to be confused with the occupation of mortician, “undertakers” as applied in the Irish plantation scheme of King James IV (England, Scotland and Ireland) were landed gentry under fealty to James who supplied their quota of colonists for his plan. They were rewarded for their loyalty with grants of land in the north of Ireland that had been confiscated earlier from Irish chieftains during their 1594 to 1603 rebellion against English rule. As the new landlords, they were conferred as “undertakers” for undertaking that duty for James IV.
The city of Belfast, Maine, straddles the wide and shallow mouth of the Passagassawakeag River where it becomes Belfast Bay. This scenic harbor on the western shore of greater Penobscot Bay was the source of great controversy during my youth in the 1960s and 70s. Heavily polluted from untreated sewage, manufacturing and agricultural waste, the bay was notoriously offensive to tourists traveling over the adjacent route 1A Bridge, belying their expectations of a “pristine” Maine coast.

Because of this pollution, Belfast was ridiculed for decades as the “city a bathtub ring.” Partly this can be attributed to a 1970 federal lawsuit over that pollution, but wider exposure came from a March, 27, 1972 article in Newsweek magazine which hung the moniker of “Schmaltzport” on the city, for the layer of chicken fat and other nauseous refuse clogging the harbor (Newsweek 61).

In what was a largely industrial community, the negative publicity was not particularly concerning from a tourism marketing perspective. Rather, the community was more concerned that the article’s implied environmental ambivalence on the part of the city and its industries might lead consumers to mistakenly associate that pollution with the city’s products being un-wholesome. That concern was not entirely unfounded or without precedent, as the industries in Belfast’s sister communities of Castine and Camden had withered and failed half a century earlier due in part to pressures from wealthy summer visitors. Their expectations for less noise, low traffic, and especially no odors gained importance commensurate with those visitors’ essential contributions to the local economy.
By the mid-20th Century, those expectations had even migrated into local contributions to national taste in the arts and entertainment. Because of tourist-related congestion in Camden, some of the city scenes in the 1957 movie *Peyton Place* were filmed in neighboring Belfast as a near mirror-image landscape, but without Camden’s traffic and crowds. For my parents’ generation, that dichotomy of urban aesthetics stung as a confusing rebuke on their livelihoods. The stately homes on Belfast’s Primrose Hill, and the celebrated architecture of Belfast’s downtown businesses, were good enough to pass as popular Camden’s best. However, the gritty factories and pedestrian workers, whose profits and payrolls had financed those Hollywood-worthy cityscapes, were considered too lowly to be included in those same images.

Still, that was not the kind of notoriety that most concerned Belfast’s citizens, government officials and business owners. They were much more worried that consumers would associate the publicized notoriety of their polluted harbor with the quality of their city’s star brand names. From city government to production line shift-workers, concerns weighed heavily that the self-proclaimed “Biggest Little City in Maine” would suffer a public relations meltdown.

Researching and writing this case study has not been without difficulties, especially as my respect for those workers, and my empathy for the community as a whole, added the complication of being too close to the subject. Despite that caution, I felt an obligation to share perspectives that were otherwise only accessible because, in full disclosure, I had for a time been employed by a number of Belfast’s manufacturing and service businesses.

Most of my work peers at those businesses had stayed gainfully employed by practicing “occupational pluralism,” a labor strategy employed in rural Maine since colonial times, and that some scholars (e.g., Dublin) advocate steadily evolved in New England’s rural domestic production until merging with urban manufacturing around the period of the Civil War. To use that his-
torical term in its local context helps me to destigmatize the euphemism “Jack-of-all-Trades (Master of None),” and acknowledges workers’ capacities as skilled professionals who must constantly train and retool in a lifelong learning environment.

Those additional skills were blue-collar’s poor substitute for management’s golden parachutes. Being ever-pragmatic, and understanding their place in a larger economy, most of my peer production workers planned for when, not if, layoffs would inevitably come around. From an outsider’s perspective, that explanation might seem folksy or provincially cautious. However, those were the strongly embraced community memes most often imprinted on me through my employment experiences, and through the oral histories, archives and personal communications of many years of researching Belfast.

One common lesson that was almost universally related to me by these blue-collar peers was “never be ashamed of doing a difficult, tedious or unpleasant job well.” This is a philosophy I consider especially thought-provoking as Maine faces a critical worker shortage following two years of pandemic restructuring. For a brief period, while store shelves had been conspicuously empty of processed and manufactured goods, blue-collar and other less visible workers have been mentioned in the same conversations about frontline workers as their brother and sister medical and life safety professionals. Not without some somber irony, then, this return to acknowledging the unglamorous-but-essential contributions of wage labor mirrors the historical embrace of Belfast for its production workers, which I present to you in this study.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The city of Belfast, Maine, is rapidly building a reputation as a trendy vacation destination with an eclectic offering of historic homes, local festivals, whimsical shopping experiences and promising art galleries, all set in a pedestrian-friendly seaside community. However, this popular and increasingly gentrified community still retains a local sense of its manufacturing heritage, and arguably, significant—if not always affectionate—attachments to its gritty and pragmatic industrial past.

Skillful application of Maine branding, urban renewal and an almost hygienic erasure of its more unsightly industrial blight have allowed this city of under 7,000 people to be convincingly repurposed as a quaint and charming New England seaport. To the credit of nearly two generations of volunteers, elected officials and intrepid business people who refused to give up on renewing the fortunes of post-industrial Belfast, the city has become a rising darling of Maine tourism’s recent successes. In part this success is also owed to a newer, uncrowded atmosphere that has replaced the driven and bustling pace of its former industrial basin.

This attractive and inviting makeover of Belfast, however, is only its most recently revised identity. This newest chapter is still a work in progress, an urban renewal of purpose and self-image, if you will. With this evolving new image, old guard beliefs that once prioritized profits and progress over visitor appeal are yielding to an updated reality where meeting consumer image ideals and expectations enhance community revenues. This yielding to new directions is typical of how over some ten generations, the community has resiliently weathered challenges and change by pragmatically adapting when possible, repurposing assets which had lost relevancy, and rebuilding with stoic determination when necessary.
The published historical accounts of Belfast reflect, with notable consistency, that across much of its population its community members have been participatory, committed and adaptable contributors to the health, welfare and identity of their city. Perhaps what is most key to that process working is that while these engaged citizens were sometimes divided, divisive, and stubbornly individualistic, their mutual heritage, shared challenges and shared goals allowed them to concede many of those differences while collaborating for the good of the community. That engagement was revealed most often when the community faced a crisis or was challenged with achieving a community-wide goal, such as building a new school or fending off the impending bankruptcy of one of its larger employers.

I wish to reinforce this contrast between Belfast’s most recent, revised sense of place as a tourist-friendly service center, with its earlier security, pride and century of identity as a manufacturing center from 1870 to 1970. In fact, the community’s sense of place and identity has transformed several times, with its evolved characteristics reflecting distinct changes to its landscapes, demographics and especially its economic center. Belfast’s post-industrial urban renewal, and subsequent gentrification of former manufacturing spaces, has had the effect of camouflaging, or at least muting, much of the city’s former manufacturing identity. When combined with the natural aging and decreasing voice of its once robust and participatory worker demographic, the manufacturing heritage they communicate as its primary stewards is likewise increasingly muted. Without their narratives nourishing the largely oral histories in their keeping, their sense of place from that era is at risk of losing relevancy in the experiences of both visitors and those new residents who lack an existing connection to that heritage.

The perspective of Belfast’s once significant population of industrial workers was always more pronounced in its oral traditions than it was in primary sources such as recorded interviews,
diaries, or even newspaper articles. I have used some of the rare interviews available to provide first-person voices available from this rapidly shrinking population of former workers, but because so many left so little in the way of written records about their experiences at or away from work, I was forced to resort to more oblique sources. It was necessary to extrapolate more generalized experiences, and largely for groups of workers participating in a common occupation, from newspapers articles, city council records and announcements from civic groups.

Sometimes the most personal information for individuals came from their obituaries, extractions of decades of census records, and even notices of court cases. While it remains regrettable that more intimate accounts of worker experiences remain elusive, it was also important for me to accept this as a limitation in researching a population whose most prolific records came from a slim percentage of Belfast’s well-educated and economically privileged elite.

The perspectives and priorities of that demographic can hardly be expected to reflect those of workers, often their employees, who had little time to document their experiences after grueling 60-plus hour work weeks. Therefore some of what I am sharing may seem to reflect the possible bias of the elite of Belfast who left most of the ‘official’ narrative; but with the caveat that unless new evidence can be uncovered with more research, that somewhat overly positive record of workplace experiences must at this time, stand on that available documentation.

With those limitations noted, my research still revealed that Belfast as a dynamic community weathering centuries of change, added layer upon layer of interdependencies between business and civic leaders, the community at large, and its workforce. Even though Belfast consistently retained its relatively small and stable population of fewer than 7,000 for two and a half centuries, its economy, urban landscapes, and community attachments still evolved through several distinct historical identities. While each of those community identities share a number of
characteristics, and even allowing for the compounding of “the steady accretion of sentiment over the years” (Tuan 32), each period remains so unique that their respective identities resist being blended into a single homogeneous sense of place. This paper includes a number of worker narratives from its manufacturing era, which help maintain an awareness of that period’s unique sense of place and community identity.

In this study both *sense of place* and *community identity* are frequently mentioned together. There are distinctions to be made though, as sense of place is about attachments, dependency and identity with largely the physical environments of a place, and community identity is more specific to the social, economic and psychological interdependencies and attachments shared within the population inhabiting a place. Whether or not they all share a common sense of belonging to the local physical environment, almost all share a sense of belonging together to a community. Part of that powerful bond of common identity is followed with emigration of some one hundred Ulster Scot ancestor families of Belfast’s founders from Ireland to New England.

**The Four “Chapters” of Belfast, Maine**

In my view, Belfast has evolved through four “chapters” of identity, each with its own distinctive sense of place. Those periods can be historically divided into Belfast as a colonial settlement, a commercial seaport, an industrial city, and currently a service center host community with a growing tourism sector. Many of the historical and contemporary accounts of Belfast draw examples from several or even all of these periods to demonstrate context, contrast or continuity of specific themes throughout the community’s existence. Because Belfast has such a long and complex history, it is appropriate to occasionally use that device to demonstrate the relevancy of the community revisiting or repurposing certain practices. However, this paper’s focus is on the
city’s industrial period, and so whenever possible I will simplify these rather enshrined threads which resonate with every period’s culture as “mutual” or “shared heritage.”

This case study focuses on demonstrating Belfast’s important manufacturing-era sense of place narratives from the perspective of community stewards and their oral histories, through the context of its documented histories and public records. It will examine the participants, events, landscapes and community interdependencies that defined and maintained Belfast’s community identity as a manufacturing culture during its industrial period, with an additional goal of maintaining manufacturing workers’ and workplace narratives within that sense of place.

While focusing on that industrial period from 1870 to 1970, details from other periods in Belfast’s history are included to establish the origins and reuse of narratives and strategies that repeatedly influenced community responses to ongoing challenges. These will ultimately include the dramatic changes in public perspectives about the relationships between industry and the environment, which in the 1970s out-paced Belfast’s historic ability to adapt and self-rescue, shuttered its unsustainable industries, and began a lengthy process of capitulating to its current service-based economy.

**Chapter Breakdown of the Thesis**

Belfast was founded out of the need for change and its founders’ desire to improve their lots by throwing off centuries of cultural, political and religious oppression. Chapter Two, *Historical Background*, will set that contextual history as both the inherited baggage, and later basis for reflective tolerance—even embrace—of those who would desire to be assimilated into the community, including its identity as a blue-collar city. This chapter also introduces local sense-of-place memes reinforcing community member’s mutual heritage, shared challenges and shared
goals. That sense of humility and desire for equal treatment from the community’s earliest experiences and folk history locally buffered much of the resistance to immigrants and other newcomers experienced in larger Maine cities during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

Chapter Three, Working the Niches, introduces the concept of occupational pluralism, or worker competency and practice of multiple production skills in either self or commercial employment, and the vital role of those highly adaptable workers in the development and success of Belfast’s industries. This chapter follows the origins of essential proficiencies in multiple crafts and seasonal resource harvesting in the region’s colonial settlements, through how those diverse skill sets, with their built-in adaptabilities, enabled a city of commerce and cottage industries devastated by fires in the 1860s to become a post-Civil War powerhouse of manufacturing. That nearly seamless transition from principally commerce and shipping to primarily manufacturing was due in part to Belfast having only recently matured beyond its own rural roots.

A number of the factories that received that influx of workers were owned and built by various incarnations of the Belfast Manufacturing Company, a chartered private coalition with city input, which then recruited manufacturers to lease their buildings and equipment. In that business model, the Board of Trade/Building Corporation functioned as landlord and property agent, manufacturers owned and operated their product brands, and Belfast’s citizens were the workforce. Those workers answered to and were paid by the operator, with their payrolls funding much of the city’s economy. The genesis of those factories, in that fire-scarred region of the city still remembered as The Burnt District, is covered in Chapter Four, Rising from the Ashes.

There were also many independently or regionally owned factories in Belfast making everything from windows and doors to clothing and fertilizer. However, few manufacturers dominated the local economy more than its first and longest-operating shoe factory. Alternately
leased from the Building Association and the city as ownership and operators changed a number of times, its importance and solvency in this company town also encumbered it with being the most frequently, and expensively, rescued factory in the city. Employee concessions that rescued this factory, and their collaborations with city officials and merchants to keep this economic life-line operating, are covered in Chapter Five, *A Stake in the Game and a Seat at the Table*.

Belfast’s citizens were called upon en masse numerous times to rescue faltering operators or contribute enticements (including once, a brand new factory) to recruit new operators to the city. That “recruit, rescue, repurpose and if need be, rebuild” theme of retaining that economic lifeblood of manufacturers is a paired theme in this paper, paralleled with that of retaining essential workers. Both of these critical assets were needed to keep the city alive, and both functioned as bookends to that century of the city’s story.

This echoes themes from many company towns, where the haze from smokestacks and pervasive grit were not blight but a tolerated, even comforting, reassurance that production continued; neighbors and friends had jobs; schools, police and fire departments remained funded; and worker and community reciprocity paid quality of life dividends. While ugly in a tourism economy—then or now—block-long factories were reassuring landscapes, and freight train and factory whistles the town criers, which pronounced normalcy, dependability, and local agency.

Throughout Belfast’s peak century of its manufacturing-centered culture, interdependencies evolved between the members of the community and the urban landscapes they created. Deconstructing those user- and place-based community interdependencies reveals that Belfast functioned very much like an incorporated business. City government mirrored many functions of management; however, their decisions often yielded to pressures from wealthy business owners. Belfast’s mayor negotiated worker bailouts of pro-bono-labor during the shoe factory’s first
bankruptcy, which awarded participating employees a voting representative on that factory’s corporate board. A later City government orchestration of a citizen financial rescue of that same factory entitled them to “subscriptions,” or what is now referred to as common stock, when that factory’s critical expansion was completed. By taking the risk of literally investing in the city’s largest—but insolvent—employer, workers and ordinary citizens had anteed up and claimed their stake in a venture on which the health of their community depended. After that rescue the rights and obligations of those stakeholders were reinforced with predictable regularity in the speeches of candidates for office, and by city officials (see chapter seven, *The Politics of Progress*).

As a community that gravitated towards a business-like alignment, Belfast came to resemble its manufacturing establishments, which adapted to new market conditions, retooled to meet new challenges, and rebuilt critical infrastructure that was worn out, obsolete or destroyed. Above all else, the community jealously guarded their skilled workforce, especially those workers who could transfer their skills from one manufacturer to another as producers came and went, and equally those who could translate and transmit complex skills through the diversity of steps in a particular manufacturing process. Those workers became forepersons who would carry the production line leadership in the mitosis that created the next generation of skilled workers.

That part of Belfast’s history is very much a story of a community obsessed with progress and keeping up with the times. To stay current and competitive the city depended on their manufacturer’s payrolls, not only to fund most of the local economy, but also to leverage as implied collateral for municipal borrowing to fund that progress. In one impassioned mayoral speech this philosophy elevated workers, or at least their pay circulating in the city, to the mythic status of golden geese. Belfast would have to be very creative to keep those geese from flying away.
Chapter Six, *The Hidden Cost of Progress*, demonstrates how mutual sense of place in a community can grow out of competing groups’ strategies to resolve shared challenges. Ironically, a number of Belfast’s community-wide challenges resulted indirectly from successful inter-group compromise, collaboration, and especially wide participation in achieving community infrastructure goals. While cultivating civic pride, unity and a shared sense of progress, Belfast’s exorbitant borrowing to build a railroad spur to the Maine Central’s Junction at Burnham burdened the community with a substantial debt load. As we shall see later, it turns out that in building strong communities, this is not necessarily a bad thing.

Chapter Seven, *The Politics of Progress*, illustrates efforts by city office holders and their competitors, along with philanthropists, to woo labor, commercial, and resident voting blocs over their respective plans to keep Belfast competitive. Those plans include building new schools and hospitals, paving roads, and creating other public works infrastructure with the aim of retaining workers and attracting new businesses. However, only a local version of private industrial welfare initiated by business leaders and those philanthropists provided enough internal competition to bring these projects to fruition. That proved beneficial to the city, its debt load, and the political careers of “civic-minded” business leaders on their way up.

Chapter Eight, *When the Bottom Fell Out*, explains how between 1925 and the first rumbles of WWII, Belfast was hit by a trifecta of economic disasters when daily steamship service to Boston ended, their railroad operator’s lease was not renewed, and the Great Depression idled numerous factories. Despite the passage of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, union activities were ineffectual, and Belfast resorted to promoting itself as a city with no union troubles and inexpensive labor. By 1948, the year of Belfast’s first “Broiler Day” celebration, the Belfast waterfront and industrial district had lost all but a handful of its keystone manufacturers. Those fac-
tories that had survived both the depression and the war were hampered in their competitiveness by a post-war recession. Closures of existing industries actually freed up industrial space and unskilled workers, which were then available to supply the city’s fledgling poultry processors. I discuss these issues in Chapter Nine, *Broiler Capital of the World?*

Poultry processing quickly grew from small operations importing live birds to comprehensive egg-to-table operations supplied and fully controlled by two of Maine’s largest operators in that industry. Rocketing into first place in Maine’s agribusiness by 1954, by 1970 Belfast’s two processing plants and its contracted growers were generating the equivalent of $400 million for Maine’s economy (French 15). Unfortunately, Belfast’s poultry factories expanded operations faster than they could effectively treat their waste streams—the highest volume of any industry in the city to date—and the resulting soiling of the entire harbor’s shore with a noxious fatty gel earned the city the title of “Schmaltzport” from *Newsweek* (62) magazine, and “city with a bathtub ring” from its home-grown Maine detractors.

**Conclusions**

The city of Belfast, Maine, is notable for a 250-year history that while rich and complex, is readily divided into four distinct periods. While the focus of this case study is the city’s sense of place and identity as a manufacturing culture during its industrial period from 1870 to 1970, key events in other eras of the city’s history were essential in forming the community’s egalitarian relationship with its workforce during that period. While the chapters in this paper illustrate the progression of one community identity into the next, and also the cultural borrowing between periods, it is important to emphasize the uniqueness of identity in each period that discourages trying to apply a homogeneous sense of place to Belfast’s entire history as a whole. Recognizing
that progression helps frame Belfast’s manufacturing era as both its longest enduring era, and also its strongest period of collaboration between wage labor and the community at large.

The title “City with a Bathtub Ring” refers to both media reports and the general public’s comments about Belfast’s harbor, which became highly polluted with commercial poultry processing waste between approximately 1950 and 1970. That debate placed a great deal of negative attention on the city at the end of an otherwise remarkable example of labor and community contributing to a mutually cherished sense of place and identity. Because there was such a mutually appreciative and interdependent relationship between the community and the workforce, that negative attention was not seen as targeted on just the poultry industry or its workers, but as a public slight on the entire community.

Belfast is equally representative of most of Maine’s formerly industrialized communities in that, while highly successful in maintaining jobs and progress—sometimes for generations—the industries are often remembered, if at all, for their legitimate but unintended environmental legacies. It is unfortunate that these communities are not equally remembered for the vibrant sense of place each identified with in their own relevant times and places. While this paper focuses on how the relationships and contributions of Belfast’s workforce and community melded into a common sense of place, it also seeks to keep the positive aspects of that type of historical Maine industrial community attached to Maine’s enduring narrative.
CHAPTER TWO
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before transporting the reader into a far deeper history than the 1870–1970 focus period of this case study, some introductory remarks are in order to explain why a pre-settlement history on the ancestors of Belfast’s founders is relevant to understanding the intense allegiances between the community and the city’s workforce during its manufacturing era. In the 1600s, more than two centuries before Belfast’s founding, their Presbyterian Scots ancestors’ experiences in overcoming prejudices, persecution, marginalization and denial of equality imprinted strong mores and memes about group survival through community unity and support.

To reduce ambiguity between terms used in popular culture such as “Scots Irish,” and many cultural geographers’ preferred terms of “Ulster-Scots” or “Presbyterian Scots,” I will use the latter two terms for their geographic, ethnic and religious clarity. The Ulster-Scots Agency’s website explains: “The term Ulster-Scots has, for nearly 400 years, referred to people, not place—the people who migrated from the Lowlands of Scotland to Ulster, and to the Ulster Scots communities they established right across the nine counties” (ulsterscotsagency.com).

This historical background also briefly explains the inclusion of many American Ulster-Scots descendants’ self-identification as Diaspora (Gardner), largely disenfranchised from their Scottish Lowland roots, persecuted by their native Irish neighbors, and discriminated against by their fellow English-speaking colonists. As a population caught up as political pawns between their monarch, rival bishops of the Anglican and Presbyterian churches, and their titled landlords, “their identities were contingent, waxing and waning depending on political, religious and economic needs and circumstances” (Kidd 210).
Until their eventual emigration from Ireland, those ancestors’ personal and community identities were subject to constant manipulation and reassessment by external agents. As will be amplified in this chapter, those Presbyterian Ulster-Scot immigrants continued to be marginalized and held suspect even up to their eventual founding of Belfast (Maine), and denied a substantive, assimilated identity for multiple generations, by the same civil and religious rationalizations used to justify their initial Irish colonization. Since these events pre-date any sociological and psychological statistics that might quantify this discrete population’s degree of prolonged cultural trauma, I will substitute existing research that instead supports the multi-generational denial of identity and place for the majority of Ulster-Scots inhabiting the same Ulster counties as the Belfast ancestors. With that larger population’s parallel experience, I will infer that what the ancestor sub-set community likely also endured could be reasonably argued as more a prolonged exile between homelands, rather than a homeland of affection.

Understanding the historical alienation experiences of that community, which eased only with their increased—even essential—usefulness after transitioning from subsistence farmers to skilled craftsmen, artisans and merchants, will also help in understanding the staying power and persistence of those lessons even throughout Belfast’s manufacturing era. While those skills, strategies and improved statuses still failed to materially breach many of the barriers to their placed-ness or identity in Ireland, they were, however, transportable to where they could ultimately plant those sense of place elements where they could grow, be defended, and passed on as a heritage. Belfast’s 1870s transition into a compact powerhouse of manufacturing would give those heritage traditions of enduring-through-being-essential, and collaborative community support, the optimal spaces to refine a producer identity which, while conceived in their ancestors’ struggles, was perfected in a community established and managed on their own terms.
Historical Background

The founding settlers of Belfast, Maine, descended from Scottish lowland farmers who were recruited by various enticements, pressures and mandates in the early 1600s to colonize, Anglicize and civilize lands confiscated by King James IV in Ireland’s rebellious northern counties. As part of James’s statecraft, those colonists turned “Irish” planters then became virtual economic instruments exchanged for land grants awarded to his loyal followers, who became known as “undertakers” for undertaking or facilitating his colonization efforts. These “English and Scottish ‘undertakers’ would control the land and import Protestant tenants…. They formed a new upper class in Ireland based on exploitation, political domination and Anglican religious control” (Keller 72).

