

2014

## Saints, Sinners, and Socialists on the Southside: Polish Catholic Immigrant Workers, Politics, and Culture in Wheeling, West Virginia, 1890-1930

William Hal Gorby  
*West Virginia University*

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Saints, Sinners, and Socialists on the Southside: Polish Catholic Immigrant Workers,  
Politics, and Culture in Wheeling, West Virginia, 1890-1930

By William Hal Gorby

Thesis submitted to the  
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences  
at West Virginia University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctorate of Philosophy  
in  
History

Ken Fones-Wolf, Ph.D., Chair  
Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Ph.D.  
Robert Blobaum, Ph.D.  
James Siekmeier, Ph.D.  
Louis Martin, Ph.D.

Department of History

Morgantown, West Virginia  
2014

Keywords: Wheeling, Ohio County, Poles, working class, Catholicism, Wheeling Steel,  
St. Ladislaus Parish, Fr. Emil Musial, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia,  
Upper Ohio Valley, Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, World War I, Benwood

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## ABSTRACT

Saints, Sinners, and Socialists on the Southside: Polish Catholic Immigrant Workers, Politics, and Culture in Wheeling, West Virginia, 1890-1930

William Hal Gorby

In the years after the Civil War, Wheeling, West Virginia developed into a major manufacturing center in the Northern Panhandle. Until 1885, Wheeling was the state capital of West Virginia and was the center of cut nail production in America. The city already possessed a large population of Irish and German immigrants. However, with the decline of the nail industry and the transition to steel manufacturing in the Upper Ohio Valley, by the 1890's, Wheeling attracted many immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. These immigrants took their places at the bottom of the industrial hierarchy and were relegated to the most menial unskilled jobs in the steel mills, coal mines, tobacco works, and glass factories of the Wheeling District.

These "new immigrants," especially the Poles, left a world where it was becoming difficult to persist on the land. Poles began looking across the continent for higher wages. Making seasonal labor trips to the industrial core areas of Western Germany and the factories around growing cities like Warsaw and Lublin, Polish peasants also embarked more permanently to America. While settling in many of the United States' largest cities, a sizable number arrived in Wheeling. Here they lived in the heart of the city's factory district, and after 1900 also the center of the vice district. Often neglected and despised by city leaders and even the local labor movement, Poles were left to create their own life in Wheeling.

Arriving in Wheeling, Polish peasants had to form a self-sustaining ethnic community if they were going to survive. This was difficult since Polish immigrants were divided by ethnic and regional differences. By 1900, Wheeling's Polish immigrants began to form their community through the grass roots efforts of an active laity and their young priest Father Emil Musial. They built the parish of St. Ladislaus in the heart of South Wheeling. Ethnic community formation allowed for the creation of popular ethnic spaces, cultural events, and a strong Polish Catholic education. Through a mixture of religious piety and cultural nationalism, the community's parish, social halls, and homes allowed the Poles to develop a distinct identity, promoted a strong family economy, while still living amidst a mixture of other immigrant groups.

World War I and the subsequent decade were vital for the community. While supporting the American war effort offered proof of the Poles' own loyalty in the minds of the native born majority, the post-war strikes in the local steel industry led to much animosity and surveillance of the Polish community. However, the era witnessed the beginnings of the Poles working with other Catholic immigrant groups, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, and within the labor movement. However, the success of the Wheeling Steel Corporation in busting the steelworkers union forced Poles to look inward again at their community. This also came as fears grew about the relationship of the second generation to those who remained tied to the old parish and ethnic *Polonia* world. The community's response and the increasing inter-ethnic interactions helped provide the background for the union organizing drives of the 1930's.

## Acknowledgements

Growing up in the Upper Ohio Valley, attending the annual ethnic festivals, getting my undergraduate degree from Wheeling Jesuit University, working on historic preservation projects throughout the city, and just buying a Coleman's Fish sandwich in the historic Center Market House, Wheeling's unique history has always intrigued me. Choosing to complete a long term project on the city's diverse and colorful immigrant history has been a wonderful experience. Although I often joke with people that I am neither Polish nor raised Roman Catholic, my familial roots in the Upper Ohio Valley date back 200 years. The process of telling a story that examines the contributions of working class Americans is a work of love for me. Historical writing itself is always a collective enterprise, and while my name appears as the sole author of this dissertation, I have been blessed along the way through the work, assistance, and friendship of numerous people.

Since this project's inception, the professors at West Virginia University and Wheeling Jesuit University have provided helpful insights, criticisms, and inspiration in the historian's craft. During my undergraduate experience, Joseph Laker of Wheeling Jesuit University started me to seriously think about the importance of microhistory as a viable method of historical analysis. Thanks to him, I decided to pursue local history as a way to examine the larger themes of American history. At West Virginia University, I have been blessed by the kind assistance and directed criticism from many different professors, who have made my writing, teaching, and professional efforts better than I could have ever hoped. I would like to thank the professors in the History Department who have recommended important books or articles, made stylistic and argumentative suggestions, talked with me about teaching and advising, and engaged in great conversations: Katherine Aaslestad, Matt Vester, Josh Arthurs, Greg Good, Peter Carmichael, Tyler Boulware, Krystal Frazier, Jack Hammersmith, Joseph Hodge, Brian Luskey, and Kate Staples. I want to especially thank Melissa Bingmann and Jenny Boulware for talking with me about public history, letting me talk with their students, and even working on some local projects. I also wish to thank Matt Vester, James Siekmeier, and Charles MacKay, with whom I worked closely in advising our undergraduate students over the last few years. It has been a rewarding aspect of graduate school that I would highly recommend. Lastly, the two most kind-hearted people I have met in the History Department are our amazing secretaries Martha May and Becky Warnke. Their knowledge of how things actually work at the university has saved me on countless occasions. They have also been reassuring friends in times of crisis.

I especially want to thank the members of my dissertation committee. Robert Blobaum's knowledge and expertise in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Polish history was invaluable in providing a transnational perspective for this work. He has also gratefully helped refine my writing and forced me to dig deeper into research questions that I often did not consider. James Siekmeier has shown me how to always keep the big picture in mind as a social historian. Immigration fits within the bigger changes in the international system, and he has been a helpful guide in seeing how American foreign relations have always been crucial to the immigrant experience. Lou Martin has been more than an academic mentor; he has been a true friend. When I first arrived at WVU, Lou was finishing his Ph.D. on the working class history of Hancock County, West Virginia. He took a young Masters student under his wing, and has always been a helpful resource in navigating problems. We have had numerous dialogues about how to write working

class history, traded sources, had a fun time riding to and from the Appalachian Studies Association meeting in Boone, NC, and bowling at Sycamore Lanes in Morgantown. Elizabeth Fones-Wolf has been a reassuring and consistently helpful guide through my years at WVU. She has more than anyone else helped me become a more mature historian and person by aiding in all my academic and non-academic concerns, which have come up since arriving in Morgantown. I am forever in her debt. Finally, since my arrival at West Virginia University in 2007, Ken Fones-Wolf has always taken the time to lead me along this maze that is graduate school. Words cannot express my gratitude to him for always being a helpful sounding board. He has always listened to my concerns, answered my research questions, and helped show me how to form my arguments in a more orderly fashion. He has always encouraged my research interests even when I doubted whether I was on the right track. I am truly grateful for his constant encouragement.

Throughout the course of this project, I have worked with and am indebted to a vast array of librarians and archivists. My home for the last seven years to write and research has been the amazing West Virginia and Regional History Collection at WVU. I have been aided countless times by the knowledgeable archivists at the collection. I have always enjoyed our discussions and shared love of West Virginia's history. I want to thank Christy Venham, Kevin Fredette, Catherine Rakowski, Michael Ridderbusch, Anna Schein, Stewart Plein, Harold Forbes, and curator John Cuthbert for making the collection a crown jewel of the university. At the Ohio County Public Library in Wheeling, Sean Duffy has always been a great collaborator on all things Wheeling, as well as an amazing writer and historian in his own right. I also want to thank the large staff of the library, which has assisted me cordially when I always seemingly run out of paper at the microfilm readers. Also I want to thank the archivists at the Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, especially Ryan Rutkowski and Jon Erik-Gilot for helping me weave through the collections, even while the archives' location moved several times. I want to thank Jon for always helping me find new treasures and photographs for both research and presentation purposes. In addition, I want to thank the staffs at the Ohio County Courthouse, the West Virginia State Archives in Charleston, and the Historical and Labor Archives at Penn State University for their assistance over the years.

I have also benefitted from friendships with other historians who have read my work, provided feedback at academic conferences, and who have allowed me to help them with their own research projects. Jim Green, one of the nation's preeminent labor historians, has been a constant friend and inspiration. Early in graduate school, I was asked to help Jim with his upcoming book on the West Virginia Mine Wars. We have spent many happy hours discussing the story, and tried to locate photographs and other original sources. I will always remember our drive along the route of the miner's march in 1921 through rural Kanawha, Boone, and Logan Counties. Also Appalachian historians Ronald Lewis, John Hennen, and Dwight Billings have provided helpful feedback on my work. John has been great as a convener for several academic panels I asked him to participate in over the years as well. All are inspirations of how scholarship on the Appalachian region is needed today more than ever.

While at WVU, I am blessed to have had the support of a great group of graduate students who were always happy to discuss and assist each other with academic concerns. My time spent talking and laughing in the graduate student office in G-13 and at social functions has

been unforgettable. Throughout my seven years in Morgantown, I have relished meeting so many new and amazing people. Several have been of great help in good times and when I doubted my abilities or the success of the project. Allison Fredette, Krista McCart, Shannon Tinnell, Ginny Young, Jinny Turman, and Jay Smith made my initial arrival at Morgantown happier than expected. Ginny Young and Jinny Turman are amazing scholars and kindred spirits in our shared love of the Appalachian region. All continue to serve as great colleagues and friends no matter where they may be in the country. During my graduate studies, many classmates and fellow teachers shared ideas and generally good times. I helped Godriver Odhiambo with some computer issues related to her own dissertation, years before I ever started my own. Fellow doctoral students Billy Feeney, David Goldberg, and Joel Christenson served as exemplar role models for being a good teacher and scholar. Nilanjana Paul and I have always had a great time discussing cultural and religious questions. Blake Perkins and I shared many academic interests, leading to helpful conversations on research. Adam Zucconi will be an excellent scholar of the Civil War, and hopefully will look more into West Virginia's past, thanks to some prodding from me. Throughout my time at Morgantown, Jake Ivey has been one of my closest friends. Even though we study two different continents, he is a wonderful teacher, friend, and fellow football enthusiast. I have also met some great graduate students as I was finishing my doctorate, including: Lacey Bonar, Chuck Welsko, and Henry Himes. In particular, Henry has been a good sport sharing an office space during the time I was finishing the dissertation. He has answered numerous random questions about working class history and life, even while we both were trying to grade student papers. All have helped make my time in Morgantown memorable.

In my life, I have been privileged to have an amazing group of friends. While I cannot ever name and thank all of you over my 30 years of life, all of you have touched my life and career in ways you cannot even imagine. From my earliest years, Susie and Mike Baker, and their three boys, Michael, Matthew, and Marc, have been a second family to me. I am proud to still be close friends with them and of all the great work they do for the youth in Marshall County. During the summer of 2012, I received a WVU Graduate Education Fellowship to work on a guided walking tour of South Wheeling's Industrial History. During my time then and since, I developed close friendships with the team at the Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation. Executive Director Jeremy Morris, Chris Villamagna, and especially Bekah Karelis are constant supporters. They took time away from their busy schedules to take me along with them to learn about historic preservation efforts throughout the city. I can say that I learned more from them than they did from me. They are a happy-go-lucky group of preservationists and are crucial to the reinvigoration occurring throughout Wheeling. I have also been blessed to work with the South Wheeling Preservation Alliance. Ginger Kabala and Fr. John Byrd have been great friends. They have let me speak at their monthly meetings and aided my efforts in writing a walking tour guide for South Wheeling. Their efforts have helped redirect attention to that part of the city that "made" Wheeling historically significant. Margaret Brennan, Wheeling historian extraordinaire, has been a great friend over the years. She has always encouraged my efforts to recreate the working class history of the area and help disseminate it to the broader public. Finally, my friends in Wheeling help make me a better human being. They have listened to my research, helped me in difficult times, helped me laugh at myself, and led me on some interesting adventures at times. I have been thankful to be a part of the cultural renaissance in Wheeling over the last few years. As my friends would say, even though I do not live in

Wheeling, my heart will always be there. Special thanks in particular to Andrew Croft, Patricia Croft, and Jocelyn Carlson (the Rhodes Island art-loving, community-gardening triumvirate), Jenna Derrico and Phil, Liz Paulhus, Marcie Panutsos-Rovan, Ryan Norman, Lydia Bugaj, Eddie and Brittany Peters, Chris Rouhier, and Beth Collins.

Early on in this project, I realized that I would need to talk with former members of St. Ladislaus parish. While I thought this would be quite difficult, I was happy to have assistance from members of my own family and the Moundsville community. I would like to thank Billie Louise Gorby for her help in introducing me to former parish members. I want to thank John Mysliwiec for his help in translating a Polish anniversary book from 1926. I would also like to thank those community members of South Wheeling who agreed to talk with me, especially Herman Werfele, Ed Gorczyca, Mary Martinkosky, and Blanche Resczynski.

Finally, I would like to thank those four people, to whom my mere words here can never express my gratitude. I would like to thank my grandmothers, Doris Ballauri and Mildred Anderson, whose working class experiences and hard lives during the Depression years have always been an inspiration. Both have encouraged and helped me out in hard times. I am thankful that both are still in good health. My father, Bill Gorby, told me once that history had been his least favorite subject. However, he always tells people that he knows more about history and loves to learn new things thanks to his son. Dad has always told me to be proud of writing a history of ordinary people. As a glass worker at Fostoria, his working class experience and view of the benefits of community, family, and God fill the pages of this dissertation. For my mother Sherry Gorby, I am forever thankful. Since I was a young boy, she has instilled in me a love of history and social justice. She has also been my greatest proof reader, best critic, and best cheerleader. She has helped me schedule research trips, hotels, and kept me straight as I have become ever more absent-minded throughout graduate school. Her life continues to be an inspiration to me.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

Tadeusz Janeczko was born in the village of Grebowie in the Russian Empire on December 12, 1880. In 1906, he married Maryanna Gonsior, the daughter of a wealthy family in Gościeradów. The following year, he emigrated through the port of Antwerp, arriving at Ellis Island on March 15, 1907. Two years later, his wife and daughter Helen joined him. By 1910, the family had relocated to Wheeling, West Virginia, where Janeczko found work at the Benwood tube works in the lap pipe finishing department. The family, which came to include eleven children, lived at 2619 Locust Street near the heart of the factory district. The house was modest with front and middle rooms, a long kitchen area, three bedrooms upstairs, and a dirt basement where the family stored coal to heat the furnace. By 1930 it was valued at \$4,000. Thaddeus, whom his grandson later recalled “was always building or fixing something” about the house, instilled in his children a strong work ethic. Several of his daughters worked at the Warwick China Company in their teenage years stamping decals on finished ware. Another worked for the Wheeling Tile Company, while his son Edward worked at Wheeling Machine Products. The family did their grocery shopping almost daily at Visnic’s Grocery Store, owned by a Serbian family, on 26<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets. For the Janeczko’s children and grandchildren, the streets nearby served as a place of pickup games and general socializing for years among a mixed community of Germans, Italians, Greeks, Serbs, Lebanese, and African-Americans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Sean Duffy for his excellent work at conducting oral interviews with a variety of people of different ethnic backgrounds in Wheeling. For the Janeczkos, see Sean Duffy, *The Wheeling Family, Volume 2: More Immigrants, Migrants, and Neighborhoods* (Wheeling: Wheeling History, 2012), 207-17; Mike Janetsky, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0016, Roll: 2550, Page 11A, RG 29-Records of the Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C., reprinted via Ancestry.com.

While the Janeczko family lived closer to Downtown Wheeling, the family attended Catholic mass at St. Ladislaus Church at 45<sup>th</sup> and Eoff Streets. Ethnic celebrations and religious sacraments were important events. In 1922, Edward and Stella Janeczko were part of the confirmation class, while sister Martha was part of one of the largest confirmation classes in May 1928 of 249 Polish-American children.<sup>2</sup> Marriages were also grand events at St. Ladislaus. Helen Janeczko married Matthew Borgacz on August 27, 1927, and her sister Martha married Henry Baranowski on June 11, 1938.<sup>3</sup> For the majority of Poles living in this wider Polish community, they would have agreed with the fictional hero of Wheeling novelist Keith Maillard, who said of his South Wheeling childhood community: “We just called it Polish Town, but the old folks called it *Stanisławowo*, you know after the church, and they got that right because St. Stanislaus was pretty much the center of everything.”<sup>4</sup> The description conjures up much of the ethnic solidarity that Polish South Wheeling experienced on a daily basis in the early Twentieth century. Ed Gorczyka recalled how from 40<sup>th</sup> Street south to Benwood there were over fifty small businesses that catered to the specific needs of the ethnic Poles of the area.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, these Polish immigrants shared their urban space with a multi-ethnic working class. Here, they saw the birthplace of the state’s Socialist movement and in the 1930’s the center of the Congress of Industrial Organization’s industrial union drive.

Historians have a difficult time grappling with the mixing of cultures that shaped South Wheeling, which alternated between sacred and secular, insular and inclusive, conservative and progressive. Often, these contradictions are used to explain the failure of Leftist politics or the

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<sup>2</sup> St. Ladislaus Church Confirmation Book, 1922, 1928, St. Ladislaus Parish Sacramental Records, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (hereafter DWC); Duffy, *The Wheeling Family, Volume 2*, 208.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Borgacz and Helen Janeczko Marriage Certificate, August 16, 1927; Henry S. Baranowski and Martha A. Janeczko, Marriage License, May 19, 1938, both from Ohio County, West Virginia, West Virginia State Division of Vital Statistics, West Virginia State Archives and History Center, Charleston, West Virginia (hereafter WVSA).

<sup>4</sup> Keith Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Oral Interview with Ed Gorczyka by the author, August 6, 2008.

ethnic and religious fragmentation that limited working-class solidarity in supporting unionization drives. For most studies of the urban, ethnic working class, the parish and the union hall are on opposite sides of a great chasm that constrained the options of those who toiled in the city's factories and sweatshops.<sup>6</sup> The reality was more complex. Wheeling's immigrant workers both paraded their ethnic Catholicism and joined multi-ethnic strikes and picket lines; participated in devotional groups and attended Socialist rallies; contributed to parish charities and demanded public assistance. Some individuals did all these things. This dissertation seeks to find commonalities to tie together such disparate and even contradictory actions. What really motivated these different immigrant working-class men and women? How can we address the moments of solidarity but also the many instances of fragmentation?

Scholars have covered many aspects of labor organizing and ethnic community life during this time. However, the one common flaw in most of the literature remains the treatment of immigrant working-class religion. When discussed, religion is often a negligible part of the narrative or, worse, is used to solely explain working-class fragmentation. To understand the total lived experiences of Wheeling's industrial workers, this dissertation proposes to make broader connections across time to reevaluate ethnic Catholic social life, working-class organization, and the Americanization process. While studies of large metropolitan centers are common, I argue that this process is much more vital for the medium-sized industrial centers like Wheeling. The city had multiple ethnic groups, large-scale mass production (steel), and several

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, Richard Jules Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

medium-sized forms of production (tobacco, canning, tile works, meat packing, tobacco, glass, and brewing), all of the variables available in a large city but on a manageable scale.

This dissertation is a case study of the Polish immigrants who settled in Wheeling. While living in the industrial core of the city, Poles branched out and interacted with other immigrant neighborhoods throughout Wheeling, Ohio County, and the Upper Ohio River Valley. Poles and their immigrant neighbors did not compartmentalize their ethnic, religious, or class feelings. Core values of cooperation, equality, and mutual assistance were vital.<sup>7</sup> Still the question remained: which way would these working-class ethnic communities go? Would they follow their Catholic and ethnic traditions promoted by parish leaders, the class consciousness promoted by the socialists prior to World War I, or would they reach out to the corporate, Americanized culture promoted by the native-born majority? In many respects, they chose a little from all three, often balancing a left-leaning view of a moral economic order, with a conservative love of their Polish heritage and Catholic religion, but all the while like their immigrant neighbors enticed by the mass consumer marketplace.

This analysis of Wheeling's Polish and other Eastern European members of Wheeling's working class offers many necessary contributions. First, this study advances and complicates the scholarship on working class Catholicism by balancing the tensions between the sacred and the secular in finding solutions to the problems of urban industrial life. Second, this dissertation provides a better grasp of the role of "ethnic culture" more broadly in issues of unionization and class consciousness. This is especially vital to understand the role ethnicity has played in the labor movement in smaller cities. This lends itself to a final contribution to Appalachian

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<sup>7</sup> The "subculture of opposition" is important to debates about class formation; Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 60-7; James R. Barrett, "Unity and Fragmentation: Class, Race, and Ethnicity on Chicago's South Side, 1900-1922," *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1984): 37-55.

historiography by focusing on a Catholic urban area in an overwhelmingly rural Protestant region.

