

## Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town*

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Buchans for the last 30 years," leads a rendition of "Solidarity Forever," one gets a sense that music has long enjoyed a central place in the social life of the community. Not surprisingly, these self-made industrial folk songs are made from the raw materials closest to the musical tastes of the people of Buchans, and as a result the album features a lively blend of traditional Newfoundland melodies and contemporary country and western music.

*The Songs of the Buchans Miners* adds to our understanding of Canadian workers in several ways. The case of Buchans seems to contradict the sociological image of the contemporary single-industry town as a place where unions are "seldom militant" and rarely "community-oriented," and where citizens experience "an overriding ambivalence and resignation." At least in the case of the early 1970s in Buchans, this generalization seems questionable.<sup>1</sup> The album also gives us some insight into the way in which original workers' folk songs continue to be produced. When the need arose in Buchans, talented local musicians came forward to give expression to the shared ideas and experiences of the working class community. Despite the powerful centralizing forces of commercial radio and recorded music, the people of Buchans have reminded us that "unofficial" or "popular" local cultural traditions are still very much alive. Breakwater Books are to be thanked for preserving and publishing this contribution to the tradition of industrial folk song in Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto 1971), 96, 140. It would be interesting to know whether Buchans was among the anonymous communities surveyed in this study. Readers may also be interested to know that in addition to the present album, a colourful portrait of the people and history of Buchans is available in the form of a slide-tape show prepared by Oxfam Newfoundland in 1975, *Buchans — Company Town* (Development Education Centre Films, Toronto).

Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-1884* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1978).

#### "An Epitaph for William Hutcheson"

ON 11 JUNE 1883 William Hutcheson was fatally shot in Troy, New York:

Rattle his bones,  
Over the stones,  
He's only a molder,  
Nobody owns.

Hutcheson was a 28 year old unionist, born and raised in Brockville, Ontario, and like many other late nineteenth-century "saw artists" he had tramped a good deal in his time. After learning his trade in Brockville, he spent part of his life in Troy, where he was respected and liked by other moulders. Prior to his killing, however, he had worked in Oshawa, and he had only been in Troy three short weeks, working at the Cooperative Stove Foundry. But Hutcheson had arrived at an inauspicious moment. For months a strike had raged at the Troy Malleable Iron Company. Part-owner and manager of the concern, William Sleicher, Jr., hired and armed non-union men, and confrontations were common. Hutcheson's death was merely the most tragic and dramatic of many such clashes. Two young non-union workers were out walking just a few blocks from the Malleable foundry when one of them was struck with a stone. They quickly turned and exchanged angry words with two unionists, one of whom was Hutcheson. As the verbal battle escalated, the "scabs" drew revolvers and began shooting. Hutcheson fell to the ground, a 32-calibre bullet puncturing both of his lungs and ripping apart large arteries upon impact. He lived for a brief six minutes, and died with his head in the lap of an unknown woman who had rushed to his side after the shooting. We will never know what William Hutcheson's last thoughts were, but it is possible that he cursed those men who had brought him to his sad end. If

Hutcheson could have lived to see his assailants and Sleicher come to trial only to be acquitted, he might have been more vehement in his denunciations. Much of this, to be sure, is speculation, and for information on the Hutcheson murder I have drawn, *not upon the book under review*, which has remarkably little to say about William Hutchinson (as it is spelled by Walkowitz), but upon the pages of the *Brockville Recorder*, a source probed with much diligence by Dale Chisamore.

William Hutcheson is worth looking at with some care, although he is perhaps unrepresentative of the settled community of skilled Irish workers that Walkowitz paints in his depiction of Troy. Dugald Campbell, an Irishman whom Walkowitz uses to introduce many of the themes of this book, a moulder turned innkeeper turned temperance advocate, who died in 1884, is perhaps a more fitting character to welcome us to the pages of this fine study. But Hutcheson was also important. He was one of those "men in motion" that we hear so much about in the current literature. And he lived, it seems, in those "island communities" which Robert Wiebe and certain University of Toronto historians have immortalized. All of this, some would suggest, means that any effort to talk of a sense of community in the nineteenth-century past, when mobility was so prominent, is doomed to obscure more than it reveals; talk of class, similarly, is suspect, for how could men constantly drifting from one city to another ever cultivate the collective experience and attachments necessary for the full realization of class and class consciousness? What we have is a depiction of nineteenth-century North America that stresses fragmentation and isolation, and denies cohesion; communities stand alone, if they exist at all, and class is simply an artificial category imposed on the diverse experiences of countless occupational groupings by romantic, intellectually sloppy, blatantly ideological historians.