Planters were obtained in a still-debated mixture of recruitment and coercion of tenants bound to those Scottish estates, primarily from among landless families and single men. The practice treated landless colonists as commodities, even chattel, in an economy that as Keller states “imported” Protestants as a service in exchange for property. Those colonists then “became the tenants of the ‘undertakers,’ who rented their [royally-granted] lands to the Irish and English poor, but did little to develop the economy” (Keller 72).

Here I must note a contentious debate, primarily between scholars in the United Kingdom, over whether Lowland Scots, who through whatever persuasion immigrated to Ireland during James IV’s colonization plan, gained an Irish identity simply by nature of their landing place. Were they assimilated, despite multiple biases and systematic alienation, into Irish identity through geographical context, or did they, by sheer will or lack of permanence of place, cling to a suppressed Scottish identity? As noted in this chapter’s introduction, whether those displaced people were even allowed to have an Irish, Scottish or some contemporarily envisioned hybrid
identity such as Ulster-Scot or Scots-Irish was “contingent,” according to Keller, on the immediate needs of their political, religious and economic masters. That identity by external fiat effectively kept their former Scottish identity in limbo for multiple generations; their solutions for bridging that void in their identity, however, would continue to resonate within Belfast’s fully matured identity as a manufacturing community much later.

The Belfast ancestors were primarily Presbyterian, and under James’s colonization edict were ostensibly community equals with their Anglican neighbors in the new settlements. However, to their distress, their rights, access to, and quality of lands and leases fell well short of what they had even under the umbrage of the Scottish gentry. What little attachment to place most of these planters enjoyed was disrupted by the anti-Protestant massacres of 1641, and “By early 1642, some 4000 Protestant civilians had died in the turmoil” (Dorney 8). The Eleven Years War in Ireland ensued, merging into the larger English Civil War from 1642 through 1651. During those conflicts, many rural Presbyterian Scots became refugees, fleeing vulnerable rural areas and migrating primarily to the Ulster Province communities of Londonderry and Belfast.

At the wars’ conclusion, three Acts by the English parliament finalized official plans to displace many landowners in Ireland’s northern counties, with the redistribution of these lands leaving both Scottish and Irish tenants adrift in uncertainty. The Adventurers’ Act of 1642 would sell off Irish lands made forfeit specifically by perpetrators of the Irish Rebellion of 1641, and was largely targeted at Catholic landholders who had initiated the uprising (Cunningham 921). A second 1652 Act for the Settling of Ireland penalized Parliament’s enemies in Ireland of all cultures and faiths, for acts throughout the combined Eleven Years War. Lastly the Act of Satisfaction of September 1653 would facilitate the transplantation of those “enemies” to Ireland’s southern counties, and also the plantation of new owners and tenants deemed friendly to parlia-
ment onto those lands. Initially commanders and soldiers of Oliver Cromwell’s army who subdued both that revolt, and that of supporters of Charles I, were proposed to populate those lands, but that variant of the Act never came to full fruition (Cunningham 922).

It was the Satisfaction Act that most inhibited the Ulster Scots’ attachment to place, as under the version appropriated by the Irish parliament, some 250 Presbyterian Ulster-Scot proprietors were to be transported to southern Ireland (Cunningham 924). The estates of those landholding Ulster-Scot proprietors were the closest approximation many of those Scots immigrants had to a stable nucleolus for their identities. After Ulster-Scot royalist petitioners were received by Oliver Cromwell, though, he actually interceded on their behalf, but with the caveat that they pay heavy fines equivalent to those imposed on English Loyalists.

The net effect of those political threats and machinations was that even though those community fixtures were not transplanted, their reduced wealth and ability to project the stability which allowed their communities to prosper was still nearly the “satisfaction” or punitive revenge that parliament had hoped to extract. Driven from their leases by the native Irish, denied a sense of guarantee of place by government retaliation, plus with the possibility of being displaced by a future unfavorable vote of parliament, those Ulster-Scots were left with little to hope for permanence-wise. They were, for all intents, marooned as unwelcome-but-legal squatters in a foreign culture, save for the aspect of the valuable labor pool they represented, which was only ever so slightly more trusted by their English taskmasters than their native Irish counterparts.

After almost a generation of successive wars and punitive Parliamentarian acts, some Presbyterian Ulster-Scots slowly moved back to rural tenements, but the redistribution of lands left many with such poor quality leases that their former agriculture was unsustainable. By default, many turned to the home production of wool and linen goods in a close approximation of
parts of the cottage industries and occupational pluralism that would later flourish in colonial New England. Similarly, many of those displaced Ulster-Scots who remained sheltered in the relative security of Belfast (Ireland), Londonderry and Donegal became urban-dwelling day-laborers, and survived mainly by practicing their spinning and weaving skills as a profession. While many found niches as co-supportive craftsmen, makers and artisans, they lacked the “notions of autonomy, collective solidarity and self realization” necessary for working men’s “moral claim to place” (Gardner 2053; Lamont 170).

Historian Patrick Griffin offers: “After living at the empire’s margins, Ulster’s Presbyterians had come to terms with each of these developments…. First and foremost, Ulster Presbyterians moved” (Griffin 6). Moving away from conflict, and with that breathing space mobilizing and allowing fresh demand for their skills, were strategies that helped Ulster Scots to find niches where they could endure. With the buffer of an intervening space, the portability of their skills often, if temporarily, enabled them a tolerable living doing the most onerous, back-breaking production defaulting mostly to the desperate and the pariah. Moving also increased access to resources and networking such as through Londonderry’s flax and linen dealers, but the persistent instability in their condition from conflicting rights and religious biases under a succession of English monarchs denied them the equality necessary for long-term belonging and competing in those temporary havens.

Historian Kenneth W. Keller explains their tenuous existence:

The Ulster Scots could live under these conditions, but they would always be outsiders on the margin, subject to the whims of new rulers. As people on the fringe of society, neither outcast nor insiders, the Ulster Scots needed a hedge, or a guarantee, that they would not fall off and be crushed. They adopted a commercial outlook and became pariah capitalist.
The Ulster Scots found extra protection in their perilous position by developing an interest in the promotion of economic enterprise. (Keller 75)

Ultimately the aversion to remaining at the margins of both the English-Anglican and Irish cultures committed the Belfast ancestors’ resolve to find a place they could belong to. During the great famine following the Williamite Wars (1688–1691), a labor tsunami of some 50,000 Scottish kin fled to the Irish colonies. As the labor population in that economically marginal landscape swelled, the work available for labor remained fixed, and wages dropped. Trapped in an increasingly bleak cycle with nowhere to retreat, the Belfast ancestors decided to emigrate, with the hopes of rebuilding their lives in New England.

Emigration

In 1718, as part of approximately one hundred families from one Ulster Presbyterian parish, the ancestors of Belfast’s founders immigrated to Boston in the New England colony of Massachusetts. They were not well-received by the Puritans of Boston, who considered Presbyterianism to be indistinguishable from the Anglican prejudices that had motivated their own exodus less than a century earlier. Nineteenth century Belfast historian Joseph Williamson also fixed upon an ethnic component contributing to that cool reception. In fact, the relationship between Boston’s leaders and the Belfast ancestors would remain cool and be largely commercial in nature, until after the American Revolution.

At first they were not treated with due consideration, the people of this country erroneously regarding them as Irish, whereas no term could be more offensive [to them]. No relations of affinity or consanguinity had ever existed between the two races [sic], and they
were as distinct from the native population of Ireland as if they had never left Scotland.

(Williamson 60)
Williamson’s claim that “No relations of affinity or consanguinity had ever existed between the two races” should be noted for the unfortunate persistence of such claims even when published in 1877, which still specifically sought to amplify perceived differences between Irish and Scottish ethnicities some 160 years after that 1718 immigration event.

At this point I feel it is important to pause and reinforce why the denial of sense of place and identity for this community, before and during its emigration from Ireland, is critical to the later strength of the community’s relationship with its labor force from 1870 to 1970. One of my primary reasons for preempting the manufacturing period’s focus with this earlier history was to demonstrate the ingrained and persistent Old World culture of resistance to inclusiveness, which Belfast’s workforce-supportive community had to overcome in order for its manufacturing identity to become so firmly rooted by the late 19th Century. That resistance ran counter to the volumes of evidence documenting centuries of cultural mixing across the mere 13-mile channel between Torr Head, Ireland, and the Mull of Kintyre, Scotland. Still, as the later manufacturing era developed prior to Williamson’s 1877 publication, people of both Scottish and Irish ancestral identities in Belfast commonly practiced cross-cultural “affections” as co-workers, neighbors and even spouses, as can be seen in U.S. Census records from the late 1800s.

Many of these historical quotes also provide context for the fact that the assimilation of newcomers often took longer for some portions of the host community than for the incoming members themselves. The remainder of this chapter moves Belfast’s ancestors from being treated as perpetual newcomers at the margins of dominant populations to becoming a host community in their own right, one with a long memory of alienation, which could ill afford to perpetuate
those old sufferings on new members if they hoped for them to remain there, sustaining the community and its industries.

**Finding Place**

Within a year, sixteen families of those immigrants from Ulster migrated to nearby Nutfield in the New Hampshire colony. They later renamed it Londonderry in honor of the Irish community that had sheltered them during their displacements in the mid-1600s. New Hampshire’s Londonderry was a healing and prosperous place for the Belfast ancestors, and repurposing the city’s namesake in Ireland was important to claiming their long-suppressed identity:

Soon joined by others, they built up a town, which, in commemoration of the place whence many of their number had emigrated, was called Londonderry…. Under these influences, by the rapid increase of the settlement, and by constant accessions from abroad, Londonderry became populous, thriving, and wealthy. (Williamson, 60-61)

The community flourished along with the irresistible swell of fellow immigrants who assimilated into New England’s participatory culture. At the local level, that transition from immigrants to community members was perhaps most profoundly different from their Irish colonial experience, when enabled through the networked voice and direct political engagement of their work, faith and civic peers participating in the town meeting process, a form of local agency that remains relevant in New England’s town governments to the present.

An equally important part of the full assimilation of the Londonderry colonist into greater New England was the participation of its colonial militias in support of Britain’s military objectives during the French and Indian (Seven Years) War. One consequence of the territorial resolution from that conflict was that, on principle at least, all of New England was now approachable,
and relatively secure, as a place for new communities. As a people who had come to associate
growth and movement with security and progress, the community once again positioned itself to
migrate. A committee of community leaders, working in concert with Massachusetts’ Governor
Thomas Hutchinson’s appointed surveyor John Mitchell, purchased a sizable portion of the Wal-
do (Muscongus) Patent from the heirs of the late (Brigadier) General Samuel Waldo. Waldo had
received one half of the Muscongus Patent from its proprietors for his successful intercession to
have Surveyor General David Dunbar’s appointment revoked, for gross abuses of his authority in
seizures and destruction of the proprietors’ property (Williamson 41). The important takeaway
concerning Waldo’s actions is that without his active civil and military participation in the con-
fluence of New England’s events in that period, the story of Belfast may have ended in colonial
Londonderry, New Hampshire.

The Belfast Proprietors’ business model for their anticipated settlement was elegantly
simple. The land they had purchased only held modest value for its timber or agriculture, and the
Waldo heirs were agreeable to dispose of it as such. At the same time, the environs around Bos-
ton were facing an ever more critical (wood) fuel shortage, post-war population expansion, and
more stringent enforcement of duties and taxes, helping to bring about a post-war recession.
However, with their insight, the Belfast Proprietors had just purchased the land with New En-
land’s most readily accessible supply of firewood.

Williamson interpreted “The wood she beareth is not shrubbish—fit only for fuel,” by
James Rosier, a ship’s naturalist, and a firsthand assessment by Mitchell during his 1765 coastal
survey, as the sources of the Belfast Proprietors’ insight (Williamson 26). Rosier had been re-
tained by explorer George Weymouth on his 1605 expedition along the Maine coast, including
Penobscot Bay. His descriptions of the region remained the staple reference points for over a
century, and the headland on the eastern shore of Penobscot Bay opposite Belfast came to be known as Cape Rosier.

True to Keller’s earlier description of Ulster-Scots finding their niches, the Belfast Proprietors had indeed “adopted a commercial outlook and become (successful) pariah capitalist” (Keller 75) in risking that venture to establish a territory of their own. Like so many of their descendants in the manufacturing culture to come, the Belfast Proprietors were of a business-first mentality from their first arrival at the settlement: “This position is sustained…that John Mitchell built a sawmill on the Westcott Brook, before a house had been erected in the town” (Williamson 113-14). The proprietorship was generating income for the community as a manufacturing commons even before the first private home was built. They had become that exemplar of industry, opportunity and change honored on them during a 150th anniversary celebration in Londonderry, New Hampshire, in 1869:

For no very long time did the ranks of the original association remain unbroken. Our country was then, as it is now, a land of changes. One eligible opening after another in the inland domain beckoned away little detachments, to lay the foundations of other settlements...which bore a marvelous family likeness to their common parent. (Williamson 62)

Conclusions

Belfast’s founders descended from landless Lowland Scots tenants of titled Scottish landlords, who were themselves bound in fealty to King James IV, the royal successor of Queen Elizabeth I of England. Their recruitment, or as has been argued “importation” (Keller 72) into James IV’s colonization schemes for northern Ireland, thrust these planters into the heart of a
multi-generational conflict between rebellious native Catholic Irish chieftains and the third successive Protestant English monarch’s attempt to control Ireland. Already stripped of their properties, and with their leaders in exile and held treasonous, the remaining native Irish were resentful of both those Presbyterian Ulster-Scots tenants and their Anglican English landlords who occupied their former homesteads.

The founders’ ancestors remained marooned in Ireland for over a century as an unwitting and unwelcome population caught between an increasingly rebellious faction of the native Irish and an increasingly authoritative English ruling class. Those hostilities eventually coalesced into eleven years of open warfare that culminated with the English Civil War, with many Ulster Scots among the 4,000 Protestant victims of Irish uprisings, but also included among those enemies of Parliament included in transport warrants for alleged Royalist sympathies during the English Civil War. While relatively few Ulster-Scots were actively involved or allied with rebellious participants named in three punitive Parliamentary acts from 1642 to 1653, the distinction failed to lessen the already oppressive bias and marginalization subjected upon Ulster-Scots.

The years of warfare and displacement denied many Ulster-Scots either an environment that permitted assimilation or a receptive place to integrate their Scottish identities. Their flights to fortified sanctuaries deposited many of those refugees in urban settings like Londonderry, Donegal and Belfast. With no means to practice subsistence agriculture, many turned to practicing their agriculture-related crafts such as weaving textiles. Their usefulness in those tedious and difficult occupations progressed into areas of marketing and commerce that while often averse to others, nevertheless successfully expanded their survival niches and strategies.

For those Ulster-Scots “succeeding” at the margins, merely surviving in those spaces hardly equaled belonging to those communities, places or cultures. That was because making
themselves useful and in demand for their sustenance was interdependent with their ability to decamp and evade for their safety. For workers on the bottom rungs of production, work will inevitably dry up temporarily, or even permanently; that reality was as true in 1670s Belfast, Ireland, as it would be in Belfast, Maine, in the United States in the 1870s, or for that matter 1970s.

The necessity of maintaining those portable skill sets, and leveraging their proficiency as “pariah capitalist” (Keller 72) in production spaces eschewed by local workers with more means or opportunity, or by those facing even more bias (such as the native Irish), became a meaningful, possibly even surrogate component in the Belfast ancestors’ community identity while in Ireland. Their cumulative experiences with denial of assimilation, delayed fulfillment of identity, and associating mobility with security, created multi-generational baggage and self-identification with refugee and diaspora-like cultures, as aligns with Gardner (2048). The ancestors of Belfast’s founders survived persecution and displacement by moving away from threats and towards opportunity, capitalizing on their multiple occupational skills, and facing change with deliberate strategies rather than fear and resignation. Mechanisms of reuse, repurposing, rebuilding and exploiting opportunities created during change became deliberate strategies for success, rather than a requiem for hard times.

When the Belfast Proprietors tired of marginalization, they literally manufactured a new center for their own agency out of a wilderness area that had largely been dismissed as being of marginal value by their oppressors and competitors. Reusing successful strategies from their Irish exile, they then used this new center of gravity as essential producers in a passed-over place to establish a degree of commercial equality and local autonomy. Much later, in mid to late 19th century Belfast, Maine, community acknowledgement of those painful past experiences was widely expressed as tolerance and a sense of moral obligation to respect similarly displaced peo-
ples. That tolerance was for the most part notably absent of the nativist attitudes towards immigrant labor in Maine’s larger industrial cities of the period. That empathy was especially sincere for those immigrants who had shared similar experiences as the Ulster Scots, with a mutual history enduring marginalization, landlessness, and the fate of being marooned in an unfamiliar land, amidst an unwelcoming culture.

The challenges that were overcome by Belfast’s ancestors were critical in the 19th century perpetuation of community memes, which reinforced drawing from the successes of their shared heritage in overcoming their current mutual challenges, and achieving their mutual goals. That reinforcement of how and why Belfast was deliberately created would help maintain the essential networking, reciprocity and support between labor and community that would later sustain Belfast’s manufacturing culture through its industrially-driven century.
CHAPTER THREE
WORKING THE NICHES

In its simplest contemporary expression, occupational pluralism is maintaining employment at more than one job. As practiced in Belfast’s manufacturing spaces into the 1870s, however, occupational pluralism still retained the competency and diversity of craft, trade and artisan skills practiced in much of rural Maine since its colonial settlement. Those colonial-era manufacturing skills were also complemented by farmers practicing forestry in winter, or hiring on as fishermen for shares of a ship’s profit once their agricultural crops had matured enough for their families to attend to (Allis).

Allis differentiates between the land-owning occupational pluralists with their intimate connections to their properties and communities, and itinerant lumberman or fisherman: “Like the lumberman, the fisherman was tied to no one spot for which he had any real affection; he was every ready to pull up stakes and move on to a part of the country that promised better fishing. Thus he too was an unstable element in the population” (Allis 146). Allis’s statement leaves open occupational pluralism as one mechanism sustained by those who intended to remain in a place of affection, attachment or dependency.

Historian Thomas Dublin explains that occupational pluralism in that classic, if limited, interpretation not only did not fade away along with the primitive isolation of colonial homesteads, but rather evolved into rural domestic production for cash, credit and finished goods during the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts of 1807 (534). Its “workers were members of rural, property-owning families who engaged in outwork in slack periods when it suited their purposes” (538). While the city’s antebellum factories had refined their manufacturing practices and
gradually increased production volumes over that of the surrounding rural economy, prior to their first industrial scale experiences, individual workers still acquired many of their skills on the farm, or apprenticed to individual craftsmen. Dublin notes that this overall increase in production came not just from within these early factories, but from the reciprocal relationship between occupational pluralists and these same factories. Rural workers had been forced to adapt to a new domestic economy where the manufacture of finished goods began in their own homes, but now supplied neighbors, local markets, and even distant factories. “Rural and urban mills alike depended on outworkers from farming families living nearby. Outwork weaving typically engaged a considerably larger number of workers than did the spinning mills themselves and thus broadened the impact of the early factories on the surrounding countryside” (539).

The modest improvements in production capacity, product quality and uniformity accomplished in the city’s factories into the 1860s were sufficient because Belfast’s economy had been based on shipbuilding, warehousing and transshipment of the commerce of other industrial and agricultural communities. Prior to the Civil War period’s demand for manufactured goods at military scale, high-volume manufacturing had been limited primarily to much larger communities with either access to rail transport, a seaport, or a navigable river. In the postwar era, after a series of fires destroyed much of its commercial and warehouse district, Belfast’s leaders opted to modernize and expand its manufacturing base rather than rebuild a dated commercial district made redundant by competing cities’ new rail and steamship connections. To assume supporting so much more of the city’s economy, and to be able to compete with southern New England’s established factories, Belfast’s manufacturers needed to both acclimate its workforce of individual craftsmen to industrial practices which prioritized efficiency and uniformity at scale, and to grow that workforce substantially.
Belfast’s industries were unusual in their employee demographics insofar as they never received the waves of immigrants that filled many of the industrial jobs in southern Maine’s industrial cities like Lewiston, Waterville, Brunswick and Biddeford. In fact, Belfast’s median population of 5,286 never shifted by more than 700 people per decade from 1870 to 1970 (Appendix A). Belfast also lacked extensive cultural diversity and language enclaves, which might have helped to lure some of that abundance of industrial workers from those communities. In the 1870s, as a near monoculture of English speakers of primarily British ancestry, and with natural growth and immigration almost balanced by outmigration and deaths, Belfast had to compensate for that extremely low population growth by actively recruiting manufacturing workers from neighboring communities, and at times from across New England.

The inland communities that would later provide a significant supply of Belfast’s industrial labor were mostly rural, agrarian and locally networked, but also capable of manufacturing a surprising array of products by their own skills and means. Family farms were not particularly isolated or independent, as survival in rural Maine was built on layers of interdependency. Most of those families were highly competent in producing most of their own implements, textiles and foodstuffs; a high portion of those families, however, also participated in the contracted domestic production of particular manufactured goods such as shoes, clothing or brooms. Households, even if not completely self-sufficient in all the stages of production, could, while collaborating with others, craft everyday items on a respectable scale.

Belfast’s adjacent rural communities maintained that pioneer level of self-sufficiency long after its own citizens had become dependent on consumer goods. Decades after Belfast was electrified and enjoyed public water, sanitary sewers and telephones, household life in rural neighboring towns was still lit by kerosene lamps, well water was still drawn by hand, and
transport over the roads was at the speed of a plodding horse. The diversity and competency of skills needed to maintain a Maine family farm into the early 1900s was still, excepting for advances in human and animal-powered machinery, nearly as demanding as before the Civil War. In both personal and contracted rural domestic production, each member and gender still needed to retain hands-on proficiency at each step of manufacture from raw materials to a finished item, though quite often the process involved some individuals or households initiating or completing pre-assemblies like skeins of yarn, barrel staves or shoe soles for peer producers.

With its interdependencies, the rural economy did allow for inter-household collaboration and bartering of specialized work such as blacksmithing, tanning of hides, or the shared use of a shingle, grist or fulling mill. While this system often spread production out over whole towns rather than being confined within a conventional urban factory, its pace of production synced with agrarian rhythms and priorities, while also familiarizing thousands of rural Mainers with networked producer skills. Until after the late 1920s, when rural neighboring towns such as Waldo and Brooks achieved parity with Belfast’s electrification and other conveniences, it was rare for rural job applicants to be perceived as too provincial for factory work because they were accustomed to crafting under less mechanized conditions. On the contrary, being perceived as able to do more with less, and under more difficult conditions, actually enhanced the value of these workers. The powered machinery and work flow of a factory setting would only make them more efficient, and the community memory within those factories was long enough to appreciate even city life’s challenges before electricity.