Unlike previous urban studies, Wheeling offers some differing perspectives. Much of the social history of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century focuses almost entirely on major metropolitan centers. Studies of Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and New York provide fascinating case studies of working class politics and culture. However, these earlier studies, imbued by a Marxist social historical emphasis, treated industrialization and urbanization as uniform social processes. They downplayed factors distinct to each place, such as “the cultural values of particular groups living in a city, the economic character of specific communities, or the distinctive political cultures of localities.”<sup>8</sup> However, most people did not live in cities over several hundred thousand people. This study seeks to contribute to a growing urban history that stresses the peculiarities of place and cities of varying sizes. Only by taking city geography seriously can historians understand how local factors assisted or constrained class formation. By 1900, “working class communities” were by definition very diverse. They included tent colonies in western mines, small isolated company towns in rural Appalachia, and smaller manufacturing cities like Wheeling.<sup>9</sup> While there has been abundant scholarship on the first two types of communities, smaller cities have received more limited coverage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Connolly, “Bringing the City Back In: Space and Place in the Urban History of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 3 (July 2002): 262, 270-1.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Joe Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Lou Martin, “Working for Independence: The Failure of New Deal Politics in a Rural Industrial Place,” (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 2008); Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Most of the literature on West Virginia and Appalachia still focuses on coal mining company towns. See especially, Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002); for an examination of place and class in newer and expanding urban areas of Appalachia, see Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930’s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

Wheeling's history made it a unique urban locale, thus contributing to its distinctive social stratification and working class culture. In 1993, Appalachian historian Ronald Lewis called for historians to do more work on understanding West Virginia's industrial transformation and creation of a "rural-industrial culture."<sup>11</sup> Industrialization never occurred quite the same way based on differences in geography, access to raw materials and transportation networks, and the racial and ethnic makeup of the area's potential workforce. The Northern Panhandle and Upper Ohio River Valley is just such a place. Louis Martin in his study of steel and pottery workers in Hancock County, West Virginia examined the creation of this rural-industrial working class culture during the Twentieth Century in the small factory towns of Chester, Newell, and Weirton.<sup>12</sup> In Hancock County, he found that workers, including native-born residents and European and African-American migrants, developed a culture that stressed local control over unions and government, a fear of distant government and union bureaucracies, a strong attachment to place, and a culture of "making do" to provide self-help activities (such as canning, gardens, and hunting).<sup>13</sup> Since Hancock County had no industry prior to 1900, its late entry into industrial work set workers on a different post-World War II path in their view of the Democratic New Deal coalition and the CIO industrial unions. Martin has since called for scholars to do more "objective social histories of Appalachians, elucidating what is distinctive about the culture of the region and observing how it has changed over time."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ronald L. Lewis, "Appalachian Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Coal, Culture and Social Change in West Virginia," *Urban Studies* 30 (1993): 299, 301.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Martin, "Working for Independence," 8-9; Martin, "The Promise of Examining Rural-Industrial Culture in the Study of Twentieth-Century Appalachian History," paper presented at the Society of Appalachian Historians Conference, May 2012, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Martin's work builds off a recent trend to examine the rural roots and self-help activities that aided in the rise of working class conservatism; see in particular Melissa Walker's *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Martin, "The Promise of Examining Rural-Industrial Culture," 2.



Ever since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, politicians, settlers, and early industrialists looked to Wheeling as a transportation hub on the Ohio River for the early commerce moving west, as well as early innovations in iron, glass, tobacco, and brewing production. Transportation improvements funded by the federal government and outside capital led to the building of the National Road, the Wheeling Suspension Bridge, and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. By the time of the Civil War, Wheeling was already a thriving industrial center with the most diverse immigrant population in Virginia, later West Virginia. Once the war was over, the region's industries continued to expand south and north along the Ohio River and east along the original National Road, but topography placed limits on that growth. From 1850 to 1880, Wheeling went through a population boom from 11,435 to 30,737 as it became the center of cut nail production and the capital of West Virginia. After 1885, the city lost the state capital and the cut nail industry fell into decline; however, the city's investment capital and manufacturing infrastructure enabled businesses to diversify and adapt, making Wheeling and the surrounding region leaders in steel production. Around the turn of the Twentieth Century, the city attracted a wide array of Southern and Eastern European immigrants to labor in the factories, mines, and other industrial plants. This helped make Wheeling the center of the state's Catholic population. In addition, its long industrial history made it the center of the state's oldest central labor council. Thus, by 1900 Wheeling was a modest-sized urban hub of manufacturing and transportation industries surrounded by a rural-industrial countryside.<sup>15</sup>

This dissertation makes an original contribution by looking at a Polish immigrant community in a smaller city. Those living in smaller cities and towns had a more complicated relationship with other immigrant groups and the native-born majority. Wheeling is a prime

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<sup>15</sup> David Javersak, "Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, 1882-1915," (Ph.D. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 1977); George Fetherling, *Wheeling: A Brief History* (Wheeling: Polyhedron Learning Media, 2008).

location for study. It had a sizable Polish community, both in terms of population and its cultural significance on the region. Also, an analysis of the Poles in Wheeling raises questions about the nature of relationships to the “native-born.” The majority of Wheeling’s population was of German descent. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of its social institutions conducted business in German. Travelers often noted that Wheeling was a German town. Having arrived in Wheeling since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the descendants of these German immigrants created a “native-born” population with a distinctively German culture.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, a study of Wheeling’s Poles suggests their importance to the local labor movement in the Progressive Era. While historians note that Poles came with little industrial experience to America, more recent work suggests that Polish immigrants already possessed industrial skills from prior seasonal migrations in Europe. In addition, with many of Wheeling’s Poles arriving from Russian (Congress) Poland’s mining and iron-making regions, most came with a background in trade union culture and even the socialist parties that existed in industrial centers such as Łódź and Warsaw. By the 1890’s, the democratization of Polish political life incorporated many peasant farmers and industrial workers. In Congress Poland, the efforts of the socialists in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century helped sponsor the formation of trade unions (which had once been outlawed) into mass membership organizations. Even in Galicia, the socialist party attracted early support among the craftsmen in places like Lwów and Kraków. This prior political culture helps explain why Wheeling’s Poles were so active in their support for unionism in the Ohio Valley.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> For the role of unionism in Prussian Poland, see Brian McCook, *The Borders of Integration: Polish Migrants in Germany and the United States, 1870-1924* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), especially ch. 3-4; for Polish political culture and trade union and socialist movements, see Robert E. Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904-1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Blobaum, “The Rise of Political Parties, 1890-1914,” in *The*

It was the city's large Catholic population that makes it attractive as a site to explore its importance in the literature on the ethnic working class. The role of religion has largely remained a "side note" in describing working class experiences. For most labor historians, the Catholic faith often appears as an amorphous and often contradictory belief system. Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore highlighted this confusion for social historians, asserting that "these men and women could be deeply Catholic, active, even militant, trade unionists, and reject much of secular, liberal thought, while they simultaneously supported core economic aspects."<sup>18</sup> Catholic history gives many insights into an aspect of people's lives where social and political issues are often discussed in a religious context. The philosophical teachings of Catholic social justice apply directly to addressing the social wrongs suffered by an oppressed people under industrial capitalism. Although this religious philosophy countered more radical socialism, Catholicism provided people with the means to live a moral life. More importantly, Catholic history helps historians understand many of the traits of community life. What made a community? How does a religious notion of "place" and "parish" assist in the economic development and class diversification of an ethnic enclave?

Most crucial to this Catholic notion of place was the immigrant Catholic parish. These sites of popular lived religion and cultural life remain largely outside the terrain of labor historians despite Leslie Tentler's call for more balanced attention, since ethnic "Catholic parishes were often founded on the initiative of lay people." She criticizes historians who argue that only after ethnic workers detached themselves from their immigrant cultures and backward, priest-ridden Catholicism were they able to move away from being "doomed to passivity and a

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*Origins of Modern Polish Democracy*, edited by M.B.B. Biskupski, James S. Pula, and Piotr J. Wrobel (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 61-65, 74-76.

<sup>18</sup> Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (Fall 2008): 11.

truncated consciousness.”<sup>19</sup> Almost twenty years later, many of the same problems of incorporating Catholic religion into working class history persist. Joseph McCartin notes the broader problem as “labor historians’ tendency to privilege instances of conflict, resistance, and working-class organization over the more mundane.” For McCartin this does a huge injustice to working people: “Workers’ religious identities are as real during moments of conflict as they are during periods of accommodation, but the role of their churches and religious practices is perhaps more visible and central in the latter instances, the very periods that our ‘committed’ approach encourages us to see as of secondary importance.”<sup>20</sup>

Acknowledging these recent critiques, this dissertation expands on several trends in Catholic working class history. First, the use of Catholic religious practice demonstrates how workers took their Catholicism seriously. Historians have synthesized labor, political, and Catholic social history to better understand early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban America. This dissertation follows this trend, best seen in Kenneth Heineman’s investigation of the “Catholic New Deal” led by religiously motivated labor priests, Catholic politicians, and Catholic labor organizers.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, this dissertation brings the role of the parish to the center of immigrant history. Mary Wingerd stresses this need since “faith played a powerful role in shaping the identity and daily life of most folks who people social history.”<sup>22</sup> To understand the broader

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<sup>19</sup> Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* (2003): 82, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph A. McCartin, “Estranged Allies on the Margins: On the Ambivalent Response of Labor Historians to Catholic History,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* (2003): 119. Tentler argues that the church’s response to the most pressing needs of its members “are no less important, and no less formidable, than the creation of a class-based opposition to capitalist exploitation. For a good many workers in the United States, the creation of an ethnic identity and the institutions of which that identity was both symbol and product was probably a necessary antecedent to the development of class consciousness.” Also see, James P. McCartin and Joseph A. McCartin, “Working-Class Catholicism: A Call for New Investigations, Dialogue, and Reappraisal,” *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 99-110.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 6.

worldview of Eastern European immigrants, social historians must bring the Catholic parish back into the narrative. In her path-breaking book *Ballots and Bibles*, Evelyn Sterne argues that parishes were the “central institution in the city’s working-class neighborhoods,” and were necessary for workers to “secure their rights and, in the process, to reshape ideas about citizenship and Americanism.” In broader terms, the Catholic Church in Providence, much as it did in Wheeling, “functioned in a Habermasian sense as a ‘mediator between society and state,’ an arena in which information was exchanged and public opinion developed.”<sup>23</sup> With the church as a public square, parish and diocesan lay organizations and charitable societies became schools for citizenship against coercive Americanization. The Holy Name Society, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and National Catholic Welfare Conference, helped push municipal reform agendas.<sup>24</sup>

For decades, historians have sought to conceptualize the arrival of new immigrants from the 1880’s-1924, and how they became part of the larger American culture. After World War II, social scientists seeking to address contemporary fears of foreign communism developed the “maladjustment thesis,” which emphasized the “uprooted” nature of the migration experience. This viewpoint stressed that European immigrants were under-prepared to “adjust” to the more modern American society. Following the work of Oscar Handlin and the Chicago School of Sociology, this literature neglected migrants’ own choices in deciding to leave Europe. The “new social history” of the 1960’s and 1970’s shifted the focus, showing how larger economic and political forces drove migration, and how migrants utilized kinship networks, labor assistance, and educational backgrounds to make it in their new locales.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Savidge Sterne, “Bringing Religion into Working-Class History: Parish, Public, and Politics in Providence, 1890-1930,” *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 149-182; Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 111-192, 255; McCartin, “Working-Class Catholicism,” 106-7.

<sup>25</sup> For the older school of thought, see Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); for the newer synthesis, see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Building off the new social history, historians sought to understand the role new workers played in the industrialization and union struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of particular concern were questions about solidarity and fragmentation. Why has fragmentation dominated working class organizing more than periods of class unity? Earlier work tended to suggest that skilled native-born workers, with older craft traditions, looked down upon and excluded new unskilled immigrants. According to David Brody, immigrants aided in the stabilization of mill towns' corporate control, impeding the early efforts of the Amalgamated Association in the steel industry.<sup>26</sup> Historians, inspired by David Montgomery's examination of "workers control" issues in response to workplace rationalization, sought to find how immigrants were increasingly brought into, on a limited basis, union organizing. Much of this scholarship focused on the immigrants' own use of these tactics in the "new unionism" from 1909-1922.<sup>27</sup>

More recently, historians building off the work of David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* have focused on the power of "white" racial identity in dividing the workforce on the shop floor and in neighborhoods.<sup>28</sup> Immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were seen as racially inferior, outside the body politic, and thus excluded from many of the cultural benefits of full citizenship. This has led to a popular view of these new immigrants as being "in-between peoples," not seen as white, but still having some benefits above black workers. For these historians, the "in-between" status grew from social constructions created on the shop floor. Certain jobs were given to certain immigrant groups based on their physical and supposed racial characteristics.<sup>29</sup> In the cultural realm, this in-betweenness was found in popular depictions of

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<sup>26</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).

<sup>27</sup> David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>28</sup> David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "In-between Peoples: Race, Nationality and the "New Immigrant" Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3-44.

immigrants in the dime press, ghetto travelogues, political cartoons, and blackface minstrel shows.<sup>30</sup> Recently other historians argue that more examination is needed to see how this racial understanding manifested itself in everyday life. As a result, local community studies remain beneficial to conceptualize the ways immigrants learned and practiced the color line.<sup>31</sup>

While much of the scholarly debate about whiteness focused on whether new immigrants needed to become white, experienced a level of “probationary whiteness,” or were actually “white on arrival,”<sup>32</sup> these new insights added to understanding important aspects of the immigrant experience. One of these was ethnic community formation and the expression of ethnic Catholic religious practices. Robert Orsi, in his *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, focused on the annual *festa* of Mt. Carmel in Harlem. Some of the folk religious practices of the *festa*, including the processions, the dark complexion of the Madonna icons, and the dark complexion of the primarily Southern Italian community led outsiders to criticize the racial backwardness of these Italian immigrants. By looking at events like the *festa* from within the community, Orsi found how it and other types of ethnic processions and festivals served as a coping mechanism to help maintain the community’s folkways in the difficult adjustment process in America. While maintaining ethnic culture, Orsi also suggests how it fostered a defiant animosity toward community infiltration. This helps explain struggles over parish space with Irish-American diocesan leaders seeking to promote Catholic Americanization, as well as the in-migration of

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<sup>30</sup> For the production of “in-between” identity in popular and government culture, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), ch. 3-4; for blackface minstrel shows in teaching ideas about whiteness, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas A. Guglielmo, “Encountering the Color Line in the Everyday: Italians in Interwar Chicago,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Summer 2004): 45-77.

<sup>32</sup> For new immigrants as “probationary white,” see Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; for new immigrants as white, according to the courts, census, Catholic Church, and the federal government, see Thomas Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

African-Americans. Much of his findings added to a growing interest in the role of popular lived religion and the material culture of immigrant folk Catholicism.<sup>33</sup>

Working class historians also used the “in-between” identity as a framework to analyze working class formation and fragmentation. New immigrants were in a difficult situation, at one time tied to their distinctive ethnic subcultures, but distinctively working class and united in common work experiences and grievances. In Detroit, Richard Oestreicher found that Irish Catholic skilled workers were leaders in the Knights of Labor and the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), while Germans were divided by skill, craft, and a variety of political persuasions. In addition, Polish workers were most tied to ethnic Catholic parishes, priests, and Polish fraternal lodges. Many community studies suggested racial in-between categories played into the ability to promote fragmentation, along lines of race, ethnicity, skill level, and gender.<sup>34</sup> Employers and the state often played on these racial categories to help undermine labor strikes. Beginning with the Haymarket Riot in 1886 and the divisions within the Knights of Labor, new immigrants were separated in factories, unions, and into their own community worlds.<sup>35</sup>

Other historians led by Thomas Guglielmo, use new methods to understand how ethnic community formation worked along with the production of notions of “race.” In criticisms of Italians arriving in Chicago, Guglielmo warns historians there was a massive difference between a group’s “color” and “race.” He sees that “color” is a “social category and not a physical description,” while “race” could refer to any of a number of large groups or even “smaller ones like the North or South Italians.” While new immigrants were continually castigated for their

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>34</sup> Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*.

<sup>35</sup> For an excellent narrative account of the failure of the Knights more inclusive unionism in the mid-1880’s, see James R. Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Random House, 2006).



“racial” inferiority, Guglielmo argues that this does not mean that their “whiteness” was in jeopardy. Italians and other immigrants could still partake in the “material” benefits of being white, even while they contended with the negative connotations of their “Italian race.”<sup>36</sup>

As this dissertation will argue, while the native population castigated Polish immigrants as “Polanders” and “Polacks,” the processes of migration and community formation helped Poles to not become white, but begin to self-identify as “Polish-American.” Coming from diverse villages and urban regions with more localized identities, community-building and ethnic associations first united the entire community as “Polish.” This builds off Benedict Anderson’s ideas of “imagined communities,” in which nationalism (civic, racial, and ethnic) develops out of social constructions forged by elite or middle class members of society. Often these “imagined” national identities assist in larger battles over the formation of who can be a member of the body politic and what are that entity’s social, cultural, religious, and literary traits. In this way, “ethnicity” itself was a constructed identity forged from within ethnic communities.<sup>37</sup>

Dominic Pacyga’s study of Chicago’s Polish immigrants provides an excellent sociological model for this process. Poles did not totally phase out their old world traditions.<sup>38</sup> Trans-national labor migrations linked families across state boundaries, linked religious and secular culture, and aided in the process of Americanization.<sup>39</sup> Poles responded to their situation in a two-step process. First, in the “communal response, they established small inward-looking communities that fostered stability and strength.” This in turn led to an “extra-communal” response, whereby they reached out slowly to other immigrants in a common cause against

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<sup>36</sup> Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 8-9, 31-4, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Verso, 2006), 1-8.

<sup>38</sup> Dominic Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> McCook, *The Borders of Integration*.

nativism, poverty, and unfair labor practices. It was the maintenance of old world communal traditions, especially their Catholicism, which provided them guidance. The power of Polish religious devotionism and ethnic collectivism both protected peasant culture, while also giving Poles a place to analyze the abuses of the industrial capitalist system. Only by understanding such ordinary things as home-buying and parish building, can historians ascertain the “lived realities” of how immigrants utilized ethnic cultural institutions to organize as a working class.<sup>40</sup>

While questions of whiteness and ethnic community-building are crucial, historians have recently focused on how the new immigrants factored into competing notions of “Americanism.” Gary Gerstle argues that a racial and civic nationalism animated 20<sup>th</sup> century American history. The racial strain emphasized exclusionary tactics, setting up a disciplinary state to guard America’s borders, conduct surveillance of radicals, and forcibly Americanize the growing foreign population. On the other hand, civic nationalism stressed an inclusionary polity based on cultural pluralism, freedom of expression, and universal political rights of citizenship.<sup>41</sup> Gerstle’s argument, however, still places too much emphasis on the subtle and coercive forms of Americanization from the top-down. This makes it appear that Americanization was “something the native middle class did to immigrants, a coercive process by which elites pressed WASP values on immigrant workers, a form of social control.”<sup>42</sup>

What needs more study is the process of Americanization from the “bottom-up” to show how new immigrants learned about the benefits of unionism and shared class grievances. Paul Krause found levels of cooperation uniting Homestead, Pennsylvania’s native-born and Slovak steelworkers beginning in the 1880’s. All shared a belief in working class republicanism, which

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<sup>40</sup> Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*, quote on 6, 121, 128-30, 258-60.

<sup>41</sup> Gary Gerstle, *The American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992): 997.

emphasized the democratic rights of unionism, collective bargaining, and working class politics as an extension of the ideals of the founding generation. Living in Carnegie mill towns, steelworkers came to share common, plebian cultural spaces, a populist form of politics, and even incorporated Slavic workers to lodges of the Amalgamated Association.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, James Barrett showed how corporate policies made Chicago's meatpacking work gangs ethnically integrated spaces between skilled butchers and unskilled Polish and Lithuanian workers. Irish and German butchers instructed immigrants in work stoppages, slowdowns, distributing union pamphlets and meeting minutes in multiple languages, and by utilizing Polish and Lithuanian language organizers, the packinghouse workers achieved a high level of unity by World War I.<sup>44</sup>

This dissertation contributes to this view of Americanization from the bottom-up. Working class formation occurred on the shop floor of Wheeling's factories, but also within multi-ethnic neighborhoods, saloons, recreational spaces, and Catholic parishes. As James Barrett suggests, Americanization was "the gradual acculturation of immigrants and their socialization in working-class environments and contexts—the shop floor, the union, the radical political party."<sup>45</sup> An earlier generation of Irish and Germans were the key Americanizers in the labor movement, local political machines, working class communities, and the Catholic hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> This was as true in Chicago and Pittsburgh as it was in Wheeling.

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel*, Pittsburgh Series in Social and Labor History (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up," 997-8.

<sup>46</sup> Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up," 999; for the importance of the Catholic Church and Irish Catholics in particular to this process and the increasing animosity between the Irish hierarchy and the multi-ethnic laity, see James Barrett and David Roediger, "The Irish and the 'Americanization' of the 'New Immigrants' in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 17-26; for a recent synthesis of immigrant Catholic religious practices, see James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 94-144.

Since this more inclusive notion of Americanization is vital to understanding class formation, the complex nature of this social process requires examining both formal and informal social networks. Americanization occurred throughout urban centers, including dancehalls, amusements parks, street corners, street festivals and processions, club meetings, city parks, movie theaters, vaudeville houses, and saloons.<sup>47</sup> The process was also assisted via already established working class institutions and ethnic cultural sites, including fraternal associations, heterogeneous ethnic neighborhoods, craft unions, and Catholic parishes.<sup>48</sup> While some older craftsmen could still promote exclusionary behavior at times, the truth is they could not readily afford to alienate the new immigrants. Because of the power of corporate capitalism and state repression, Americanizers reached out to the newcomers by promoting new organizations, new strike tactics, and new ways of socializing. In Wheeling, Socialists and union activists often translated strike demands into many immigrant languages and had translators available.

World War I was a major turning point. Prior to U.S. involvement, labor organizers stressed their own version of Americanism, promoting civil liberties, free speech, freedom of religion, the right to organize, collective bargaining, and the right to safe working conditions. Labor unions saw the war as a time to use the language of Americanism to stress the democratic rights of working people.<sup>49</sup> This broad notion of “industrial democracy” pushed forward the

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<sup>47</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 65-90; Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 30-67, 172-214; Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*; Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 38-44, 119-31.

<sup>49</sup> The use of “Americanism” allows for making broad connections over periods of time when studying working class history. This language continued to unite immigrants’ struggles against welfare capitalism, homogenizing mass culture, the “red scare,” and attacks on Catholicism. For some of this literature see, David Montgomery, “Nationalism, American Patriotism, and Class Consciousness among Immigrant Workers in the United States in the Epoch of World War I,” in *“Struggle a Hard Battle”: Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, ed. Dirk Hoerder (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), Joseph McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of the Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); John Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

mass industrial union drives. Even with these high hopes, the years witnessed “100% Americanization” campaigns and use of corporate and state power to repress labor, while forcing people to conform to a set ideal of citizenship traits that were native, middle class, and largely non-Catholic.<sup>50</sup>

In the postwar period, historians still disagree as to how ethnic identity shaped the class consciousness of immigrants and their children. Were immigrant families more interested in social mobility and improving their own status in the community, or were their goals more “realistic?” John Bodnar argues that Eastern European immigrants’ “nexus of concerns” narrowed to support “realism, an inclination to seek political goals over loftier goals of earlier protests.”<sup>51</sup> Seeing immigrants as more pragmatic, he argues kinship ties fostered a “clustering process,” which created a rigid division of labor placing immigrants in certain types of jobs.<sup>52</sup> Part of their larger “cultural system,” Slavic workers sought to always protect the needs of their families. Taking low wage industrial jobs provided a level of job security within the capitalist system, and allowed for the preservation of the family unit and the purchase of a home.<sup>53</sup>

Other historians disagree about this immigrant “working class realism” by comparing the first and second generation. How did “becoming American” affect the second generation’s views toward mass consumption and the 1930’s industrial union movement? Many second generation offspring of immigrants desired to break away from the controlling nature of their parents over their consumer habits. In addition, while the 1920’s and Depression years fostered increasing economic antagonism between new and old immigrant groups over jobs, this second

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<sup>50</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955); Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans,” *Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (Sept. 1997): 524-58.