The life, and particularly the death, of

William Hutcheson suggest something quite different. The "island communities" of the late nineteenth century were not all that isolated; no community was an island unto itself. In fact, archipelago is the more appropriate metaphor. We must see late nineteenth-century communities existing in an ocean in which currents, drifts, and streams flowed from one island to the next. Linking some of these islands — Oshawa, Brockville, and Troy — was the process of iron-making, and the men — moulders, heaters, puddlers, apprentices — who staffed the foundries that figured so prominently in the economies of these cities. Thus, when six members of Lodge No. 2 of the Iron Moulders' Union, Troy, accompanied Hutcheson's body on the trip back to Brockville, the dead man was not the only moulder returning to his home. Two members of the delegation, Bill Owens and R.J. Walker, were "old Brockville boys." Hutcheson had not been the only one to travel the familiar path from Brockville to Troy. Those historians who suggest that movement fragmented communities have yet to confront the possibility that a sense of community continued to exist because those leaving and arriving shared similar values, traditions, and beliefs. William Hutcheson's Brockville funeral underscores this process, and was described as "an imposing spectacle." It was followed by "one of the largest corteges ever seen in our town." Friends and spectators crowded outside of the house where the funeral service was held, and the procession to the grave was headed by the Iron Moulders' Union, the Knights of Labor, the Battalion Band, and deputations from various labour societies and unions. All of this for a moulder of less than 30 years who had left Brockville some time before, an unmarried man with few roots. There is something of community here, and something of class as well.

In fact, it is the intersection of class and community, a process best illuminated in Canada in the 1880s with the emergence of the Knights of Labor, that is so striking.

Indeed, Hutcheson's life and death indicate that he saw himself as a member of the working-class community. When he was shot, he had been in Troy less than 20 days. He had worked in Troy before, to be sure, but he had no wife, no children (that we know of), and nothing to anchor him there. When he appeared in May 1883 why did he not go to work for Sleicher, pocket some quick and easy money, and move on to greener pastures? That would have been the action of a man with no sense of community, with no class allegiance. But William Hutcheson was a *union* moulder. Nobody owned him, and nobody would. He took his stand with his fellow unionists, and worked in the Cooperative Foundry. He hounded scabs. And he paid for it with his life. That is a class action. When the Troy moulders' delegation attended his Brockville funeral they expressed open indignation at Hutcheson's foul murder, attacking the employer responsible, and they referred to the dead moulder as a "comrade." It is difficult to misinterpret the meaning of that.

This intersection of class and community is what *Worker City, Company Town* is about, establishing the confluence of these forces in Troy in the 1860s and 1870s, suggesting the beginnings of the conjunction in Cohoes in the early 1880s, and asserting the drift away from this blending in both cities by the mid-to-late 1880s. It is a book that impresses, entices, tantalizes, and annoys. What Walkowitz has done is explore the differences between Troy, a union town dominated by skilled Irishmen who worked in the city's iron industries as moulders, puddlers, heaters, rollers, mounters, and machinists, and Cohoes, a cotton mill town of unskilled French Canadian women and children, coloured by the paternalism of the Harmony Mills' management. Troy was a diversified industrial city, where the expanding iron industry was tailed by laundry and shirt-and-collar industries. Workers organized a strong trade union movement in the 1860s, and exercised considerable political and

economic power. With a specific work subculture and a unified ethnic community at their backs, the iron workers created a worker city, ready to support labour's economic, political, and industrial claims. There is not sufficient space to detail the complex aspects of this history, but Walkowitz demonstrates the impressive range of the ironworkers' power. They controlled the police force, for instance, until manufacturers moved to stifle that power by implementing reform measures that would sever the connection between the police and the people and establish law and order in the interests of entrepreneurs; union ironworkers launched a "reign of terror" in the mid-1870s, resisting employer efforts to wrest control of the iron industry from the hands of skilled workers, and impose a more rigorous discipline and efficiency at the workplace.