Rural occupational pluralists migrating across urban boundaries were a win-win for both communities. The increase in trades specialization at larger facilities in Belfast, such as shipyards and paper mills, ironically also fostered a parallel resurgence in occupational pluralism in
the surrounding feeder communities in Waldo County, as smallscale manufacturing boomed in rural mills and households to fill the former, local production for Belfast itself. Maine’s cottage industries produced everything from buckets, nails and furniture, to brooms, candles, shoes and cloth (by the millions of yards) in a “put-out” (or outwork) system of individuals and households contracted to produce set quantities of domestically manufactured goods, and facilitated by local merchants as go-betweens with larger industries. This output rivaled the production of many of the state’s larger manufacturers (Judd et al 320-322). That output had grown large because, like in Belfast, their small-scale production was also contracted and destined for growing companies in Boston. Because of its association with that metropolitan market, put-out production was also called the “Boston System” in those community networks.

**Factory Work and the Role of Transportation**

At the turn of the 20th century, Belfast reached its lowest ebb in population change. With a net population change of just three people over the decade from 1900 to 1910, there was insufficient population growth to support manufacturing expansion. In the endless cycle of satisfying customers and attracting new ones, Belfast’s manufacturers were losing their ability to compete with southern New England’s employee-rich production advantages. This also made Belfast’s industries less attractive to shippers because their profits depended on the volume of goods they moved, which gave preference to clients contracting the most shipping. For instance, in maintaining the profits of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad, and steamship companies servicing the Belfast to Boston run, the put-out system was a consistent percentage of the freight justifying those daily trips. The more primitive work conditions in rural production neither translated to poor product quality nor inconsistent output. In fact the opposite was true, as the desire to
achieve the progress and quality of life observed in town, and the cash income that was coupled to a participant’s output, was compensated by the same model of piece-rate system employed in many of Belfast’s factories.

That parallel led to what I consider the Crown Jewel of occupational pluralism’s migration from farm to factory. The experiential learning environment in those extended families, and the rural communities where those manufacturing skills were passed on, served as the predecessor to much of the industrial arts training for Maine manufacturing. In an age when high schools were still obsessed with the Lyceum regiment of classical languages, higher mathematics, elocution and philosophy, small industrial cities like Belfast were utterly dependent on the steady trickle of young rural adults with hands-on manufacturing experience. The preceding generation’s reliance on lengthy apprenticeships, while superior for training in singular crafts, could not hope to supply the volume of generalized experienced workers needed for industrial production. With its near-static local population, which varied little from its hundred-year median, Belfast’s manufacturing was never able to fully supply its workforce needs from just the city’s natural increase. That was a primary reason for both the community’s obsession with retaining experienced workers, and its constant competition with larger cities over recruiting those workers.

Two factors put a substantial drain on that available workforce. First, from 1865-1930, Maine’s “wage-earning labor force more than doubled” (Judd et al 448). And second, that doubling of wage labor numbers took place despite the state hemorrhaging young adults at the highest levels in Maine’s history. The doubling of Maine’s wage-labor force needed to be supplied by additional workers even as that available pool of workers was being depleted by a young-adult exodus from the state. Maine experienced most of that out-migration of young adults from its rural communities. While this scarcity forced Belfast to compete harder for young workers, it
also translated into those farms lacking a new generation to help bear the workload being abandoned. That displacement sent older adults, including those with domestic production skills, into towns with suitable factory work. With that “gray migration,” Belfast’s workforce numbers may have stabilized, but its worker population aged accordingly.

While their piece-rate outputs sometimes lagged, these older, experienced adults often fulfilled a critical assembly line role as “roustabouts,” occupational pluralists who could cover nearly any work station for sick, injured or disenfranchised peers:

Immigrants and Yankees, women and men, traveled from job to job according to the shifting locus of industrial opportunity. This was part of the incessant quest for a better quality of life that animated nineteenth-century American workers generally, and it reflected the uncertainty and instability of industrial work in Maine’s changing economy. (Judd et al 448)

As discussed in Chapter Seven, in city elections, council meetings and local newspapers, retaining these diversified workers was a constant hot-button issue. Debate was filled with how this constant city challenge might be stabilized with enticements for workers to relocate to Belfast that were both meaningful and affordable.

While the transportation element of that goal had been met decades earlier (at least temporarily) with the completion of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad in 1870, that only relieved the transportation issue, not the worker shortage problem. The railroad had helped the city’s economy recover from its devastating fires, primarily by enabling the regular and timely delivery of raw materials and shipping of finished goods. Similarly, the new rail link helped occupational pluralists in those towns along its route to receive raw materials and hardware that could not be produced locally. It also provided residents in the six towns (besides Belfast) along
its 33 miles of track the ability to work and board in Belfast while still maintaining some presence in their rural homes. That early type of hybrid worker movement typifies how the interdependencies between labor and community in Belfast migrated out into its feeder communities, and was reciprocated by workers and products migrating into Belfast.

The freight fees for moving supplies and finished products paid the lion’s share of operating those trains, with passenger service enabled as a conditional fringe benefit. While the actual rail line only ran to the Central Maine Railroad junction in Burnham, and was leased to that operator, Burnham was a very convenient connection hub to the rest of Maine’s and the nation’s rail networks. That connectivity made those communities far less isolated than before Belfast manufacturing began to grow the city into Waldo County’s economic hub. That also made Belfast at least as attractive when competing for those communities’ potential workers, as regular service to a familiar city relieved that isolation. Likewise, if a passenger ticket was sold to or from Belfast, that traveler owed its affordability and dependability, at least in part, to the consistent manufacturing output from Belfast’s factories, as well as their own rural producers.

Charlie Hall, who started working for the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad just out of high school in 1933, recalls the passenger experience of his early service with BMLRR:

People would come in from Brooks and Unity and do their shopping and things. Most of the traffic was local, but people would go to other places too. My brother started right here in Belfast and went to every state in the union and three foreign countries. It connects with the Maine Central, and the Maine Central takes you across Maine, and from there you can go anywhere. (Davis et al 53)

Hall also explained how freight service tied the interdependencies of manufacturing, retail businesses and the communities together:
There could be everything in there. Instead of loading one car with just one commodity we’d have a weigh car with candy for Howard and Hatch or for Marsano, and about all the stores had their stuff come that way, either by railway express car or by weigh car. The A&P used to have all their bread and doughnuts and stuff come in by express. We used to ship chickens, hens, rabbits, dogs. Chickens were shipped by express, and buckets of scallops would come over from Castine on the Hippocampus. Most of them went to the fish market in Boston. At every station we’d stop and load canned goods in the weigh car; at Brooks, at Thorn-dike, at Unity; they’d come from the cannery over in Freedom. (Davis et al, 53)

Similarly, Belfast enjoyed a long history of steamship lines delivering goods and passengers both to a number of ports in Maine, and also to Boston, with rail and ship connections to points beyond. As early as 1842 a price war on competing lines dropped ticket rates from Bangor to Boston from six dollars to one dollar, and reduced prices on the Bangor to Portland service to fifty cents one way (Bradlee 88). Belfast’s noted historian Joseph Williamson traveled regularly on similar steamers to his secondary schooling at Bangor Theological Seminary.

The modern 320-foot City of Belfast (1909-1936) and her slightly smaller sister ship Camden, known affectionately throughout New England as the “Great White Fliers,” provided routine, economical service for almost 26 years. In fact, the service was so routine that a number of Belfast professionals maintained offices in both Belfast and Boston. Even into the depths of the Great Depression, when overnight delivery was scrapped to maintain profits at their thinnest ever margins, these ships exemplified the prestige and pride of place enabled by the production of that work-a-day city. Without being juxtaposed with the majesty of these impressive liners,
Belfast’s manufacturing landscapes likely would not have garnered a second thought from customers at those receiving ports. During the heyday of those Boston Boats, the failure of their passengers, or any other visitor to the city, to be impressed with Belfast’s factories and harbor would not have been taken with any real concern. Belfast’s citizens in those decades were confident in their products, and their identity and self-image looked outward, not inward (Davis 58). For a city that thrived on adapting to change, though, and confidently sneered at comments about its pedestrian utility, a disappointing change in fortunes would put the blues in blue-collar town.

Conclusions

The occupational pluralism that helped Belfast’s manufacturing restore an economy devastated by two district-wide fires in 12 years had its origins in the highly autonomous, home-spun manufacturing practices of rural Maine. A period of great youth out-migration beginning after the Civil War, and peaking shortly after World War One, saw Maine’s rural economy transmit some of its best work ethics, and train some of its best vocationally prepared manufacturing applicants, despite the lack of public school mechanical arts programs. Belfast’s manufacturers were also able to glean some benefits from the challenges that contributed to that youth loss. The delay in rural electrification, and coinciding lack of non-agricultural employment in rural areas, allowed for considerable retention of the hand craftsmanship still needed for low- and no-powered home manufacturing. As potential recruits for factory work, that generalized experiential learning kept skilled rural workers near or at par in value with their more specialized urban counterparts.

The skills maintained through continued production for their put-out and Boston System production commitments were easily merged into Belfast’s factories’ piece-rate production sys-
tems. That similarity in compensation helped reduce culture shock in migrating employees transitioning from domestic production to congested factories, and improved manufacturers’ reception of those largely pre-trained workers. The diversity of manufacturing skills in Maine in general, and Belfast’s factory-dense environment specifically, enabled region-wide mobility of workers seeking a better quality of life. Despite this (and also because of this) Belfast remained able to retain its workforce at a competitive level, largely due to community reciprocity in local quality of life.

Worker use of mobility to find a time-appropriate niche for their skill sets did not preserve their sense of place as much as it preserved their ability to stay in a place that they identified as belonging to. In the case of Belfast’s workforce, attachments to community came first; where the community was located provided the optimum environment to prevent them from being dispersed, or to be judged because of their blue-collar occupations. This might have been repeated in nearly any industrial community in Maine, but it was the environments of Belfast that imparted this particular flavor of industrial community identity. Locally, occupational pluralists broke the myth of stereotyped industrial workers performing one ultra-specific task, and also of the perceived occupational myopia of being hostage to the fate of one product or one employer. Those adaptable employees helped give their host manufacturers the ability to adjust to market changes, and gave not just Belfast’s leaders, but the community at large, the economic continuity to plan strategically, rather than act tactically to their challenges and goals.

The continuity of output by Belfast’s workforce was enhanced by the community building its own railroad line and attracting a succession of prestigious “Boston Boats” to serve the city. Belfast’s retention of those shippers was made possible largely because of the productivity of its workers, and that production’s proximity to regional markets virtually guaranteed a reliable
profit for those shippers. That circular support migrated into and out of the city over those transportation networks, nurturing Belfast’s civic pride, continuity of population, sense of place, and a positive identity as a robust manufacturing community.
CHAPTER FOUR

RISEING FROM THE ASHES

As noted earlier, Belfast’s manufacturing era was the third of four community identities to complement its growth over the city’s history. In each of its first three historical periods (settlement, commercial and manufacturing), the community experienced a number of tragic events such as forced abandonment of the community during warfare and devastating fires, which influenced its sense of place. While some of the social, physical and economic changes resulting from those events, and the recovery processes after, influenced the community’s identity for the duration of their respective periods, a few carried over to be bound up as part of the city’s overall historical legacy.

On the night of October 12, 1865, like so many of its sister communities of a recently divided nation, Belfast rested exhausted after years of Civil War. On that autumn night, a fire in a single business near the wharves at the foot of Maine Street raged into an inferno that consumed most of Belfast’s commercial district, and with it much of its earlier commercial identity. Huge urban fires were not unusual in that era in Maine, where its wealth in forest resources made wood a preferred building material, as well as one of its primary commercial commodities. What was unusual for Belfast, though, was having both its economic security and principle identity erased in a single night. Before the fires, progress for the city was based on a changing-but-dependable inventory of assets which could be harvested, warehoused, banked and borrowed against, with the profits and interest guaranteeing a return on the community’s investment. Literally overnight, though, much of a century’s investments spent building up those assets of its commercial identity had gone up in smoke.
Arguably that post-fire trauma to Belfast’s commercial identity hints at one reason why the community later came to cling so tenaciously to its skilled workforce. While the physical landscape of the city was changed almost beyond recognition, its workforce emerged as the most recognizable part of Belfast’s security and identity going into its manufacturing era. Before the fire of 1865, Belfast’s shipyards, commercial warehouses and their contents were perceived as Belfast’s economic heart. Once modern factories had repopulated the burned out commercial or “burnt district,” as those fire-devastated blocks came to be called, many in the community, and especially its leaders, became more vocal about retaining “their” workers who made the city’s signature products and primed the city’s economy with their paychecks.

The recovery period just after the 1865 fire showed the first public signs of the community acknowledging that simply rebuilding its commercial warehouses and docks would not resolve its latest challenge. Communities like Bangor, which Belfast both serviced and competed with, were rapidly connecting to Maine’s growing rail network. Those rail links effectively nullified Belfast’s seasonal competitive advantage as Penobscot Bay’s most northerly, ice-free winter customs port. Belfast would have to copy Bangor’s embrace of a rail link to reclaim its geographic advantages and fulfill its recovery. That near half a century of competitive advantage had helped maintain community confidence that Belfast’s commercial businesses and their owners were the principals sustaining the local economy. However, by the early 1870s wage-earner payrolls were beginning to meet community expectations for a post-fire recovery. The opening of the city’s first purpose-built shoe factory in 1872 would validate those expectations and launch a change in how most people in Belfast saw themselves both within and beyond their community.

In an important nuance moving forward, the community would begin to champion, and even compete for, workers as assets distinct from and far more important to its general welfare
than just its business properties. Part of that appreciation for labor could be attributed at least in part to the growing humanist philosophies, including the abolition debate, which continued even after Belfast’s significant loses of young men during the Civil War. It is also arguable that the community’s long institutional memory cringed at the possibility of another multi-decade recovery after a devastating fire.

Nearly a century earlier, but still a palpable scar in the community’s memory, Belfast had been burned to the ground by the British in 1777, during the American Revolutionary War. It had taken until 1811, some 34 years later, before the community was recognized again for its vitality as a thriving seaport. That year, visiting Captain Leverett Saltonstall declared: “This town has more the appearance of having sprung up in a day than any I have seen” (Taylor vi). Saltonstall was likely unaware that the rebuilding effort had taken nearly two generations for the community to accomplish. Considering the public anxiety in 1865 over the potential for a similarly prolonged recovery helps explain the increased confidence and support felt for its workers, and for increasing their numbers to expedite the city’s recovery.

While commerce had ruled the city’s economy since Captain Saltonstall’s 1811 visit, a variety of complementary manufacturing concerns had grown up as well, filling local and regional needs. That light industry also added much needed economic diversity, kept tradespeople and artisans connected to the community, and directly supported the city’s commerce with imports of raw materials and exports of surplus value-added products. After the loss of the commercial district, their indispensible role in bridging the following economic shortfall made expanding manufacturing’s role an attractive part of Belfast’s recovery. The manufacturers that existed in Belfast in 1865 were largely mechanically evolved descendants of those that had supplied Belfast in its earlier recovery and growth into a commercial and shipbuilding center. They
had retained and enhanced their traditional skills, as well as much of their mechanical technology. What they lacked was scale, financial backing, and a large enough skilled workforce to capitalize on both. To accomplish that, city leaders and businesses would borrow from Belfast’s earlier self-rescue, building up their existing small-scale but successful industries.

A number of those factories had expanded from milling lumber and fulling wool to manufacturing shoes, clothing and other war materials to supply the Union army during the recently ended Civil War. From the Kelly Axe Factory to the Sherman Leatherboard Mill, nearly every available dam site on the Passagassawakeag River, as well as Belfast’s numerous lesser streams, powered over a dozen modest factories (Williamson 5-7, 14-19). While those water-powered sites remained economical and adequate for smaller manufacturers who would not expand, they also remained limited by their small local workforces in those rural settings. To meet their need for a larger workforce, Belfast’s new industries would need to be located near the city center, and within walking distance of worker housing. Without water power, though, that meant those new factories would need to incorporate steam power. That technology, especially when upgraded to drive electric generators, would completely change the nature of manufacturing in Belfast, from shared power sources to dependent feeder businesses, and as will be explained in Chapter Five, even labor contracts and collective bargaining.

Belfast would recover from the 1865 fire, and one even more devastating in 1873, through planned industrial development. The momentum and commitment towards that development continued even after the latter fire consumed much of the harbor district and 53 adjacent homes. While slowing during the Great Depression and wartime shortages, that recovery-through-redevelopment strategy would continue largely uncontested into the late 1960s. Again, this was part of a collective heritage of adapt, reuse, repurpose and rebuild that Belfast had relied
on since its post-Revolutionary War recovery. Belfast was hardly unique among Maine communities that suffered and bounced back from repeated tragedies. Maine’s coastal communities especially have a long and painful history of rebuilding from man-made and natural disasters. Belfast, however, would recover from those tragedies by leveraging its opportunities to build back with the latest technology and a changed sense of purpose that for most of its members embraced manufacturing and its blue-collar workforce.

The community’s strategy to build back on a manufacturing model was attractive to investors, especially southern New England industrialists who were finding it difficult to integrate large factories, and especially large tracts of worker tenements, into already crowded urban landscapes. That industrial development was, even in its relative adolescence in 1870s New England, already receiving pushback in larger cities, which would reach Belfast. In that post-Civil War era, the grime, smokestacks and noise was not the chief grievance of local residents about encroaching industry; after all, that was progress, and allowances were still often tolerated to enable progress. Their concerns were more nativist, though not xenophobic in nature. Their complaints were primarily with the large numbers of immigrant workers who were willing to fill those difficult and often low-paying positions.

While Belfast never saw the large influx of especially French-Canadian immigrants that filled many manufacturing jobs in southern and central Maine, a tiny minority of elite locals and wealthy summer visitors persisted in their beliefs that immigrant workers represented “the alien inhabitants of the industrial-age factories, displacing the fine craftsmen of earlier times” (Davis et al 183). On the other hand, the perceptions of later residents, such as immigrants arriving after Belfast’s industrial makeover, were free of those clinging filters, attaching instead to the actual rebuilt landscapes that were envisioned by those who crafted that recovery.
Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan summed up the difference between visitors (or migrants) accepting the landscapes they encountered (or sought out), and residents conflicted over what their home landscapes mean to them, this way: “The visitor’s viewpoint being simple, is easily stated.... The complex attitude of the native, on the other hand, can be expressed by him only with difficulty and indirectly through behavior, local tradition, lore and myth” (Tuan 63). As Belfast navigated the rapid changes of the last quarter of the 19th Century, that myth and lore of a pastoral landscape populated only by “non-alien fine craftsmen” (Davis 183) would persist for a negligible minority for generations; however, the community’s acceptance and recruitment of industrial workers would help define Belfast’s identity for a century.

**Belfast Commits to Being a Blue-Collar Town**

By 1872 the Belfast Manufacturing Company had completed the four-story shoe factory that would come to dominate the city’s economy. Starting with 150 employees, its workforce would wax and wane with the national economy to at times over 500 workers; and its fortunes would influence those of the city for three quarters of a century. Mathews Brothers sash, door and blind company was erected in 1873 just blocks away from the new shoe factory. After the death of its founder, it would become Maine’s first industrial concern completely owned by women. Still operating successfully today, the company repeatedly demonstrated the ability to adapt to changing conditions (and public sentiments) imposed by the times. Two catastrophic fires in just eight years had created a need for factories with new technologies and scaled up production to support the city’s recovery. The new factory’s design responded to those needs by being “probably being the largest and most complete factory of the kind in New England” (Repub-
lican Journal 1873, 2), and was also constructed with a brick, double-walled engine house to ease the anxieties of that fire danger-obsessed community.

Mathews Brothers represented two recovery fronts in Belfast’s rise from the ashes of those fires. First, like the new shoe factory, it would help fill a huge void in the city’s economy. Secondly, as a provider of many of the doors, windows and other essential fixtures needed in the city’s physical recovery, its employees had a hands-on role in actually rebuilding their community. That likely was a powerful part of the local sense of place during the rebuilding, and for generations after, as the community watched the heart of their city rise back up out of the burnt district. Each window and door recognized as coming from their home city, and made by their neighbors, had the potential to become micro-monuments that celebrated pride of place.

In the decades to come, that kind of intimate local recognition would regularly reinforce the community’s attachments to the factories that rose up phoenix-like near the foot of Belfast’s Maine Street or its waterfront. In that emerging manufacturing culture, whether producing windows and doors for local homes and businesses in the 1870s, or decades later pivoting to construct the 245-foot, 3500 ton, five-masted schooner Jennie Flood Kreger in World War I’s resource-scarce economy, skilled occupational pluralist like those at Mathews Brothers understood they were not just making products for their employer. Their products endured. That sense of purpose was consistently reinforced for those workers by the surrounding community. The orders they put up were loaded onto ships and railcars just yards from their loading docks, with some of those vessels built in neighboring shipyards that they crafted parts for. The local newspapers papers (34 were published in Belfast during the 1800s and 1900s) regularly included production and shipping news, as well as advertising most locally produced brands.
Once the city had recovered from the 1865 and 1873 fires and fully embraced manufacturing, production became so pervasive that it would have been difficult to live in Belfast from the 1880s to the 1970s and not been connected with its manufacturers, their suppliers and customers, or members of the workforce. That network of influences could even exchange players unexpectedly, and still remains consistent in its saturation. In fact, while particular factory structures remained well-used fixtures in the community, their ownership and products fluctuated regularly. Consider Dana’s Sarsaparilla Company, an earlier, hugely successful company that bottled patent medicines in the recovered Burnt District. Dana’s enjoyed impressive growth and a wide national following until going bankrupt in 1894. Its manager Edgar F. Hanson was largely responsible for the innovative advertising that drove the company’s success, and he became very wealthy when the company was sold to a Boston firm in 1892. That sale netted Dana’s stockholders a 1300 percent return on their investments (Davis et al 78).

There was never a clear explanation for that Boston firm’s bankruptcy two years later, but the Dana building continued to be repurposed for various manufacturing operations for decades. Those included a chemical company, a producer of machine parts, a raincoat factory, a cigar factory and a paper pulp mill; all of those after the factory’s original purpose as a milk bottling plant. Businesses were willing to invest in Belfast’s other so-called serial failures because successes like a window and door factory’s initiative and constructing a 245-foot commercial ship demonstrated that the workforce, not the spaces they worked in, gave enterprises in the city much of their potential.

Many of the manufacturers launched during the rebuilding period lacked the star power of Dana’s Sarsaparilla or Mathews Brothers. However, their workers, many of them immigrants and the city’s newest residents, had the staying power to nursemaid a succession of assorted
manufacturers through that landscape of surrogate factory buildings. Time and again, the citizens of Belfast were reminded that those short-term businesses’ operators were the real transients. Their core employee populations proved that they were not just marooned in Belfast, far from communities they hoped to return to in better times. Instead, they were as firmly attached and assimilated as the entrenched and respected descendants of the city’s founders.

While more than a century had passed since the ancestors of those respected old guard residents had settled Belfast and cast off their refugee burdens, their community status did not stop the recognition of their own ancestors’ desires for a better life, which they witnessed in those new immigrant workers. It is difficult (though not unheard of) to put a time stamp of “otherness” on peers while working shoulder to shoulder on the same manufacturing line. Those shared experiences allowed for a sense of unity between old guard and later-arriving laborers, as both were equally uprooted and replanted in one new workplace environment after another, regardless of which wave of immigration brought them to Belfast.