<sup>51</sup> John Bodnar, “Immigration, Kinship, and the Rise of Working-Class Realism in Industrial America,” *Journal of Social History* 14, no.1 (Autumn, 1980): 45.

<sup>52</sup> Bodnar, “Immigration, Kinship, and the Rise of Working-Class Realism,” 49-52.

<sup>53</sup> John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

generations' better education and more Americanized culture aided in them promoting a unified ethnic support for "industrial democracy" by the 1930's.<sup>54</sup>

Lizabeth Cohen's landmark study *Making a New Deal* (1990) takes this debate further to show how a multi-ethnic working class could unify to forge collective action as a result of their contact with mass consumer culture and welfare capitalism.<sup>55</sup> Cohen stresses that contact with mass culture did not fully supplant the unity of ethnic communities, but instead showed how 1920's ethnic institutions and cultures were dynamic, and not a static protector of traditions. Out of their experiences, workers' came to support what she calls a "moral capitalism," which created standards for how companies should behave and also set the labor agenda for the 1930's. This moral capitalism explains why workers did not forge a radical movement to overthrow the capitalist system. Their ideology developed from their own Catholic beliefs and participation in a working class culture devoted to a mass culture that promoted private property rights.<sup>56</sup>

This dissertation reinforces many of the crucial themes of the recent literature on the new immigrant working class, while utilizing new methods. Benefiting from a revival in the use of micro-history, my focus on the Polish Catholic immigrant community will not view them in isolation, but use their migration and shared experiences as a window into inter-ethnic interactions and the divisions within the community along class, gender, and generational lines. I argue that the Poles' ethnic, folk Catholic religion and tendency to support home ownership created a tighter class consciousness than other groups, and helped them in actively supporting local labor issues as well. This is seen in their response to everyday problems, union organizing campaigns, and Catholic cultural interactions.

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Gobel, "Becoming American: Ethnic Workers and the Rise of the CIO," *Labor History* 29, no.2 (Spring 1988), 174-6, 185-6.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 5-7.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 75, 209, 285, 314-5.

To get at the internal dynamics of the Wheeling community, this dissertation will utilize a mass of primary sources reproduced via Ancestry.com. For previous scholars, getting access to these documents required going through the massive collections at the National Archives. With the recent digitalization of many key record groups, this study will have access to ship passenger lists, census records, naturalization applications, passports, draft registration cards, and other government documents that allow for a more nuanced understanding of immigrant life. Future immigration historians will have to mine these records to assess the personal and the political nature of the immigrant experience.

Second, this study examines how the Poles could address both the pull of a class-based appeal as well as the pull of popular religious traditions. Which held more sway and when? How did Polish-Americans address these problems? By the 1910's, the Poles were a dominant ethnic group, but had to interact with other ethnic communities. Over time, the Polish community vacillated between being insular in its relations with others by choosing to build its own religious and fraternal institutions, and more outward-looking in reaching out with other groups on multi-ethnic causes. Interaction was unavoidable, and led to earlier and greater cooperation with politicians, trade unionists, and leaders in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. In addition, in going to work, getting a drink at a local saloon, taking the family to a local park, and laboring in the mines and blast furnaces, Poles had more direct interaction with a wider number of immigrant groups. While this could lead to ethnic rivalries and street fighting, by the 1920's the Poles became part of a wider Eastern European community that held annual street festivals, ethnic cultural displays, and worked together within the Catholic Diocese, particularly once the labor movement failed to transform immigrant life. Finally, the common experiences of dealing with the yearly flooding living along the Ohio River and dangerous workplaces helped

bridge the cultural divide between the Poles and neighboring Ukrainians, Hungarians, Croats, Italians, and Greeks.

To get at the interior and often overlooked experience of the Poles, I follow Dominic Pacyga's interest in reconstructing the "communal response" of the Polish Catholic community, I spend much time utilizing diocesan and parish-level documents. Looking at how ethnic Catholics spent their money, went to school, and fought within the parish, I argue historians will find that immigrants' Catholic background and religious devotionism had the most pull in shaping their views of themselves as working class. For this reason, much of my study revolves around St. Ladislaus Polish Catholic Parish, as well as neighboring Catholic parishes. Evelyn Sterne argues that "Catholic parishes were the most accessible and important institutions in ethnic neighborhoods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries . . . [they] functioned not only as sources of spiritual solace but also as dispensers of charity, promoters of upward mobility, and centers of neighborhood life."<sup>57</sup> Since parishes provided the one institution where most men and women congregated for spiritual and political purposes, they serve as a main focal point for understanding the creation of "Polishness" in Wheeling, West Virginia.

This dissertation starts the story in Chapter 2 by setting the Polish migration in the context of the global movement of peoples in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as presenting a social geography of Wheeling in years from 1880-1915. The development of the steel industry and growth of new urban spaces helped attract Poles to certain neighborhoods throughout the city. The timing and composition of the migration evolved over time, but by 1910 made South Wheeling the center of *Polonia*. Once in Wheeling, Chapter 3 explores the struggles of working and living in South Wheeling and Benwood's factory district. By 1900, Wheeling had serious urban problems. The Pole's arrival coincided with the growing concerns over the area's "wide-

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<sup>57</sup> Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 3-5.



open culture” and efforts to segregate vice and crime in the factory district. In many ways, these problems of corruption, the saloon culture, and crime were increasingly seen as caused by the immigrants. With city neglect, Polish immigrants slowly came to terms with the new industrial environment, while adapting to their surroundings and other immigrants.<sup>58</sup>

Chapter 4 shows the communal response of the Poles through the creation of the ethnic, national parish of St. Ladislaus. Through the efforts of an active Catholic laity and an energetic priest, Fr. Emil Musial, the Poles developed a unique culture on the South Side. However, this meant that they often came into contact and conflict with other Catholics in the city, and even the diocesan leadership. Part of the reason for forming insular communities around the parish was, as seen in Chapter 5, the tepid reaction the Poles and other Slavic immigrants received from the local labor movement during the 1890’s Depression. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wheeling saw a spike in strike activity. Slowly, the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly began reaching out to immigrants. During this period the Assembly promoted socialist principles and socialist political candidates. The attractiveness of this form of politics further exacerbated the tug of war between the socialists and the Catholic Church for the “hearts and minds” of working people.<sup>59</sup>

World War I served as a crucial turning point. As seen in Chapter 6, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and many foreign-born Catholics saw the wartime climate as a chance to demonstrate their loyalty to the American war effort. While the Germans and to an extent the Irish attracted suspicion, the Poles were able to flourish. The period allowed for a certain level of “pluralistic Americanism,” which used the ideals of American civic nationalism to argue that immigrant culture and ethnic Catholicism were loyal as long as they did not promote subversive

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<sup>58</sup> James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multi-Ethnic City* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 10-11; 13-55.

<sup>59</sup> William Hal Gorby, “Subcultures in Conflict in *Polonia*: Class, Religion, and Ethnic Tensions in the Formation of Wheeling’s Polish Community, 1895-1917,” *West Virginia History* 4, no 2 (Fall 2010): 1-34.

activities. While many served and donated to the cause, other Poles were very critical of the war abroad, leading to intense surveillance of the factory districts by agents of the Bureau of Investigation to search out draft dodgers and critics.

With the experience of working together to promote the war, Chapter 7 demonstrates how the Poles factored into the postwar union organizing campaigns. Led by the National Association for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers, the Steel Strike of 1919 saw the Poles increasingly become supporters of trade unionism and labor politics. However, this solidarity fell apart during the strike against the Wheeling Steel Corporation (1921-1924). Bitter over the corporate strategies used and importation of African-Americans, Greeks, and Lebanese immigrants, the labor movement returned to its anti-immigrant views of the 1890's and unionism diminished as a vital force.

In reaction to labor's decline, Poles turned back to the parish. Some Poles did well, even opening new small businesses; however, most still worked in dangerous and low-wage factory jobs. One new development was the expansion of coal mining throughout the Upper Ohio Valley, which caused a dispersal of the Polish population. This led to a growing concern to build up the institutional aspects of the Catholic parish community. Even so, the pull of ethnicity remained strong in the 1920's, while immigrants reached out to other foreign-born groups. Following the terrible Benwood Mine Disaster of 1924, the region saw an increase in large, public ethnic festivals that displayed ethnic dances, food, and culture for the wider community. Done partly as an expression of nationalistic beliefs and also to maintain the ethnic loyalty of the second generation, these events contributed to the heyday of Wheeling's *Polonia*.

The story concludes with a brief look at how far the Poles had come by the 1930's. While still firmly blue collar factory workers, the benefits and the leadership the community

provided gave the second generation the ability to fight for a better livelihood through the organizing by the CIO. By this time, Polish-American men and women were key supporters of the steelworkers union, but still maintained close ties to their parish and cultural community.

## Chapter 2

### “Wheeling might appropriately be called a Polish city”<sup>1</sup>: A Local Look at World Migrations in Populating a Polish Neighborhood in Industrial America, 1880-1915

Born in Lublin in 1890, Alexander Oszustowicz grew up in a world being drastically altered by economic forces. With the expansion of railways into portions of the once untouched countryside, the growth of modern urbanized cities like Warsaw and Krakow, and the seasonal migrations of Polish men to the agricultural fields of Prussia or coal mines of Rhineland-Westphalia, Alexander was part of a global pattern of migration that drew workers from the economic periphery of Eastern Europe to work in the industrialized core. Arriving in Buffalo, New York, in 1907, he worked for several years until finally relocating to Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1910. Once there he fell in love with American born Frances Mogielski, whose marriage to a foreign national cost her her American citizenship. Both she and Alexander settled in the industrial hub of South Wheeling at 45<sup>th</sup> and Eoff Streets in the epicenter of a growing *Polonia*.<sup>2</sup> While there were many industrial jobs in the steel mills, coal mines, glass factories, and tobacco plants, Alexander was drawn to Wheeling because of its rich cultural and musical traditions. Playing for a while in the Wheeling Orchestra, Alexander soon formed his own symphonic orchestra, the Moniuszko Orchestra, and eventually the regionally popular “Polish American Rhythm Kings,” whose regular Sunday program was a mainstay on Wheeling’s WWVA radio.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, August 7, 1876, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the course of the thesis, a *Polonia* refers to what Polish-American historian John Bukowczyk defines “as to pretend that individually and collectively they [*Polonia*] were a replica of their homeland” villages in urban America. A *Polonia* is a Polish community outside of Poland, which were crucial in the Polish diaspora during this era. The process of first creating a viable *Polonia* will be important in the second chapter. John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Sean Duffy and Jim Thornton, *The Wheeling Family: A Celebration of Immigrants and Their Neighborhoods* (Creative Impressions: Wheeling, West Virginia, 2008), 144-5; The author would like to acknowledge the marvelous work done by Mr. Duffy and Mr. Thornton in compiling this magnificent volume on Wheeling’s diverse ethnic communities; Interview of a Polish-American of St. Ladislaus Church, interviewed by Michael Kline,

While immigrants made individual economic choices when they migrated, often they traveled via well-established kinship and village/ town networks. As a result, Polish urban communities often contained many people and whole families from one or two towns or villages. Like Alexander Oszustowicz, Anthony Gorczyca, also born in 1890, emigrated from Lublin in Congress Poland. Unlike Alexander though, Anthony had no musical talents. He and his wife worked in agricultural labor around Lublin, and Anthony's wife even worked for some time in a sugar factory to make extra cash. As a peasant laborer whose life was changed by the incorporation of this peripheral region within the expanding industrial core of the Russian Empire, Anthony migrated seasonally to find work, and eventually landed in Passaic, New Jersey, one of many Russian Poles and Ukrainians in the area. Anthony's small family remained in Passaic until 1913, during which time Anthony made seasonal trips to find work in the steel mills of Wheeling. He worked for some time in the blast furnace, but when it relocated to Mingo Junction, Ohio, he and his family moved to South Wheeling. Finding work in the local coal mines at Boggs Run, the Gorczyca's rented and eventually purchased a house at 4706 Wetzel Street, only several blocks from Alexander Oszustowicz in the middle of Wheeling's *Polonia*.<sup>4</sup>

These stories of Polish immigrants assist in internationalizing American history from 1880-1914.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will focus on the European backgrounds, the various "push-and-pull"

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October 31, 1994, in "Pierogi Making at St. Lad's," transcript, Wheeling Spoken History Project, Ohio County Library <http://wheeling.weirton.lib.wv.us/history/wahp/other/96-021.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Martinkosky, interview by author, Wheeling, WV, August 10, 2008; much of the immigration historiography since the incorporation of the "new social history" of the 1960's and 1970's emphasized how this migration from 1880-1914 fit within a standard "push-and-pull" framework as people moved between two unequally developed economies based almost solely off individual decisions. For a synthesis of this historiography, see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), ch. 1; for a more recent interpretation of immigration within a more global world systems model, see Ewa Morawska, "Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 1880-1914," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (April 1989): 237-72.

<sup>5</sup> Immigration to America adds great complexity to the historiography of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. America became a modern industrial power on the world stage. However, while studies of the period emphasize the expansion of industrial capitalism, these studies view these massive changes in an isolated fashion. The greatest theoretical addition to American immigration historiography in the last few decades was the influence

factors, migration stories, and demographic trends that attracted Poles to Wheeling. The social and economic changes occurring during the late nineteenth century affected areas of Europe at differing times. Each of the Polish partitioned territories under the German, Russian, and Austrian Empires sent Polish migrants to Western Europe and America at different times and for a plethora of reasons. As a result, Poles arrived in Wheeling over an extended period, from the 1870's until World War I. As each specific group arrived, they constantly remade Wheeling's Polish community, extending its geographic base beyond the core region of South Wheeling and North Benwood. After thoroughly addressing the social and economic changes in Europe, personal stories of migration will attest to the variety of factors influencing outmigration from the rural Polish countryside. The rest of the chapter will address the reworking of the Wheeling community by examining the social, residential, and occupational backgrounds of the Polish immigrants. These findings highlight how groups from each partitioned land held only a loose affiliation to a Polish national identity, possessing village or regional identities and affiliations.

### **Recent Views on the Incorporation of the Polish Lands in the World Economy**

Recent scholarship emphasizes immigration as not a single move, but rather a series of calculated individual and economically stimulated moves of proletarian workers within a developing global economy. Scholars such as Dirk Hoerder and Ewa Morawska emphasize how international labor migrations between the developing and industrialized regions are “a part of a global circulation of resources within a single system of world economy.”<sup>6</sup> Massive migrations

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of Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems model. This economic historical framework shows the uneven economic development between the rise of “core” industrial areas as centers of massive manufacturing and product distribution, and “peripheral” areas mainly used for resource extraction and excess labor pools to assist the rapidly advancing industrial core.

<sup>6</sup> There is a wide breadth of secondary literature on the lasting influences of this theoretical model. The model's significance comes from its application to many differing historical subjects. For the purposes of this thesis, the world systems model applies greatly to the historiographies of global world migration, Appalachian history, American industrialization, and Polish history after the end of serfdom. The early portion of this chapter will further expand the model's addition to all of these recent historiographies. For quote see, Morawska, “Labor Migrations of

from Southern and Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1914 occurred because of the evolving market relations of former peasants. A people's distance from the industrial core, their country's policies, and cultural and kinship traditions all factored into the decisions to migrate. Equally important, historians note that international labor migrations occurred within various transnational networks and created transnational communities. Whether influenced by "padrone" labor recruiters, kinship ties to particular villages or regions, or massive advertising campaigns by American conglomerates, global migrations internationalized immigration, labor, and urban history during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.<sup>7</sup>

The stories of Alexander Oszustowicz, Anthony Gorczyca, and Wheeling's other Polish immigrants began with events in Europe. Polish migrations developed in response to many social, political, and economic factors shaping Europe in the late nineteenth century. Without a state since the late eighteenth-century partitions by the Prussian, Austrian, and Russian empires, the Polish people benefited from the emancipation of serfs throughout Eastern Europe from 1807-1864, as social and economic mobility drastically changed Polish life.<sup>8</sup> This gradual process of emancipation by these imperial powers forced Polish peasants to adjust to proto-

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Poles in the Atlantic World Economy," 237; for a synthetic treatment of the model for the history of global migrations, see Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), ch 14.

<sup>7</sup> For the transnational orientation of recent American labor historiography, see Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930's* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007); for the importance of transnational links in American immigration history, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 23. Any strong transnational study of Polish immigration and community formation in America requires a thorough examination of the revolutionary changes within the Polish lands from the 1860's-1914. Since the 1960's and 1970's, Polish social historians moved the historical debates away from solely looking at imperial policies or the nationalist appeals of recreating some mythical Polish past. The recent work focuses more on questions of how emancipation altered the social and economic lives of Polish peasants; how there was no widespread popular support for a monolithic Polish nationalism; and how the Polish lands' incorporation within the Atlantic world economy fostered seasonal international and national labor migrations.

capitalist forms of agriculture. The peasantry entered the globalizing market economy of the late nineteenth century, which altered standards of living, traditional household economies, land distribution, and emigration trends. In the decades after emancipation the total acreage of peasant lands grew by ten to twenty-five percent.

For many emigrants from the Prussian partition, political repression on culture and landholding drove migration. Polish peasants in Prussia were emancipated in 1807 without receiving landholdings in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, fostering an early impetus to migrate for farm and waged labor. German unification in the early 1870's fostered a spirit of Germanization against minority populations. The 1871 German Constitution made no provisions protecting minority rights, and Otto von Bismarck's "Iron Kingdom" viewed the Poles as *Reichsfeinde* (enemies of the Reich). The subsequent *Kulturkampf* sought to Germanize Polish culture and undermine the influence of Polish priests. For example, authorities banned the Polish patriotic hymn *Boze cos Polske* ("God, Protector of Poland"). In economic terms, the Germanization campaign spurred migration first to Western Europe and then abroad. Seeking to purchase Polish agricultural land for German colonization, the Prussian partition saw rampant land speculation and spiking prices well beyond what small farmers could afford. According to one estimate, Prussian land policies increased land values by over 250% from 1888 to 1906. Brian McCook finds this trend one of the greatest ironies of German history since these policies to "Germanize" the Polish lands actually spurred a "Polonization" of parts of Germany.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For the Political and economic factors driving Polish migration within the German Reich, see William Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The National Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Richard Blanke, *Prussian Poland in the German Empire, 1871-1900* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1981); James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* (Twayne's Immigrant Heritage of America Series, 1995), 14-5; for a great comparative treatment of Polish migration within Western Europe and northeastern Pennsylvania, see Brian McCook, *Borders of Integration: Polish Migrants in Germany and the United States, 1870-1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 18-19, 187.



For Poles living in Congress (Russian) Poland, the principal factor driving the need for migration was the massive population explosion across Eastern Europe, along with the problems in rural landholding in the late nineteenth-century. Polish peasants emancipated in 1863-1864 received large allotments, without having to pay redemption payments to the state. In addition Poles got legal title to their landholdings. However, problems developed over time that made life increasingly difficult for rural Poles. First, fragmentation and dispersed plots set in “checkerboards” (*szachownicy*) remained a widespread problem during a period of general depression in agricultural prices in the 1880’s and early 1890’s. The opening of lands fostered gradual consolidation and the rise of medium sized landholders. Isolated and scattered strips of peasants’ lands in and around the traditional villages were consolidated into integrated plots in more than 800 villages.<sup>10</sup> Second, the population explosion in the countryside during this poor economic period led to the subdivision of existing family plots. This subdividing of land and the scattered nature of peasant holdings among their heirs led directly to the process of consolidation. As the number of peasant landholdings grew, the average size of these holdings naturally fell in size. The Russian state also slowly encouraged consolidation and land improvement by offering financial credits. By 1900, around 72 percent of peasant landholders were “dwarf-and small holders.” At the onset of the Stolypin agrarian reforms within Russian Congress Poland in 1906, 90 percent of the landholdings averaged 12.4 acres or less. Many Poles strapped for cash and living in provinces bordering the German Empire migrated for farm work in Prussia to earn enough money to then purchase more landholdings<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Blobaum, “The ‘Woman Question’ in Russian Poland, 1900-1914,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 802-3; Blobaum, “To Market! To Market! The Polish Peasantry in the Era of the Stolpin Reforms,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 407-9.

<sup>11</sup> Stefan Kieniewicz, *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 180-89; Morawska, “Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy,” 242; Blobaum, “To Market! To Market!,” 408-10, 417-20.

Finally, emancipation policies and the demographic boom created a “landless peasantry” resulting in a large rural proletariat. In 1900, landless, wage earning peasants accounted for nearly 3.5 million Poles. In Congress Poland, landless peasants swelled from 13.2 percent (1864) to 18.1 percent (1901) of the rural population. In rural Galicia, the conditions of the peasantry were often worse. Birthrates increased by 35-40%. Unlike the Russian partition, Galicia had a low degree of urbanization and industrialization, intensifying rural overpopulation and landlessness even more.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these drastic changes, by the 1890’s many Polish peasants increasingly engaged in the market economy. Improving literacy and the creation of mutual benefit societies made these opportunities more available. As they learned to read and came into contact with bureaucratic agents of the Russian Empire, they became aware of modern political systems. Increasing numbers of peasants in local agricultural societies and agricultural circles also provided the peasantry an entry into modern “populist” discourse over agricultural technologies to help with grain yields but also to provide more diversified goods to sell for extra cash. Populists viewed the economic advances of peasant agriculture as a vital part of forming a more modern yeomanry within the larger nation-building process.<sup>13</sup> These findings in Congress Poland show how Polish peasants anticipated market changes while becoming active in grass roots politics.<sup>14</sup>

As Polish peasants became more market-oriented in agricultural practices, they also became integrated within the world economic system. Because of the large numbers of landless

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<sup>12</sup> Morawska, “Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy,” 242-4; Blobaum, “To Market! To Market,” 409-10; Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 22-5; Piotr Eberghardt, *Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe* (M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 85-92.

<sup>13</sup> Blobaum, “The ‘Woman Question,’” 803; Blobaum, “To Market! To Market,” 410-6.