The struggle continued into the 1880s, and William Hutcheson's death reflected the continuity of the antagonism between Troy workers and manufacturers. In Cohoes, in contrast to Troy, workers' power was negligible. Unionization began in the 1860s, but it was sporadic and ineffective; it was stimulated as much by the skilled leadership of Troy's labour movement as it was by the Cohoes workers themselves. Predominantly unskilled and female, Cohoes workers lacked the male leadership cadre necessary to establish strong unions in this early period. The arrival of masses of French-Canadians in the 1870s exacerbated the organizational problems, and Cohoes mill hands could not draw upon the ethnic homogeneity, associational strength, and established power characteristic of Troy. Finally, technology, too, played a role. The cotton industry had been transformed in the 1840s and 1850s, mechanization undermining any craft skills that remained in textile work. Iron industries, however, remained relatively untouched by technological innovation until the late 1880s. Skill meant power in Troy; it simply did not exist in any meaningful sense in Cohoes. For all of

these reasons, then, militancy was woven into the very fabric of life in Troy, while it came relatively late to Cohoes, erupting in 1880, when cotton workers walked off the job after a fourth wage reduction had been announced. By this late date, the operatives' limits of tolerance had been reached, and the Cohoes working-class community had adapted sufficiently to challenge the paternal mill owners. This history of a worker city and a company town is thus an analysis of structural differences and how those differences were reflected in the timing and nature of class conflict or, in Walkowitz's term, worker protest. And underlying this protest was the complex way in which different workers in different situations adapted to their environment.

Walkowitz begins with chapters outlining the social and economic structure of the two towns. He presents statistical data on the respective working-class communities in 1860 and 1880, detailing the ethnic, occupational, and age structure of the Cohoes and Troy workforces. The book also presents the reader with a detailed discussion of the employers, their historical evolution, and their place in the towns of Troy and Cohoes. Enriching this structural analysis are case histories of particular families illustrating the general importance of ethnicity, mobility, occupation, and kinship. All of this is impressive. Moreover, it provides the foundation upon which future chapters, resting on more traditional sources (primarily newspapers), build. But despite the strengths of these chapters they sometimes frustrate, for there are moments of repetition and awkwardness, and the argument is sometimes convoluted. Walkowitz's effort to recreate one of the main strengths of John Foster's *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, the complex interaction of worker and employer, is ambitious (and deserves commendation) but unfulfilled. These chapters close by stressing the modest worker achievements of the 1860 to 1880 years, the availability of jobs, the reality of upward mobility of a limited

nature, and the realization of modest property holdings. Such working-class achievements facilitated the integration of the immigrant family and the community, in both Irish Troy and French-Canadian Cohoes. But at the same time as these achievements were promoting integration, industrial capitalist development — amalgamation and concentration — placed constraints on these achievements, and expanded the power of employers, who became nationally prominent while workers remained essentially local beings. It was in this context that Troy and Cohoes workers confronted their political and industrial problems, lived their daily lives, and organized resistance.

In the following chapters of the book, Walkowitz chronicles adaptation and organization, the early unionization of workers and their settling into communities, processes which laid the groundwork for protest. He then explores the manufacturers' efforts to secure control over the workplace, the community, and the workers' resistance throughout the 1870s and 1880s. There are stirring accounts of episodic clashes between workers and employers, and Walkowitz is consistent in his demand that discussion be city-specific, trade-specific, and industry-specific, constantly comparing the different experience of Troy and Cohoes. It is Walkowitz's precision that is most valuable, although the reader is occasionally drawn away from the specifics of Troy and Cohoes that he has come to regard so favourably by the author's reliance on British historical studies. When discussing poverty and technological change, for instance, the lack of American work moves Walkowitz towards Foster's *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, Benjamin Rowntree's classic 1901 English study of poverty, and unpublished work by Raphael Samuel. As an historian who has worked with local sources, and realizes their limitations, I can sympathize with Walkowitz's plight, but there are many in the discipline who will not.