Despite sometimes spotty employment security, most of that workforce stuck with Belfast through its revolving door of short-term operators. Their own self-confidence in their ability to assimilate into new niches in the local economy translated into being accepted as a known quantity in the city’s calculus on retaining a critical mass of businesses. Those expectations could only be met, of course, by also retaining a reciprocal mass of supporting worker, who could pour their paychecks into the local economy.

And as for Edgar Hanson, the manager of Dana’s Sarsaparilla who possessed the golden touch for launching that eclectic fleet of businesses? He became a controversial but much beloved ten-time mayor, and chief promoter of Belfast’s manufacturer-friendly climate. Here is a
snapshot of a 1914 Maine Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics survey of the city’s leading manufacturers a few years before the end of Hanson’s reign as mayor:

- Lubec Packing Company (Sardines), 150 employees.
- Coe-Mortimer Fertilizer, 110 employees.
- Mathew Brothers Sash and Blind, 75 employees.
- Clarence E. McIntire Fish Plant, 47 employees.
- Pierce-Billings (clothing), 41 employees.
- Thompson Manufacturing (clothing), 69 employees.
- J.B. Pearson (clothing), 30 employees.
- Pearl Brook (cigars), 30 employees.
- F.M. Bailey (cigars), 20 employees. (Davis et al, 156, 2002).

Those numbers were in addition to employees of the shoe factory, the Kelly Edged Tool Factory, and the Sherman Leather Board plant. Those industrial jobs employed 820 men and 569 women for a total of 1389 persons, or nearly 42 percent of the city’s population over the age of 16 (U.S. Census extract; Appendix A). Even in 1914, such a substantial segment of Belfast’s adult population participating in that level of manufacturing was still several years before that workforce reached its peak numbers, and adaptability and diversity of skills during the production extremes of World War I. To expect that level of adaptability and commitment from its workforce towards victory and the greater good would reciprocally require Belfast’s trust and commitment to its identity as a manufacturing city, one that supported its workers when producing the necessities of either war or peace, and in the mutually enjoyed progress that maintained their whole community’s quality of life.
Conclusions

The fires that devastated Belfast’s commercial and shipping economy in the decade after the Civil War forced the city to reevaluate simply rebuilding its destroyed commercial infrastructure. Primarily this was because the advent of regular railroad and steamship service to equally-placed communities would soon make a mere clone of earlier Belfast redundant without its earlier distribution advantages. To justify committing the entirety of the city’s resources to a specific rescue plan, while also avoiding the multi-decade recovery from earlier tragedies, meant having the community honestly revisit, assess and avoid the reservations and divisions which stalled its post-Revolutionary War recovery for almost two generations. With humility and a pragmatic assessment of their available community assets, Belfast launched an almost frenetic period of building factories with the knowledge that if they could attract regional operators and their capital, the community could supply a ready workforce to populate those production spaces. Many of those new enterprises were highly successful, especially when considering their survival during the repeated economic depressions of the late 19th Century. Despite those national economic anxieties, Belfast prospered and was able to retain most of its workforce even as much of Maine lost young working adults to out-migration at an alarming rate.

Belfast’s other recurring dilemma was the need to recruit new operators for its factories as the economy forced many into bankruptcy, or downsized to their original out-of-state facilities. New operators, however, produced unexpected concentrations of work peers of different residency, or even cultures, sharing workspaces and negotiating mutual workplace challenges. That forced intimacy in the city’s production spaces would, through the interdependencies of trust necessary in serial production, enhance a more egalitarian sense of place within Belfast’s labor community. Empathy for those late 19th century immigrants and migrants, especially as
coworkers in Belfast’s factories, helped mute the often harsh resistance shown to immigrants in many of Maine’s larger industrial cities. That smoother assimilation can be attributed in part to old-order residents’ reverence for the similar experiences their ancestors endured in Ireland and colonial New England, but also to Belfast’s more pressing demands for a larger workforce, suppressing individual resistance in return for community-level security. It should be noted that if there had been a scarcity rather than a surplus of jobs as Belfast grew into its manufacturing identity, the city might have endured greater ethnically-related labor bias similar to that in southern and central Maine’s larger industrial communities.

During this era, the community’s self-confidence in its ability to ride out trauma to both its landscapes and its economy owes much to its confidence in its workforce as a known quantity. That trust provided enough assurance of small but incremental gains in quality of life that as Belfast transitioned from a commercial and shipping center to a manufacturing center, the community’s sense of place was able to assimilate its repurposed identity as a manufacturing culture.
Nearly anyone even remotely exposed to mainstream media is familiar with the often-misquoted movie line from *Field of Dreams*, “If you build it, he will come,” based on the book *Shoeless Joe* (Kinsella). In this case study, that premise applies to the recovery strategy for Belfast’s Burnt District after the Great Fire of 1865. While that fire was an economic tragedy for the city, it actually could not have happened at a more fortunate, or at least more auspicious time. At the end of 1865, America’s manufacturing was returning to the production of consumer goods after over four years of wartime privations. This had created substantial pent-up consumer demand, especially as both manufacturing technology and quality had improved dramatically, and a host of new innovations were waiting in the wings for this released production capacity.

During the Civil War, several of Belfast’s small factories had participated in production for government contracts. However, the surviving businesses’ limited production capacity was unlikely to attract those large private contracts that relied on high volume production at thin profit margins. A private consortium of Belfast businessmen formed the Belfast Manufacturing Company to address this lack of manufacturing capacity, and in 1872 built a four story, city block-long shoe factory, which was initially leased to the Richardson and Critchett Company. This type of business arrangement was a refinement of an existing manufacturing strategy in Maine. Unlike some existing (principally textile) mills where the structure, equipment and brand name were wholly owned by wealthy out-of-state individuals or limited partnerships, in Belfast the assets, risk, and profits were diversified between the principals. The Belfast Manufacturing
Company owned the real estate, while each of a series of operators either owned the brand name or manufactured products under contract for that brand’s owner.

Because of its expense and intricacy, much of the specialized machinery used in the shoe industry was leased. By 1899 the three largest of these companies (Consolidated Mckay Lasting Co., Goodyear Shoe Machinery Co., and McKay Shoe Machinery Co.) merged to form The United States Shoe Machinery Company. The leasing of critical manufacturing equipment was a substantial part of each pair of shoe’s fixed cost. Training individual employees to operate this complex and often dangerous equipment was also a consideration, as retraining replacement workers was a cumulative process of multiple skills, requiring years of experience to be truly proficient. This was one area where highly regarded rural handcrafting skills offered no competitive advantages.

The convergence of these factors in the Belfast shoe factory set up some very complicated checks and balances. The building owners’ financial stake was primarily their debt incurred from buying the land, constructing and insuring the building, and paying property taxes. Deferred maintenance, improvements and expansions would become another issue to be addressed later. The contracting operator’s stake was their lease, utilities, materials on hand, payroll, and encumbered obligations for unfinished orders. There was usually some insurance on materials and wholly-owned machinery, but product liability insurance in the late 1800s was nearly non-existent. Because the operator did not own much of the machinery, the building’s owners would not be left with an empty shell if the operator failed or abandoned the business. This created a balance of power and risks between the building’s owners and the business operators, as production could be terminated quickly, and with few assets to recover.
Initially the employees had the lowest monetary stake risk in the venture, but also the highest and most immediate risk from accidents and job loss. They did, however, have a limited degree of independence and portability of how and where their skills would be used. Most (union-represented) manufacturing concerns had (and still have) a job specification bidding system, usually based on seniority in place. Employees with skills and seniority commanded the best of that limited agency. Most shoe manufacturers have a “piece-rate” system, where production of each piece, or operation of assembly, pays a set rate according to its difficulty and value to the price of the shoe. As employees grew in time-in-service (seniority), they could bid to fill open positions which paid more for each piece produced, or even (rarely) “down-bid” for a less frenetic position as they aged out or dealt with injuries.

In a 20th century shoe plant, occupational pluralism was important initially upon hiring, because many rural handsewn Boston Job productions pre-trained good candidates for those manual operations in production plants. Their value was also in their ability to quickly adapt to the quality of output at speed and scale. Pluralism within the shoe plant came from the bid system, as employees grew their diversity of skills. Proficiency in each step also reflected quality and volume assurances while reducing wasteful mistakes. Then or now, the piece-rate system (financially) rewards adaptable pluralists, and punishes those who are inefficient or resist growing their skills.

Employees had only modest influence over their wages, as bidding up the job ladder was often measured in cents, or even fractions of a cent per “coupon,” a receipt for a production step completed (Davis et al 171). That was, however, a sought after enticement and matter of earned choice, even if mostly on principle. That ability to choose did translate to an important perception of personal agency over the employees’ work environments. With Belfast’s long history of
few and ineffectual unions representing shoe plant employees, managers and contract operators worried far less about strikes than about individual experienced employees becoming burnt-out and disgruntled, and then quitting. In the years before benefits, vacations, and human resource departments, quitting often did not carry the same permanency of separating from an employer as today, but could function as much as a cooling-off period of indeterminate, unpaid length. This usually meant loss of any seniority and position in the bid hierarchy, and of any potential bonus built into a particular production contract. Loss of up to a ten percent bonus privilege was a powerful incentive to stay put (Davis et al 169).

**Quitting, Leaving and Getting Hired**

Even with the informal hiring and firing practices before the labor reforms of the 1930s, employees who were habitual quitters ran the risk of being blackballed by manufacturers. This was true even outside of the shoe factory, because other manufacturers were rarely beyond the influence of Belfast’s largest employer. An individual employee’s personal agency was to a considerable degree a function of their reputation. Belfast was an intimately self-aware city, with a small population with an impressive collective memory. With such a readily accessible sample, usually hovering around 1400 adult industrial workers between 16 and 70 years old, being a “known quality” as a worker could be a liability just as easily as an asset. For those employees who had developed a wide set of skills and a reputation for dependability, those skills were portable as well as coveted by manufacturers. In the list of manufacturers given earlier, a worker who stitched uppers in the Leonard and Barrows shoe factory could easily migrate into a vacancy doing similar work at clothing manufacturers Thompson Manufacturing, Pierce-Billings, or J.B.
Pearson Company. While there would always be hardscrabble times when any job in the city was competed for, more often there were more positions than workers to fill them.

During the 1870 to 1970 manufacturing era, few editions of the Republican Journal, the longest operating newspaper in Belfast, can be searched without encountering two-column-inch or longer help wanted advertisements running for successive weeks. Typical of those was an ad that ran through most of April and May in 1911:

25 Girls wanted. The Estabrooks Shirt Mfg. Co. can give steady employment at once to 25 girls. A new fore-lady will have entire charge of our stitching room and any of our former employees who go to work for us can be assured of fair treatment and good pay.” (The Republican Journal 1911)

A number of inferences can be drawn from that advertisement about the working environment in Estabrooks Shirts, if their help wanted ads are followed through successive months. The first clue is that “Women” is substituted for “Girls” as the school year approaches. That substitution hinted at the summer rite of passage for Belfast teenagers, who often worked over their summer vacations in one of the city’s manufacturing plants.

A second clue emphasizes both the change to a new forelady, and that former employees “can be assured of fair treatment and good pay.” This begs the question, was there an employee retention issue under the last forewoman? The ad specifically mentions “former employees who go to work for us can be assured of fair treatment and good pay,” yet does not directly extend that promise to new employees. Therefore Estabrooks Shirt seems to be making some effort at a public atonement to its former employees, implying that a better work environment was now in place. The shoe factory endured a huge financial crisis in 1911, and yet there was still a shortage of experienced stitchers in a garment factory requiring very similar skills only blocks away. It
appears that Estabrooks Shirt factory was not able to sort their issues out, because they did not appear in the city registry in 1914 when the state conducted a manufacturing survey.

Regrettably, outside of their product and help-wanted advertisements, there are few detailed records for many of those short-lived manufacturing establishments. However, in a kind of contrast perhaps based on endurance, the importance of the shoe factory to the long-term overall health of Belfast’s economy helped preserved a number of examples about its workforce. Some of those examples are about their production association with the factory, and some demonstrate how they indirectly influenced the community’s sense of distress or wellbeing due to labor-management issues at that largest employer in the city until well into the 1950s. Many of those examples are related to public and private efforts to sustain production through the factory’s host of operators. Also, they document the employee-to-community dynamic during changes in ownership, strikes, and even the death of one of its owners.

It is notable that more records are available from these periods when Belfast faced economic threats than when its economy was stable, at least as far as newspaper accounts covering important bankruptcies, the deaths of business leaders, business closings and foreclosures. While business openings, particularly large sales contracts or acquisition of high-value customers, were routinely reported as well, it was the convergence of the alarm-filled newspaper reports with court documents, labor board determinations and published meetings from community rescue attempts that more frequently mark waypoints in that period’s local sense of place. While granted, there is some validity in the expression “history is written by the winners,” in Belfast’s available records there are often more robust (if oblique) paper trails to indicate when and where the community had to adapt to a crisis, or publically vented their frustrations with labor, management or (rarely) business owners.
Owners, Labor and the Community in Conflict

While conventional elements of the city’s interdependence with the shoe factory are usually easy to point out, such as its contribution to the property tax base or influence on utility rates, others are more community-specific, such as the factory being the primary source of steam and electric power for neighboring manufacturers and businesses. At the turn of the century, before much of Maine was interconnected into larger power sharing grids, factories were often an area’s first (private) local utility for electricity, steam, water or even gas for cooking and lighting. Factory workers living in housing that was often close to their workplaces sometimes even had access to those utilities years before such services reached the city’s wealthier neighborhoods.

The shoe factory had the largest dynamo (electric generator) in the city, and sold its surplus power to a number of neighboring establishments until 1919, when Central Maine Power Company assumed providing electricity for much of Belfast, especially those neighborhoods beyond the factory’s miniature grid. Until then, many of those dependent consumers were without power any time the shoe factory was unexpectedly idle (*Central Maine Power Company Collection, 1883-1965* 5, 10).

The power supply issue created a special dynamic in the relationship between the shoe factory’s employees and their fellow citizens’ sense of security and propriety. When production was smooth and labor was placid, the industrial basin hummed with energy and security. When the factory was suddenly idled with the death of its second owner in just one year (1901), some 300 jobs in neighboring firms that were dependent on power purchased from the shoe plant were affected as well (Davis et al 159). For the general public in that company town, that particular event was judged an unfortunate but understandable work stoppage that cascaded onto those power-dependent firms. This was a nuanced perception, as it was not the income of the associat-
ed idle plants, but the loss of payrolls received in the city-at-large which was more concerning. Bankruptcies were nothing unusual in this industrial city, nor were tragedies such as fires or unfortunate deaths. Manufacturing was fraught with all types of expected hazards, and in work-a-day Belfast, these were suffered with a certain sense of their inevitability. However, the public was largely unsympathetic about work stoppages that inflicted revenue loss on the city and interdependent businesses solely because of unresolved labor disputes. In payroll-dependent Belfast, strikes, walkouts, lockouts and any employment dispute that was not contained to the respective aggrieved parties and their factory was resented as manufactured, hazardous to the community, and unlikely to receive support from the greater community.

That was a strange dichotomy in a city with businesses largely owned by wealthy Republican businessmen, but who frequently had to collaborate with solidly Democratic city mayors. Long after the conservative economic leadership of factories in Belfast faded or was relinquished by their patriarchal owners, traditionalism still expected that employment was a service and not a right. Workers, or even owners judged by the court of public opinion of putting their workplace grievances before the community’s general welfare, risked alienating the community support that lubricated the city’s social machinery and without which a functioning industrial Belfast would grind to a halt. The power controversy became moot, however, after Central Maine Power connected the greater part of Belfast to its external electric grid. With an unaffiliated supplier, the implied potential of secondary users suffering collateral damage from labor strife lost its use as either labor’s or management’s cudgel during negotiations, and also lost relevancy as a target for the community’s behavior shaming.

While likely not perceived as a mainstream issue in the relations between communities and their workforces, Belfast’s shoe factory’s power controversy triggered locally meaningful
concerns still retained from its historical roots finding security as a manufacturer. The time-
honored unspoken rules about sticking together to endure mutual threats had been undermined by strife from within. Taboos against creating that kind of community vulnerability had existed since the days of their ancestors’ Irish exile, but like any enduring meme, the rules needed adjustment to function in changing times. In response to that need, public opinion slowly became notably more sympathetic towards employee grievances at the shoe factory; that sympathy, however, did not translate to community support if the means or ends of labor-management strife threatened community security. As mentioned, old taboos and expectations had deep roots, and even as the 20th century approached, labor disputes triggered old misgivings about the consequences of breaking faith with those ancient patriarchs whose estates once provided the community’s security.

The first notable labor dispute at the shoe factory in 1899 marked the end of a more patriarchian perception about labor and manufacturing’s influence on the city’s sense of identity. That work stoppage marked when owners and labor began drifting into roles as adversaries. Author Jay Davis (157) describes the last of the civil relationship:

An aging gentry, many wealthy from fading shipbuilding fortunes, ran the city’s most important institutions. The relationship between the gentry and the working class was based on mutual respect, and it was strongly patriarchal. Workers were taken care of, managers were obeyed. Workers and managers did not mingle, and blue collars spoke to white collars only with deference, no matter how angry or disgruntled they were. Davis’s comments describe a markedly civil work stoppage that had been triggered by a pay cut notice. Workers walked out silently, and only after finishing their outstanding work orders. Without collective bargaining, each had to answer to the owners’ ultimatum personally,
and individually bear the risk for their response. Ultimately, though, the stoppage accomplished nothing more than communicating workers’ disappointment with the pay cut.

A year later, co-owner Oliver Critchett died, leaving his partner Ami Cutter Sibley to carry on alone. Within a year, Sibley also passed away, just one day after the shoe factory went into bankruptcy. Davis credits the medical examiner as listing Sibley’s death as a probable suicide, and Sibley’s death certificate distills his final act after a lifetime of substantial contributions to his community as simply “suicide Poison” (Maine State Archives, Roll No. 51, 1892-1907). There was no specific mention of that coroner’s proclamation in Belfast’s newspapers. I have found no final statement attributed to Ami Cutter Sibley that might answer questions about whether his death was motivated by personal disgrace over the bankruptcy, guilt over letting down hundreds of employees and their families, his diminishment as a town father on the boards of many important business and charitable institutions, or some combination therein. Those were all speculations that were searched to humanize the divide between the terse language of official state records and the palpable resonance of loss committed into Belfast’s archives with passages from Sibley’s memorial service.

For the city, the potential economic impact from Sibley’s death and subsequent closure of the shoe factory was nearly as great as from the devastating fires of the last century. The loss of a leading patriarch following the bankruptcy of Belfast’s largest employer demonstrated the city’s vulnerability if they remained dependent on a single keystone business. An excerpt from Sibley’s eulogy by the Reverend George S. Mills notes the community’s tone over how much of their mutual security rested with one man, and one factory:

When he took the management of the shoe factory in 1880 in association with the late O.G. Critchett, I can well believe that the very moment of civic patriotism was no small
factor in his plans. He was ambitious that the city of his love should have a thriving industry for the sake of the common weal, and that it has had in the main until the present time. When it is considered how many have been employed in this principle business of our city, with the families dependent on them and the money put into circulation to the advantage of all our trade and interest, it should be with profoundly grateful thought of the man who in company with others for so long gave and did the best he could for Belfast. (*The Republican Journal* 1901, 01)

While it is expected that a eulogy, especially one for a wealthy community leader, should lionize his character, several items speak strongly to this case study’s focus points. The Reverend Mills makes a point to revert to the Scottish phrases “sake of the common weal,” and “civic patriotism.” Those phrases register almost as a mandate for many in the community to remember the mutual heritage of their struggles in Ireland as a marginalized people, and a people who would go on to overcome their challenges. It carries specific hallmarks (civic patriotism) of expectations of participation to be included as belonging to the city, and the solution.

This was a dignified, if flowery, message that a crisis was brewing, and that every citizen in Belfast would likely be pressed into a rescue plan, a mass meeting for which was already announced in the abutting column, for the shoe factory. The line “with the families dependent on them and the money put into circulation to the advantage of all our trade and interest” signaled the formal acknowledgement of the interdependencies between labor, commercial and ordinary citizens, and the mutual obligations (and sacrifices) it would take to effect that rescue. The fact that this message is woven into Reverend Mills’ speech and not the adjoining article by the mayor adds the tone of a moral rather than a civic imperative to participate for the good of the community. While preparations were being made for Mr. Sibley’s funeral, a letter had been cir-
culated to all of the shoe factory’s employees. It summoned them to a meeting at the factory, where an option to rescue it from receivership would be presented. Mayor Small informed the gathered employees that it would require $50,000 to accomplish that rescue plan (which amounts to just under $1.7 million dollars in 2022). The working committee he had put together believed they could solicit as much as $40,000 from investors in the region, but the plan would require the employees to accomplish the remaining $10,000, or one fifth of the amount needed.

Mayor Small emphasized this was not a gift, nor would the employees need to raise this amount among themselves as cash (with most making fifteen cents an hour or less). He proposed that this be accomplished by each employee giving a week’s work (six ten-hour days) at that time, and in the future another week’s work. For the plan to succeed there was also a possibility of a five to ten percent reduction in wages. The plan, on the other hand, would enroll each participating employee to their deferred contribution’s equivalent in common stock, and would also give them an employee representative on the board of directors. While a sacrifice, this meant the workers were not only actively participating in the rescue of their employer and their jobs, but also that of their city in its dependent role. They had a stake in the game, and a seat at the table, in a role that would make or break the economy of Belfast. This was arguably the very definition of Labor buying into their community’s sense of place.

Only ten years later, deferred maintenance and the need to make necessary improvements to remain competitive would once more leave the shoe factory in danger of closing. A buy-back, modernization, and expansion of the factory were needed to retain (as operator) Leonard and Barrows Shoe Company, which had assumed the factory during the 1901 rescue. In exchange, Leonard and Barrows guaranteed a $200,000 per year payroll for the next ten years. In April 1911, a public meeting was organized to solicit funding to expand the factory.
Incredibly, $8,600 of a requested $9,900 dollars was raised that evening from the public. This was accomplished in part from the repeat of the now well-worn tropes on interdependency, duty, economic and moral imperatives for participation in this rescue delivered by Mayor Ed Hanson and the Rev. Adolpf Rossbach. That sense of moral and community obligation was repurposed during the 1911 rescue committee’s planning, when its member John Dunton recommended:

It should be well advertised in the papers, verbally by members of the board (Belfast Board of Trade), and he thought there would be no impropriety in having it announced from the pulpits and in the public schools. *(The Republican Journal, 1911, 1)*

Reciprocity in the city’s rescues had come full circle in just under a decade. Community sense of place was balanced between labor’s 1901 investment in community and the community’s buy-back of its workforce’s greatest stronghold in 1911. As equality among citizens, that combined agency was only matched elsewhere in the city by the community’s ownership of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad. In the entwined patterns of fortunes for Belfast, that community asset would soon need rescue as well.

**Conclusions**

In 1872 The Belfast Manufacturing Company built a state-of-the-art shoe factory under the speculation that modern manufacturing space would be both in high demand and readily leased in the post-war economy. Many of its board members were familiar with the wartime production challenges encountered from outdated methods, equipment and building design. Recognizing these shortcomings, they overbuilt their first major structure of the recovery, as an industrial showpiece that could accommodate the long-term needs of progressive manufacturers. Recognizing both the city’s adequate supply of experienced workers and the reduced capital expo-
sure using leased machinery, the structure was deliberately configured as an operator-leased venture. That strategy minimized the financial risk to all of the stakeholders while leveraging the owners’ ability to repurpose the structure, and possibly retain the employees, if the operator failed or withdrew.