<sup>14</sup> For an examination of earlier peasant and Russian relations, see Robert E. Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904-1907* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

peasants and the lagging nature of political and economic infrastructure in much of the rural countryside, the emerging Polish proletariat became the key source of labor in extractive industries, textiles (Russian partition), and agricultural cultivation (German and Austrian partitions). The Polish lands rested on the boundaries of the core industrial region of Western Europe. The distance to this core region largely determined the character and duration of Polish labor migrations. German Poles, for instance, migrated to the agricultural fields of Prussia and coal mining areas of the Ruhr and Westphalia regions of Germany. There, despite local anti-Polish sentiments, they actively entered into the labor movement and played a key role in coal strikes around 1900.<sup>15</sup> Russian Poland, in contrast, served as a center of textile manufacturing for Russian markets. Because intellectual elites actively promoted issues of national identity, seasonal migrants within Congress Poland took hold of this idea of “Polishness,” but in a way that catered to their own cultural attachments and their developing working class identity. Polish textile workers were often a part of a fragmented ethnic labor force, which played Russians, Poles, Jews, and Germans off against one another. It was this peasant, working-class conceptualization of Polish national identity that aided these workers in labor strikes.<sup>16</sup>

The rural peasants of Austrian Poland forged a peasant national identity during their seasonal migrations. Like Congress Poland, the Galician peasantry became more incorporated into local and regional peasant agricultural movements. As they debated about political needs, Galician Poles used agricultural circles, meetings with local officials, and the increasing appeals from Polish intellectuals to craft their own expression of Polish nationalism. Power relations

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<sup>15</sup> John J. Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement: Xenophobia and Solidarity in the Coal Fields of the Ruhr, 1871-1914* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), 1-10; 71-104; Morawska, “Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy,” 242-5; Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, ch. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Laura A. Crago, “The ‘Polishness’ of Production: Factory Politics and the Reinvention of Working-Class National and Political Identities in Russian Poland’s Textile Industry, 1880-1910,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 18-20, 38-41.

based on older class arrangements faded with the emancipation of the peasantry after 1848, and various groups fought over what constituted a proper Polish identity. Often, Polish intellectuals misunderstood how the experience of serfdom, the Austrian state, the Polish Catholic Church, peasant ideologies, and regional loyalties (i.e., rural Carpathians versus Krakow's urban dwellers) were vital to their peasant class consciousness. Later cultural attempts to forge a united vision of Polish Galicia only reinforced these class differences dating back to the failed 1846 revolt in Galicia.<sup>17</sup> Polish peasants applied modern politics and critiques of industrial capitalism and class to their own emerging national identity.

Galician peasants superimposed modern traditions and “national symbols” within an older “folk nationalism” to formulate their own populist views for the Galician village and the goals of Polish seasonal migrants. This peasant conception of Polish national identity emerged with the assistance of village administrators, local schoolteachers, and populist Catholic priests, but the peasants themselves still actively created this identity. The Catholic Church was vital in promoting higher levels of literacy through, at first “secret,” and later organized parochial schools. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a period of devotional revivalism. Priests trained in the Krakow seminary produced zealous proselytizers. Polish women religious increased, forming a cadre of organized women going into the Galician villages to provide social services to the poor. These nuns served as “catechizers” for intensifying the orthodoxy and piety of Catholic villagers. Also, peasant lay societies gave Polish women a sense of autonomy in shaping the direction of local populist appeals and views over the changing nature of the household economy. Although

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<sup>17</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 6-10. Her views add to the comparative nature of the contest over the identities of Polish immigrants during the “100 Percent Americanization” campaigns of World War I; for the cultural battles over the definition of “Polishness” in Galician cultural production and the cultural differences of those in the major cities and rural countryside, see Larry Wolff, “Dynastic Conservatism and Poetic Violence in Fin de Siècle Cracow: The Habsburg Matrix of Polish Modernism,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (June 2001): 735-764.

founded by activist parish priests, rosary circles were transformed by rural Polish women into politicized religious and social spheres. The increase in devotional associations and use of prayer books, medals, scapulars, and holy pictures helped spur pilgrimages to religious sites such as Częstochowa. In this way, William Galush argues that these religious transformations helped in “sacralizing travel and certainly accustomed peasants to associating piety with movement” in Europe and abroad. Some priests even dispensed tools for religious instruction abroad, especially scapulars and holy pictures, to provide visual aids of their faith in a strange land.<sup>18</sup> This complex process of creating a national, Catholic identity was vital to the “recreation” of key aspects of the Polish village as part of a religious experience once in America.<sup>19</sup>

### **Personal Stories of Migrating to Wheeling “*Za Chlebem*”**

After the turn of the century, global market forces and state policies shifted the source of Polish migrants to North America. Beginning in the 1860’s, economic modernization expanded across Central and Eastern Europe. The ruling empires sought to export as many traditional agricultural staples and raw materials to then develop a modern industrial sector. This fostered a core-periphery pattern, creating industrial locales like Warsaw, Łódź, Białystok, and Lublin and large unindustrialized agrarian regions. Railroad building lagged in the Polish lands, and in 1862 there was just 635 kilometers of track. However, extension projects increased the rail lines so that by 1887 there were more than 2,000 kilometers of rail. This connected Warsaw with Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg to the east and Berlin and Vienna to the west. Periphery regions in the Polish lands included Galicia and much of north/ northeastern Congress Poland. Industrial

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<sup>18</sup> Robert E. Blobaum, “The Revolution of 1905-1907 and the Crisis of Polish Catholicism,” *Slavic Review* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 672-5; Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 173-80; Blobaum, “The ‘Woman Question’”: 802-5; Jan Molenda, “The Role of Women in the Polish Migration to the Rhein-Westphalia Industrial Region at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Polish Review* 42, no. 3 (1997); William Galush, “Journeys of Spirit and Space: Religion and Economics in Migration,” *Polish American Studies* 59, no. 2 (Autumn 2002), 13-5.

<sup>19</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 146-51; 185-215. Her views add more complexity to a key debate in American immigration historiography as to how much of the peasant village was recreated within the urban American industrial context.

capitalism drew thousands of rural peasants in Congress Poland, Galicia, and Eastern Ukraine to seek higher wages in factory work in American cities like Wheeling. Business agents at first enticed potential workers, but after 1885 steamship companies in Hamburg, Bremen, and Liverpool did most of the recruitment. Many emigrants were poor, landless, and more populist in their political outlooks. Many came from multi-ethnic lands dominated by Poles, with significant numbers of Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Jews.<sup>20</sup>

While the expansion of the cash economy and rise of industrial centers connected by modern rail networks encouraged rural outmigration, political factors increasingly played a role. Polish immigrants leaving Russia-Poland spiked following the Imperial defeats in the Russo-Japanese War and the failed Revolution in 1905. Many of these rural Poles had already migrated to the textile mills of Łódź and even Warsaw. As evidenced by their personal stories, Polish men arrived in chain migrations over the years to work in Wheeling's steel mills. Stanislaus Fazalkowski came from Lutocin, a village in east-central Russia-Poland about 120 km northwest of Warsaw, on May 2, 1899. Over a decade later, Tranciszk Tayalowski arrived from Lutocin on July 16, 1910. Ignacy Kleczkowski hailed from Oleorydki, emigrating some time later. A more thorough story of these close village ties was Władysław Galkowski. He was born on January 1, 1897, in Skępe, a small town about 40 km from the village of Lutocin, northwest of Warsaw. In the county seat of the Gmina Skępe, Władysław worked as a day laborer on a farm in his teens. It is unknown whether he migrated for industrial work in the region, but he finally decided to go abroad in the summer of 1913. Leaving Hamburg, Germany aboard the steamship *Pretoria* on

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<sup>20</sup> Morawska, "Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy," 252-3; for the world systems approach for the modernization in Eastern Europe, see Ivan T. Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 136-40, 152; Dominic A. Pacyga, "Polish Emigration to the United States Before World War One and Capitalist Development," *Polish American Studies* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 10-18; Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22-62.

June 21, 1913, he arrived in New York on July 5, 1913. Władysław's trip was like many Polish migrants on the Hamburg-American Line, for he spent the time in steerage (*Zwischendeck*). He did not travel immediately to Wheeling, but by 1919 he found a job as an iron worker in a Wheeling Steel mill living at 4527 Wetzel Street, when he applied for naturalization.<sup>21</sup>

Congress Poland's economic development was quite sporadic, leaving thousands of landless and desperate small farmers. Areas near the major factory centers could absorb this growing population, but those in more remote rural regions suffered terribly. The northern sections of Congress Poland were economically depressed throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Up to 1904, most of the migration to America from the Russian partition came from the provinces of Płock, Suwałki, and Łomża. Many Poles left the region from the 1880's through the start of World War I. This was the case for Konstanty Lapinski, born on January 27, 1894 in Łomża about 145 km from Warsaw. As a boy, Konstanty worked as a day farm laborer. With the worsening economic conditions in the region, he left just before the start of World War I. Traveling on the Hamburg-American Line vessel *S.S. Graf Waldersee*, he arrived in Philadelphia on June 6, 1912. Laboring in various industrial centers, Konstanty did not arrive in Wheeling until the early 1920's, and by mid-decade was a mill worker living near 44<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For the names mentioned, see the list of Polish immigrants applying for naturalization in late December 1918, *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 30, 1918, 10. It should be noted that the story of Galkowski, who serves in a prominent role in various Polish Catholic fraternal societies in the 1920's and 1930's is based off several sources where there is corroborating evidence, but some mistakes in dates or locations. All sources place his birth around 1895-97, coming from Russia Poland and arriving on July 5 1913 (or July 5, 1912 in the *Intelligencer's* case). The paper often misdated immigrants' arrival and their names in these mass listings of potential applicants. The sources consulted for these portraits are the following: Walter Galkowski, World War II Draft Registration Card, 1942, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C., Wheeling, West Virginia, Microfilm Series M1937, Roll#18; Władysław Galkowski in Hamburger Passagierlisten (Hamburg Passenger List), 1850-1934, database, from Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Germany; *Hamburger Passagierlisten*, Volume 373-7I, VIII A1, Band 261, Page 2036, Microfilm No. K 1830; Władysław Galkowski in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 database, Arrival 1913, New York, New York; Microfilm Serial T715, roll 2122, Page 169, all databases in Ancestry.com (21 June 2013); *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1920), 357.

<sup>22</sup> Pula, *Polish-Americans*, 15-7; Berend, *History Derailed*, chapter 4; Konstanty Lapinski, in Hamburger Passagierlisten (Hamburg Passenger List), 1850-1934, database, from Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Germany; *Hamburger Passagierlisten*, Volume 373-7I, VIII A1, Band 247, Page 1315, Microfilm No. K 1823; *Callin's*

Rural Poles in Galicia had to make similar migration choices. As noted earlier, Galicia was even more underdeveloped by the turn of the century. During the 1850's, extensive railroad building for the Krakow-Lwow line introduced wage labor to the region, but on a relatively small scale. This continued with the construction of the Krakow-Zakopane and Jaslo-Rymanow lines. However, most of these railroads sought to connect the rich agricultural lands of Galicia with the urban centers in the Austria-Hungarian Empire, such as Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. A rather restless place, the region suffered from overpopulation, rising land prices, and indebtedness. Industrialization provided little economic outlets for rural migrants. In 1880, Krakow's population was 59,830, but by 1910 increased to 127,592. Its weak industrial growth provided few low wage jobs. For those migrants who did find work, unskilled work in the metal industry only paid 20-40 cents a day, with a weak labor movement to protect them.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the limited options in Galicia, many peasants and day laborers used the railroads to seek work in Russian and German lands. In 1900, reporter Jan Turski noted the crowds at the Krakow Railroad station bound for Germany: "The reason for the emigration . . . is the higher pay by the owners of German estates for Galician workers." Working 200 days of seasonal labor earned Poles about \$96, plus room and board. Over time, Galician Poles began to learn about the better options in the United States, where average daily wages for a Polish laborer were from \$1.25-2.00 a day, with cheaper food and housing costs.<sup>24</sup>

Some Poles left the rural countryside following obligatory military service. Sergeant Wincenty Front left with his wife Kunegunda in 1906 after serving in the Austrian Army. Originally from Zawoja, a rural village in Southern Poland 52 km southwest of Krakow, the

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*Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1922), 738; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1924* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1924), 607.

<sup>23</sup> Galush, "Journeys of Spirit and Space," 5-10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ameryka*, April 28, 1900, reprinted in Galush, "Journeys of Spirit and Space," 10-11; Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21-25.



earlier railroad construction tied his hometown to broader markets. Located in Sucha County, Zawoja was in a mountain valley. Drawn by railroads to regional industrial centers like Krakow, the villages of the present Lesser Poland Voivodeship sent many migrants abroad, but also to Western Europe. According to a study done by the Diocese of Krakow at the height of the Galician outmigration in 1907, Wincenty's Zawoja saw 2,200 people leave. While the return rates are hard to determine, what is intriguing is that America was not often the top choice. Only 200 (about 9%) left for America. The vast majority went to Saxony (1,500) and the industrial regions of Prussia and Silesia and the factories in Wrocław (500). The patterns of return migration were seen in the village of Zaborów. Seasonal journeys were a way of life in the village of 160 farms. From 1882-1938, a total of 2,168 seasonal laborers returned, 721 non-seasonal migrants returned, and only 782 never returned to the village (about 21%).<sup>25</sup>

Rural Maszkienice shared some similarities to Zawoja, as outmigration picked up after individuals started traveling to America, rather than the coal mines in Ostrava, in the 1890's. From 1899-1910, many Maszkienicans left "always going, men as well as women, to relatives and friends, and, if possible, journeying in the company of the local people," according to a local observer. Front, his wife, and others from Southern Poland could travel overland from villages like Zawoja and Maszkienice northeast to Krakow. There they could take the train to one of the border stations set up after 1894 to monitor the health conditions of migrants streaming into Germany. Migrants benefited since these stations were run by two of the larger German ship companies, Hamburg Amerikanische Packetfahrt Actien Gesellschaft (HAPAG) and Norddeutscher Lloyd (NPL). From the border station the train traveled northwest to Breslau, then depending on their embarkation point west to Leipzig and then north to Hamburg, or

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<sup>25</sup> Sean Duffy, *The Wheeling Family: More Immigrants, Migrants and Neighborhoods, Volume 2* (Wheeling: James Thornton, Wheeling History, 2012), 197-9; Wyman, *Round Trip to America*, 17-8.

northwest to Berlin-Ruhleben, and then west to Bremen.<sup>26</sup> Wincenty Front traveled this route, but he chose to disembark from Liverpool, England, sailing on the *S.S. Cedric* to Ellis Island on June 24, 1906. The couple lived for some time with relatives in Lorain, Ohio, before moving to South Wheeling, where Wincenty got a job working at the Hoffman Tannery at 28<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>27</sup>

Many migrants made numerous moves between the old country and America thanks to the extension of railroad lines and the speed and cheap fare of trans-Atlantic steamships. One such emigrant was Michal Sawa, born on October 8, 1876 in the city of Zabaraz, northeast of Tarnopol to Albert Sawa and Mary Mazur. Zabaraz had a long history, beginning as a Ruthenian fortress city in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Lying in the multi-ethnic part of Eastern Galicia (now part of the Ukraine), the town was predominately Ruthenian Catholic and Jewish. Sawa was Polish, and left the region during its difficult times in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sawa first arrived in America via the Hamburg (HAMPAG) line in April 1906 on the *S.S. Amerika*. He found work in Jamaica, New Jersey, near Jersey City. Several passengers traveling with him from similar Galician villages sought work in Brooklyn, Jersey City, and Bayonne, NJ. After a short time, Sawa returned to Zabaraz, but migrated again via the Hamburg line to New York. Returning this time on the *S.S. President Grant* on December 3, 1909, Sawa and another Zbaraz native Anton Bajarczuk traveled to Paterson, New Jersey, where there were sizable Polish and Ruthenian communities working in the over 300 silk and textile mills. The textile mills of Paterson and in the Northeast saw an average wage of \$1.15 during this time. Sawa eventually left Paterson

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<sup>26</sup> Comments of Franciszek Bujak of Maszkienice, quoted in Morawska, "Labor Migrations of Poles," 261. For conditions in the villages around Maszkienice, see Morawska, "Labor Migrations of Poles," 256-7, 259-61. For the viable travel route of migrants from this region to the ports of Bremen and Hamburg, see Morawska, 256; Dirk Hoerder, "The Traffic of Emigration via Bremen/ Bremerhaven: Merchants' Interests, Protective Legislation, and Migrants' Experiences," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 90-2.

<sup>27</sup> Duffy, *The Wheeling Family, Volume 2*, 197-9; "Wicenty Front," in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, database, Arrival 1906, New York, Microfilm Serial T715, Roll 731, page 78, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957; National Archives Microfilm Publication T715, RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reprinted by Ancestry.com (12 June 2013).

around the start of the city's historic labor unrest in February 1913. Utilizing much child labor, workers struck for an 8-hour day, higher wages, and safer factory conditions. The strike got quite violent, aided by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in organizing a general strike of thousands of Eastern European immigrants. During the lockout and labor conflict, Sawa traveled west and by that year was working as a laborer at the National Tube Company in Benwood.<sup>28</sup>

While most stories of Polish immigration tend to highlight single males coming *za chlebem* (“for bread”), young women also considered the decision to migrate. Some came to meet relatives already in America, while others came to reunite with their sweethearts. In many cases, husbands disembarked several years earlier, and after earning enough for the passage and rail fare would write to their wives on how to make the passage. Such was the story of Leokadia (born in 1878) and Antonia Jasienska (born in 1875). Both came from Gozdowo, the principal town of a rural gmina in Sierpc County located about 106 km northwest of Warsaw. After marrying in 1891 and living in Gozdowo for some time, Leokadia's husband Władysław immigrated to America in 1903 and found work at the Riverside Mill. In little over a year, he sent for his wife and three young boys, Jan (born 1896), Stanislaus (born 1898), and Josef (born in 1903). Picking up the children, the trip became a larger family outmigration from Gozdowo as Leokadia was joined by sisters Antonia and Michalina, along with Antonia's three young girls Stanisława (born 1898), Lesława (born 1900), and Anastasia (born 1903). After traveling across

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<sup>28</sup> Hoerder, “The Traffic of Emigration via Bremen/ Bremerhaven,” 90-2; Michael Sawa Death Certificate, in West Virginia, Deaths Index, 1853-1973; “Michal Sawah,” in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, database, Arrival 1906, New York, Microfilm Serial T715, Roll 684, page 45; “Michal Sawa,” in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, database, Arrival 1909, New York, Microfilm Serial T715, Roll1389, page 191, both in Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957; National Archives Microfilm Publication T715, RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reprinted by Ancestry.com (1 March 2013); Pula, *Polish Americans*, 15-7; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1913-1914* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1913), 544; for the IWW's role in the Paterson Strike of 1913 and its failure, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 152-67.

Russian Poland (which often entailed slipping past border guards), they sailed from the port of Rotterdam on the *S.S. Amsterdam*, arriving at Ellis Island February 18, 1905. Shortly thereafter, the large Jasienska crew joined Władysław and Jan where they were renting at 4526 Jacob Street in the heart of *Polonia*. The difficulties of keeping such a large family unit together in the railroad trains across Central Europe, on the steamship, and the train from New York shows the strength and the fortitude of Polish women to reunite their families in industrial America.<sup>29</sup>

The Jasienska experience suggests the commonality of family chain migrations from certain key villages, particularly in Galicia. Some were couples already married, while many more came independently and later met those from common villages. Most of the Russian and Galician-Polish couples were married at St. Ladislaus parish in South Wheeling. By 1910, a large number of South Wheeling Poles hailed from the villages in and around the city of Brzozów northwest of Przemyśl. Antoni Bober was born in 1882 in Golcowa, a rural village in the mountains 10 km north of Brzozów. Living and working as a farm laborer, the increasing lack of land and agricultural crises led Antoni to join his brother Joseph already in Wheeling. Making his way to one of the German border stations west of Krakow, he and another Golcowa farmer Josef Olloj took the train ride north to Bremen. Olloj worked from 1902-1904 in Wheeling with Joseph Bober, and came back to get Antoni. Both benefited from steady prices of steamship tickets as a result of the continual price wars between the major passenger lines, especially those from Hamburg and Bremen. By 1899, a steerage ticket on the Bremen line cost between \$36.50 and 38.50, and averaged around a total of \$30 thereafter. Both traveled on the

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<sup>29</sup> “Leokadia Jasienska” Ship Manifest List, *S.S. Amsterdam*, Holland-American Line, in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, database, Arrival 1905, New York, Microfilm Serial T715, Roll536, page 114, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957; National Archives Microfilm Publication T715, RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reprinted by Ancestry.com (27 June 2013); 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0117, roll T624\_1692, FHL microfilm 1375705, page 16A, via Ancestry.com (27 June 2013).

Norddeutscher line *S.S. Kronprinz Wilhelm*, cruising into New York on January 11, 1905. After settling himself and getting a job as a laborer at the Top Mill in North Wheeling, Antoni “Tony” Bober met his future wife Agnes Laboj, who also emigrated from Golcowa. In a ceremony on June 1, 1909, the two were married by Father Emil Musial at St. Ladislaus parish.<sup>30</sup>

By 1910, several trends were obvious. One was a steady stream of migrants from villages between Krakow and Brzozów and further east near Jaroslaw, creating a strong Southern/ Southeastern Galician regional identity in Wheeling. Second, most Polish marriages included people from the same villages or regions. Of a sample of 37 marriages from 1908-1909, at least 14 were couples came from the same village or county. Even more striking was most came from the area bounded by Rzeszów to the north, Jasło to the west, Brzozów to the south, and Jaroslaw to the east. This suggests that initially regional identities and cultural heritages were stronger than any unified notion of “Polishness” among Wheeling’s Poles.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Growth of the Industrial Core in Wheeling and the Early Formation of *Polonias***

The Trans-Atlantic labor migrations of Poles led directly to the growth of a Polish ethnic social space (*Polonia*) in American cities like Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh.

Whether drawn by circulars and ads for the major manufacturing plants or by calls from friends

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<sup>30</sup> Wyman, *Round Trip to America*, 24; “Antoni Bober,” Ship Manifest List, *S.S. Kronprinz Wilhelm*, Bremen-American Line in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, database, Arrival 1905, New York, Microfilm Serial T715, Roll 528, page 104, in Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957; National Archives Microfilm Publication T715, RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reprinted by Ancestry.com (20 May 2013); *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1911-1912* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1911), 105; Tony Bober, World War I Draft Registration Card, 1918, Ohio County, West Virginia, roll#1993024, United States, Selective Service System, *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, Microfilm Series M1509, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C., in database reprinted by Ancestry.com (20 May 2013); Antonius Bobber and Agnes Laboj, Marriage File, June 1, 1909, St. Ladislaus Marriage Book, 1908-1941, 28, *St. Ladislaus Sacramental Records Collection*, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (hereafter DWC). I would like to thank archivist Jon Erik-Gilot for finding these amazing original bound volumes.