Perhaps one of the most enticing sections

of the book deals with the associational tradition that Walkowitz asserts shaped workers' attitudes and behaviour. He looks to the Old World Irish resistance to the English and the landlord, benevolent and friendly societies, fire companies, Fenian groups, ethnic associations, baseball teams, and clubs as part of a matrix of institutional life central to the experience of Troy and Cohoes workers. But his evidence here is, as he admits, fragmentary and incomplete, and the hypothesis tentative. Part of the problem may well be that sources simply do not exist, but it may also be that Walkowitz has not probed the available material with sufficient care. City directories appear to be used only casually, and Walkowitz honestly admits that in the case of Troy his exploration of the daily newspapers centred on periods of confrontation. But the associational network which he describes would have extended beyond the episodic, and perhaps would have been more visible in the press in periods of relative passivity, when violent confrontation did not capture the front page of the press. Having worked extensively in nineteenth-century newspapers, and being in touch with others who have as well, it strikes me as odd that no names could be culled from the papers (of members of baseball teams or fire companies, for instance) and their occupations checked in directories. Walkowitz assures us that the friendly societies were led by non-working-class elements, and this may well be true, but again, we need some names and some occupations (at the very least) before we can accept this without question. All sources must be consulted, and there are no shortcuts in attempting to outline the cultural experience of a community's workers. From the fragments gleaned from mundane records of picnics, baseball games, parades, and other seemingly inconsequential events the historian may be able to present a clearer picture of working-class cultural life than we get in the tantalizing pages of *Worker City, Company Town*.

Walkowitz's conclusions, too, are

enticing, if problematic. After probing the process of worker protest in rich detail, explaining its timing and character by reference to his impressive statistical data, Walkowitz moves towards the termination of his study. Here, in the last chapters, one feels that the author has drifted away from the empirical strengths of his work on to a shaky theoretical terrain, informed more by presentist desires to explain the seeming acquiescence of twentieth-century labour than by adequate research. In the final pages we are presented with a picture of workers questing after the "good life" of the 1880s, of a worker city transformed by a rising Irish middle class, no longer tied to the working-class community (as it had been in the 1860s and 1870s), but dominated by professionals and entrepreneurs. This new middle class and its forceful presence in the Democratic Party, coupled with its increased involvement in the French-Canadian community, helped to shift ethnic alliances to an inter-class axis. Bourgeois cultural values began to exercise increasing sway in the labour movement, and helped to shape patterns of working-class protest. This process, in conjunction with the decline of both the cotton and iron industries in the mid-1880s (a decline Walkowitz notes was ironically pushed forward by the strength of local unions and the relatively high wages commanded), destroyed the worker city, and undermined the company town. Troy and Cohoes became industrial wastelands. That the two settings declined cannot be questioned, but the process that Walkowitz argues led to the emasculation of the working-class movement demands more substantive discussion. And it is at this point that this study annoys.

At the root of the questions raised by the conclusions of this work are the chronological confines of the study, the poles 1855 and 1884. All such periodization, of course, is arbitrary, but we must especially question this study for it stops at a critical moment. If one is to understand the transformation of the worker city and

the company town in the 1880s surely one must examine the history of the Knights of Labor. Walkowitz fails to do just this, and his assessment of the Knights is surprisingly superficial and simplistic. Cohoes cotton workers, as Walkowitz notes, joined the Knights of Labor after being defeated by their employers in an 1882 summer strike. Upon their affiliation with the Order, the operatives resolved, "That we do not consider it a defeat neither do we consider the question of capital and labor settled in Cohoes. We have shown this corporation that they under-estimated the strength and intelligence of their work people [and we shall]. . . join and unite in that grand phalanx of labor that is known as the Knights of Labor." For Cohoes cotton workers, the Knights of Labor represented the beginnings of a class stance. In Troy, however, where iron workers had stood for militant class action since the 1860s, the situation appeared to be different. Walkowitz suggests that the Knights of Labor and trade unionists remained divided throughout the 1880s, and implies that competing Troy labour organizations frustrated working-class solidarity. He bases this view, apparently, on two antiquarian histories of Troy, sources of some interest, but hardly definitive statements on labour's struggles. In hastily passing over the Knights of Labor this study raises irreconcilable contradictions, offers virtually no evidence, and misses a central moment in the history of the Troy and Cohoes working class. An organization that embraced many local workers, skilled and unskilled, united in approximately 30 local assemblies in 1886, and that published a newspaper, established a circulating library, held regular meetings, and supported political candidates cannot be ignored this easily. The range of obvious sources which Walkowitz could have consulted to partially fill this gap includes the voluminous Powderly correspondence, official publications of the Order, daily newspapers, and prominent reform journals such as *John Swinton's Paper* (New