Many of the manufacturing facilities built after the Great Fires favored production that used the piece-rate pay system. That method of compensation was part of the work environment agreeably familiar to both Belfast’s established workforce, and to the growing number of rural workers who had participated in put-out and Boston System’s rural domestic production. Belfast’s merchants and manufacturers had a long relationship with the domestic producers in neighboring feeder communities which supplied raw materials and value-added products of various degrees of finish. It was only a small and logical step for the city’s manufacturers to avail themselves of this much-needed supply of experienced producers.

Loss of manpower during the Civil War had created many production challenges, which even before Belfast’s surge in manufacturing cultivated protective behaviors towards retaining skilled workers. That protectiveness grew to competitiveness as Belfast’s manufacturing expanded to more than a dozen sizable factories in the early 1900s. The intimate demographics of Belfast, along with the robust engagement of its citizens, enabled workers’ appreciation of their dual value in both wages and as economic assets to the city. Just as labor was at the cusp of being able to demand better representation in the workplace, the bankruptcy and death of the last patriarch of the mill owners sent the city into crisis. With city leaders recognizing that saving the shoe factory would require the willing participation of its most readily deployable asset, the workforce was co-opted into the economic rescue plan. That plan was notable for two benchmarks. The first was recruiting employees into a financial stake in the rescue and stewardship of their place of
employment. The second was the acknowledgement by the city officially recognizing the mutual interdependencies between labor, businesses and the community at large. Furthermore, that collaboration guaranteed all participating employees a representative overseeing their financial stake and a first-ever seat at the decision-making table. During that age of corporate monopolies and Republican business ascendency, that level of employee agency was nearly unheard of.

While future labor disputes would occasionally create ripples of insecurity in the city’s general population, that anxiety confirmed that the health of the workforce mirrored the health of their city. Workers came to understand that by weathering difficult times and remaining in Belfast, they were building that community reciprocity of shared values, which would encourage new schools, better health services, and progress in infrastructure. That expectation for security included reliable inter-city electrification, which also removed major anxiety about their personal employability and agency once that goal was met. A decade after the shoe workers’ critical financial commitment to the city’s economic welfare, the citizens of Belfast overwhelmingly supported a buyout, rescue and expansion of that largest employer in the city. That reciprocity restored the balance of agency, security and confidence between the workforce, business leaders, and Belfast’s citizens. From that point forward, Belfast, in all of its diverse groups’ self-interests, understood that their futures depended on mutual support for common goals, and for navigating common challenges.
CHAPTER SIX

THE HIDDEN COST OF PROGRESS

Belfast has been primarily explained to this point as a city that reinvented itself as a center of manufacturing in order to move past devastating economic and infrastructure challenges. As pointed out earlier, that challenge was also an opportunity for starting with a nearly blank slate in the Burnt District, and implementing improvements far beyond just another copy of its dated commercial district. Belfast’s perception of progress during the 1880s through the turn of the century was not encumbered with modern popular culture’s connotations of “progressive,” such as the important political and social reforms since the 1950s. While sharing many overall goals, Belfast’s conservative business obsession with progress in the late 19th and early 20th Century was aligned more with technological and infrastructure improvements which, while improving the community’s overall quality of life, also helped it to compete economically with similar cities.

The community facilitated this progress by systematically improving roads and bridges, building factories, and recruiting agents which could move resources into the city while transporting value-added products out to the region’s customers. As mentioned earlier, those last challenges were met by the city building its own rail link to the Central Maine Railroad’s Burnham Junction, and recruiting the Eastern Steamship Line to service the city. Both of these solutions helped achieve the community’s transportation goals while also delivering the hoped-for progress. However, the city’s railroad would cause latent challenges, and dependence on the steamships would expose delayed vulnerabilities.
As mentioned in Chapter Three, after the fire of 1865, Belfast recognized its limitations as a burned-out commercial port for sailing ships in an economy plunging into the age of steel and steam. Belfast’s leaders were well aware of, and had even benefited from, their rival city Bangor’s construction of the Bangor & Piscataquis Canal and Railroad some 29 years earlier. That first commercial rail line in Maine was a diminutive twelve miles long when expanded to Old Town and Milford. Reaching above the falls that prohibited larger (ocean-going) vessels further travel up the Penobscot River, the line gave Bangor’s merchants an advantage of overland access to interior Maine’s forest resources and markets with which Belfast could not compete.

To survive economically, Belfast could not just rebuild to a level playing field with its competitors; it had to outbuild and out-class its rival ports just to remain relevant once its anticipated manufacturing came on line after its own construction and commissioning period. From the night of the “Great Fire,” there really had been no time to deliberate the possibility of whether to commit to the massive two-fronted campaign to restore the city’s economy with manufacturing and rail. Any serious delay would have relegated Belfast to the Maine coast’s atrophy that infected many sea-bound communities between the Civil War and the turn of the century. Once completed, the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad and Belfast’s population of all stripes would be joined in mutual dependencies, and no small amount of controversy, until the end of the city’s industrial era in the 1970s.

Construction of the railroad began in 1868, just three years after the first great fire. To finance this vital link, which would jump-start replacement of lost jobs and new growth, Belfast sold $500,000 in bonds. This was a calculated risk at a time when the city’s combined real estate values were less than two million dollars (Davis et al 39). The bonds also financially encumbered Belfast so close to its debt ceiling that it would have trouble borrowing for schools and in-
frasstructure for the next half century. The key problem with meeting the dual goals of building both modern factories and a new railroad to supply those factories and move their products was that the capital-intensive construction that launched the post-fire economic recovery also left the city with deteriorating schools, wooden sidewalks, and roads and streets which seasonally devolved to muddy paths. Belfast’s citizens were not going to stand for their children’s education crumbling into ruin; nor were the factory and business workers of this largely pedestrian city willingly going to trudge through calf-deep mud to work six ten-hour days a week. Freeman Walker, who worked 49 years as a shoe factory worker and foreman, explained:

As a worker, you’d get there 6:45, 10 minutes to seven. I lived on Bridge Street, and then I lived up on Miller Street, and I always walked to work. Some days it was snowing, some days raining, some days cold. (Davis et al 168)

Belfast’s mayor and city councilors were usually of one voice on matters that might encourage members of its workforce to migrate to a competing industrial community. Their public statements broadcast that they were the champions of “the everyman” and of the universal uplift enabled by progress. They certainly also understood that the manufacturing workers, even before universal suffrage, constituted the city’s largest voting bloc.

In 1907, when Freeman (Freemi) Walker was still in grade school, the 1824 courthouse, which had been repurposed into the city’s high school, was in danger of being condemned by the city inspector. The stuffy, aging structure was also seriously overcrowded. Between 1900 and 1923, when the new Crosby High School would open, its student population grew by 166 percent. Five years later, even the new high school was at capacity with 500 students. The intervening years had seen spillover high school classes fill the city court, the council chambers in the City Hall, and also rooms in the Masonic Hall. During those years it also became an imperative
to consolidate and replace the city’s elementary schools. In an act of what is now termed “industrial welfare,” a private partnership was formed by some of the city’s leading businessmen and employers to purchase the McLellan Mansion and make it available to the city as a replacement for the dilapidated north primary school next door.

The head of that partnership was Orlando E. Frost, (then) owner of Mathews Brothers window and door factory. He would become Mayor of Belfast in 1923 with a controversial finance and construction plan for the new high school. His plan opposed a delayed, but potentially lower cost plan by his friend—but still political opponent—Mayor Clement W. Wescott. The financing of the school coalesced from many sources. Those included donations of generous patrons such as Anne Crosby Johnson, granddaughter of the late Governor William Crosby, and oil magnate Ira Cobe. Much of the costs were also borne by the everyday citizens of Belfast, who would be encumbered with $40,000 dollars in new taxes. While this community accomplishment validated that those of disparate views, political affiliations and incomes could work through their mutual challenges, it is notable that it took a generation to resolve just the Crosby school issue. Many of those who voted Frost into office were also among those turn-of-the-century students who endured the deteriorating conditions of the aged school buildings of that generation-long debate.

Unlike those neglected school buildings, improvements in the curriculum and teaching methods were both much better funded and promoted. As early as 1899, the Belfast Teachers Club secured $13,593 for summer lectures of new educational methods for the city’s teachers (Williamson 80). In 1902, school superintendent John Dunton advocated a curriculum change, which reflected that:
The High School is not simply a fitting school for the benefit of those who are able to go to college, but its courses of study are designed to give first and chiepest consideration to the needs of those whose school life ends here.... The books and materials are different, but these are only the means to a most practical end, namely, to teach the pupils to do with their minds the things the mind has occasion to do in practical life. (Davis et al 116)

Superintendent Dunton’s views mirrored many that of many of the city’s leaders, who believed in a more practical skills-oriented education for those students who would likely be joining their parents in the city’s workforce rather than continuing on to college. The (then-current) emphasis on oration, Greek, Latin and other classical studies would likely do little to prepare them to compete in an industrial environment. After Dunton’s tenure, the curriculum would soon include business and typing classes, mechanical arts, and home economics classes.

It was likely not mere coincidence that later brought John Dunton and Orlando Frost together at the April 1911 Belfast Board of Trade meetings, which planned the earlier-mentioned financial rescue strategy for the shoe factory. Both were businessmen as well as community leaders who, parent-like, looked after their employees and their value to the community at the same time. Frost would later be mayor, and Dunton Belfast’s state representative. Through those respective offices, both would facilitate local and regional sharing of the community’s common heritage, common challenges, and common goals. The intimate scale of Belfast meant most of its civic players would continually cross paths, collaborating on the city’s priority of retaining skilled labor for its factories. Payrolls from those factories, of course, fueled the city’s economy and nurtured the progress at the heart of the community’s manufacturing identity. A similar well-intended goal of earlier leaders in 1867, the railroad bond, planted a fiscal time bomb for a future generation to defuse decades later. Unfortunately, stuck on those well-intended but myopically
implemented goals, similar templates were used in 1901, 1911 and 1923. The resulting debt only accumulated despite those good intentions, until the originators were dust and the current stewards were going gray.

That pattern would be worn to raggedness until it completely unraveled just before the Great Depression, when the Maine Central Railroad relinquished its fifty-year, $18,000 a year lease of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake’s tracks. In 1925, unable to repurpose even its credit, the city began actually paying the principal of its railroad bond debts rather than mortgaging their citizens’ futures. They would have to operate the line on their own hook, and in the black. Not surprisingly, their profitable years compared well moving forward to those of the Maine Central tenure with all its resources. In 1935, when the last of the Boston Boats were pulled from Belfast in the midst of the Great Depression, the city felt fortunate to have still retained its workforce. It would have to work even harder to keep them now that the bottom had fallen out. The loss of that daily, extremely convenient link to Boston’s metropolitan services and markets would turn Belfast’s vision inward, and from being a city of progress to one working hard just to make ends meet.

**Conclusions**

In 1868 the city of Belfast borrowed more than one quarter of its total real estate value to begin construction of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad’s connection to Burnham Junction. While this would double the accessibility to distant resources and markets, failure to pay anything but the interest on its bond loans, and diverting the railroad stock dividends received to other city expenses, would leave the city credit-strapped for almost half a century. The progress at the heart of the city’s vision for itself would be hobbled for even modest improvements, unless
the city resorted to the grand economic rescue missions of the early 1900s. Those rescue attempts were eventually successful only because they were assisted by large subscription buy-ins from the region’s wealthy citizens. Those benefactors’ conditions and control, however, left everyday citizen stakeholders with a Hobson’s choice over withholding their buy-in and their voice, primarily in the all-or-nothing choice in the voting booth.

The last straw, as it were, of voter forbearance about the city’s aging schools and infrastructure was the inability to borrow the funds necessary to replace the desperately crowded and marginally functional high school. The philanthropy of wealthy citizens and generous summer visitors ignited the momentum to launch a building initiative without borrowing, but those gifts had strict caveats to return any and all funds if the high school was not built within the gifts’ deadline. Not only were Belfast’s leaders forced to accede to those stipulations, but the next mayoral election also turned into a referendum over a lack of tolerance for any city leader who would continually move the community’s goal posts while also delaying its end game. The election of Mathews Brothers owner Orlando Frost as mayor put the same no-nonsense leader who had guided Belfast’s second oldest business through decades without debt crisis or closures at the helm of the city’s finances. That change in management of the city would more authentically align the community’s sense of place to a manufacturing economy supporting steady, pragmatic progress, instead of pendulum swings. Rather than expecting industry and labor to perform most of the financial heavy lifting and sacrifice, the whole city would have to roll up its sleeves, pay its debts, and get on with the business of business.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE POLITICS OF PROGRESS

Political scientist Kenneth Palmer routinely attributes Maine’s politics to the highly participatory culture of its citizens, and the almost moralistic “obligation of citizens to take part in its governance” (Palmer 27). In Belfast, that hands-on participation in local government flourished long after surrendering its annual March Town Meeting to a mayor-council government in 1852. That change was not without controversy and confrontations, especially for a people born from a struggle for personal agency and a seat at the table in community decisions. Belfast historian Joseph Williamson II, who in 1852 was appointed Justice of the new municipality’s city court, commented, “A strong practiced exhibition of the necessity of a city charter was given at the spring meeting, which was disorderly and almost riotous” (Williamson 149). It should be noted that Williamson’s family was among Belfast’s most wealthy and influential, and that they had relocated to Belfast in the generation after those founders who had endured both British military displacement and occupation in their lifetimes. The descendants of those founders likely perceived “disorderly” and “riotous” through the lens of their shared heritage with a much more patriotic enthusiasm than Williamson’s privileged perspective recognized.

Davis, Hughes and Pinette’s History of Belfast in the 20th Century offers that Williamson might have been expressing class bias with his dismissal of ordinary citizens’ participation in self-governance when he wrote, “At annual meetings much confusion prevailed, and important matters were voted upon without consideration or understanding of their merits or demerits” (Williamson 149). Davis et al took exception with Williamson’s tone with that statement, and
commented that “Behind Williamson’s words was the belief that elected leaders chosen from the educated class had a far better claim on governing than the uneducated masses” (Davis et al 70).

That element of elitism would creep into city politics in Belfast, although as noted in the last chapter, ordinary citizens could voice their resounding disagreements and disappointments to certain “educated” decisions with their ballots. Kenneth Palmer (187) notes these political checks and balances, commenting, “That pattern was consistent with the historic emphasis on citizen governance.... Maine had lots of local government structure, to be sure, but parts of it were in the hands of citizens volunteering their time, and employees serving on a part-time basis.” Belfast’s politics were notable for their lack of career politicians, while in their specific professions they were far less the “amateur leadership” noted by Palmer (197). As business owners, physicians, school superintendents and ministers, among other vocations, they likely had much more daily direct contact with Belfast’s blue-collar citizens and their sensibilities than would polished professional politicians of larger cities.

Popular ten-term mayor Edgar F. Hanson was originally a harness-maker, a fundamentalist preacher, and then manager of a bottling plant before entering city politics. Orlando E. Frost was first the manager and finally the owner of Mathews Brothers before becoming the mayor who would usher through Crosby High School’s construction. Belfast’s longest-serving city councilor was Chet Grady, a blacksmith who represented his ward for 22 years, and also served as a county commissioner. Because so many elected officials in Belfast served while actively developing the community through their businesses, the very nature and compensation of the city’s political positions ran a gauntlet of conflicts of interest. That was further complicated as those positions were primarily as advocates for the best interest of the city. However, what was in the best interest of the city often was beneficial to the businesses owned or served by those
officials. During the age of Republican Ascendancy, which coincided with the marriage of a manufacturing identity into Belfast’s sense of place, whatever furthered progress and the growth of manufacturing was usually rationalized as ethical and necessary for the wellbeing of the city.

In such a small city with so many of its assets concentrated in the hands of an elite few, for each official with any potential conflict of interest to need to recuse themselves would likely have ground city government to a halt. The low compensation for elected positions in contrast to appointed employees leaves the door open for speculating whether their motivations were sacrificial and for their authentic belief in the public welfare, or a platform to see agendas pay later dividends. City Council member and newspaper editor Nathan Small wrote, “Belfast has come to the point where it, at times, is almost necessary to solicit or draft our mayors, and whoever accepts the office must do so at great sacrifice to his business or profession, or neglect the office to which he has been elected” (Davis et al 76). In 1900 the city librarian was paid three times the annual salary of the mayor, and the school superintendent nearly seven times as much. While those salaries were comparable to those respective positions across Maine at that time, the wage disparity opens the argument that one particular compensation for the mayor’s position possibly lay with the influence to align the city’s policies with their own.

That concern resonated strongly enough that Charles Pilsbury, editor of The Republican Journal and Mayor Hanson’s most vocal detractor, labeled city policy during Hanson’s multiple terms in office as the result of a “one man rule” (Davis et al 72). Hanson, a Democrat in a city swarming with Republican sympathies, received a celebratory torchlight parade through Belfast’s blue-collar neighborhoods after his reelection in 1908. The fact that such a tribute was paid in a city justifiably paranoid with fires, and with laws prohibiting carrying an open flame in any-
thing but a fireproof container, speaks more to the status affirmation that this self-proclaimed “man of the people” sought from the office (Davis et al 7).

Despite those concerns, when the city faced either an economic crisis or a threat to its perceived progress, the mayor and city council were expected to collaborate with business entities such as the Belfast Manufacturing Company or the Belfast Building Corporation to mount a rescue operation. During the mass meeting with employees following the 1901 bankruptcy of the Critchett and Sibley shoe factory, Mayor Elmer Small set the policy precedent that the “shoe factory’s woes were the town’s woes” (Davis et al 159). Mayor Small understood the ripple effect the loss of one third of its industrial employee paychecks would have on the city. He makes it clear that this was not just about employee challenges, but also the businesses they patronized: “[The] effect which the closing of the factory would have on the general business and prosperity of the city, and on the present employees” (Republican Journal 1901, 1).

In Maine landscapes now increasingly absent of their past industrial identities, contemporary perceptions of labor’s contributions are rarely witnesses to public affirmations as supportive as Mayor Small’s speech to the shoe factory workers. It was front page news with full transparency that the shoe factory, its workforce, and the city deeply depended on each other. Payrolls from the city’s other sizable employers, even while each might have been proportionately less critical, were similar in the community’s feelings of security, vitality, and sense of progress. It is no wonder why retention of the workforce monopolized so much of the city’s political energy. During the first World War, those local workforce issues were eclipsed by the national emergency, war production, and materials and manpower shortages. Mayor Clement W. Wescott emphasized those pressures on the city in his 1917-1918 Address to the City Council:
[C]ertainly in the elementary unit as a Town or City, we are as of one family, interested only in one result, that [being] the best for our city.... As a City, Belfast is simply a large social and business co-partnership, with a capital invested of $3,000,000, in which all our people are partners. (Maine Town Document 1379, 2)

Wescott continued at length, dipping into the much-used well of that Manufacturing Culture’s platitudes:

[W]ages are high and labor is scarce.... [If] we allow our roads to become unsatisfactory, our streets to become unattractive, our sidewalks dangerous, our sewage neglected, our fire protection inadequate, to use an old adage, we are “killing the goose that lays the golden egg.” Our business activity must be encouraged to such a degree as will insure incentive for accumulation and success. (Maine Town Document 1379, 4)

Wescott, by profession a bank president who worked his way up from a cashier, borrowed from nearly every trope in the city’s sense of place repertoires during his nine page speech. I have extracted the most relevant comments (ibid 6-9) towards that manufacturing identity as follows:

We all desire to see Belfast expand and grow, to see the trade rightfully belonging to Belfast remain here.

Can we not keep our boys and girls at home and draw others in to build up added industries instead of sending them away to build up other cities?

As to the means to the accomplishment of progress and growth, our City Schools should be of the highest standard possible, inviting people seeking a place where they may economically educate their children to locate here.
I would recommend also that our Superintendent of Schools be asked to see that our Reports are introduced into our High School and that at least all graduates each year be required to be able to analyze intelligently the City’s Financial Trial Balance.

Those four statements bracket much of the change in social attitudes in Belfast that transpired between those of Williamson’s local elitist comments during the transition to a city charter, and the local unity and patriotism required of a city contributing to an allied nation embroiled in a world war. In its antebellum commercial period, Belfast had nurtured those class distinctions of wealth and privilege, delegating prescribed dependencies from its mansions on Primrose Hill and High Street to the factory-hugging tenements near the Puddle Dock, and Union and Front Streets.

The “new” Belfast that rose out of the ashes shortly after the Civil War was also beholden to a working class which supplied many of the city’s volunteers and conscripts to that conflict. The existing patriarchies could not simply demand adherence to their fiats of propriety when that moral authority was muted by such sacrifice. Organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R) would help cultivate its own separate and more egalitarian sense of place to welcome and embrace that conflict’s survivors. Shared trauma during such conflicts often overwhelms social barriers and brings together people who would rarely if ever mingle, at least as equals, during times of peace. During the “Rebellion,” as the Civil War was referred to locally at that time, sons of rank and privilege (those who were not exempted) died as readily from battle and disease as did their working class farmer, trades and artisan peers. The local Thomas H. Marshall Post No. 42 of the G.A.R. was named after that officer and elite son of Belfast who, in 1861, along with 80 of his men from the Maine 7th Volunteers, died in Baltimore, Maryland of camp fever (likely Typhoid fever or Cholera).
The shared experiences and shattered perceptions of that conflict, and also from the rarely mentioned Spanish American War, fostered new recognitions of worth torn loose from protective class biases. While public lip-service to the city’s obsolete notions of wealth equaling a better claim to governance would persist for decades, the G.A.R., Ancient Order of United Workmen, Odd Fellows, and other fraternal organizations would work beneath that surface veneer, building a grassroots voting bloc of comrades and survivors of war and workplaces. Those survivors would build the workplace coalitions that maintained the private web of fraternity and obligations between labor and management, voters and politicians. Sense of place in this intimately small city, and how one identified with it, grew far more complex the further external forces thrust its members into distant conflicts and vulnerabilities. Belfast’s American Legion and VFW halls remain oases and refuges to how similar their mutual needs appeared, as they fought to return—and retain—home.

Politicians and economists often speak of events and incentives that level the playing field between international, regional, economic and social competitors. In Belfast, monuments dot the cemeteries, bridges and parks paying tribute to how distant battlefields leveled barriers of “otherness” and the devaluation of contributors based on their income or origin. Barely a decade after Mayor Wescott’s confirmation of the city as a business, inseparable from its manufacturing culture, Belfast citizens would need to cling to their recognition of, and reliance on, their interdependencies. Their sense of community identity would mature from that of a growing business to mutual stakeholders in a company facing bankruptcy.
Conclusions

Mirroring the histories of many Maine industrial communities, Belfast’s politics and its economy retained considerable notions of wealth, privilege and education maintaining an inherited claim on civil and economic governance into the 1870s. This contradicted the more egalitarian origins of Belfast’s participatory governance through its annual town meetings. That later privileged minority’s class bias would become both increasingly irrelevant and more politically incorrect each time the working class alliance was solicited to sacrifice during times of crisis.