<sup>31</sup> This sample came from marriages listing birth locations in St. Ladislaus Marriage Book, 1902-1908; St. Ladislaus Marriage Book, 1908-1941, 28, *St. Ladislaus Sacramental Records Collection*, DWC; June Alexander, utilizing parish marriage books noted a similar process for Pittsburgh’s Slovak immigrants; settlement patterns evolved based on first village, then regional/ county ties. See, June Grantiar Alexander, *The Immigrant Church: Pittsburgh’s Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 10-12; 156.

and family, Poles flocked to urban areas. During this era, Wheeling was an important regional industrial center. Although much of West Virginia remained agricultural in the last third of the nineteenth century, the Northern Panhandle consistently remained a center of iron, steel, tobacco, and glass manufacturing. Wheeling benefited from its antebellum roots in the making of nails, iron, and glass, and the region continued to attract businesses as a stronghold of the Republican Party. With the rising political power of Gilded Age Republicans like Stephen B. Elkins and Nathan Scott (the latter was a Wheeling glass manufacturer), who promoted what some historians call the “Development Faith,” there was a hope for wider economic and manufacturing growth throughout northern West Virginia. The Republican platform promoted infrastructural improvements, tax breaks and incentives for railroads, protective tariffs to promote American-made manufactures, the gold standard, and a high wage, high productivity economy. Throughout the industrial core from the Northeastern textile mills to the coal and steel areas of Western Pennsylvania and across the Midwest, the Republican Party’s platform fostered manufacturing growth. On the southern fringes of this industrial core, only the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia attained the level of “development” that the “captains of industry” desired.<sup>32</sup>

During the Gilded Age, Wheeling blossomed as a manufacturing hub within the Appalachian region. With close ties to the steel industry of Pittsburgh, Wheeling grew by leaps and bounds. The city possessed a diversified economy with iron and steel mills interspersed with glass factories, slaughterhouses, and cigar making. By 1890, these Wheeling industries totaled fifty-three establishments employing thousands of skilled artisans and unskilled industrial laborers. In 1890, just fewer than 2,000 worked in the iron and steel factories, as Wheeling grew

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Franklin Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19-23, 47-50; Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns*, 59-80; John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1976), ch. 5.

to be known as the “Steel City.” With the expansion of production and economic trends internationally, Wheeling’s population grew to 41,641 by 1910.<sup>33</sup>

Much of this growth resulted directly from the influx of European immigrants from 1880 through 1917. Prior to the Civil War, Wheeling had a population of 11,435 with many Irish and Germans living in the North End and in South Wheeling.<sup>34</sup> The influence of the Irish and Germans added to the city’s culture, religion, and architecture. Foreign-born Germans continued to arrive in Wheeling, particularly skilled artisans, puddlers, glass makers, and brewers. These immigrants helped maintain one of the region’s strongest labor federations, the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly. With this ethnic influence in local labor unions and politics, these “old immigrants” supported many of the efforts of GOP politicians like Stephen Elkins and Nathan Scott. The two key issues for Wheeling’s Irish and Germans were the protective tariff and immigration restriction on those “new immigrants” from Southern and Eastern Europe.<sup>35</sup>

Slavic immigrants first took up residence to the south of the bustling, cosmopolitan downtown near the tall smokestacks of the steel mills and tobacco works in South Wheeling. In particular, the Poles settled within Ritchie District, the last division in Wheeling and Ohio County. In 1910, Ritchie District boasted a population of 7,947 due to the growing concentration of the Polish community there.<sup>36</sup> A decade earlier, the Polish contingent was spread out throughout South Wheeling. According to the census, in 1900 both the foreign born Poles and

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Social Statistics of Cities: Tenth Census (1880)-Part II-Southern and Western States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 87-92; U.S. Census Bureau, *Report on Manufacturing Industries in the United States: Eleventh Census (1890)-Part 2* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 606-613; U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census (1910): Population*, Volume III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 1011-15.

<sup>34</sup> Ken Fones-Wolf, “Caught Between Revolutions: Wheeling Germans in the Civil War Era,” in Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 20-6.

<sup>35</sup> Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns*, ch.2; Louis C. Martin, “Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike in the Wheeling District,” MA Thesis, West Virginia University, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census (1910): Population*, Volume III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 1011-15.

their American-born children in Wheeling totaled only 505 persons.<sup>37</sup> This figure is probably low, due to the census not taking thorough account whether a person from Austria, Germany, or Russia was really Polish. However, because of global economic changes, by 1920 South Wheeling contained a vibrant Polish community of 1,836 Polish speakers along with many more who spoke a variety of languages.<sup>38</sup>

Over the years, the growth of this Polish enclave reflected the diversity of larger international migration patterns. Beginning with a rather meager population in 1900, the community grew rapidly. This sustained growth derived from the work of social organizations and the church, but it is necessary to provide more concrete demographics of the Polish community. The earliest Poles arrived in Wheeling as part of the German migrations in the 1870's and 1880's. Most were unskilled, but blended into Wheeling's German artisanal culture in the years after the Civil War. The earliest mention of Poles living in South Wheeling dates from the late 1870's. Theodore Warsinsky, born in 1853 in German Poland, came to America on an earlier trip in 1865, before returning to Central Europe. Warsinsky then arrived in Baltimore aboard the *S.S. Leipzig* (via Bremen) on March 27, 1876. Finding work as a laborer and living on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, he married in 1879 and had at least 10 children. By 1900, he moved his family to Benwood in Marshall County. He rose in the steel factory from a laborer, to a fireman, skelp weigh man, and eventually a foreman at the Wheeling Iron & Steel Mill. By 1910, three of his sons worked as semi-skilled or skilled workers in the Benwood mills.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census (1900): Population-Part 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 800-3; 876-7.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census (1920): Population, Volume II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 1036-7.

<sup>39</sup> Theodore Warsinsky, *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Baltimore, Maryland, 1820-1891, Arrival 1876*, Microfilm Publication M255, roll#25, RG 36, Records of the U.S. Custom Service, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.; Theodore Warsinsky, 1880 Manuscript Census, Wheeling 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 208, Roll#1410, page 394B; Theodore Warsinsky, 1900 Manuscript Census, Union District, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0076, Roll#1765, page 10B;



Some German Poles arrived with some craft skills and very quickly rose to occupy skilled jobs. August Kubkovski (Kubsky) was born in 1868 in the German partition and came to Wheeling around 1888 with his wife Minnie and another relative, Chas. August got on as a molders' apprentice, probably at the Top Mill in North Wheeling. Living first at 454 Market Street and then on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, by 1890 he was a skilled iron molder. By 1892, Fred Kubsky and his son arrived, moving to Pike Street in North Wheeling, where the father worked at the Wheeling Pottery. The chain family migration increased so much that by 1896, there were seven Kubsky immigrant men living and working in North Wheeling. Two were potters, four were laborers or mill hands at the Top Mill blast furnace, while August now worked as stove molder at Joseph Bell Stove Company on 4<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets.<sup>40</sup>

Over the next few decades, the composition of Wheeling's Poles changed drastically. As seen in some of the previous migration stories, after 1900 Wheeling saw an influx of Poles from Congress Poland and Galicia, as well as many Ruthenians and Lithuanians. Table 2.1 shows that the peak years of immigration reveal national and international issues that fostered increased emigration to America. Polish migration to America decreased sharply with the economic depression from 1893-1897. With the American industrial unemployment rate jumping from 3% in 1892 to 12% in 1893 and remaining in the high teens until 1899, immigration fell to a trickle until 1900.<sup>41</sup> During this period, Poles made more seasonal moves to Western Europe to find

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Theodore Warsinsky, 1910 Manuscript Census, Benwood, Ward 4, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0089, Roll#T624\_1688, page 10A, all in databases in Ancestry.com (20 May 2013); *Benwood Enterpriser*, August 7, 1913, 4.

<sup>40</sup> August Kubsky Death Certificate, in West Virginia, Deaths Index, 1853-1973, database via Ancestry.com (25 May 2013); *W.L. Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1888* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, Co., 1888), 267; *W.L. Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1890-91* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, Co., 1890), 259; *W.L. Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1892-93* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, Co., 1892), 262; *W.L. Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1894* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, Co., 1894), 262; *W.L. Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1896* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, Co., 1896), 315; Gibson Lamb Cranmer, *History of Wheeling and Ohio County, West Virginia and Representative Citizens* (Wheeling, 1902), 674.

<sup>41</sup> See Morawska, "Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy," 250 for her figures.

work in the coal industry in the Ruhr and Westphalia regions of Germany or as agricultural laborers. Polish migrants balanced their migratory patterns in relation to what was most cost effective, as more than three times as many Poles per year (between 300,000 and 600,000) traveled to Western Europe for seasonal labor, rather than overseas (which only accounted for about 100,000 to 200,000).<sup>42</sup>

**Table 2.1: Year of Arrival of Polish Immigrants in Ritchie District, 1900-1920**

1910 Census	1920 Census
1907-10 (98)	1917-20 (0)
1903-06 (118)	1913-16 (66)
1899-02 (84)	1909-12 (70)
1895-98 (14)	1905-08 (51)
1880-94 (44)	1901-04 (71)
	1897-00 (45)
	1893-96 (15)
	1889-92 (19)
	1879-88 (13)

Source: Manuscript Census Schedules, 1910, 1920, Ohio County, West Virginia and Regional History Collection.

As these Poles migrated within the changing dynamics of the world economy, the opportunity for higher industrial wages was an important factor in the choice to go to America. The U.S. Immigration Commission’s study, *Immigrants in Industries*, offers many insights into the relative economic situation of unskilled Polish laborers. In the Pittsburgh Steel District for example, prior to immigration 51.9 percent of males worked as farm laborers for monetary wages and 33.9 percent of males worked as farm laborers for wages in kind (non-monetary).

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<sup>42</sup> Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, 334-44; Morawska, “Labor Migrations of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy, 238; 242; Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement*, 18-26.

Often these latter farmers received payments of food, wood, and other necessities from local landowners. Another 4.8 percent worked as general laborers for wages and 2.1 percent in the hand trades.<sup>43</sup> Among all immigrants studied, the Poles ranked first in the number of farm laborers working for wages in cash and fourth of all those who did farm labor for wages in kind.<sup>44</sup> The total for all Polish immigrants (3,665 sampled) reveals even more strongly the lack of prior industrial skills. 75.5 percent previously worked in farm labor, 9.1 percent in general labor, 5.1 percent in the hand trades, and only 4.2 percent in iron and steel manufacturing.<sup>45</sup>

By 1910, a growing number of Poles came from Galicia in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Many emigrated after the “Galician Misery,” as Polish farmers could no longer compete with their Hungarian and Czech competitors in the southern portion of the empire.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the years from 1899 up through 1910 saw a massive out-migration of Austrian Poles escaping the economic underdevelopment of Galicia. However, the spike of 118 Polish immigrants from 1903-1906 also reflects the arrival of many Russian Poles coming over for better economic opportunities during the crisis connected with the Revolution of 1905. The decade after 1910 witnessed a steady increase in Polish immigration up until America’s entry into World War I.

Table 2.2 shows the breakdown of the Polish immigrants. While the first wave of Poles came overwhelmingly from German Poland, the table highlights the changes in the ethnic

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports: Immigrants in Industries*, pt. 2, *Iron and Steel Manufacturing*, 61<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2d session, Senate (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 253.

<sup>44</sup> These comparisons derived from the relative wage rates prior to immigration of Croatian, German, Irish, Northern Italian, Southern Italian, Magyar, Polish, Roumanian, Ruthenian, Servian, and Slovak. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports: Immigrants in Industries*, pt. 2, *Iron and Steel Manufacturing*, 252-3.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports: Immigrants in Industries*, pt. 2, *Iron and Steel Manufacturing*, 255. The ranking derived from a study of twenty immigrant groups of Bohemian/ Moravian, Croatian, English, Finnish, German, Greek, Irish, Northern Italian, Southern Italian, Lithuanian, Magyar, Polish, Roumanian, Russian, Scotch, Servian, Slovak, Slovenian, Swedish, and Welsh.

<sup>46</sup> Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants in Industrial Chicago*, 123-4.

composition of the Polish community up to 1920.<sup>47</sup> The fact that Poland was divided between three European empires for generations significantly limited the attachments of seasonal migrants to a shared Polish identity. Wheeling's contingent identified with particular villages or towns, the result of kinship networks. As noted earlier, one of these was Brzozów in the Podkarpacie Province of southeastern Galicia. Josephine Franczak immigrated from Brzozów on September 4, 1911 aboard the *S.S. Berlin*. She was one of six siblings among many other villagers to leave the rural countryside and settle in Wheeling.<sup>48</sup> For many years afterwards, immigrants from Austrian (Galicia) Poland became the dominant regional group. In 1914, Josephine married a German-Polish immigrant Michael Klamuta. After his death in 1927, she married Joseph Bargiel, who immigrated from Harbutowice, a small village near Krakow, in 1913.<sup>49</sup> During these decades, Wheeling's Polish population grew. With the growth of the community and the influx of families from the homeland, the number of American-born Poles greatly increased and even spread across the county line into Benwood in Marshall County.

**Table 2.2: Ethnic diversity of Polish South Wheeling, 1900-1920**

	1900	1900	1910	1910	1920	1920
Ethnicity	Foreign Born	Native Born	Foreign Born	Native Born	Foreign Born	Native born
Austria-Polish	27.83%	16.25%	41.56%	34.40%	40.93%	33.48%
Polish	-	-	-	-	33.64%	33.04%
German-Polish	37.11%	68.75%	8.13%	13.76%	1.12%	2.78%

<sup>47</sup> This table provides quantitative data to support many of the claims of the recent immigration historiography, which highlights how migrations of peoples from specific villages and regions of countries and empires worked to limit a strong feeling of cultural and ethnic nationalism. For a recent example see, Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5-15.

<sup>48</sup> Duffy and Thornton, *The Wheeling Family*, 151.

<sup>49</sup> Duffy and Thornton, *The Wheeling Family*, 151-3.

Russian-Polish	35.05%	15%	50.31%	51.83%	24.30%	30.70%
<b>Totals</b>	97 (100%)	80 (100%)	320 (100%)	218 (100%)	535 (100%)	684 (100%)

*Source:* Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, 1920 Ohio County, and 1920 Marshall County, West Virginia Regional History Collection.<sup>50</sup>

Many immigrant histories focus on the problems these new inhabitants encountered in America, particularly when it came to finding a place to live. Early on, most of the immigrants were unmarried males or husbands who came to earn enough money to pay for their families’ later passage to America. These early living arrangements conformed to what Dominic Pacyga referred to as a “workers’ commune,” where several males rented a house and had either one of the men’s wives or a housekeeper cook and clean for them.<sup>51</sup> More common were men who boarded together in the house of a widow or of a married couple, also of Polish descent.

Statistics on home ownership and boarders are vital to understanding how the immigrants’ economic status changed over time. Table 2.3 highlights the evolving household demographics, and with the large numbers of boarders and rental rates shows how by 1920 many of the new Polish immigrants began settling in Benwood.

**Table 2.3: Home Ownership of Poles in Ritchie District, Wheeling, 1900-1920**

<b>Demographics:</b>	<b>1900-Ritchie</b>	<b>1910-Ritchie</b>	<b>1920-Ritchie and Benwood</b>
Total population	177	627	1299
Boarders	21(11.86%)	96(15.31%)	92(7.08%)
Workers	64	249	403
<b>Home Ownership (Total number of households):</b>			
Owns	-	29(25.22%)	69(28.87%)

<sup>50</sup> The 1920 totals include the Poles living in northern Benwood, as the community extended further south.

<sup>51</sup> Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants in Industrial Chicago*, 40-1.

Rents	-	77(66.96%)	170(71.13%)
Unknown	-	9(7.83%)	0

Source: Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, 1920 Ohio County, and 1920 Marshall County, WVRHC.

The above table shows how the Poles of the Ritchie District proliferated in a short period. Overall, boarders never accounted for more than 15% of the Polish population. The small number of boarders for the entirety of Wheeling's Ritchie District in 1920, along with almost a third who owned their homes, shows how slowly many in the community were becoming economically secure. Often these households included many children, some of whom worked, but many who attended the Polish Catholic parochial school. Although child labor assisted in the household economy, the fact many children attended religious schooling shows the community valued education to aid the next generation's social mobility and maintain its ethnic heritage.

This large data from Wheeling's *Polonia* needs to be compared with a smaller sample to highlight how certain blocks compared to the entire core area. Precincts 6 and 7 of Ritchie District (8<sup>th</sup> Ward) covered the northern fringe of the region above St. Ladislaus.<sup>52</sup> Comprising 68 Polish or Ruthenian households, 17 (25%) owned their homes. Each household's family economy suggests how they tried to pay the rent or mortgage. In his study of immigrant families in Detroit, Oliver Zunz found high levels of Polish homeownership by 1900, whereas in most census tracks in Wheeling the home ownership rate was around 25%.<sup>53</sup> Polish families would rent out the parts of a larger 2-3 story house to pay off mortgage payments, thus creating a common pattern of owner-occupied homes shared with renters. Unlike in Detroit or Chicago though, this process did not last as long, for after a few years homes were fully paid off and

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<sup>52</sup> 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ritchie District, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0117, Precincts 6 and 7, WVRHC; Ritchie District's Precinct numbers 6 and 7 started at the 4100 block of Jacob Street, which is near the southern end of the Bloch Brothers Tobacco Company, down to 44<sup>th</sup> and Wood Streets.

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 177-195.

boarders moved out. As parents aged, their children would pick up the work load. Only 16 households (24%) got by with the earnings of the family head, 29 housed boarders (43%), and 23 (33%) saw children or other family members working. Those having boarders averaged 2.7 per household. This wide variety of family economies is intriguing, considering that 74% of all household heads labored in unskilled, low paying jobs. Eleven household heads (16%) were in semi-skilled or skilled jobs, and only seven (10%) could be considered white collar.<sup>54</sup>

The use of boarders, children, and other relatives at an overwhelming number of households suggests the struggles faced by Polish and Ukrainian families. This was particularly the case with child laborers. While there were 3 times as many boarders than children working in the sample, their early entrance highlights their economic dependence to their families. Most were teenagers, and none were younger than 14. Occupations were highly gender specific. Six female laborers worked as packers or pickers at Bloch Brothers Tobacco Factory, located between 39<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Streets. On the other hand, the boys either worked in the steel mills or served as gatherers, carry-in boys, or laborers at the Northwood Glass House near 36<sup>th</sup> Street. Some households mixed both forms of supplemental labor. For example, the Januszewski family rented their home at 4403 Wetzel Street and the father worked at the Riverside Mill. Contributing to the family income were his two daughters, Katherine (19) a tobacco packer at Bloch Brothers, Mary (15) a laborer at the Northwood Glass House, and a boarder named John Mieske (38), a Riverside laborer. The Januszewski daughters needed to continue working and staying with their parents to help provide for the family's four young children, all under 12.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The unskilled occupations were as follows: 34 worked as day laborers at the steel mills, 6 worked on blast furnace crews, 6 were coal miners, and 4 were laborers at Hoffman's Tannery on 28<sup>th</sup> Street. For the white collar heads: 2 grocers, 2 in saloons, one musician, one salesman, and the other ran a boardinghouse.

<sup>55</sup> 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ritchie District, Enumeration District 0117, page 14A, WVRHC; for the patterns of employment in tobacco factories, see Patricia A. Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 164-5; 191-4.

For many of these teenage girls working at Bloch Brothers Tobacco, these jobs were not as economically liberating as some historians assume. Girls often had to leave school early, and their occupational choices were limited. Polish women who started working in these factories would then act as unofficial agents of the company attracting other Polish female friends and relatives. Most if not all of the money they earned went back to their families. This conforms to Leslie Tentler's argument that working girls' employment served as a conservative impact on their lives: "women inhabited a distinct and separate labor market, one characterized by low pay, low skill, low security and low mobility." Sexual division of labor in these tobacco plants reinforced conservative views about women's identity.<sup>56</sup> The sizeable number of young boys at Northwood were often seen by progressive labor reformers as a major problem, since this work stunted their physical development and was very dangerous. However, the use of boys and girls in industrial work was brought over from Poland as part of the family adjustment process.<sup>57</sup>

The census does reveal the gradual emergence of an ethnic middle class. While some rose to prominence by hard work in Wheeling, most white collar workers and business owners arrived in this country with some business trade or skill. Like those analyzed by historian John

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<sup>56</sup> Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 14-5, 60. Social historians have stressed that factory work emancipated working class women. They could use their pay and free time to go to urban leisure sites, which provided a sense of independence and refuge from the capitalist value system. Kathy Peiss argued that these "cheap amusements" gave immigrant children the full embodiment of American values of individualism and the ideology of consumption. More recently Nan Enstad in explaining the female garment workers' strikes from 1909-1912 found working girls' consumer culture gave them new possibilities, symbols, and spaces to shape class consciousness. It fostered Americanization within immigrant families against their own traditional cultural norms. While these cultural understandings expands our knowledge of how class and gender was constructed, this work focuses too much on newspaper accounts and rhetorical appeals, which can become too divorced from the real social problems and experiences working women dealt with everyday. Chapter 5 will show the ways that working women and the Trades Assembly used leisure sites to organize unorganized workers; see, Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), ch. 2.

<sup>57</sup> For the use of immigrant boys in glass houses resulting from family choices and new technological changes like Michael Owens's Automatic Glass Bottle Making Machine, see James L. Flannery, *The Glass House Boys of Pittsburgh: Law, Technology, and Child Labor* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). This analysis of the family economy will be expanded and placed in a broader context in the next chapter.



Bukowczyk, most of these men, especially those from German Poland, were merchants, who followed trade networks to this country to open up businesses. For example, John Raszkwicz arrived as a grocer in 1907 and established his store at 91 45<sup>th</sup> Street. There were two types of Polish businesses—small artisan or retail shops (bakeries, butcher shops, saloons) or those businesses meeting specialized ethnic needs (printers and funeral parlors).<sup>58</sup> This middle class provided many of the community's needs, especially during mill layoffs and strikes.

Wheeling also offered possibilities for upward mobility. Frank Lewandowski changed occupations many times. Lewandowski first showed up in Wheeling in 1904 as a coal miner, his occupation until he opened his own painting business in 1921.<sup>59</sup> Stanley Zarnoch illustrated the ebb and flow of opportunities *Polonia* could offer. After migrating back and forth, Zarnoch first appeared in Wheeling in 1915 as a unskilled steel worker. While initially out of work in 1917, by June he had risen to be a pipe cutter at the Wheeling Steel & Iron Benwood Works. Once World War I was over, he was out of work again in 1919, and hired by 1921. In the mid-1920's, Zarnoch now labored as a coal miner. With the money earned, he tried to move into the small business class by operating a pool hall in 1928. However, the onset of the Depression forced him back into the mines as a coal loader.<sup>60</sup> This fluidity of employment opportunities for ethnic Poles lasted through the 1950's in South Wheeling.