York). But this material remains, for the most part, untapped. The conclusion that in Troy and Cohoes in the 1880s "class struggle filled the streets, but no one saw any classes there," might well be questionable in the light of Walkowitz's failure to explore this history of the Knights of Labor. In other communities, remarkably similar to Troy, the situation was just the opposite. His assertion that the class experience of Troy's ironworkers of the 1870s was replaced with occupational interest group identification may well be true, but it demands a more sustained inquiry. We will not know the conclusion to this book, in short, until we know more about the Troy and Cohoes Knights of Labor. I think that William Hutcheson, the woman who came to his side, and the Knights of Labor who followed him to his grave would have recognized this. It is unfortunate that *Worker City, Company Town*, in so many ways an important contribution to our understanding of late nineteenth-century workers, appears to try to avoid addressing what should be its final chapter.

It would be unfair to end on this critical note. Walkowitz's impressive and convincing effort to relate the timing and nature of class conflict to the structural character of the working-class community and the process of adaptation is pathbreaking, and I find little to quarrel with in the stimulating premises upon which the author constructs his argument. Unlike many quantitative historians, Walkowitz marshalls his statistics to tell us something of significance, and this is a major accomplishment. To challenge *Worker City, Company Town* is merely to suggest that this book raises questions of importance, a test, surely, of any serious and substantial piece of historical writing. William Hutcheson's final and full epitaph may not emerge in the pages of this book — the final sentence appears to be missing — but a much-needed beginning has been made, and for this social and working-class historians, and perhaps even Hutche-

son himself, can be grateful.

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Clyde Griffen and Sally Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers; The ordering of Opportunity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Poughkeepsie* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1978).

THE IMMEDIATE impact of the "new" social history on the study of social mobility was to debunk the myth of equal opportunity which had dominated American society throughout the nineteenth century. However, with the destruction of this strawman (and in the absence of any other social theory), the intellectual basis of the subject degenerated into a debate over what was a "just" rate of social mobility. Should a given rate of upward mobility be praised for demonstrating the incredible flexibility of American society, or should it be condemned for reflecting its rigidity? On these terms, the debate became sterile, totally removed from the historical context in which it should have taken place.

To remedy this situation, historians moved in two directions. One group took a step backward and placed mobility in the context of other social processes and institutions. Another group took a step forward, studying individual patterns of mobility. We might say that the former group wished to discover the meaning of social mobility for society, while the latter group attempted to discover its meaning for the individual. Until recently, the first path appeared to be the most promising, but with the publication of *Natives and Newcomers* by Clyde and Sally Griffen, the promise of the microscopic study of mobility has been demonstrated.

In their study of social mobility or what they call "paths of opportunity" in Poughkeepsie, New York between 1850 and 1900, the Griffens summarize over a decade of research on that city. As a result, the book shows a certain unevenness, rang-

ing from a treatment of aggregate rates of mobility that seems dated in 1978 to the most interesting and imaginative discussion of individual routes of mobility in the nineteenth century yet published.

In their selection of sources, the Griffens exhibit the same unevenness. Of course, they use the standard source for mobility studies — the federal census manuscripts for 1850-1880. Unfortunately, they ignored the New York state censuses for 1855, 1865, and 1875. The 1855 census, in particular, is one of the outstanding quantitative sources for the century, including data on the subject's length of residence in his town or city and the value of his dwelling.

To balance this omission, the Griffens make excellent use of city directories and the credit records of R.G. Dunn and Company. They benefitted from having an incredibly complete county directory for 1879 — which even listed the place of employment of factory operatives. Of more general interest, the Griffens are among the first investigators to use business directories to distinguish artisan/proprietors from journeymen. Not only is this important for the study of mobility, but it has immense implications for the study of class structure in North America.

From a methodological perspective, *Natives and Newcomers* clearly points in a nonaggregate, nonquantitative direction. As the Griffens write, their goal is "to identify the paths of mobility more precisely through microscopic examination of the opportunities of workers in specific occupations." Indeed there is something distinctly "old" in the method of these "new" social historians. Their triumph rests in an old historical tradition — contextual history. Through the inclusion of dozens of thumbnail sketches, they communicate an understanding of the texture and character of life in Poughkeepsie which renders any question of the city's "representativeness" irrelevant. Although the book includes the requisite number of tables, *Natives and Newcomers* makes few