Noted Maine political scientists and public policy experts Kenneth Palmer, Richard Barringer, Lisa Pohlmann and others have written extensively on the surprising uniformity of Maine’s participatory culture in politics, governance and civic contributions. Using cues from their observations allows critical thinking to help unravel the interdisciplinary connections in the fabric of Belfast’s history. That deconstruction of myth mingled with primary sources allows examples of the collaborative efforts of community leaders, allied with the workforce and supportive community, to claim their space in this period’s sense of place. Just as earlier chapters have shown how the city’s wealthy, educated and connected patriarchs orchestrated Belfast’s rescue of the burnt and wounded shell of its commercial district, this chapter marks the transition where the city recognized its labor force was equal in carrying that manufacturing economy, and community identity, forward.

The alliances between labor and business advocates which had repeatedly rescued the city’s economy were also appropriated by Belfast’s political leadership. On entering city politics, Mayors Small, Wescott and Frost would legitimize the mantra of retaining skilled labor to hold the city together. Many in city government would also bend that community meme for a host of agendas in the name of progress, or even to villainize opponents’ views as jeopardizing progress.
Their adoption of that political tactic could not later be lightly abandoned, and so over time would shape public policy, as voters from the labor bloc worked their own new agency and visibility as active participants in their community’s future. Somehow, this new balance of power that acknowledged mutual heritage, challenges and goals would see them through the hard times ahead.
CHAPTER EIGHT
WHEN THE BOTTOM FELL OUT

Nearly any text on United States history makes reference to the 1920s as the “Roaring Twenties” for its noted consumer-driven economy and rapid social change. Those same texts consistently mark the beginning of the Great Depression with the “Black Thursday” Stock Market crash of October 24, 1929. For the city of Belfast, though, the national prosperity of the 1920s only increased the competition, and lowered the already slim profits, for its late 19th century era factories. As Belfast’s manufacturers struggled against the post-war manufacturing capacity of southern New England, it found itself punching above its weight class.

Changes in Labor Relations

The early effects were already being felt in 1923 when a push to reduce Maine’s maximum workweek from a legal maximum of 54 hours to 48 hours failed. Those long hours still had not changed by 1929, when a Maine industrial survey circulated throughout New England touted that “the state had reasonable labor laws, a 54-hour week for women, and reasonable wage rates” (Judd et al 511). That survey’s endorsement made Belfast, with routinely at least a third of its manufacturing workforce being women, the unrequited target of a number of New England’s leanest business operators.

That reputation for cheap labor was already old news owing to the two rescue bailouts of the shoe factory in 1901 and 1911. The first rescue enabled Boston manufacturer Leonard and Barrows to take over the factory in 1902. A second, citizen-funded expansion of the facility was secured in 1911, when Leonard and Barrows grew dissatisfied with the factory’s growing obso-
lescience and threatened to leave Belfast. When the aging A.H. Leonard decided to sell out in 1923, he found a ready buyer in Robert P. Hazzard, who already owned a number of shoe stores and a larger factory than Belfast’s in Gardiner, Maine.

Hazzard operated in Maine largely because its labor costs were far lower than in Massachusetts, even though the area around Boston was the heart of the leather supply and tanning industries for New England. The twice-daily steamers between Belfast and Boston mitigated that slight disadvantage, especially as a Kennebec River connection kept his larger Gardiner, and later Augusta, factories readily supplied. That accessibility also allowed Hazzard to keep Belfast employees on a short leash. His consistent retort to any labor unrest was that he could always shutter the Belfast operation and let the Gardiner plant take up the slack (Davis et al 161). Hazzard pressed that possibility just before Christmas in 1925, dropping wages across-the-board by ten percent. When much of America was reaping the benefits of a post-war economic boom, the 500 workers at the shoe factory—almost one third of the city’s manufacturing workforce—were facing the choice of either wage cuts or a plant closure. This did not bode well for Belfast, especially with its all-in commitment to factory payrolls financing not just its blue-collar workers, but the quality of life for all its citizens.

Hazzard was a shrewd businessman who completely understood Maine’s economy. At that time in Maine, only 26 other industries in the state employed as many as the 500 workers he had in Belfast. Despite the competitiveness enabled by Maine’s inexpensive labor, however, the industrial output of the whole state was only 6/10ths of one percent of the national total (Judd et al 511). For Belfast, with its entire economy dependent on a tiny fraction of that national fraction, its workers and the city were both hostages to the interdependencies they had helped create and cultivate over almost half a century. Hazzard was also a man of his word. A walkout in Au-
gust of 1927 by some 120 workers in the shoe lasting department had resulted in a threat issued through the plant’s general manager that, “If they didn’t care to go back to work, the factory would be closed” (Davis et al 161). That draconian response effectively shifted any blame for harmful peer and community-related consequences of the strike from management directly onto the shoulders of the striking workers. The workers, unwilling to assume that responsibility, capitulated and returned to work.

Belfast’s shoe workers had long been among the lowest paid in the state. As early as 1900, even under the more benevolent and patriarchal Ami Cutter Sibley, a survey of 55 workers revealed an average annual household deficit after expenses of $49.07 (Davis et al 159). That deficit would equate to some $1,657 dollars in 2022, or almost six percent of today’s national poverty level for a family of four. Despite Belfast’s ability to consistently maintain both employability and production through the challenges of the intervening quarter of a century, the financial prospects for both those workers, and the city at large, had made only minor gains. Those fiscal doldrums did little for the morale of a community whose Mayor Hanson had declared The “Biggest Little City in Maine” barely a decade earlier.

Belfast’s current leadership dared not crow like the rooster that had adorned the banner of Hanson’s newspaper, The Waldo County Herald. In fact, third term mayor Foster Small became the errand boy for vacationing shoe plant general manager Jack Thompson during the plant’s final labor dispute under R.P Hazzard’s tenure as owner. How very unusual that a city mayor was appropriated as a subordinate for a factory operator and his general manager while they vacationed in Florida. Mayor Small, a physician, already had the responsibilities of his practice in addition to his duties with the city. He was instructed (by telegram) by manager Thompson to have employees who wished to continue working to “sign a paper that they would not strike or
cause trouble again” (Davis et al 162). After his vacation Thompson made it known that if the employees didn’t care for their working conditions “they can go elsewhere.” Whether the desired result or not, by April 9th of 1928, the workers answered with their feet, and production ceased. R.P. Hazzard decided to make good on his earlier threats and closed the Belfast operation, stating he had fulfilled any “moral obligation” to keep the plant open (Davis et al 162).

It would take 16 months to reopen the shoe factory with a new lessee, Daley Brothers of Boston, Massachusetts. The citizens of Belfast had to front the deal with $110,000 ($1,825,000 in 2022 dollars) in local-preferred stock. What was far more humbling for the employees’ professional sense as contributing members to their city is that this deal was solicited through advertisements in national shoe manufacturer’s magazines. The recruiting included photos with a huge “rent free” banner over the entrance. That enticement would make any worker complaints about their sacrifices seem petty when compared to the city’s loss of rent revenue. Worse, the banner included “there are no unions or so-called labor troubles in Belfast” (Davis et al 162, emphasis added). For a city that considered itself to be a business, and where your word is your bond, that banner was not just a “gentlemen’s agreement” between the factory’s workers and the city, but a public covenant they had jointly professed to a national industry. In the Great Depression then bearing down on most of the industrialized world, professing Belfast as a city with a docile, unorganized, and underrepresented workforce would undermine progress in working conditions until after WWII.

Despite President Roosevelt’s labor law reform efforts of the early 1930s, Belfast’s anti-union promises enforced factory operator control over its employees like a curse. Shortly after the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act created a right to collective bargaining, nearly half of Daley Brothers workers went on strike over a ten percent pay cut despite a 66 percent increase in
production. As if the strike had not fractured the no-labor-trouble myth enough, the employees also secretly formed a local union. Like R.P. Hazzard before them, the Daley Brothers owned other shoe factories that could absorb Belfast’s production. On learning of this breach of the promises that enticed him into buying that much-troubled business, John Daley threatened to close the factory.

Because Belfast’s largest labor group was perceived as having twice imperiled the security of their community in just five years, they also earned some of the villain’s reputation for their actions. Labor had stepped outside of the common heritage, common goals, common challenges community mantra, and broke faith for their version of a solution. In a face-saving effort, the head of the newly minted union and nine others resigned and the union was disbanded (Davis et al 163). This was sincere enough as a public apology that the community warmed to the grievances of their relatives, neighbors and friends who had dared press for changes that might improve their lots.

Belfast was too small a community to survive a grudge-match caused by insistence over a point of order in an advertisement. Daley relented, reversed the wage cut, and also reduced the grueling schedule down to the Roosevelt administration’s nationally recommended 40-hour workweek. What is important to remember in all this business theater is that, as large as the Daley Brothers’ operations were, in sum they were still a family business, and one trying to stay afloat during America’s most profound economic crisis to that date. Leo Daley, the brother who was most often in direct contact with the Belfast operation and its employees, personally endured cost cuts by traveling from Boston to Belfast every other week on a public intercity bus. The owners were not the aloof Boston Brahmins who so often ran Maine businesses like absentee landlords; they had their own skin in the game, and their plates were as lean as those of their em-
ployees. Wealth did not grant immunity from the losses of the Great Depression; it merely guaranteed you had more to lose if things came apart.

Daley was remembered by Ann Larrabee (Brierly), later a shoe plant manager in her own right, as having “a good Irish wit about him.... He wouldn’t just walk through the office and go see the superintendent.... he’d go on through and say hi to each and every one of us.... [I]f you tried to do a good job he recognized the fact, too” (Davis et al 165). This effort was not lost on the employees in Belfast, especially when contrasted with their (union) brother and sister shoe workers’ treatment during the Great Maine Shoe Strike of 1937. That strike had involved 16 factories in Lewiston and Auburn, Maine, not counting all the supporting industries contributing to or benefiting from those factories. The Belfast workers understood the ugly repercussions, from the arrest of union organizers for contempt of court, to Governor Lewis Barrows calling in the National Guard to keep the masses of protesting workers from paralyzing traffic on the cities’ streets and bridges.

The cost for Belfast to remain a city of production, which lauded both its workforce and its factory owners and operators as critical community assets, was to humbly ride out those hard times by favoring neither. Like jealous siblings, the comfortable relationship between labor, management and the community was never again quite as satisfactory or co-supportive. There would be other unions, and other strikes, each as counterproductive as the failures already described, because the margins in Belfast’s businesses had become just too thin to support growth, progress or anything more than just hanging on.
Transportation Changes

While the citizens and businesses in Belfast were part of a supportive community that would come together to enable the community as body to ride out the depression, the steamship and rail operators who serviced the city could only trust their profit and loss statements when deciding they had to quit a failing route. As important as Belfast’s merchandise had been for justifying those steamship trips, dependable rail service and the huge improvement in highways and automobile reliability had also sliced the profit margins just too thin, especially where those alternatives were equally convenient, and with no waiting out tide tables and bad weather.

Early in the century, businessmen, students and local doctors had commuted on the “Great White Fliers” to their practices in Boston. Margaret Craig Stone, who also traveled to college on those steamships, recalled some of the professionals who used them:

Hugh McLellan for instance, and Dr. George Holmes, the Radiologist, when he was at Mass General in the old days. Hugh McLellan came in Friday night and went back Sunday night and was back at work Monday morning. Northport, Belfast and Camden, all of them had business people doing that often all along the coast. (Davis et al 35)

Those ships were able to maintain that wonderful extension of community to the rest of New England, and often New York as well, but only as long as freight cargo paid the primary bills. As with the later demise of passenger rail in Maine, moving people was a fringe benefit enabled by moving profitable freight. If something had to give, moving the profitable manufactured goods from Belfast would shift to rail and later to trucks. People would just have to find their own way, and at their own level of convenience, just as they continue even today.
Finding one’s own way, though, at least in the intermingling of these two port cities on these grand steamers, is contrary to that tradition. When one traveled that regular route, they were almost always in the company of a segment of their community, and an extension of one port city into the other. When the last overnight boat left the city for good, the community did not only have to try harder to find its own way, it had to fight harder to remain part of that New England manufacturing market economy as well. Like so many institutions in Belfast that had been repurposed, both the S.S. Belfast and the S.S. Camden received brief new identities as the Arrow and the Comet on the Providence to New York run, but were quickly sold to the U.S. Government as troop ships with the first rumblings of World War II. With their single-bottom hulls they were considered unsafe for civilian passengers, but would press on in usefulness just like their namesake cities, as another war ended some obsolete institutions and demanded far more from the survivors.

Changes of War; Changes of Peace

Before the increased production of World War Two would rescue the shoe factory, and also create the city’s signature association with poultry processing, Belfast would lose Saco Valley Canning Company, Coe Mortimer Fertilizer, the McIntire fish plant, both its cigar factories, the pulp yard, and its creameries. The only progress of note was that the labor cost offset by Works Progress Administration funds during the Depression allowed for the construction of the Governor Anderson elementary school for the cost of its materials. Belfast once promoted itself with “Welcome to the Biggest Little City in Maine” on billboards on each road leading into the city. Just as those signs had framed those bridge crossing points like grand gates into the community’s proud industrial interior, they seemed to mock a city that incentivized moving to Bel-
fast with its progress, but suddenly could only construct a new elementary school with federal assistance. That was a blow for the morale of a city known for its Republican distrust of “big government,” and its pride in the convergence of so many Waldo County students to its new high school that it exceeded its capacity just five years after it opened.

Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has cautioned: “We normally think of cities as centers of convergence. To a motorist moving across the continent, however, cities are not necessarily a destination; they may merely be places to refuel, eat, or obtain a night’s rest” (Tuan 203-4). Belfast had never been a tourist destination, unlike when Bar Harbor became one of Tuan’s self-declared “gateway cities” (203) to Acadia National Park. However, the community had long been the default nucleus for all the satellite communities that orbited Belfast as their economic hub and county seat. By 1936, with automobiles and trucks becoming the default form of transport for Belfast’s residents and businesses, the city had 28 gas stations with 61 pumps for barely 5,000 people—and that was just within the city limits.

Belfast, a place which for decades had rarely been a destination for anyone but its own citizens, became a place you had to drive through on your way to someplace else. Author Jay Davis wrote:

Tourist [sic] might have meant wealth and riches for Belfast, now fully rigged with all the conveniences of 20th century life, but it was not to be. Belfast held few attractions for tourists. The city’s industrial ambience did not appeal to visitors in search of pastoral beauty. Instead the city favored a fill up and passthrough. (Davis et al 49)

Davis’s reflection on that low point for the city was somberly appropriate. Belfast’s citizens had nurtured an industrial identity since its self-rescue after the fire of 1865. In their
living memory, its citizens knew only the building, support, rescue and repurposing of its factories. As those factories failed and were shuttered one by one, and the solutions of past generations failed them, Belfast waited for the hard landing as the bottom fell out of its economy. That plummet was only barely averted by the sacrifices made in the global conflict to come.

Belfast would come out of World War Two relieved, but jaded. Thirty of its sons would perish in that conflict, and many more would come home as victims of their experiences, clinging to Belfast as their oasis of normalcy. Many would return to factory work, deflecting their memories with the exhaustive concentration required to avoid injuries just as devastating as those faced on the battlefield. Reminders would visit them, though, of touchstones of the past which had endured their own scars. As its last supporting role with the city from the losses of the Depression, the steam whistle of the liner S.S. Belfast, salvaged from its grounded hulk as a troop transport after the war, was returned to its namesake city and installed on the engine house of the Stinson’s sardine cannery. Just as it had called the city’s travelers upon its arrivals, and dock workers to unload the life-blood of the city’s factories, it would call one more generation to work with its piercing notes of homecoming and pride in production.

Conclusions

Belfast’s factories never truly regained their footing after the imposed scarcities and targeted production of World War One. Those conditions had greatly expanded the industrial infrastructure of its primary competitors in southern New England, and also played a part in priming that region to be a huge player in World War Two’s arsenal of democracy. The Great Depression crept into Belfast one break-even production shipment at a time, but still years before America
was engulfed in the tsunami of red ink that arrived elsewhere with just a few horrible trading days in America’s financial markets. With the world cutting corners to make ends meet, Belfast was already cut too lean to compete. The city lost over half of its industries before the national recovery at the cusp of WWII. Of those, most finally fell when the Boston Boats severed service with the city, and the miniscule remaining business advantages they had obtaining materials in bulk, and overnight shipping of perishables to waiting customers, disappeared as a bleak December evening fell, and the SS Belfast’s stern lights winked out below the horizon one final time.

The lean markets of the Depression would reinforce the fact that Belfast lacked the scale of both producers and workforce to effectively integrate progress in wages with increased production. Both of those reserves were required for success, but both failed if either faltered. My personal communications years later working side by side with members of that generation lead me to believe that the sense of sheer melancholy remaining in them after enduring the sacrifices of the Great Depression and WWII in succession likely merits its own survivors’ identity, separate from those already covered, and is omitted primarily because that is too complex a sidebar for this study. Their recovery came at the dreadful cost of yet another war with its unspeakable loss of life and deprivations to millions. Producing for the war effort would help their own recovery, but producing for America’s millions, who wanted to move past the scarcities of the war, would change Belfast from a city of producers to one of processors. Shoes, fish and windows would be shipped for decades more, but the one food product exempted from wartime rationing, poultry, would reinvent Belfast’s identity for the last push of its industrial century.
CHAPTER NINE

BROILER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD?

It is doubtful that respected Maine historian, judge, and noted son of Belfast Joseph Williamson II would have recognized Belfast’s waterfront in 1948. The city had reached the apex of its blue-collar identity a mere 46 years after the death of that New England conservative. The last leg of the city’s industrial century would be noted not for its signature shoes, millwork, or even sardines, but for the unexpected industry of poultry processing. With his two-volume *History of the City of Belfast in the State of Maine* (1877 & 1917), Williamson had taken great pains to describe every nuance of businesses, structures, vocations and their histories along the city’s twin waterfronts. His style resonated with his family’s longstanding status as confident owners of a number of those successful city businesses; his descriptions are remarkably similar to those of an insurance actuary catalog calculating each property’s asset-worthiness to the city.

Until World War Two, the progressively-minded coalition of the city’s business and civic leaders had carefully managed the reuse and repurposing of those valued structures and their production spaces. What was once an eclectic but highly functional hybrid of mixed-purpose production spaces had defaulted to a haphazard ward of depression-era survivors. Those structures were interspersed with seldom-used and sometimes structurally suspect neighbors, retained and kept standing mostly out of sheer Yankee thrift, that there might be some use left in them. This was not the beating heart of the Republican business ascendancy that Williamson had so diligently chronicled like a balance sheet in the city’s historical ledger. The decay had advanced to the point that the “Puddle Dock,” once the pride of that seaport’s Jacksonian-era innovation, had devolved into the city’s trash-filled dump, which caught fire in 1941 and was capped as re-
claimed land to reduce its fire threat and assault on the senses. Even then, the neighboring homes of the city’s poorest citizens remained the closest thing to a slum Belfast knew over that century.

The mouth of the river, once flanked on both banks with thriving businesses, had also been a dependable fishing ground in its own right. While progress, in its industrial context, had extended the city’s main sewer beyond the steamboat landing, it also converted the harbor into a dumping ground for municipal and industrial waste deemed too noxious to dump near the Puddle Dock’s basin. Still, Belfast was no exceptional ecological villain of that era; in fact, ecology as a science, and the full ramifications of pollution, were only just entering the public’s awareness. In hindsight, Belfast’s harbor was the unintended victim of its own successes. Its industrial model mirrored that of nearly every other city of that era with coastal or river access, on a planet still not worldly enough to recognize the consequences of finite resources and finite capacity for recovery. While these observations are rightly the subject of a larger and separate investigation, they are appropriate to be mentioned here to put Belfast’s later disparagement as “Schmaltzport” and the “City with a Bathtub Ring” into context.

**From Success to “Schmaltzport”**

While Belfast’s polluted harbor was a legitimate ecological disaster, which would become far worse before becoming any better, Belfast was comparatively, and more accurately, a symptom of a growing global pollution crisis. However, Belfast’s visibility as an eyesore along the Route 1A highway to “tourism’s riches and fortunes” would soon make it the poster child and political football of both Maine’s complicated sense of place discussions, and its post-industrial creative economy. Despite many similar issues with pollution, fisheries collapse, and poverty in Hancock and Washington Counties, neighboring Downeast Maine would be rational-
ized as pristine and visitor-worthy when contrasted against tourism-averse Belfast. The external origins of perspectives along those lines were not lost on coastal communities, which espoused amongst themselves that “the tide lifts all boats equally.”

Coastal social taboos discouraged the open public derision of other communities, and leastwise seeking some kind of advantage, well into the 1960s. However, that custom would fall apart as pollution rather than overfishing became the more convenient scapegoat for declining fish stocks. Increased dependency on tourism economies would also cause non-manufacturing communities to distance themselves from Belfast’s industrial reputation and the ghost of their own manufacturing legacies. To this day, for example, Camden still monitors an EPA brownfield site for toxic agents from its shuttered tanneries. Rockland once filled its abandoned lime quarries with garbage, and its harbor with fish processing waste. Even today, Castine still suffers from proximity to the nearby abandoned Callahan mines on Cape Rosier, and Bar Harbor eventually spent decades and millions of dollars for a sewage treatment plant that replaced the direct discharge pipes of its grand hotels.

None of those challenges were perceived in their original context as their respective community’s environmental sins. Before the full impact of natural limits of environmental recovery were understood, many communities accepted there had to be some temporary tradeoffs to creating a diverse economy. There was also some expectation that river and tidal currents would disperse those wastes into the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. Later scientific studies revealed that water in the Gulf of Maine has an extremely low exchange rate. That meant many coastal bays and estuaries were dangerously saturated with accumulated waste, even before the wartime industrial surge. While not offered as any rationalization for the behaviors that led to systemically polluted Maine waters, it is well to remember that the science of the day was
also confident that Earth’s atmosphere would also safely disperse the toxins of above-ground nuclear testing. For industrial communities, trusting in that protective reassurance of science allowed their local tunnel vision to go untreated until the media, and early scientific trailblazers like Rachel Carson, staged America’s first environmental interventions.

The Gulf of Maine’s low restorative capacity was a relative unknown approaching 1950, even as unpleasant changes began to raise concerns. Belfast had not yet received any noticeable attention as both Maplewood and MacLeod poultry companies rapidly expanded beyond their wartime base capacities. This was primarily because of the way poultry was processed for the New England and New York markets. The chickens, while bled out, de-feathered and cleaned, were not eviscerated before being shipped to customers. That light processing, known as “New York dressed,” meant that 95 percent of the waste—entrails, oil pods, heads and interior fat—that would later pollute the harbor remained with chickens all the way to their respective markets (Pullen and Savage 16). That also meant the labor force needed to process the chickens was but a small fraction of its 1970s peak.

The labor dynamic of those initial poultry plants stabilized a sudden skilled labor shortage in the city. In late 1948 the city was approached by Belgrade Shoe Manufacturing Company with an offer to move to Belfast and assume a ten-year lease if the city would build them a modern factory. Daley Brothers, operators of the existing and now antiquated shoe factory, were incensed, claiming there was already an extreme shortage of skilled workers in the area, and certainly not enough to support two factories (Davis et al 165). They published their concerns in the local paper, including a statement that they would close the Belfast operation if the city moved forward with the plan. The matter was put before the city’s citizens in a packed public meeting, with those present voting 476 to 397 in favor of building the new factory. That public vote,
with the full knowledge that start-up included public funds and public risk, marked the third time in a half century Belfast’s citizens had bought into financing their own employment. Daley Brothers followed through with their threat and pulled out of Belfast, but by the following spring the new shoe factory was built in an astonishing 53 working days. In 1950 a second company, Truitt Brothers, took over the old shoe factory, and was encouraged enough with Belfast’s workforce that they built a new factory near the city limits in 1963.