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<sup>58</sup> *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1904-1905* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1904); *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1905-1906* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1905), 459; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1907-1909* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1907), 374, 486, Ohio County Public Library (OCPL); Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, 35-8.

<sup>59</sup> *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1904-1905* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1904); *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1905-1906* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1905), 459; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1907-1909* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1907), 374, 486; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1911-1912* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1911), 392, 398, 525; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1918), 408; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1920), 546; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1922), 753, OCPL.

<sup>60</sup> *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1915-1916* (W.L. Polk & Co., 1915), 747; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918*, 738; Stanislaw Zarnoch, World War I Draft Registration Card, 1917, Ohio County, West Virginia, roll#1993026, United States, Selective Service System, *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, Microfilm Series M1509, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington,

Table 2.4 further highlights the overwhelmingly blue collar composition of the Polish community from 1900-1920. For the entire Atlantic migration to America, over 95% found low skilled jobs in three main branches of industry: coal, steel, and slaughtering/ meat packing.<sup>61</sup> For Wheeling, most Poles and their sons remained unskilled laborers in the steel mills, although some became semiskilled workers at higher positions in the mills. Some even entered skilled union positions as pipe cutters, machinists, boilermakers, and miners. At the top of the ethnic community was a steadily growing contingent of businessmen and white collar workers.

**Table 2.4: Composition of Wheeling and Benwood’s Polish Workforce, 1900-1920**

	<b>1900-Ritchie</b>	<b>1910-Ritchie</b>	<b>1920-Ritchie/ Benwood</b>
<b>Unskilled Laborers</b>	48	175	224
<b>Semiskilled Laborers</b>	6	38	91
<b>Skilled Laborers</b>	1	6	12
<b>Child Laborers</b>	7	10	18
<b>White Collar/Business</b>	2	20	56

*Source:* Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, and 1920 for Ohio County, and 1920 for Benwood, WVRHC.

Many were proprietors of their own stores or served as clerks, bartenders, butchers, funeral men, pool house men, musicians, jewelers, and teachers. This middle class grew over the years, with about an equal number of them arriving from Poland or coming from the Polish-American stock of South Wheeling. Table 2.5 gives a more detailed breakdown of the industries and businesses employing the Wheeling Poles.

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D.C., in database by Ancestry.com (5 June 2013); *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920*, 968; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922*, 1322; *Polk’s Wheeling City Directory, 1923-1924* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1924), 1041; *Polk’s Wheeling City Directory, 1928* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1927), 1169, OCPL.; Stanley Zarnoch, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 25, page 12A.

<sup>61</sup> Morawska, “Labor Migrations of Poles,” 252-3.

**Table 2.5: Places of Employment for Wheeling/ Benwood Poles, 1910-1920**

	<b>1910-Ritchie</b>	<b>1920-Ritchie</b>	<b>1920-Benwood</b>
<b>Steel Mills:</b>	188(74.60%)	154(62.60%)	100 (71.94%)
Mill	69	-	11
Tube mill	90	-	42
Plate Mill	13	-	3
Other-Mill	16	-	44
<b>Coal Mining</b>	8.33%	8.54%	10.79%
<b>Can Factory</b>	0.40%	6.50%	2.88%
<b>Glass Factory</b>	1.98%	2.44%	0.00%
<b>Tobacco works</b>	2.38%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Other Industry</b>	2.78%	1.22%	5.04%
<b>White Collar</b>	9.13%	15.45%	9.35%
<b>St. Ladislaus</b>	0.40%	3.25%	0.00%

*Source:* Manuscript Census Schedules, 1900, 1910, 1920 Ohio County, and 1920 Marshall County, WVRHC.

Despite the diversification of Wheeling’s industries at this time, the Polish immigrants overwhelmingly represented the bulk of the unskilled labor force in the steel mills.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Changing Nature of Wheeling’s *Polonia***

By 1910, there was a vibrant *Polonia* in South Wheeling. The community was mainly working class, with some Poles arriving with white-collar skills. Comprising the mass of the unskilled industrial labor force for the Wheeling Iron and Steel Company and its subsidiary industries, many workers suffered because of the slack work schedules. Because of the failure of trade unionism in the Wheeling District, the industrial labor system utilized Poles as a cheap labor force that could be discarded at any sign of labor protest. The failure of the 1909-1910 organizing campaign resulted partly from the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers’s resistance to industrial unionism.<sup>63</sup> The American Federation of Labor frequently voiced its disapproval of how “The Poles, Slavs, Huns, and Italians . . . come over without any

<sup>62</sup> 1910 and 1920 Manuscript Census Schedules, Ohio County, West Virginia, WVRHC.

<sup>63</sup> Louis C. Martin, “Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike in the Wheeling District;” for an overview of the failures of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century organizing, see David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 131-146.

ambition to live as Americans live and . . . accept work at any wages at all, thereby lowering the tone of American labor as a whole.”<sup>64</sup> Nationally and in the Northern Panhandle, the burgeoning mass of Polish immigrants occupied a precarious place in the economic hierarchy.

As industrialization expanded through the city and beyond, so did the Polish settlement process. Poles tended to cluster in small groups near work environments in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading to the mass concentration from 43<sup>rd</sup> to 48<sup>th</sup> Streets and south through North Benwood near the massive steel mills. However, after 1900 large Polish clusters grew in two other sections of Wheeling where there were blast furnaces. One of these was in the multi-ethnic working class neighborhood across from the Belmont Mill, located between 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Streets. The Belmont Works dated from 1849 when it produced cut iron nails. In 1874 a blast furnace was built on the site, and then remodeled and expanded in 1893. After several slow periods in the 1890’s depression, owners updated the site with a continuous rolling mill operated by newer machinery and furnaces.<sup>65</sup>

After these 1903 renovations, the Belmont began recruiting a multi-ethnic workforce. The region from 23<sup>rd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> Streets was increasingly populated by some Slovaks and Serbs, but the majority immigrant groups were Italians, Greeks, Syrians, and Poles. Most of the latter were from Congress Poland, and began arriving after the failed 1905 Russian Revolution. In the core of what residents dubbed “Little Poland,” a sample shows that at least 110 Polish immigrants lived there in 1910. Of that number, 84 (76%) were Russian-Poles, and 81% of those arrived after 1905. Unlike the core area around St. Ladislaus, this region was even more blue collar.

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted from the AFL’s *National Labor Tribune* and found in Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 135.

<sup>65</sup> The original site included large rolling mills and gas heating furnaces, along with the massive blast furnaces to make Bessemer steel. For updates that aided in employing unskilled immigrants, see *Wheeling Register*, August 2, 1903, 5; for company descriptions, see *Directory to the Iron and Steel Works of the United States, Compiled and Published by the American Iron and Steel Association, Seventeenth Edition*, corrected to March 1, 1908 (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1908), 189-91; Sanborn Insurance Atlas Maps, Wheeling, 1890, 1902, 1921, OCPL.

Many suffered when the Belmont Mill was closed (as at the time of the 1910 Census). Of those working, 76% were unskilled laborers or blast furnace workers at the Belmont. Most of the rest were unskilled laborers at the Hoffman Tannery at 28<sup>th</sup> Street or skilled machinists and chargers at the mill. There were only three men (4% of the sample) who were small businessmen, including two grocers and a saloonkeeper. The composition of the region changed little by 1920. With about 125 residents, the region had many more stable families, as opposed to single male boarders. However, 80% of the families rented their homes. Even so, the area saw some occupational mobility. Of 30 household heads, 10 (33%) were unskilled steel workers, 5 (17%) were coal miners, but 12 (40%) were now in semi-skilled and skilled positions in the steel mills. This included several heaters, catchers, doublers, etc. However, there was only one head who was not in a blue collar factory job, an older German-Polish woman serving as a midwife.<sup>66</sup>

The region long held a negative view among native-born residents and even Poles living farther south. “Little Poland” was also renowned as “Fighting Poland,” for its boisterous, and heavy crime activity. Even with a small number of Polish families, the region’s other groups lived in large boardinghouses facing the Belmont Mill going toward the hillside. The police heavily patrolled the region, arresting many Polish, Greek, and Italian men for disorderly conduct. Most common were street fights and “booze fests” that could get out of control. As seen in the next chapter, this area was also very close to the Center Market House and the growing prostitution district.<sup>67</sup>

These economic hardships were offset by ethnic assistance and the changing dynamics of Wheeling’s Polish communities. With the restrictions on further immigration by 1914, the Poles

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<sup>66</sup> 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Webster District, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0131, Precincts 1 and 2; 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 93, Precinct #1, WVRHC.

<sup>67</sup> *Wheeling Register*, April 17, 1906, 3; May 7, 1906, 3.

solidified as a cohesive group. They also worked with satellite Polish communities. This period saw the emergence of a separate, but closely-linked *Polonia* in the Fulton area just northeast over Wheeling Hill.

As seen with the earlier story of the Kubsky family migration in the 1880's, many German Poles first worked in North Wheeling at the Top Mill. While long a state-of-the-art nail factory during the Civil War, in the mid-1870's the plant expanded when a Bessemer steel blast furnace was constructed, and then remodeled several times between 1888 and 1894. Producing 100,000 tons of Bessemer steel annually, many Eastern Europeans labored there. However, most were Slovaks and Croats according to census records.<sup>68</sup>

The Polish settlement in the area expanded in several spurts between 1900 and 1920. This occurred after the construction of the Wheeling Mold & Foundry complex on the Peninsula east of Wheeling Hill. Located on a high plateau where Wheeling Creek bends around the hillside, in 1901 Charles Blue expanded his mold-making business to the ten acre site, building a machine shop and massive foundry. The company produced heavy steel castings, and had large contracts including the Pennsylvania Railroad's underground tunnels in New York City and the castings and mechanisms needed to finish the Panama Canal lock gates.<sup>69</sup> The need for men in this hot and labor-intensive work drew many Polish immigrants to the foundries but also to work at the Top Mill Blast Furnace providing pig iron for the complex. By 1910, many Russian and Austrian Poles arrived and were living on North Main Street, and snaking up Wheeling Hill along Coal and Bow Streets and eventually along National Road. The area's immigrant

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<sup>68</sup> *Directory to the Iron and Steel Works of the United States, 1908*, 189-91; 1900 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Washington District, Enumeration District 0136, Roll 1769, page 11B, Ancestry.com (20 March 2013).

<sup>69</sup> *National Labor Tribune*, February 21, 1901, 8; June 6, 1901, 8; Edward C. Wolf, "Wheeling and the Panama Canal," *Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review* (2004): 13-5.

population diversified after 1901 to include a few Russian Poles and Slovaks, and many more Slovenes, Lithuanians, and especially Austrian Poles.<sup>70</sup>

These Polish immigrants mainly arrived from Galicia between 1906 and 1914. Amounting to about twenty families in 1920, their population continued to expand.<sup>71</sup> In 1920, sixteen of the twenty families rented their homes, but most were small families with an average household size of fewer than four people. Only two members were naturalized citizens, but many possessed interesting stories. John Jawrilowicz and his wife came from Poland in 1906, but as illustrative of the many smaller moves in the immigration process, he and his young family spent time from 1906-1914 in New York and later from 1915-1917 in New Jersey, probably during the early war years in the steel works and Polish enclaves of Bayonne and Paterson. They arrived in Wheeling sometime near the end of World War I where John was employed in the Wheeling Steel Works.<sup>72</sup>

The Fulton area was also home to Stanislaus (Stanley) Duplaga, who immigrated from Austrian Poland in 1910. He soon became one of the key leaders in the local Polish community. During the war years he established the Fulton Grocery to cater to the Poles and other ethnics of the Fulton/ National Road area.<sup>73</sup> While he was one of several white-collar storekeepers, 68% of the Polish men were unskilled laborers. Although the Top Mill Blast Furnace remained a large employer of Poles in 1910, by 1920 many more now labored at the foundry, and were unskilled

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<sup>70</sup> 1910 Manuscript Census, Washington District, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 126 and 144; 1920 Manuscript Census, Washington District, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 120; 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 1, Enumeration District 75, in Ancestry.com (24 May 2013).

<sup>71</sup> 1920 Manuscript Census Schedules, Ohio County; 1930 Manuscript Census Schedules, Ohio County, WVRHC.

<sup>72</sup> Manuscript Census Schedules, 1920, Ohio County, WVRHC; John J. Bukowczyk, "The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1915-1925," *Labor History* 25, no 1 (Winter 1984): 55-60.

<sup>73</sup> 1920 Manuscript Census Schedules, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia; for the growth of the Polish community of this part of the Northern Panhandle, although entirely in Polish, see *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Ksiedza Emila Musiala, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Krola, Wheeling, W.Va, 1926*, in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (DWC).

workers and butchers in the various meat packing plants in Fulton. These immigrants were rather homogenous ethnically, most tracing their origins to Galicia.<sup>74</sup>

Evidence of the changing Polish community can be seen in the Selective Service registration cards. These draft card records provide much evidence for military historians, but also social historians of ethnic communities during this time.<sup>75</sup> Table 2.6 provides a breakdown of a sample of ninety-nine (99) young Polish immigrants from Ohio County, who registered with the Selective Service. The table shows where these men resided and reflects for 1917 the highest concentrations of Wheeling’s Polish community.

**Table 2.6: Location of Residence for Polish Immigrants in Draft Card Survey, 1917**

<b>City District</b>	<b>South Wheeling (40<sup>th</sup>-48<sup>th</sup> Streets)</b>	<b>South Wheeling (27<sup>th</sup>-39<sup>th</sup> Streets)</b>	<b>Center Wheeling (12<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> Streets)</b>	<b>North Wheeling (1<sup>st</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Streets; Warwood)</b>	<b>Fulton</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Number</b>	61	13	7	5	11	2

*Source: United States Selective Service System World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, M1509, Ohio county, West Virginia, Roll 1993024), from Ancestry Library Edition-World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918.*

From these findings, it appears broader South Wheeling, from the Belmont steel mill on 26<sup>th</sup> Street south to Benwood was still the locus of the Polish community. At the same time, the community began to expand north to Warwood and east to Fulton.

More importantly for any social history of the community’s development, these cards give a glimpse into the actual locales of immigration from Eastern Europe. Most of the men

<sup>74</sup> 1910 Manuscript Census, Washington District, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 126 and 144; 1920 Manuscript Census, Washington District, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 120; 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 1, Enumeration District 75, in Ancestry.com (24 May 2013).

<sup>75</sup> For examples, see Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).



listed their region’s political affiliation, or the imperial power in control. Table 2.7 gives a breakdown of the ethnic/ national diversity of this section of immigrants.

**Table 2.7: Ethnic Diversity of Polish Immigrants in Selective Service, 1917**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>German-Poland</b>	<b>Russia-Poland</b>	<b>Austria/Galicia-Poland</b>	<b>Poland (no distinction)</b>	<b>Poland (Villages unknown)<sup>76</sup></b>
<b>Number</b>	2	42	10	14	31

*Source: United States Selective Service System World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, M1509, Ohio County, West Virginia, Roll 1993024), from Ancestry Library Edition-World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918.*

While difficult to locate some of the more obscure villages, the majority of the data shows that a growing plurality of immigrants hailed from Russian Poland.<sup>77</sup> The sample reveals that many of these Wheeling immigrants came from the areas around Warsaw, Lublin, and Kolno.<sup>78</sup> Others hailed from the small and isolated villages in Galicia. These distinctions illuminate the diverse regional and village ties that eventually faded away with the community’s role in fostering a unified national identity. Historian Thomas Guglielmo notes that during the 1910’s and 1920’s, most ethnic enclaves first had to forge a strong collective national or racial identity to unite disparate regional loyalties. Community leaders constructed an idea of the “Polish race” to mobilize community political activism against nativism, organized crime, and local politics.<sup>79</sup>

These Polish immigrants made up a significant portion of the unskilled labor force fueling the industrial war machine. Of those sampled, 68 worked in the various steel mills and subsidiary operations in Wheeling and the Upper Ohio Valley, with the majority (34) employed

<sup>76</sup> These immigrants only listed their specific village of origin, with no context of the partitioned section.

<sup>77</sup> Blobaum, “To Market! To Market!”, 409-10; Berend, *History Derailed*, 162-4.

<sup>78</sup> *United States Selective Service System World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, M1509, Ohio County, West Virginia, Roll 1993024, from *Ancestry Library Edition-World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*.

<sup>79</sup> Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 31-4; 60.

at Benwood's National Tube Company. Nine men worked in the coal mines, five were unemployed, and ten held various unskilled laborer jobs. Only six were considered white-collar proprietors, and many of them requested exemptions. Despite some gains, in 1917 the Poles remained at the bottom of the labor force.<sup>80</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, South Wheeling's *Polonia* was a microcosm of the effects of the evolving world economy. Becoming market-oriented allowed many Polish peasants to engage in seasonal migrations to Western Europe and America. Wheeling was a prime location on the fringes of the manufacturing belt, which possessed a long immigrant history. The strong influence of the Irish and Germans played into the politics, labor activities, and culture of the city. However, their most lasting influence came in making Wheeling the seat of the state's Catholic diocese. The industrial expansion after the Civil War drastically increased Wheeling's Catholic working class population. The Church built the large St. Joseph's Cathedral and many other "territorial" parishes. By 1900, the arrival of many former peasants from Southern and Eastern Europe gave the Catholic Church more social and political influence, but also sparked debates over whether these "new immigrants" would worship in Irish/ German territorial parishes throughout the city or in newly created "national parishes," seeking to maintain old world tradition.

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<sup>80</sup> *United States Selective Service System World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Ohio County, West Virginia.*

### Chapter 3

#### “There has always been a tough element in that section”<sup>1</sup>: A Social History of Work and Neighborhood Life in South Wheeling and Benwood, 1890-1915

Life in South Wheeling was rough. Because of industrialization throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wheeling’s industries had grown and attracted a wide variety of workers from around the globe. However, industrialization also caused growing pains, as largely agricultural Eastern European migrants had to traverse the many difficulties of life in urban America. Family, kin, and religious networks were crucial for survival, but the dangers of everyday life made survival difficult. Finding hard, irregular work at low wages, many new immigrants suffered from constant workplace dangers and frequent economic insecurity. As a result, most were forced to live near the largest factories in old, or decaying housing stock. Crammed together in grimy brick row houses, and wood frame structures, these immigrant workers and their families endured constant flooding and unhealthy conditions.

Polish immigrants suffered the worst in their new surroundings. In November 1893, a local reporter investigated a brick row house in North Wheeling. Housing laborers for the nearby Top Mill blast furnaces, the structure was a 200 feet long and 40 feet high, two-and-a-half story row, where lived “promiscuously about seventy-five Polanders.” Unemployed for six months, the reporter wondered “how they live” since “hunger is abroad among them.”<sup>2</sup>

Describing a scene that few native-born residents could understand, the *Wheeling Register* noted the dreadful living conditions:

“The apartments were dimly lighted by candles and wood fires. Wandering in the darkness, over ash barrels and other rubbish, the reporter managed to get to a large room. In this were probably forty of the foreigners. They were all poorly clad, and most of them sat on the floor. There were among them the old gray-haired man and the babe, the men and women of various ages.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, August 17, 1903, 8.

<sup>2</sup> “Out of Work: The North Wheeling Polanders Will Soon Be in Want,” *Wheeling Register*, November 12, 1893, 4.

Throughout the room, a heavy fog of Hungarian cigar smoke hung in the air. Common of depictions of immigrant poverty, the reporter also ridiculed the “Polanders” eating and drinking habits. Commenting on how they substituted beer for food: “Pretty soon quite a racket was heard and [a] big, powerful Polander rushed in with a beer keg on his shoulder . . . Some seemed so thirsty that they made a dive for the tub, and began to drink like a horse from a trough.” The scene turned joyous when a large amount of “strong smelling meat” mysteriously arrived. They “attacked” the meat with knives, forks, fingers, and gobbled it up in a “hideous” frenzy. Following the meal, the Poles “danced and sang in their native manner.” Finally, they “ascended a rickety stairway” to the second story, where fifty “stretched out on the floor.” With bleak work prospects, the merriment over a keg of beer and some decent meat distracted these Poles for a night from the grim prospects of a harsh upcoming winter.<sup>3</sup>

While drawn to Wheeling’s factories as a result of global economic changes, this chapter focuses on the precarious nature of working class life for new Polish immigrants. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Wheeling had serious urban problems. While both political parties suffered from corruption, most blamed the power of brew masters, saloonkeepers, and prostitution madams, dubbed “Schmulbachism,” after the city’s leading symbol of political corruption.<sup>4</sup>

Many Polish and Slavic immigrants found work and crammed into South Wheeling’s working class neighborhoods at the height of the “wide open” culture. Just as they arrived in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> My arguments in this chapter benefit from the amazing social history of prostitution by David Rose in the 1980’s. See, David W. Rose, “The Trial of Alice Bradford: A Study in the Politics of Prostitution in Wheeling, W.VA.,” *Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review* Volume XVI, no. 1 (Autumn/ Winter 1986), 6-22; David W. Rose, “Prostitution and the Sporting Life: aspects of Working Class Culture and Sexuality in Nineteenth Century Wheeling,” *Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review* XVI, no. 2 (Spring/ Summer 1987): 7-31; “Schmulbachism” refers to brewer Henry Schmulbach (1844-1915); for the “wide-open” culture, female working class subcultures, and prostitution, see, Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

large numbers, public outcries against prostitution led city officials to regulate the male “sporting” subculture by creating a segregated “Tenderloin District” in the area of South Wheeling becoming quickly overrun by new immigrants. As a result, the period represents a shift in the social history of the city. Issues of political corruption, organized vice, the saloon culture, and criminality appeared as general problems caused by the immigrants. This association led many to neglect the real problems caused by industrialization, dangerous working conditions, and the unhealthy life in immigrant neighborhoods.

The shift from an agrarian to a modern industrial economy shaped unique ethnic subcultures in South Wheeling and Benwood’s immigrant neighborhoods. One must understand the social conditions they confronted before viewing the ways they communally built ethnic Catholic parishes, joined trade unions, or entered local politics.<sup>5</sup> Immigrants did not shed their old world ways, but through a gradual acculturation process, they came to terms with the new industrial environment. Settlement houses were crucial, but most immigrants learned about city problems while tending the blast furnace or loading coal, drinking in a neighborhood saloon, assisting immigrant families during a spring flood, encountering yeggs and street toughs, going to a prostitution house, and chatting with neighbors on the front stoop.<sup>6</sup> However, these sites served as direct threats to the Polish family and ethnic culture these immigrants encountered.

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<sup>5</sup> Social historians find studying these “alternative subcultures” a useful tool for understanding the processes of class formation; Richard Jules Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 60-7; Dominic A. Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago, 1880-1922* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> James Barrett argues that any social history of immigrant acculturation in “multi-ethnic” cities should focus on the spaces and interactions that shaped everyday life, especially the streets, the parish, the union, leisure sites, and the political machine. His insights on the role of public spaces in acculturating inter-ethnic interaction are crucial to my insights in this chapter, see James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multi-Ethnic City* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 10-11; 13-55; Dominic Pacyga, “To Live Amongst Others: Poles and Their Neighbors in Industrial Chicago, 1865-1930,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (Fall 1996): 55-73.

The goal in recreating this social history serves as a reminder not to ascribe too much agency to those immigrant poor who had limited choices in life.<sup>7</sup>

### **Precarious Nature of Working Class Life**

The composition of Wheeling’s Polish workforce was typical of other industrial cities. Arriving from rural settings, many of these men flocked to unskilled work in the steel mills and other factories. Even with the hope of economic mobility, most workers of the first generation remained unskilled laborers. The largely blue collar nature of South Wheeling’s Polish community reflected the broader changes in working class life. Table 3.1 highlights the overwhelmingly working class composition of the Polish community from 1900-1920. Most Poles and their sons remained as unskilled laborers in the steel mills, although some became semi-skilled workers at higher positions, as well as coal miners. Some even entered skilled union positions as pipe cutters, machinists, and boilermakers.

**Table 3.1: Composition of Wheeling and Benwood’s Polish Workforce, 1900-1920**

	<b>1900-Ritchie</b>	<b>1910-Ritchie</b>	<b>1920-Ritchie/ Benwood</b>
<b>Unskilled Laborers</b>	48	175	224
<b>Semiskilled Laborers</b>	6	38	91
<b>Skilled Laborers</b>	1	6	12
<b>Child Laborers</b>	7	10	18
<b>White Collar/Business</b>	2	20	56

*Source:* Manuscript Census Schedules sample, 1900, 1910, and 1920 for Ohio County, and 1920 for Benwood, West Virginia & Regional History Collection, West Virginia University.

After 1900, immigrant workers learned “what it meant to work in a large-scale, mechanized, rationally managed, corporate system of production.”<sup>8</sup> The Polish, Italian, Syrian,

<sup>7</sup> James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago’s Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 65, quote on 100.

<sup>8</sup> David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Struggle*, Second Edition (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

Ukrainian, and Croatian immigrants seeking work in Wheeling entered a new and more dangerous work environment. These “new immigrants” found coal mines that had replaced the highly skilled collier with undercutting machines. At the Elm Grove, Richland, Hitchman, and Wheeling Steel mines, immigrant men and boys in essence became fast-paced machine tenders and conveyer loaders. As a result, wages remained low.<sup>9</sup> The same fate met those seeking common labor in the steel mills and glass houses, where most tended blast furnaces, worked in railroad yards, moved raw materials, and tended machines. What most failed to notice was that the growth of “nondescript, unheralded, and unskilled work” came just as massive immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe heightened.<sup>10</sup>

The adoption of the continuous flow of production in Wheeling’s steel mills, coal mines, and glass factories, deprived new immigrants of control over the pace of their work. Most of the factories where immigrants labored employed hundreds. Following the 1890’s Depression, Polish and Slavic immigrants’ main employer was the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company and the National Tube Company’s Riverside Works in Benwood. The latter mill complex in North Benwood employed anywhere from 2,000-2,500 workers; however, in good times it employed as many as 4,000. The Wheeling Steel & Iron mills, along with Wheeling Corrugating, Wheeling Can, and the American Tin Plate Company’s mill at the LaBelle Nail Works employed 1,951 in 1895. By 1905 their total employment nearly doubled to 3,724 steelworkers, in 1908 they

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<sup>9</sup> Elliott J. Gorn, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), 76-7; West Virginia Department of Mines, *Twenty-Third Annual Report—Coal Mines in the State of West Virginia, for the Year Ending, June 30, 1905* (Charleston: The Tribune Printing Company, 1906), 86-7; *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report—Coal Mines in the State of West Virginia, for the Year Ending June 30, 1906* (Charleston: The Tribune Printing Company, 1907), 96, 8; *Annual Report of the Department of Mines: For the Fiscal Year Ending, June 30, 1915* (Charleston: Tribune Company, 1915), 294, 6.

<sup>10</sup> W. Jett Lauck, “The Bituminous Coal Miner and Coke Workers of Western Pennsylvania,” *Survey* 26 (April 1, 1911): 34-51; for a recent work that examines the cultural history behind this mechanization process on native and foreign-born working bodies. As labor became more backbreaking for the skilled worker, Slavishak argues that “Unskilled labor was both crucial and relentless.” See Edward Slavishak, *Bodies of Work: Civic Display and Labor in Industrial Pittsburgh* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 29-50, quote, 50 and 36.

employed 4,300. By 1927, these mills employed 4,744. Bloch Brothers Tobacco, Northwood Glass Company, and the Wheeling Pottery/ Tile Factories employed many young immigrants, especially women. Throughout the 1890's-1910's Bloch Brothers employed nearly 500 workers; the Wheeling Pottery Works had anywhere from 350-500 workers. They tended to hire Polish and Slavic women in the tobacco stripping department and the finishing rooms. Young Polish young women also did machine work at Wheeling Stamping and the Wheeling Can Factory at 48<sup>th</sup> Street. By the 1910's, many Polish immigrants found work at the Wheeling Mold & Foundry in Fulton. Assisted by contracts for work on the Panama Canal lock gates and munitions in World War I, the factory's employment grew from 209 (1905), 360 (1907), 815 (1919). Finally, many Slavic and Italians found work in the B&O rail yards, which by the 1920's employed over 500.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of scientific management strategies and employer open shop drives, skilled craftsmen lost control to mechanized mass production processes. Factories merged human and machine technology, controlled by managers, who demanded a faster work pace and greater standardization of task or piece work. Polish and Slavic steelworkers often took time to adjust to this system of regulated time on the factory floor.<sup>12</sup> With this process already in place by 1900, corporate managers kept costs down through time-saving mechanization and recruiting a large pool of common laborers from Eastern and Southern Europe. By 1907, Carnegie's Pittsburgh

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<sup>11</sup> Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 7; for the employment figures, see *Report of the Commissioner of Labor of the State of West Virginia, 1895-1896* (Charleston: Moses W. Donnally, 1896), 318-326; *Ninth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor of West Virginia, 1905-1906* (Charleston: The Tribune Printing Company, 1906), 112, 122-4; *Tenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor of West Virginia, 1907-1908* (Charleston: Tribune Printing Company, 1908), 105, 120-3; *Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor of West Virginia, 1919-1920* (Charleston: The Tribune Printing Company, 1920), 16, 37-9; Peter Boyd, *History of Northern West Virginia Panhandle, Embracing Ohio, Marshall, Brooke and Hancock Counties, Volume 1* (Topeka: Historical Publishing Company, 1927), 291-99. Exact figures based on nationality or ethnicity are not available. These figures also don't account for the many immigrants who labored in the steel mills in Bellaire, Bridgeport, Martins Ferry, Yorkville, and Steubenville, Ohio.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (June 1973): 531-88; Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 11-2; E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38, (1967): 56-97.



steel mills employed 14,359 casual day laborers, of whom 11,694 (81%) were Eastern Europeans. As “Hunkies” and “Polanders” filled the jobs tending large furnaces, loading coal underground, stripping tobacco, or running a can or glass press, employers could cut and set common wage labor rates. The constant immigration of more diverse nationalities, along with women and child laborers helped to further subsidize this low wage, unskilled economy. Slavic immigrants working in the Pittsburgh mills earned on average 16.5 cents/ hour in 1910, barely enough to support a large family even with the male head working six 12-hour days.<sup>13</sup>

Periodic unemployment plagued common laborers. With the consolidation of steel firms at the turn of the century, the boom and bust nature of the business cycle often led to periods of seasonal unemployment and larger downturns. This made attaining an economic foothold increasingly difficult, best seen during the “Banker’s Panic” of 1907. Often depicted as a short-lived, Wall Street bust, in reality it ushered in a widespread economic depression devastating the industrial Midwest. In Pittsburgh, the tonnage production of steel fell by almost 40% from 1906 to 1908. While wage rates dropped slightly for skilled tonnage workers, most steel companies laid off masses of unskilled workers (almost by one third). Conditions in Wheeling were bad by early 1908. One observer noted how awful it was “to see children of the city running about with no shoes or stockings on their feet. Their fathers . . . being unable to provide for their wants.”<sup>14</sup>

Unskilled laborers suffered the most. Requiring steady employment just to get by, the depression produced a sluggish economy from late 1907-early 1910, followed by another

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<sup>13</sup> Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, ch. 4; Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*; Barrett and David Roediger, “In-between Peoples: Race, Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16(1997): 3-33; Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns*, 29-55; for the experience of unskilled new immigrants finding work in the steel mills, see Brody, *Steelworkers in America*; Slavishak, *Bodies of Work*, ch. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 3, 1908, also cited in Fred A. Barkey, “Socialist Influence in the West Virginia State Federation of Labor: The John Nugent Case,” *West Virginia History* 38, no. 4 (July 1977): 283-4; for an economic analysis of the Depression’s effect on steel production and common wage rates, see Peter R. Shergold, “Wage Rates in Pittsburgh during the Depression of 1908,” *Journal of American Studies* 9, no. 2 (August 1975): 161, 165, 172; John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (New York: Russell Sage, 1911), 159-60; *Wheeling Register*, January 12, 1908, 7; January 19, 1908, 6.

recession from 1914-1915. During both “panics,” immigrants responded in similar ways. 1908 saw one of the largest return migrations to Europe. In addition, the exodus of foreign-born laborers and their families throughout the spring of 1914 continued at the rate of about one hundred a day, hoping to return once the business conditions improved. Many secured tickets from steamship agencies that operated out of the Bank of Benwood. The timing of the layoffs brought a new set of problems for families caught between two continents, particularly after war broke out in Europe. Frantic immigrants wrote numerous letters home, worrying if loved ones who returned home seeking work had been drafted into their nation’s armies. John Wercelich, a prominent Hungarian, appealed to the State Department to know what happened to his father who left for Austria in June 1913. Since he had not heard from him, he assumed that his father, a naturalized American citizen, was forced to join the Austrian army.<sup>15</sup>

However, hundreds stayed in Wheeling and Benwood, suffering from a lack of relief services and starvation conditions during cold winters.<sup>16</sup> Things seemed to brighten a bit in January 1908, when several factories reopened on the South Side. The Wheeling Pottery Company’s Chapline Street and La Belle departments rehired 250 and 400 workers respectively. Warwick China rehired 60-70 employees, Northwood Glass Company brought back around 400 hands, and Bloch Brothers Tobacco employed 300 more in its packing department. However, the steel mills remained closed. Most of these other plants rehired American born workers at a lower wage rate, or more commonly hired women and children.<sup>17</sup>

The plight of immigrant steelworkers and their families filled the local press coverage. The *Wheeling Register* noted the high numbers of Poles “in bad straits” who seemed to be

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<sup>15</sup> *Wheeling Register*, March 1, 1908, 17; *Benwood Enterpriser*, February 12, 1914, 4; April 30, 1914, 4; June 4, 1914, 4; for the desperation of immigrant workers and their worries about loved ones drafted into the armies of the Central Powers, see *Benwood Enterpriser*, May 7, 1914, 4; September 3, 1914, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Shergold, “Wages Rates in Pittsburgh,” 182-5; *National Labor Tribune*, August 20, 1908, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 3, 1908, 10; January 7, 1908, 8

“almost starving.” Things were made worse since many foreign-born men sent a significant portion of their paychecks home to families in Europe. Even the foreign saloonkeepers could no longer provide aid and free lunches for needy men.<sup>18</sup> Conditions were worse for those in Benwood. Even though one observer claimed that the “foreigners, on account of their thriftiness and ability to live cheaply, are in much better shape to weather the panic,” in reality their suffering was much worse because of meager wages and poor condition of rental housing.<sup>19</sup>

One of the few private organizations to come to the aid of the immigrant poor were the ladies of St. Joseph Cathedral’s Immaculata Guild. Reaching out to fellow Catholic families, these middle class women provided food and clothing for those near starvation in the overcrowded neighborhoods near the steel mills. One of the worst cases they uncovered was of a Polish family living on 25<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets near the Belmont Mill. The Catholic society found the Lokiski family living in a “mere shamble of a dwelling . . . a veritable hovel scarcely fit to quarter an animal,” without even a “crust of bread in the house.” Unable to speak English, the men of the house were unemployed, and the youngest children went without necessary winter clothes. Discovering how malnourished they were, the charity provided groceries to ease their suffering. Unable to meet the growing demand, the Immaculate Guild reached out to the city as a whole and published the stories of destitution in the local newspapers. These women discovered that the most difficult task in helping these immigrant families was that many were “too proud to ask for aid,” desiring to take care of themselves. Their efforts were joined by the Knights of St. John in assisting the poor of Benwood near St. John’s Catholic Church. They investigated homes and provided food and clothing to any family regardless of ethnicity.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 10, 1908, 10; January 12, 1908, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 13, 1908, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 23, 1908, 5; January 24, 1908, 4; January 25, 1908, 6; February 2, 1908, 18; the following chapter will talk more about the role of ethnic and Irish Catholic lay organizations.

The short, unnamed descriptions of immigrant families in need from one day highlight the variety of suffering:

“Two widows living on South Jacob street, sons unable to secure work, suffering from cold, and without provisions.”

“Afflicted family on Chapline street, Eighth Ward, entirely destitute.”

“Family of father and five children living in Riverside block, Eighth ward, father rheumatic, need food and clothing.”

Conditions for those in Benwood reached crisis conditions, as families were totally dependent upon the steel mills. Almost 90% of the men in Benwood were unemployed for months, the worst economic conditions since the start of the depression in 1893. Local ethnic grocers stopped extending credit for destitute families. Lacking the money to purchase coal, families nearly froze to death in their cramped quarters. Conditions turned worse when a large flood surprised the working class sections of South Wheeling and Benwood in mid-February.<sup>21</sup>

Economic conditions did not improve until the large Benwood mills reopened in June 1909. The good news attracted several thousand immigrants who “poured into Benwood and South Wheeling . . . clamoring for employment.” Hundreds of immigrant workers congregated outside the mill gates every day for weeks, seeking casual labor jobs and work on the blast furnace crews. Highlighting the racialized views of natives toward the immigrant working class, one observer noted how “Every tenement house in Benwood is occupied and in some of them the foreigners are congregated as dense as bees in a hive.”<sup>22</sup>

Another economic depression occurred in April 1914, when National Tube Company closed down furnace A and B, throwing thousands out of work. Many skilled workers and machinists found work in the B&O rail yards, at the Goodyear Rubber factory in Akron, or in

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<sup>21</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 25, 1908, 6; January 31, 1908, 2, 9; February 15, 1908, 1; February 17, 1908, 3

<sup>22</sup> *Wheeling Register*, June 8, 1909, 1; for reporting of new immigrants as insects and animals, living in “savage-like” crowded tenements similar to the jungles of Africa and Asia, see Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 105-138.

Steubenville.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the 1907-1908 depression, many more men demanded public works jobs. Prominent Croat Mike Kostolich appeared before the county court and pleaded that idle immigrant men with families get jobs on the road improvement project on the Boggs Run Road. However, the contract engineer refused the proposal stating the work was a “mechanical job.” These unemployment conditions were disastrous for some immigrants. John Saublach was killed by a passenger train when he and some Croatian immigrants walked along the railroad trestles from Benwood seeking employment.<sup>24</sup>

Conditions remained precarious for the unemployed. When the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company plants closed in December 1914, thousands lacked the money to either return home or travel throughout the Ohio Valley to find employment. One local charity official commented how “conditions among the poor [are] worse than they have been for years.” What made the downturn of 1914-1915 unique was that many more immigrant families sought relief for the first time. Settlement house workers noted that most cases were of “industrious and deserving men and women who are idle through no fault of their own.” This differed from the way most public officials blamed immigrants for their own poverty by wasting wages in saloons. The desperation worsened as the mills remained closed through the winter of 1914-1915. Wheeling and Benwood saw an increase in tramps. By January 1915, there were at least 400 unemployed men sleeping each night at city hall. Many “wanderers” from other cities without any other recourse asked the local police to arrest them. With some warm shelter in the city jails, police turned many away after lodging for a night or two. The police also arrested many young girls and “street walkers” roaming the streets, whose numbers spiked with “new recruits from the shops,

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<sup>23</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, April 30, 1914, 4; July 22, 1915, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Saublach was a prominent member of the Croatian Society and St. John’s Catholic Church, see *Benwood Enterpriser*, May 7, 1914, 4.

mills and factories.”<sup>25</sup> When conditions finally improved, the men flocking to the mill gates for work also quickly filled the tenement apartments on Harmony Hill and in North Benwood, led to massive crowding on South Wheeling’s streets for months with new and returning families.<sup>26</sup>

### **Immigrant Workers’ Danger on the Shop Floor**

Working in South Wheeling’s factories was inherently dangerous. Like the mills of the Pittsburgh District, steelworkers toiled near treacherous machinery. In one grisly incident at the National Tube Company in the fall of 1907 an immense iron flywheel, eighteen feet in diameter, went to pieces killing a foreign laborer, John Bedosck. The incident occurred in the die shop on a “large elevated platform suspended about eight feet from the floor.” The description of what transpired was terrifying: “Another piece of the wheel fully as heavy as the one that struck the dye shop went through the roof of the tube building, soared over the storage house and buried itself in the ground about eight hundred feet distant.”<sup>27</sup> The description of Bedosck’s demise details the graphic dangers of work in the steel mills: “[he was] struck on the head by a piece of metal and instantly killed; skull split open and brains and flesh oozed out.”<sup>28</sup> Six others were also injured, suffering broken arms and legs, and bruising.

The nature of these industrial accidents did not strike all workers equally. Unskilled immigrants did the most precarious mill work. The near daily reporting of workplace accidents illuminates the plight of Slavic immigrant laborers, who suffered the most from mechanization.

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<sup>25</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, December 17, 1914, 4; for descriptions of tramps and the poor, see *Wheeling Majority*, December 10, 1914. By early 1915, there were at least 5,000 men unemployed at the various mills and yards of the National Tube Company; see, *Wheeling Majority*, January 14, 1915, January 21, 1915; during a previous downturn, a Polish woman and several foreign-born men were fined by the Benwood city court for stealing coal from the B&O railroad company. The paper failed to note that the cold weather might have prompted the immigrants’ actions; see *Wheeling Register*, January 12, 1906, 9; for arrests of tramps and streetwalkers, see *Wheeling Majority*, October 15, 1914; January 28, 1915, 1; February 4, 1915, 1; February 11, 1915, 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, February 12, 1914, 4; April 8, 1915, 4; July 15, 1915, 4; July 29, 1915, 4; March 9, 1916, 2; *Wheeling Majority*, July 8, 1915; *Benwood Enterpriser*, January 22, 1914, 4; February 12, 1914, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Wheeling Register*, September 15, 1907; September 20, 1907.

<sup>28</sup> *Wheeling Register*, September 15, 1907.

As a result of “Language differences, lack of experience, and managerial neglect combined to place new immigrants directly in the line of fire.” Many Polish steelworkers probably shared the view of one common laborer at Pittsburgh’s Jones & Laughlin mill that “people died like bugs.” This almost passive reportage of immigrant workers’ deaths, argued a writer in the *Amalgamated Journal*, showed that managers treated immigrants like a “bedbug or cockroach or a troublesome mosquito . . . so much vermin” that was expendable.<sup>29</sup> Where one worked on the shop floor was dictated by skill, nationality, and the possibility of fatal injury. Area mills, especially the Riverside Tube Works, were industrial war zones. One man, John Polis, died after being “struck by a B&O passenger train at the Tube Works, while Joseph Ebeling was “struck by a sledge” opening a major gash under his eye.” Another “well-known foreigner” Jacob Levoch had “a heavy piece of iron” fall on his head, almost fracturing open his skull. The working conditions in Wheeling city mills were dangerous as well. Frank Wattabaugh, a dipper in the tin house at the LaBelle Mill was a victim of a gas explosion in the dipping pot when it accumulated too much gas. Small pieces of metal filled his eyes, and “his face was slightly scorched.”<sup>30</sup>

The numerous accidents and deaths in the steel mills meant that immigrant workers were taking their lives into their own hands. One of the worst accidents on the South Side involved a Syrian immigrant Joseph Judge working at the La Belle tin plant in August 1906. Joseph, age 50 “fell headforemost into a seething pool of acid.” Most fellow workers were so terrified that they could not help him. When rescued, Joseph presented the “most revolting spectacle imaginable” as the acid burned off his moustache and eyebrows, and burned his skin from his head to waist.<sup>31</sup> A similar accident befell John Pavolich, a blast furnace laborer at the Riverside mill. Working

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<sup>29</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, October 20, 1910, quoted in Slavishak, *Bodies of Work*, 160.