One might ask, what did making shoes have to do with processing chicken? First, the low skills needed for the New York Dressed poultry then processed in the city expanded local employment that had been lost after the war. Importantly, this did not compete for skilled workers, who remained available for other, more intensive manufacturing. Secondly, the growth of poultry processing allowed an employment buffer to temporarily absorb some of the unemployed shoe workers when Daley Brothers pulled out, thus lessening a potential crisis while the new plant was constructed. And thirdly, the orderly assimilation of risk with both modernization and worker retention with the new factory made Belfast an attractive community for Truitt’s later recruitment. The net effect was that the growth of poultry processing, plus replacing an obsolete shoe factory, had rekindled industry’s interest in Belfast. The city’s practiced and still nimble recovery with the Daley Brothers’ withdrawal only served to amplify that interest. Belfast was playing to its strengths, and with growing confidence began to promote its new industry on the regional stage.

**Cause for Celebration, Cause for Concern**

Belfast’s first “Broiler Day” in July of 1948 was thrown together with about a month’s notice. While initially this was to celebrate and promote the unexpected business interest, growth
and prosperity of that newer meat commodity, the city’s anticipated growth in other manufacturing also benefited from the welcome exposure. While this new industry was revitalizing Belfast’s struggling economy, processing meat on an industrial scale was perceived as significantly different from manufacturing shoes, windows and doors, machine parts, tools or clothing. There would undoubtedly be some growing pains.

The Broiler Day celebration provided an opportunity not just for wooing regional customers and industries for the city’s products and production spaces, but also to acclimate the workforce in Belfast and its satellite communities to the potential for growth in this field. This would be especially true for the contract rearing of the poultry supply, which would come to dominate Maine’s agriculture for decades. The rhythms and supply of Belfast’s manufacturing would need to migrate out to its rural neighbors, and their citizens would need to be tapped to supply this new industry. This ripple effect was taken in stride as a natural part of Waldo County’s relationship with Belfast. After all, Belfast had been tapping its rural neighbors as feeder communities for generations.

There had been common ground in some industries for both the workforce and the communities to absorb that transition. The sardine cannery and now-shuttered vegetable cannery had introduced Belfast to the rhythms necessary for processing perishable goods at scale. Workers and neighboring residential blocks accommodated not only the unorthodox timing of shifts which began whenever fresh product arrived, and did not end until those perishable goods were all safely packaged. That postwar rhythm retained a seasonal reminder of earlier times of production urgency, as the steam whistle of the long ago scrapped S.S. Belfast shrieked across the harbor rooftops for the whole city to hear, hurrying workers in before the catch spoiled. Grumble as
neighbors might at 7:00 am or 9:00 at night, freshness is measured in minutes, and the whistle sounded like money in the pockets of the whole city.

Before the overnight boats to Boston withdrew from service, Belfast and many of its sister communities on those coastal routes had been the dairies and greengrocers for greater Boston. To accommodate the daily urgency of that resupply, fleets of milk and produce trucks rumbled through the city at inconvenient hours, so relentlessly that their absence would be noticed more readily than their presence. It was not unusual then, when just before World War Two, poultry trucks began to replace those other vehicles rumbling through Waldo County and into the city that slept in shifts. In what would later only become a point of contention mostly for visitors and non-industrial residents, those new trucks left a visual reminder of their passing: feathers. In fact, by 1970, even with America embroiled in the Vietnam War and enthralled by the Apollo moon missions, pressure from an indignant but vocal minority resulted in the city’s first ticket issued for “feather littering” to poultry truck driver Clarence Ward (Davis et al 216).

The public clamor for the law that made that arrest possible signified a change in Belfast’s sense of place. When the city was obsessed with worker retention, the manufacturing pragmatism of the community never would have supported such an ordinance. While people “from away” moving into the community and bearing their own cultural perspectives with them is a common grumble in Maine communities, Belfast’s outreach and recruitment of additional workers from outlying communities aided that suspicion with a legitimate shift in demographics. Belfast was in fact seeing turnover and displacement in its population. The number of Belfast residents showed only minimal (overall) growth, however, as workers became less pedestrian and more inclined to drive, following America’s patterns to live outside of the urban-industrial zones. Many even moved out into the feeder communities of their newer work peers. That turno-
ver in housing slowly changed the composition of many Belfast neighborhoods from staunchly industrial families to those who were neither dependent nor tolerant of their old manufacturing-first allegiances.

Belfast’s co-opting of neighboring communities into its growing poultry industry was highly successful, but that success would have both positive and negative unintended consequences. The rapid growth of that industry transformed Belfast from being primarily the county seat for those communities into a return as much of the county’s economic hub. By 1970, supplies, employment, taxes and contracted services supporting Belfast’s Maplewood and Penobscot poultry operations contributed $58 million dollars of Maine’s $85 million total from just the poultry industry (King and French 15). That dazzling success in the economic landscape had the effect of desensitizing the players to what was transpiring in plain sight in their own environmental landscape. At Belfast’s waterfront, Maplewood Poultry repurposed the site of the former Coe-Mortimer fertilizer plant. A new, state-of-the-art Penobscot Poultry plant was completed in 1956. Its added economic potential to the city, county and state attracted a joint appearance of Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson and Maine’s Governor Ed Muskie.

Ironically, Muskie, later one of Maine’s U.S. senators and the 58th U.S. Secretary of State, would be highly vocal in condemning not only Belfast’s, but all industrial pollution in Maine and the nation (Goldstein 229). While the record shows that Muskie was entirely sincere concerning environmental issues, his legitimate concern, and especially his speed in taking up the cause, helps to demonstrate just how quickly this new industry had pushed Belfast’s harbor and Penobscot Bay over the ecological tipping point. Just eleven years after that gala opening, which coincidentally began a doubling of the local poultry waste stream, polluters from Bangor to Rockland in the Penobscot River watershed received orders from the U.S. Department of the
Interior “to reduce the pollution of shellfish beds by 1970 or face Federal penalties.” The concern had become serious enough regionally that negotiations on the issue, held in Belfast, were reported in the *New York Times* (Fenton 66).

That media attention adds another level of irony to the controversy, inasmuch as that in 1954 New York State represented 72 percent of the market for Belfast’s poultry products (Pullen and Savage 15). The increasing demand from that market created the justification to build the new Penobscot plant and would absorb much of its output. Unlike today’s environmental issues, the co-culpability of destination consumers and demands were rarely considered as in contemporary cases of blame-sharing and co-liabilities. That blame, however, could easily have been divided over countless players from Midwest feed growers to veterinary pharmaceutical manufacturers, to even a substantial number of university animal science researchers. The millions of dollars generated from these businesses spurred decades of experimentation that effectively lowered poultry mortality and steadily increased the weight of meat per pound of feed consumed, while reducing the number of growing days to market weight.

In an age when satisfying consumer demand translated to positive optics for participating in a manufacturing culture, being attached to Belfast’s $58 million dollar sliver of American agribusiness seemed to have no downside. Maine poultry was gaining a strong following with consumers, Maine researchers were gaining accolades for their innovation and contributions to the field, and Maine business models were adopted as templates for success. What was yet to be realized is that all this success migrated down the highways and watersheds of central Maine to Belfast, and after the profitable elements were extracted, the rest would be consigned to Belfast’s harbor. The process started in America’s Midwest corn belt, with poultry feed shipped by rail to Belfast. That grain freight generated most of the business for Belfast’s city-owned railroad. The
feed was stored in grain elevators at the foot of Main Street, which were as large as to appear as navigation aids on coastal charts. They also emitted, while not noxious, an unmistakable and olfactory-tiring odor over the downtown.

Grain spillage also supported an extraordinary pigeon population, whose aerial spread of droppings fouled cars, sidewalks, and shoppers. With every rain it was transformed into a nasty whitewash that eventually made its way to the harbor. As an adolescent I would watch local boys and their fathers cull the flocks with air rifles early on Saturday mornings. The hunt was tolerated by the city council, as feral pigeons (Columba livia) are one of only three species, including European starlings and House sparrows, all non-native to North America, not protected by the Migratory Bird Act of 1918. However, more than a decade before PETA was formed, objections were raised over the methods of that cull. Poison was tried briefly, and then avian birth control (Ovo-control) was added to grain baiting stations. Even as the city depended on the revenue generated from up to one million chickens being slaughtered just blocks away each week, the pigeon cull, while brief, simmered in local emotions far longer. A debate over what was cruel, and what was “just” an unavoidable part of providing vast amounts of food to millions of people, crept uncomfortably into Belfast’s sense of place. The grain and the pigeons and their waste had converged visibly at Belfast’s waterfront, and so were easy targets to vilify or assign blame, but somehow connections about what was leaving Belfast’s waterfront were still being missed.

The grain was shipped to poultry farms throughout Waldo County and many neighboring counties. It was part of a contract package where the poultry companies supplied grain, chicks, and eventual pickup crews for adult birds. “Adult” seems almost an impossible term for a chicken grown from a hatchling to packaged meat in as little as eight weeks. Many larger poultry farms reared up to 100,000 birds at a time, and even with mortality and cleanout periods could,
conditions permitting, produce nearly half a million birds each year (Davis et al 261). Half a million chickens produce a huge amount of waste. Much of that chicken manure was given to dairy farmers who would haul it away to be spread later on their dormant silage corn and hayfields as fertilizer. It was an expected sight traveling rural Maine to see hundred-plus foot windrows of chicken manure, six to eight feet high and wide, “aging” at the edge of pastures and crop fields. The ammonia content was so high in the manure it had to “age out” for at least one, and often several, years so it would not chemically burn the roots of the plants it was intended to fertilize.

An unintended consequence of that process was that, as the ammonia in that aging manure decayed, it transferred much of its nitrogen not just onto the land as intended, but also into the local watersheds. Over time these sources combined and made their way downstream to the Penobscot River, or one of the tributaries that merged into the Passagassawakeag River, and then into Belfast Harbor. That same process happened with all the precipitates from the vehicle exhaust of the delivery trucks, pickup crews, and daily employee traffic serving these factories. These were not Belfast sources of pollution, but regional ones that became more concentrated the closer they migrated to Belfast. This was at a time when tetraethyl lead was added to gasoline to increase its octane rating. As a 4-H Club member, my agriculture lessons from the Maine Cooperative Extension Agent programs cautioned us to never gather dandelion or other wild greens within fifty feet of a roadway because of this lead contamination.

The final act of dumping waste chicken parts into the harbor was totally the responsibility of the poultry companies. That waste started as live animals and their support products, which benefited tens of thousands of Mainers (and regional players) in their supply, production, distribution and retail sales. As mentioned, consumers bore part of that culpability as both a justification and recipient of the industry’s “benefits.” That is how the precursors of Belfast’s “bathtub
“ring” percolated through Maine, and the national markets, to become concentrated in Belfast Harbor, with Maplewood Poultry Company left holding the bag for all the accumulated environmental complicity of many participants. With the 1970 filing of Federal lawsuits against Maplewood [320 F. Supp. 1395 (D.Me1970)] on behalf of local newspaper editor Alan (Mike) Brown of Belfast’s Republican Journal newspaper, the economic golden child of the post-war recovery had become the poster child for Maine businesses destroying its fragile coastline.

Brown came from a family of commercial fishermen, and his allegations of too little remediation, taking far too long to implement by the polluters, carried significantly more regional authenticity than if the allegations could have been dismissed as coming from “folks from away” getting involved with a local issue. Brown had also written a monthly column for many years for The Maine Coast Fisherman (now Fishermen’s Voice). His wide following among both of his vocations eventually pitted two of Maine’s important food industries against each other in a battle of perceptions about what represents, and should not represent, Maine to the nation’s consumers. Maplewood and Penobscot were part of a huge agribusiness, at least by Maine standards, and also represented an equally important employment sector. Those in Brown’s corner in both the media and the fisheries had the implied advantage of representing the future of Maine’s fisheries, especially its iconic lobster fishery. The Belfast Broiler Festival aside, in a battle of concern over Maine’s icons then, or now, a lobster bake won hands down over a chicken barbecue in both consumer and sense of place symbol recognition.

The fall from grace of the poultry industry from darling of Maine’s economy to environmental villain took a scant sixteen years. In the city’s context of worker retention, a child born to a poultry plant worker the day Penobscot’s state-of-the-art facility was christened by Maine’s “environmental governor” Muskie would be too young to work in that same plant, without a stu-
dent worker permit, the day litigation began the industry’s death spiral. That is an incredibly short period to accumulate such a lasting disparagement for a city with a 250-year history. In 1971, Maplewood’s appeals would receive acknowledgement by Justice Edward Gignoux that while noxious, the poultry waste did not in fact impede navigation on a navigable waterway anymore substantially than other semi-liquid wastes exiting a sewer. They did, however, violate the recent 1970 Federal Water Pollution Control Act, which had superseded 33 U.S.C. §407, the 1899 law in the suit Maplewood had contested. Maplewood had already invested significantly in a new pollution control facility beginning in 1968, and Penobscot Poultry and the city of Belfast were well into the planning stages of their own treatment plants prior to those federal lawsuits being filed over their discharges.

In public relations, though, optics are timing-dependent. While operation of those new treatment plants made immediate improvements to water quality in Belfast Bay, the lawsuits initiated by Republican Journal editor Allen Brown continued (Davis et al 284-286). None of those interventions were in time, either, to prevent Newsweek magazine from publishing an article in March of 1972 which hung the label of “Schmaltzport” on the city. The article, buried deep in the middle of the edition and not even credited to an author, stated: “Some snide New Yorkers, drawing on the Yiddish word for fat, have taken to calling Belfast ‘Schmaltzport,’ U.S.A.” In an objective fight over the ethics of environmental culpability, that late shot seemed like a punch after the bell. Any debate over the ill-timed parting shot stills reveals sore spots in the community, which left a lasting black mark on Belfast’s sense of place. For many who chose not to completely relinquish all of their pride in that earlier identity, that mark has never really been erased.

A then-minority of manufacturing supporters felt that the problem of pollution, contrary to some media accounts, was being addressed, just not as fast as the condemnation was being
fueled. When the studies were definitively finished, and the engineering and funding put in place, both companies and the city began the slow but committed process of remediation. Still, like any major infrastructure project, as the city’s whiplash funding proposals for the project showed repeatedly, construction of the facilities took longer to accomplish than the construction of complaints in that city with a fully participatory culture. A fact seldom included in the tale of Schmaltzport is that the same detractors of the city have yet to commend the city for cleaning up their harbor in even less time than it took to pollute it. While the Newsweek article does admit that Belfast’s Republican Journal editor Allen Brown was fired shortly after his lawsuit against Maplewood (and later Penobscot Poultry) was filed, it also lionized him as a “redoubtable crusader” (63).

All of this turmoil focused on Belfast was the polar opposite of the accolades and Award of Merit bestowed by Governor Muskie on Penobscot Poultry in the late 1950s, and it was likely not lost on the citizens of Belfast that to Muskie’s credit, he later became a fierce proponent of the 1972 Clean Water Act. By that point, the fierce reciprocity once shown between the city and its workforce was exhibiting similar polarity, which is why I set 1970 as the last weigh point of that solid manufacturing sense of identity. After that threshold, trusted alliances shifted, and unconditional support for skilled workers wavered. Belfast, for better or worse, was no longer resolving its issues in house, but had found itself thrust into the glaring light of the national stage. Few communities could likely endure that level of scrutiny before their actions are influenced as much by the audience as the actors.

Surprisingly, tourists began seeking out the city not long after all the bad press—perhaps curious, perhaps sensing the rare opportunity to get in on the ground floor of a region that had nowhere to go but up from this humbling bottom. Belfast’s manufacturing identity had taken a
serious hit, and after a century of tenacious support of the city’s manufacturers and labor force, enthusiasm mellowed into something approaching perfunctory participation. Broiler Day, which had grown into a weeklong celebration attracting 17,000 visitors in 1972, would crown Miss Carla Withee its last “Broiler Queen” in 1981, just a year after Maplewood Poultry descended into bankruptcy. Penobscot Poultry would close in 1988, just a year after its owner George Lewis died, and with his son and heir Bernie Lewis diagnosed with cancer. No one in the Lewis family had the heart, or the interest, to try to hang on for another rally without the enthusiastic support once lavished by the city on its producers.

Authors Cedric Chatterly and Alicia Rouverol would record a series of interviews with poultry worker Linda Lord, of Brooks, Maine, who worked for Penobscot Poultry during its final two decades. These were compiled into a book that reflects on a poultry worker’s perspective of the changes in the plants, and in Waldo County after the Schmaltzport debacle. Lord’s responses echo many of my own from the foreword of this paper, and confirms that when the city’s workforce had the community’s support, difficult jobs which many might believe were thankless or mind-numbing could yield their own rewards, including a respectable wage and a deep bond with the community. Two of her comments stand out to me, and for me:

Some of them (co-workers) couldn’t even hardly write their names or make out an application form. Then you had some people that were a family, they had completed their education, who were fairly smart. But it was fairly good wages and close to home and (so) they worked there.

I wasn’t really happy. When I first went to work there, my hands were awful sore. They would swell up. You’d go home and you’d soak them and try to get so that you could
move them.... But it was a job. It was a fairly good paying job for around this area at that time. So in some ways, I was content and not content. (Chatterley and Rouverol 21, emphasis added)

That last line became the title of the book. While it cannot sum up a century of reciprocity between a workforce and their city, which were as bound to each other as the members of any family, it does convey the resolve and resignation of workers, citizens and leaders who constantly searched their hearts over the question of “why stay?” Belfast had remained small enough and adaptable enough that if a person could change in place, right along with their city, those who chose to work created a community that could be content. Linda Lord’s “content” eloquently defines that common goal once and perhaps still shared by much of Belfast and its workforce. In a place that can be as difficult to make a living as Maine, content is a good place to be.

Conclusions

The ravages of the Great Depression and the shuttering of temporary war production plants after WWII left the waterfront manufacturing district of Belfast a shell of its former productivity. While the shoe factory, Mathews Brothers, and several of the clothing plants remained in production, and the sardine cannery still operated seasonally, the remaining empty factories were falling into ruin. Worse, lurking unseen, pollution was already severely damaging the fauna of Belfast’s harbor. The decline of those once-productive areas was so bad that its tidal flats would be downgraded by Maine authorities to Class-C, one level above raw sewage. Belfast already suffered the disdain of its coastal neighbors, even as their own environmental problems degraded their respective communities. While some types of public comments were taboo, like
family secrets, later competition for tourism and federal development dollars would allow the gloves to come off. Derogatory names, such as *the city with a bathtub ring*, were bandied about even outside of native-only conversations. Like most mud, those comments stuck tenaciously.

The stellar growth of the poultry industry in Belfast, as well as its growth in much of Maine after WWII, would bring much needed economic relief, becoming the state’s leading agribusiness. Belfast’s two poultry processors, Maplewood and Penobscot Poultry Companies, would claim nearly half of that production, contributing some $58 million dollars a year to the state’s economy at its peak. That extraordinary growth in production unfortunately corresponded to an equal increase in pollution discharged into Belfast’s harbor, crossing the tipping point for nature’s ability to clear the wastes. At the end of the 1960s, after very vocal objections and legal actions over the pollution, the city of Belfast and its two poultry companies each installed pollution control plants, but not before negative attention from national media outlets damaged the image of the city and its products. While the outward reputation of the city would recover rapidly, internally its identity remained traumatized, retaining that stigma in its collective memory even today.

Belfast as a community also had to come to terms with the fact that it was singled out for this negative national exposure even though it was geographically only the terminus for the cumulative waste of hundreds of operators in dozens of towns. Belfast had shared its rising prosperity with these communities, but with such a damaged reputation, had no resources or connections left to ease the economic crash shared by these communities when the industry came apart. The rapid rise and fall of the poultry industry in Maine closely mirrored the state’s classic boom-to-bust resource harvesting cycle. It is doubtful that growth could have been maintained even if the industry and the city had intervened with the bay’s pollution earlier, or had managed to avoid
the resultant negative publicity. The very industry practices Belfast’s factories had pioneered, along with the disease tolerance in poultry enabled by Maine researchers, created the open source solutions that allowed Del-Mar (Delaware and Maryland) competitors to beat Maine’s best agribusiness with its own successes.

Half a world away, the Arab Oil Embargo, in response to U.S. support of Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, drove energy prices high enough that Maine poultry producers, who had to heat their massive facilities during the state’s severe winters, could not compete with southern growers. That same colder weather had once made Maine an ideal environment for raising broiler chickens, because poultry diseases in hot, humid climates once decimated southern flocks. Maine, at least in the poultry business, had perfected itself right out of yet another industry, one ingenious Yankee innovation after another, and aided by yet another external conflict it was powerless to recover from.

Some legacies from this period remain as positive reminders. Those with a living memory of Belfast’s Broiler Festival will forever appreciate how its robust simplicity of enjoyment reflected well on the sense of place of the community that hosted it. How better to demonstrate that than with a parade, a midway, a young lady crowned Broiler Queen, and 17,000 guests fed half a barbecued chicken with all the trimmings for a dollar a plate? This was a city that was never ostentatious on its best day, and never needed to put on airs to have a good time or share its bounty. While pedestrian in its manners, the city was sophisticated in its ability to recover, repurpose, and offer the best that remained. After these last challenges of the industrial century had been weathered together, though, Belfast recognized that its identity as a manufacturing community had run its course, and it was time to reinvent and repurpose itself just as it had after the great fires. Belfast would, as a late-comer, follow its sister cities down the path of tourism
dependencies, and bet its future on manufacturing a new version of itself, which would compete for (their) visitors as well as any other product made by its skilled workforce. Only now, they were crafting experiences.
CHAPTER TEN
FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Many people who visit Belfast, Maine, and even significant numbers of the area’s newer residents, are unaware that this charming midcoast community was, for over a century, a city heavily oriented to industrial production and a culture of manufacturing. While largely absent from its current identity as a service center and tourism destination, that manufacturing culture was robustly sustained from approximately 1870 to 1970. Surviving heritage industries Mathews Brothers window and door factory, Penobscot-McCrumb (Penobscot Frozen Foods), and Ducktrap Industries (Seafood Specialties) remain to the present as solid financial contributors to the community, although the service and hospitality industries now dominate the city’s economy.

The historic ability of the Belfast community to overcome formidable challenges has roots extending even to its founder’s ancestors struggles enduring their collective exile as colonial planters in Ireland in the 1600s. Their ascension from refugees to pariah capitalist imprinted a cultural ethic of mutual support, self-rescue and collaborative problem solving that remained evident in their descendants’ community even into the 1970s. The legacy of those ancestors’ challenges as a refugee culture, transmitted through their descendants, encouraged compassion for later immigrants who endured similar experiences. The tolerance shown to foreign, American, and Maine-resident newcomers helped contribute to Belfast’s ready assimilation of those migrants who demonstrated they were committed to remaining in its permanent workforce. The moral imperative for that tolerance, especially for those newcomers in the workforce, was reflected regularly in reprints of popular local ministers’ sermons in a local weekly paper, The Republican Journal, and in their own private publications.
Belfast’s ancestors’ own rebuff by Massachusetts Puritans on their arrival in New England is credited by early historians Crosby, Parker and Williamson as motivating first their relocation to Nutfield (Londonderry), New Hampshire, and finally to their settlement of Belfast on the Maine frontier. That yearning to create their own separate community, and not be marooned again as unwelcome transients in a hostile society, also contributed to that acceptance of those later arrivals that purposely chose Belfast rather than accepting it by default. After Belfast transitioned to a manufacturing community, having occupational skills provided a ready medium of introduction and eventual assimilation for those newcomers. That settlement period of Belfast is also important to its later transition into a manufacturing culture, because the community first learned to rebuild after it was destroyed by the British during the American Revolution. The community then learned to endure isolation from its peer communities and parent state when it was occupied by British forces during the War of 1812.

That isolation and sense of abandonment helped to generate strong community self-confidence in its ability for self-rescue. That ability would be repeatedly tested and reinforced after devastating fires, collapses of keystone businesses, managing suffocating city debt, and abandonment by its most critical providers of shipping and passenger service. However, that capacity for self-rescue sometimes contributed to a less-than-complimentary smugness in Belfast’s self-promotion, support of industry and disdain for tourism during its manufacturing heyday. For peer communities which had resigned their own manufacturing in exchange for tourism’s rescuing incomes, even Belfast’s boastful motto the “Biggest Little City in Maine” likely earned the city at least some of its later industrial image blowback.

Regardless of any questions over its public humility, Belfast’s capacity for self-rescue is what enabled the city to rise up from a series of post-Civil War fires and transform a destroyed
commercial district into a compact powerhouse of manufacturing. While rightly mourned as severe tragedies, the great fires of 1865, 1873 and 1887, which destroyed the harbor, commercial and business districts respectively, were instrumental in forcing the city to abandon its geographically redundant commercial and shipping economy and its aging facilities. The reliability, economy, capacities and speed of steamships and railroads after 1865 rendered Belfast’s warehouses, docks and shipyards both redundant and obsolete for all but the most mundane and local of commodities. The fleet of coastal sailing vessels that called Belfast their homeport would continue to enjoy a place in Belfast’s economy well into the 1930s, but far less often a place at the top. A last notable exception was the construction of the 245-foot, five masted schooner *Jeanie Flood* Kreger during World War One. However, her construction was not a nod to the city’s longevity as a commercial port, but rather to Belfast’s capacity to retain a workforce with centuries-deep roots in their crafts, which showed little sign of atrophy.

If not for the wholesale economic restructuring of Belfast into a manufacturing community, efforts to sustain its importance in commerce, had that district been rebuilt, would have likely substantially failed, leaving the city a backwater of the Maine coast. Likewise, as the Belfast and Moosehead Railroad validated with its continued presence when the Boston Boats abandoned the city in 1934, rail service gave any community in Maine the commercial potential to equal Belfast, with or without their own harbor. The shipping of competing upriver, tidewater communities like Bangor had been immobilized between high tides for most of their history prior to rail service. After their connections to Maine’s rail network, they flourished as commerce centers, freed by national transportation access Belfast never dreamed of with ships.

While a crude euphemism, the great fires in Belfast were the urban renewal forces of that era, which forced its stodgy, patriarchal business leaders to run with the progressive practices of
the Victorian age. Before the fires, Belfast’s business district was a hodgepodge of dissimilar wooden buildings that lamented their temporary nature to their customers. After the fires, largely due to threats from the city’s insurers, the downtown boasted its permanency in multistoried brick with granite lintels, slate roofs, and Victorian adornments. A group of buildings on High Street is still known as the Phoenix Block. The original structures from 1824 were rebuilt after the 1887 fire, and pronounce the city’s willingness to rise up from its challenges and try again with whatever was needed to keep moving forward. This is an important concept to consider with Belfast’s manufacturing identity of that period. Like a mortgage on a family homestead, the city leaders who committed to those first factories in the Burnt District wrote a promissory note their grandchildren, and their grandchildren after them, would be encumbered to contribute to should they choose to remain in the city. In one parallel example of that almost casual acceptance, that debt of obligation never even saw a single penny paid on the principal of the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad for the first fifty years after its bonds were issued.

The repurposed “Burnt District” would have been unrecognizable, perhaps even unimaginable, to Belfast’s antebellum population. Similarly, today’s Bank of America and Athena Health Care service centers would have seemed alien and out of place to those who weathered the Great Depression in the city, struggling to make ends meet on their factory wages. While accustomed to, and even having depended on, incredible changes to keep their city vital and competitive, few from any generation of that century of manufacturing likely could have imagined Belfast’s waterfront vacant of factories humming their tunes of production. Belfast has, in fact, experienced so many cycles of rebuilding, repurposing and adapting to change that any prolonged lack of change might seem out of character. When Maplewood Poultry’s grain elevator was torn down on the city’s waterfront, and Penobscot Poultry’s factory site was repurposed into
a green space, those were seen as less of an ending, and more as Belfast shuffling its assets for a restart in a new economic gambit.

Belfast’s celebrated transition from a devastated commercial and shipping identity to a manufacturing powerhouse was largely made possible because of the production practices of its modest antebellum factories. Those synced well with the area’s historic participation in the put-out and Boston Systems piece-work jobbing contracts. Multiple generations of rural farm families readily supplied the occupationally-diverse employees which industry needed for growth and to offset the out-migration of young adults from the 1880s through the Great Depression. Belfast as a community exhibited complex co-dependencies both in retaining members of its workforce and in retaining the largest employer in the city—the shoe factory. Belfast touted its skilled workforce when recruiting operators for its businesses, but rarely supported those employees during labor disputes with those operators. However, leaders in the city, and the citizens at large, repeatedly participated in “all hands” resuscitations of those lost jobs once those operators cut ties with Belfast and its workforce. This rather manic cycle finally leveled out in 1948 when the citizens of Belfast voted overwhelmingly to construct a new, state of the art factory for Auburn Shoe Company, triggering the withdrawal of the aging shoe factory’s last patriarchal out-of-state operator, Daley Brothers.

The city’s business-first blind spot sometimes failed to recognize debt limitations inhibiting its progress-related goals. Missed vulnerabilities about over-reliance on its rail and steamship links to external markets compounded that blind spot. It would require the intervention of frustrated voters and taxpayers to force leadership changes that restored the city’s fiscal soundness. That soundness or credit worthiness was the lifeblood that financed Belfast’s leaders’ vigorous engagement in the “Industrial Welfare” of infrastructure projects, especially schools, cur-
riculum and teacher training. These quality of life incentives served to bolster worker retention, as well as attract new citizens to the community. Restoration of the city’s ability to borrow allowed for the construction of the New Crosby high school, and endowments by private benefactors helped replace several aging elementary schools. Even those financial interventions, though, failed to fully prepare the city for the coming Great Depression. However, the debt loads of the early 1920s had kept Belfast from financially overextending itself during the roaring twenties, as happened with many of the city’s competitor communities. That lean city-operating model kept Belfast on a healthier fiscal footing for weathering the depression than many wealthier cities.

While being fiscally sound did not necessarily equate to growth potential, Belfast’s Republican conservatism in its businesses meant that while the bottom fell out of the city’s economy during that depression, most of its workers were able to ride out the depression employed in some fashion. Those who could vocationally pivot and be content with a benign landing when the bottom fell out found lean times endurable in small-but-adaptable Belfast. While suffering over a decade of very lean times, especially as the city never really emerged from the post war-recession of 1919–1920, Belfast, like much of Maine, was still a more benign place to endure those hardships than America’s largest industrial cities. With a workforce composed largely of occupational pluralists with diverse skills and experiences, Belfast’s laid off workers had better options for finding work than their ultra-specialist metropolitan counterparts, and often without uprooting their families.

A darker incident of keeping the city’s manufacturing jobs during the Depression was a rather desperate self-promotion by the city as having inexpensive labor, with no union troubles. This implied precondition for attracting potential operators hampered pay increases and collective employee bargaining for years. Workers would have to press for better pay or working con-
ditions when production surges made them more critical, not just when they were more valuable. Wartime production periods through the manufacturing century amplified the value and importance of these diversified workers. From as early as the city’s post-Civil War fires, multiple recoveries were in part made possible by this adaptability. Exemplary application of retained skills like those used in the construction of the Jennie Flood Kreger later demonstrated their continued value even beyond the First World War. The city’s production for the Second World War’s needs—even after the flat production of the Depression—validated worker adaptability and utility through yet another generation. That workforce-specific repurposing would continue even as the city’s industrial gravity shifted from manufacturing to processing.

The niche market for poultry in Maine during the Great Depression grew steadily during WWII as an available supplement for rationed beef and pork. Consumption habits after the war remained high for poultry, especially as budget-conscious families migrated from the cities into new suburban communities seeking affordable single-family homes. When paired with the post-war G.I. Bills, which allowed returning veterans to obtain home loans and post-secondary educations, Farmers Home Administration (FHA) loans contributed to modernizing many of Waldo County’s farms into poultry-specific operations. Belfast’s poultry processors correctly assessed and capitalized on this growth market, building two modern poultry factories where the city’s workers would once again adapt their skills to lead the city’s agribusiness as the highest producers in the state. This industrial growth rapidly replaced many manufacturing jobs lost during the depression, and also contributed to the first significant population growth (by nearly 600) in the city in decades. That population increase was due in part to the growth of poultry processing jobs, but also to jobs at two additional new shoe factories, Belgrade (Waldo) Shoe Company, and
Truitt Brothers Shoe Company. Both the choice of new employers and the influx of new employees mutually enhanced each other’s needs, as well as the prospects for the city as a whole.

While that much manufacturing growth created a temporary worker shortage, it also expanded the options for the occupational pluralist in Belfast’s highly adaptive workforce. Those who had defaulted to whatever employment they could get during the depression, or were steered into during the production priorities of WWII, once again enjoyed choice in which of their skill sets they would employ, and also which employer suited them. The growth of Belfast’s poultry industry also translated directly across Waldo County as farms in its feeder communities supplied the production end of Maplewood and Penobscot Poultry Companies’ processing. This economic growth mushroomed directly into the $58 million network of business which also kept the Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad solvent, supported two grain elevators with their fleets of delivery trucks, two chick hatcheries, and a host of other support businesses from box manufacturers to fuel suppliers.

That growth also stimulated Belfast as a retail hub, including four modern supermarkets (A&P, Cottles, Sampson and First National), which supplied surrounding communities as well. With a new boom economy, Belfast constructed a new high school, a new hospital, and, my personal favorite, at the suggestion of a freshly attracted New Brunswick physician Norman Cobb, central Maine’s only curling facility. Unfortunately, all this increase in production translated into a massive increase in untreated waste disposal into Belfast Harbor and adjacent Penobscot Bay. Belfast gained the singular notoriety of having perhaps the most disgusting harbor on the Maine coast. That embarrassment was amplified by three factors. The first factor was that the crisis had erupted in barely twenty years without any real local concern or apology. The second was that the clamor had also embarrassed state and national politicians who had lauded the city’s new in-
dustry, and whose continued political success was now attached, for better or worse, to those “albatross factories.” And third, the resulting consumer backlash came to national attention just as Maine’s poultry brands began to dominate America’s northeast markets.

While a very different market in 1970 than today, Maine’s tourism industry at that time also represented a major, and perhaps more importantly, growing employment sector. At that time, just before the energy crisis and runaway inflation as Richard Nixon’s presidency collapsed, Maine was considered flush with industrial jobs, and a few of those being sacrificed for a sector with more future potential was not initially concerning. At that time Maine was just transitioning away from the last of its “summer colony” generations of visitors who owned Maine properties and enjoyed months-long vacations. Those summer residents had generations of experience negotiating, or more often avoiding, the nuanced battles of local business turf wars.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Maine was increasingly accommodating “windshield tourists” who made brief automobile excursions based more on enjoying Maine’s iconic scenery and food, rather than a restful, extended summer experience. Those were the consumers of many Maine-branded products advertised in the New York Times and Newsweek magazine, which carried articles about pollution in Penobscot Bay and Belfast Harbor, respectively. The first was a minor piece buried deep in the New York Times, which correctly spread the blame over many of the larger communities discharging into Penobscot Bay. A second article in Newsweek in March of 1972 lampooned Belfast as “Schmaltzport” for the layer of putrefied chicken waste which clung tenaciously to every surface in the harbor. What was likely more humiliating, and longer lasting as a stinging embarrassment, was the Maine-made derivation of the Schmaltzport comments. Detractors in Maine, especially from frank, pragmatic and painfully direct peer communities along the coast, snarkily referred to Belfast as the “city with a bathtub ring.” While the
comments were made specifically about the condition of the harbor, the innuendo was actively cultivated as a jab towards the city’s citizenry, and their sometimes smug and vocal preference for industrial growth over tourism. If ever there had been a case of municipal karma where the “chickens had come home to roost,” Belfast was its perch of offensive glory, and it seemed there would be no living down the curse.

This history has provided many examples that the community of Belfast is resilient and thoroughly capable of pushing past fires, economic depressions, and the sacrifices of multiple wars. Rebuilding seems almost an art form for the city, although letting go of industrial sense of place icons has been much harder. The loss of all Belfast’s poultry and shoe production in the generation after the Schmaltzport episode would not end with one of the city’s classic industrial rebounds. Belfast would instead lean into a service economy, which would eventfully attract credit giant MBNA and healthcare services leader Athena Healthcare Systems. Like most relationships, especially complicated ones that unite dissimilar identities, the newly shared landscape has to be purged of incompatible or obsolete items. Penobscot Frozen foods, now owned by McCrum Foods LLC of Canada, repurposed the empty Maplewood Poultry Facility. Neighboring Mathews Brothers Company, still healthy and profitable, similarly moved into the vacant Truitt Brothers Shoe building, even expanding the facility to increase production.

Their combined vacated properties, along with the abandoned Penobscot Poultry facility, were demolished and turned into a public waterfront green space and walking paths funded primarily through grants from the MBNA corporation. The green space was appreciated for its return to quiet restfulness after Penobscot’s noisy occupation of property that abutted, and perhaps overlapped, what had once been (west) Belfast’s primary cemetery until its graves were moved to newly dedicated Grove Cemetery. Even today, oral traditions insist that the dignified reloca-
tion was not quite completed. And so, Belfast moved forward with new partners, honored some with more dignity, and used its signature talent of repurposing industrial space to encourage the growth of stalwart partners and their strong existing recognition.

Penobscot McCrum Frozen Foods LLC (Photo by the author, August 26, 2021)

Postscript

Unfortunately those reliable partners sometimes are struck with all too familiar tragedies. On the morning of March 24th, 2022, as this thesis was being written, Penobscot McCrum Frozen Foods was destroyed by a fast moving fire. McCrum was the successor of Penobscot Frozen Foods, an earlier spin-off of Penobscot Poultry Company. The “frozen food locker,” as the original facility was called in my youth, had started with the sale of frozen, cut up chicken pieces, which were then packaged for the consumers who had until then only bought whole birds from their local grocer or butcher. The business branched into frozen vegetables, reclaiming that local sector from the long-shuttered Saco Valley Canning Company, and soon added its signature
product: frozen, pre-baked, flavored potatoes. That move also nudged that landscape towards a different kind of industrial acceptance. Rather than the rank odor of industrial slaughter, a smell like one might notice when driving past a fast food franchise wafted along the harbor.

That was just one more evolution of purpose, which redefined a heritage industrial site that had been under almost continuous use since the early 1900s. I believe that this type of continuity in industrial repurposing a site for over a century earns them a place as fixtures in Belfast’s sense of place. I believe it also sets a hopeful precedent, that an industry which also provides living wage paychecks can remain equal partners with tourism in a collaborative economy for Belfast, or any other Maine community. Erin Herbig, City Manager of Belfast, commented to WABI-TV news the day after the fire:

We’ve always been gritty…. We’ve been tough. We’ve been authentic. We’ve always turned ourselves around. So, I know in a situation like this, it’s going to be no different. I think something exciting and an opportunity will come of this....

Belfast will see this as an opportunity, and I don’t know what that looks like just yet. (Sullivan)

As I noted in this paper’s Foreword, I have a personal history with the Maplewood plant, as do two siblings, with a third employed several seasons at the Penobscot Poultry Plant. We were all shocked by the loss of the factory and its shared history, but far more wounded at the direct loss of 138 jobs, which will send ripples through the city’s entire economy.

Knowing something of the way things evolve after catastrophes in Belfast, and with its self-rescue capacities, I offered a friendly wager to my siblings that evening. I predicted that Belfast’s leaders would try to get the most mileage out of two perspectives in the city: one to rebuild the McCrum Plant or its equivalent, and the second that the premium waterfront property would
be redeveloped into the high-end condominiums that were once slated for the neighboring Stinson’s Cannery site, which was instead turned into the Front Street Shipyard. My nostalgia craves a genuine factory on the site to anchor Belfast’s manufacturing heritage in its historic setting. My pragmatic side suspects the city will offer a site in its industrial zone near its airport for free, or with tax incremental financing, so that the city, the employees, and McCrum can all benefit from their continued relationship. That would befit a legacy going all the way back to the 1865 fire, and would allow the city to promote a gentrified expectation which allows all the cultural bearers to receive something each values to showcase Belfast for the next century.

I hope this study of Belfast’s manufacturing history will help restore a sense of the skill, productivity and reciprocity of some five generations of citizens who defined the co-supportive behaviors that created an important Maine sense of place and community identity. For my part, as one of the culture bearers of that age, and also of a Maine increasingly dependent on a tourism and services sector supporting its economy, I know we have the ability, the intelligence, the courage, and the love of this place we call Maine, to do both better, together. While still a work in progress, Belfast is proof that Maine communities can respond to that challenge.
REFERENCES


Industries and Wealth of the Principal Points of Maine: Being Portland...Belfast...and Others New York, NY, American Publishing & Engraving Co., 1893.


Belfast, Maine. City of Belfast Mayor’s Address the Annual Reports of the Several Departments and the Receipts and Expenditures for the Municipal Year 1917-18. Belfast, Maine Town Documents, no. 1379, 1918. Accessed at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/towndocs/1379


Congregational Church (Belfast, Maine) Ladies Circle. Footnotes of Belfast History. Belfast, Maine, Congregational Church, 1913.


Landers, Neal H. *Present Location, Trends and Future of the Poultry Industry in Maine.* Augusta, Maine, Maine Development Commission, 1933.


Micka, Edward S. *The Competitive Position of the Maine Poultry Industry.* Life Sciences and Agriculture Experiment Station, University of Maine, 1976.

Miller, David W. *Searching for a New World: The Background and Baggage of Scots Irish Immigrants.* University of Tennessee Press, 2011.


*The Republican Journal* (Belfast, Maine), vol. 44, no. 21, November 27, 1873, p. 2.

*The Republican Journal* (Belfast, Maine), vol. 73, no. 35, August 29, 1901, p. 1.


*The Republican Journal* (Belfast, Maine), vol. 83, no. 20, May 18, 1911, p. 2.

“Schmaltzport U.S.A.” *Newsweek*, vol. 79, March 27, 1972, pp. 61, 63.


*Swan and Sibley Company Records, 1877-1910*. Raymond H. Fogler Library Special Collections, University of Maine, Orono, Maine.


Woman’s Relief Corps, Department of Maine. *Proceedings of the Fifty-seventh Annual Convention of the Department of Maine Woman’s Relief Corps, Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic*. Raymond H. Fogler Library Special Collections, University of Maine, Orono, 1941.
APPENDIX A

DECENNIAL CENSUS NUMBERS AND POPULATION CHANGES

FOR BELFAST, MAINE 1860–1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>5520</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>5278</td>
<td>-242</td>
<td>-4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>5294</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>5294</td>
<td>-11</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>4615</td>
<td>-679</td>
<td>-12.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>4618</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>5083</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>10.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4993</td>
<td>-90</td>
<td>-1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>5440</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>10.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>5960</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>6140</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5957</td>
<td>-183</td>
<td>-2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6243</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(U.S.) National Archives: Records of the Bureau of the Census.
## APPENDIX B

**1860 BASE OCCUPATIONS IN BELFAST, MAINE**

**BEFORE HEAVY INDUSTRIALIZATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Owns Real Estate</th>
<th>ORE % Peer Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambrotype</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axe Maker</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney/Counselor</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block Maker (Ships)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick-Layer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick-Mason</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Maker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain, Cutter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter, Dress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter, House</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter, Ship</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carriage-Maker</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carriage-Painter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashier, Bank</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casing Maker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clock-Trader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Owns Real Estate</td>
<td>ORE % Peer Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Driver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coat-Maker</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordwainer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Collector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress Maker</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>93.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric Maker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Gatherer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture Dealer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Miner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Smith</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harness Maker</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Trainer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostler</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Proprietor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House-Maker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Agent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Molder</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Peddler</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Owns Real Estate</td>
<td>ORE % Peer Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jailer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeweler</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joiner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlord</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>4 (2M, 2F)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livery Operator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumberman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Doctor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Maker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Contractor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marble Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason (General)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Mariner</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Ship Builder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat Market Man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(non-specific)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant, Meat</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant, Shoe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant, Tailor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midshipman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milliner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill-Man</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill-Man, Master</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Owns Real Estate</td>
<td>ORE % Peer Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millwright</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministeress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper-Hanger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper-Maker</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Manufacturer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peddler (GM)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peddler, Tin Plate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sail-Maker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saloon-Keeper</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saloon-Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sash and Blind Mfg.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5(M)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamstress</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>4(F)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship Builder</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship Builder, Master</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ships Captain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship Carver</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipwright</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoe-Maker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoe Manufacturer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Driver</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steamboat Agent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevedore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Cutter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyor, Coast</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyor, Land</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailoress</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher, Music, Art,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph Operator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin (Plate) Worker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Maker/ Edger</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck Man</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turpentine Dealer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelwright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool Dealer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool Puller</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from individual citizen record of the: 1860 Decennial Census; National Archives, Records of the Bureau of Census.

https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/029.html
APPENDIX C

AUGMENTED HISTORICAL MAPS

Belfast, Maine Burnt District, Fire of 1865

Note: Harbor (East) is oriented to the top.

(From Williamson, 1877; augmentation by the author, 2022)
Belfast, Maine Burnt District, Fire of 1873.

Note: Harbor (East) is oriented to the Top.

(From Williamson, 1877; augmentation by the author, 2022)
Belfast, Maine Labor and Wealth Concentrations in 1913.

(From Williamson, 1913; augmentation by the author, 2022)

**Color Key**

- Deep Green: Oldest Wealth
- Mid-Green: Ship Builders, Sea Captains
- Light Green: Business Owners & Professionals
- Purple: Working Class Single Family
- Light Blue: Primarily Tenements
- Dark Blue: Factory District
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Michael C. Munson was born in Belfast, Maine, into a family with a presence on the Gulf of Maine dating to the 1640s. He graduated from Mount View High School in Thorndike, Maine. He graduated from the University of Maine (Orono) with a Bachelor’s Degree in University Studies in December 2014. He was recognized by the University Professionals and Continuing Education Association-New England as their 2015 Outstanding Continuing Education Student Award recipient.

Michael holds four (Maine) professional licenses including a Master’s License in Oils 1 & 2 and an Unlimited License in Propane and Natural Gas; he was re-qualified under the provisions of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Transportation Security Administration in 2022. He has been employed in commercial, institutional and residential energy management, distribution, sales and service since 1988.

Michael is a member of the Alpha Sigma Lambda National Honor Society, and holds the office of Treasurer with the Beta Upsilon Sigma Chapter affiliated with the University of Maine. Michael is also a member of the Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society Chapter One, affiliated with the University of Maine. He is a candidate for a Master of Arts degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Maine in August 2022.