<sup>30</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 25, 1905, 11; March 5, 1905, 20; March 11, 1905, 3; March 3, 1905, 10; *Wheeling Register*, March 5, 1905, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 3, 1906, 3.

on the notorious furnace B at night in the cold January weather, Pavolich was knocked off the trestle platform near the furnace, falling twenty feet, and landing “directly on his head in a pile of iron.” He had deep gashes on his head, along with a fractured skull, which later proved fatal.<sup>32</sup>

Most accidents in steel mills occurred in the blast furnaces and in the loading yards near the railroad tracks. Often reporters noted that “Accidents Galore” occurred near the Benwood steel mills, especially involving discharges from furnaces A and B. These were the most common accidents for unskilled Slavic laborers. Steve Visnic operated the furnace around the gas producer; however, on one occasion flames burst forth, badly burning his face and chest. Of even more danger were runaway coal cars and trains that intersected the mill yards. Often the speed of coal trains could surprise mill workers. A 68 year old worker, Frank Szcemski of 48<sup>th</sup> Street was “horribly mangled” when he was run down by a B&O train.<sup>33</sup>

The intense temperatures and constant strain of steel production often killed men on the spot or drove them mad. Although many of the steel mills provided cooling stations and longer breaks for men to recover from the heat of the furnaces; however, fatigue and death loomed. Mike Coleric died an hour after collapsing at the Riverside Mill from the intense heat. A “Polander” working at the Riverside, Peter Rodonic, became so “mentally unbalanced as a result of overwork and the intense heat,” he ran “amok” through the mill. These types of episodes were common for the newest arrivals, who came to the Benwood mills with no prior factory experience. Rodonic, who died within the week, did not understand the labor gang’s work rules, since he labored a series of continuous turns without resting or eating his meals. The desperation of men injured physically and psychologically led some immigrants to commit suicide. A Slavic miner Anton Ambrose hung himself from a rope in the closet of his room in the Hitchman Row

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<sup>32</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 3, 1906, 7; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 15, 1906, 6; July 21, 1906, 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 15, 1907, 6; March 8, 1907, 6; *Benwood Enterpriser*, April 15, 1915, 4.



boardinghouse in early 1914. Anton labored for years at the Hitchman mine and its dangerous conditions proved too much for him to take. Leaving some letters in Slavic, Anton despaired that he would never get to see his wife and children still living in Europe again.<sup>34</sup>

Work in the nearby coal mines and coke ovens were also full of peril. From 1890-1912, West Virginia's mines had the highest death rate in the nation. While the southern coal fields were the deadliest, several Wheeling area mines were dangerous. Miners needed to be vigilant about potential accidents. Polish miner Frank Bartula almost lost his life working too fast digging coal and was crushed against the floor by a heavy fall of slate. Many foreign born, mostly Polish and Slavic, miners knew they walked into a proverbial battlefield everyday below ground. The Hitchman Coal & Coke mine in Benwood was the most notorious. Many older Polish miners died, like John Compass. He met his demise digging coal from the face, when a two feet piece of slate fell on him. 46 year old John Neicice died after three days of "untold agony," crushed by a fall of coal slate. Neicice's wife died while in Hungary, and he and two sons migrated to America, eventually settling in Benwood's Hitchman row. Hoping to return home someday, Neicice died after working only nine months.<sup>35</sup>

The attractions of wage work in the coal mines of the Upper Ohio Valley brought thousands of Slavic speaking immigrants to the region. On the Ohio side, immigrant coal miners congregated in Bellaire, Bridgeport, and Martins Ferry, and especially Lansing. On the West Virginia side, miners settled in South Wheeling and Benwood, as well as in Warwood and Triadelphia. Many of the miner settlements outside Wheeling were derisively dubbed "Hunkie

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<sup>34</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, September 16, 1915, 4; June 19, 1913, 4; July 2, 1913, 4; January 22, 1914, 4.

<sup>35</sup> David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 10; West Virginia, Department of Mines, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, Coal Mines in the State of West Virginia, for the Year Ending June 30, 1906* (Charleston: Tribune Printing Co., 1907), 166-7, 211; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 18, 1907, 6; *Wheeling Daily News*, January 30, 1907, 3; Polish miner Jacob Wysorski, age 35, died in a similar slate fall at the Hitchman mine. Like other Slavic coal miners killed in that non-union mine, they often had left their wives and children in the home country to travel over later. See Wysorski's accident in, *Benwood Enterpriser*, November 20, 1913, 4.

Hollows” for the high proportion of Polish, Hungarian, Croatian, and Greek and Italian immigrant miners. Often these “company patches,” two to three miles from Wheeling, allowed for better control over the diverse workforce.<sup>36</sup>

Immigrant coal diggers lived a precarious life. John Kogut’s father Andy immigrated as part of wider Polish chain migration in 1908 and settled in Lansing, Ohio. The company charged Kogut \$3 a month rent taken directly from his wages. Most Polish coal miners worked as unskilled coal loaders, often shoveling coal from one side and then the other like a machine. By the 1890’s, most local coal mines had a strict ethnic divide as Southern and Eastern Europeans made up most of the coal loaders and scrappers, while native born, Irish, Welsh, and German miners ran mine machines or served as foreman. With the increase in fatal mining accidents, the Department of Mines blamed the conditions on the “heterogeneous mass of humanity,” which lacked the proper skill and knowledge to mine safely. By early 1890’s—native and second generation Americans distanced themselves from the new immigrants at workplace.<sup>37</sup>

Added to the deadly nature of mill and mine work was the payment of wages. Immigrants from agricultural backgrounds often complained of the payment of wages each few weeks. For example, beginning in 1907 workers at the Riverside Mill vigorously criticized the company’s three-week lag in pay periods. If a worker labored from December 1-December 15, the company did not pay him for those two weeks until December 22. Even worse, for February 1-February 15, mill workers only got paid on March 2. This payment structure made it

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<sup>36</sup> Final Report, “As They Say in Wheeling,” The Final Report of the Wheeling Spoken History Project (Wheeling: Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation, 1995), 97-8, Wheeling National Heritage Area Main Office, Wheeling, West Virginia (hereafter WNHAC).

<sup>37</sup> Final Report, “As They Say in Wheeling,” 131-2, WNHAC; Slavishak, *Bodies of Work*, 57-8; West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines, for the Year Ending June 30, 1907* (Charleston: Tribune Printing Co., 1908), ix.

impossible for families to pay household bills.<sup>38</sup> On occasion, workers fought back. In early 1907, over 700 workers, machinists, tube workers, and welders struck in protest of the National Tube Company's system. It appears many workers felt unjustly treated by the fact that in the three-weeks' pay system, they only received two actual weeks' wages. It would take another three weeks to receive the extra week from the previous pay period.<sup>39</sup>

National Tube set standardized payment systems, production levels, and employment among their various operations. In response to the threatened strike at Benwood, the company offered a ten-cent a day increase for common day laborers. In the end, over 2,000 workers at the Riverside Mill received an advance of 10-12 cents a day. This included all laborers earning under \$2.00 a day (virtually all the unskilled immigrants and blast furnace hands); excluded were the skilled tonnage men, the semi-skilled piece rate workers, and salaried employees. This tactic divided the immigrant common laborers from the skilled machinists, tonnage men, welders, and crane men who were pushing for the strike. The nature of this pay raise also suggests how much de-skilling had occurred following the failed strike in 1901. Local steel companies continued to undercut their skilled workers by adding new mechanized production lines. The Wheeling Stamping Company enlarged their plant capacity with new machine presses. Efforts were made to turn the Belmont Mill into a continuous production mill with an investment of \$50,000. New blast furnaces, an electric crane, and a new foundation reflected a policy of implementing mass production designs to connect the various mills and blast furnaces in the Wheeling, Benwood, Martins Ferry, and Steubenville region together to compete with the Pittsburgh district.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Slavic immigrants' fought factory regimentation via acts of cultural resistance like ethnic weddings, drinking, and missing work on ethnic Catholic holidays; see, Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," 547, 550, 578-80; *Wheeling Daily News*, January 6, 1907, Section 4, pg. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, January 9, 1907, 1; January 11, 1907, 1; January 13, 1907, Section 4, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, January 9, 1907, 1; January 11, 1907, 1; January 13, 1907, Section 4, 7; January 23, 1907, 2; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 7, 1907, 8; *Wheeling Daily News*, July 18, 1909, Section 4, 5; for unskilled immigrants adapting to early 20<sup>th</sup> century mills, see David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in*

The mechanization of area factories led also to the hiring of scores of young boys and girls for certain unskilled work. Boys assisted their fathers and brothers as catchers and loaders in the coal mines. Limited career opportunities led many teenage boys to the steel mills. Their additional wages were crucial to supplementing the meager family economy. August Oglinsky emigrated with his parents from a rural Polish village in 1909. Oglinsky's father got a job in the coal mines near Lansing, Ohio. Recalling family expectations, Oglinsky remarked "Everybody, when they got to the age of about 14 . . . were looking for a job to help their parents." Without the paychecks from other children, Oglinsky remembered that "you didn't eat." After graduating from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he started looking for work in 1921. By 1923, the sixteen year old (5'2", weighing 112 pounds) went with a neighbor to meet the foreman for the Wheeling Traction Company. Seeking work on the track gang, the foreman asked whether he thought he could "do a man's job." After working all day with a pick and shovel crew, the foreman learned from the rest that August was the "best man in the crowd." He returned home, proudly told his mother "I've got a good job now," and worked with the company for the next 52 years.<sup>41</sup>

Others had to find work after their father died in the mills and mines. Jack Brennan grew up in a "Poor as church mice" Irish family in Benwood. When he was seven, Jack's father died in an accident. With five other siblings, Jack by age fourteen, and only weighing 115 pounds, decided to get a job at Benwood's pipe mill in the early 1920's. Even though the work was dangerous, Brennan knew "Mother needs the money." Getting employment was tough. Steelworkers worked the twelve hour day beginning at 6:10 in the morning until about 6:30 at

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*the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), ch. 2. By 1916, these companies still utilized the three-weeks' pay system, see *Wheeling Majority*, March 3, 1916, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Sean Duffy and Jim Thornton, *The Wheeling Family: A Celebration of Immigrants and Their Neighborhoods* (Creative Impressions: Wheeling, West Virginia, 2008), 162-3.

night.<sup>42</sup> Usually foreman and employment agents would choose a group of extra laborers each morning at the company gates. The casual nature of labor recruitment made it difficult even for child laborers. Brennan had to sit outside the plant for a week before he was allowed to work. Because of their youth and inexperience this could lead to many accidents. One foreign boy had his leg badly mashed when a fell in the tube mill in Benwood, causing him to have a leg amputated. Another teenage Polish boy, Joseph Chynat, met a terrible death at the Hitchman mine in August 1914. Working since age 15, he died from electrocution, deep below ground.<sup>43</sup>

While immigrant men clustered in the blast furnaces, rolling mills, and coal mines, many immigrant women and young children supplemented the family income working in smaller machine factories, tobacco plants, and glass houses performing a variety of unskilled jobs. Younger immigrant children provided extra supplies often by scavenging for food, and more so coal in the cold winters. After Christmas 1897, constables arrested a Polish family after catching them stealing coal falling from the B&O train cars. This was a common problem for the railroad, as they reported losing fifteen tons of coal in South Wheeling and Benwood, to families who had “their coal houses stocked with enough coal to last all winter.” More often, Polish boys were run over by B&O trains, as they sought to provide fuel for their needy families.<sup>44</sup> However, many local factories actively recruited young workers. Hazel Atlas Glass often hired a mixture of boys and teenage girls. Wheeling Can Company also employed many young boys and girls over 14 to work the canning machinery. Some boys did yard work at Wheeling Mold & Foundry.<sup>45</sup> Northwood Glass Company was one of the most common sites of causal

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<sup>42</sup> Final Report, “As They Say in Wheeling,” 159-60, WNHAC.

<sup>43</sup> West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines: For Fiscal Year Ending, June 30, 1915, Part II* (Charleston: Tribune Company, 1915), 40.  
*Benwood Enterpriser*, July 15, 1915, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Wheeling Register*, December 30, 1897, 8; December 13, 1896, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 4, 1906, 8.

employment. After taking over the former Hobbs, Brockunier Glass Factory in 1901, Northwood needed a ready supply of youth to work as “snapping up boys” and to carry in. They constantly hired dozens of young boys ten years and older. Often, company advertisements made the job sound much better than it was. One Northwood ad needing fifty young boys claimed they could earn 80 cents to \$1.20 a day and hopefully have a chance to learn the skilled trade. Walter Reuther’s childhood shows the dangers of work in the glasshouse. As boys, Walter and his brother Ted worked at Northwood around the corner from their home. With no state child labor laws at that time, the company employed children sporadically for five-hour shifts. At age nine, Walter wandered into Northwood and was struck near his eye with a hot blowpipe, with molten glass on the tip, leaving a terrible scar.<sup>46</sup> Because of their youth, inexperience, and small stature, many young immigrant children were maimed terribly. Many worried daily if they would be like one young girl, who lost two fingers caught up in a press at the Wheeling Can Factory, “crushed to a pulp.”<sup>47</sup>

As a result, the low wages promoted a unique family economy, where all members of the immigrant household contributed to the family’s survival. This “working class realism” made up the principal “calculations in the working class economy . . . The reliance on multiple incomes, especially among the low paid, thus continued to sustain American working-class life.” Over time, rank-and-file immigrant workers’ objectives narrowed to support realistic goals “over loftier goals of earlier protests.” Most working class families had a unique “nexus of concerns,” which forced them to be pragmatic in protecting their family above all else.<sup>48</sup> While workers formerly found assistance from trade unions, by 1900 most operated under an intense

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<sup>46</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 26, 1903, 2; Victor G. Reuther, *The Brothers Reuther and the Story of the UAW: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), 12, 29-30; *Look*, August 10, 1965.

<sup>47</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, May 8, 1913, 4.

<sup>48</sup> John Bodnar, “Immigration, Kinship, and the Rise of Working-Class Realism in Industrial America,” *Journal of Social History* 14, no.1 (Autumn, 1980): 45, 49-52.

“parochialism” that led skilled workers to draft contractual bargains with employers, monitor work rule changes, all the while striving “to hold apart from the unskilled and the alien.”<sup>49</sup>

Polish household structure reflected this family economy. A good example is Joseph Kowalski, who lived at 2628 Market Street in “Little Poland.” Born in 1866 in German-Poland, he immigrated with his wife in 1892. By 1910, they had 6 children between 2-16. With their father out of work, Kowalski’s three oldest children worked outside the home. Daughter Frances (16) was a house servant, and his son Mike (15) and daughter Rose worked at a nail factory (La Belle). To supplement the money to pay the rent and family needs, Kowalski allowed eight boarders to live with them. Between the ages of 19 and 44, all but two arrived after 1905. Given the lingering economic recession at the time, only five were employed as unskilled laborers at the nearby Belmont Mill and one as a farm hand. When conditions remained poor and the male breadwinner was out of work, this family economy sustained many Polish households.<sup>50</sup>

### **Arrival of Immigrants into Crowded and Environmental Hazardous, Industrial Zone**

For working class residents, social class “had a distinct spatial dimension,” as they fought a daily battle against the potential dangers lurking around the street corner. Poor sanitation, crowded housing, and bustling streets posed a daily adventure in survival.<sup>51</sup> The problem was acute for new immigrants encountering South Wheeling’s streetcars and railroads. As early as the 1890’s, Polish immigrants died terribly at the hand of speeding B&O railroad cars. In what

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<sup>49</sup> Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 21-3; for more on the nature of the family economy with wives managing boarders, working in canning and glass factories, and children working in coal mines and tending machines, see John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 89-112 ; James Barrett examines this nature of Irish-American Catholic labor leaders and skilled workers toward new immigrants, stressing their balancing act between inclusion and exclusion of the new immigrants. See, Barrett: *The Irish Way*, ch. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Kowalski, 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Webster District, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0131, Precinct #1, page 13A, WVRHC.

<sup>51</sup> For the role of “semi-public” spaces, see Perry Duis, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 1-8, quote, 86; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

the *Wheeling Daily Register* callously called “the same old story of stepping out of the way of one train right in the way of another,” a young Polish laborer at the Riverside Tube Mill named Lewandowsky, was hit by a train backing up between 40<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Streets. Knocked down onto the tracks, the “engine passing over his legs . . . mangling them in a horrible manner.”<sup>52</sup>

However, the worst incidents involved young children killed by the B&O trains. One Polish boy needed both arms amputated after being hit by a Hempfield Division train near the Riverside Mill. The most gruesome story was the death of ten-year old Anton Cienkurski. During another cold winter, young Anton was picking up loose coal near the B&O yard at 27<sup>th</sup> Street, near the Spears Axle Works, on order of his parents. While “industriously engaged” in getting the much needed fuel, Anton’s foot got caught in the track and his body was “cut in two, across the abdomen.” In one of the most agonizing scenes imaginable, the boy’s mother ran from nearby and “gathered up the upper part, the head and the chest and carried it to the house in her apron.” Worse yet was that there “seemed to be a spark of life left” when she arrived. Another woman brought home the other portion of the little body.<sup>53</sup> Labor leaders protested that the city “filled the streets with railroad tracks with complete disregard for the common people compelled to live in the vicinity.” In addition, most immigrant workers lived nearby dangerous industrial machinery. Many Polish, Greek, Lebanese, Italian, and African-American steel workers rented

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<sup>52</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, February 24, 1895, 4; *Wheeling Register*, November 1, 1897, 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Wheeling Register*, December 13, 1896, 1; December 12, 1897, 20. As is often the case of the time, the newspaper misspelled Anton’s name as Cienkwsz. According to city directories, his father was working in the area, named Anton Czenkus; *W.L. Callin Wheeling City Directory, 1898-1899* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, 1898), 161; the proper name is taken from the official death record. See Anton Cienkurski, Jr., Death Record, December 11, 1897, “Register of Deaths Within the District of Addison Israel, Assessor, For the County of Ohio In the Year Ending 31st December 1897, 92, Division of Vital Records, West Virginia State Archives and History Center, Charleston, West Virginia (hereafter WVSA).



homes or boarded right next to the Belmont Mill from 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> Streets in South Wheeling, where dangerous explosions and fast railroad cars endangered all.<sup>54</sup>

South Side streets were appalling. Most were still brick and kept in a dreadful “shameful condition,” while dirt alleys were common. One angry resident chided the *Wheeling Register*, the supposed “champion of the oppressed” to force the city to do something about the “noise evil” that made living in these regions almost unbearable. Every day, residents competed with the “rumbling and creaking of the traction car,” business wagons, “vehicles of pleasure,” and the “cackling” of a young woman and the “exultant crowings of her proud and happy consort.” These caused a “nerve-disturbing” public to wish that South Side factories would be more considerate of the thousands of people crammed into the small region.<sup>55</sup>

By 1900, Wheeling had a modern and extensive streetcar system, extending south to Moundsville, north to Wellsburg and Weirton, and across bridges to Bridgeport and Bellaire. These connections allowed some South Wheeling workers to travel quickly to downtown shops, the steel mills on Wheeling Creek, Fulton’s Wheeling Mold & Foundry, and to mills in Martins Ferry and Yorkville. In 1899, the formation of the Wheeling Traction Company consolidated the various electric car lines, extending an interurban line with Wheeling’s suburban communities to the East. By the 1920’s, the company operated 70 cars on a system of 101 miles of track.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, November 19, 1914; by 1920 a sample of households near the Belmont Mill showed ten different immigrant groups in the area. Of the sample: 37.5% (Polish), 18.8% (American), 11.3% (African-American), 10% (Irish), 8.8% (German), 5% (Greek), and 7.5% (Slovak, Syrian, and Italian). Of the sample, 73.8% rented, and only 26.3% owned their homes. See sample of 80 households from 1920 Manuscript Census Schedules, WVRHC. These descriptions come from Ohio County, Wheeling City Tax map, 1901, Ohio County Courthouse, Wheeling, West Virginia. I thank Ginger Kabala and Fr. John Byrd of the South Wheeling Preservation Alliance for this amazing document; Sanborn Insurance Atlas Maps, Wheeling, 1884, 1890, 1902, and 1921, OCPL.

<sup>55</sup> *Wheeling Register*, June 6, 1909, 4; June 2, 1909, 4.

<sup>56</sup> *The History of West Virginia, Old and New* (American Historical Society, Inc., 1923), 460 and at <http://www.lindapages.com/wags-ohio/trolley/trolley-train.htm>. Streetcar lines created an intricate and dangerous web through South Wheeling’s. There were two main lines starting at 26<sup>th</sup> Street going south. One starting on Main Street turned north on 27<sup>h</sup> Street to Chapline. It ran on Chapline all the way to 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, then turning north to Eoff Street at 33<sup>rd</sup>. It went straight for several blocks, turning north again at the corner of Eoff and 39<sup>th</sup> Streets to Jacob Street. From here, it went straight all the way to Benwood. A second line starting on the 2600 block of Chapline

The Traction Company was a center of working class discontent. The company's rates changed arbitrarily, and most believed that it bribed local city councilmen for favorable franchise rates. Animosity toward the streetcars could also erupt into violence, as seen during the bitter streetcar workers' strike in 1899. In early April, an angry mob set fire to the company's barn in Benwood, and workers antagonized those riding the cars throughout South Wheeling during the strike.<sup>57</sup> The B&O railroad's lines also presented many hazards, since they ran down the middle of streets. This dense network of railroad and streetcar traffic and the close proximity of factories next to immigrant neighborhoods, made daily life noisy, dirty, and precarious.<sup>58</sup>

Those working class immigrants and their families settling in South Wheeling contended with another major problem—the prevalence of deadly diseases. In a river town like Wheeling, its physical geography made the spread of pestilence a concern. The low-lying region south of Wheeling Creek through Boggs Run was in a flood plain. These neighborhoods laid in a narrow stretch of land flanked by the steep hillsides to the east. By 1900, the potential for epidemics grew as a result of overcrowding, pollution, and industrial waste. Almost half of all disease deaths came via tuberculosis. From 1903-1912, between 47 and 94 people died annually from the disease. Tuberculosis infected many more who went unreported in the immigrant districts.

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Street turned north at 27<sup>th</sup> Street turning onto Eoff. It continued straight until it turned north at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street onto Jacob Street. The line went straight for several blocks until it turned north at 39<sup>th</sup> Street. Finally, it went north on Wood Street. Then it went south at 43<sup>rd</sup> Street onto Jacob Street; Wheeling City Tax map, 1901, Ohio County Courthouse.<sup>57</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, April 1899, and David Javersak, "The Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly: The Formative Years, 1882-1915" (Ph.D. Diss., West Virginia University, 1977); ch. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Railroads shipped finished goods and raw materials to and from the various South Wheeling factories. The main lines of the B&O were the largest in South Wheeling; however, several smaller rail lines operated along the river. The B&O's major railroad terminus was located on the riverside between 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Streets, and along the hillside at Wood Street. The main lines of the B&O then ran northeast from the river in a track of land between 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Streets. Many spur lines ran to each of the largest factories on the Southside, like the Wheeling Pottery Company at 31<sup>st</sup> and Eoff Streets. The B&O river and hillside lines intersected at a point at 33<sup>rd</sup> and McColloch Streets south of the Schmulbach Brewery and the Northwood Glass Works. Spur lines ran south of the Schmulbach Brewery so that packaged beer could be loaded for shipment. Another spur line branched off at 40<sup>th</sup> Street between a residential neighborhood and Bloch Brothers Tobacco Factory. The main B&O lines continued along McColloch Street south until they intersected with connecting lines at the Benwood Roundhouse; see, Wheeling City Tax map, 1901, Plates 9, 14, and 15, Ohio County Courthouse; Sanborn Insurance Atlas Maps, Wheeling, 1890, 1902, OCPL.

By 1912, about 75% of those reported infected, died from tuberculosis. Charles Yergovich, already weak in health, hoped to return with his wife and son to Poland after earning enough money. However, watching his son die from typhoid fever, led to his own break down. Diagnosed with tuberculosis, Yergovich longed to “die back home.”<sup>59</sup> Poor garbage collection made the problem worse. Without a crematory, most garbage was partially burned and then thrown on the hillsides above Center and South Wheeling. Already clear-cut of trees, this garbage polluted the soil even more. During the summer the garbage would smolder and “fill the air with noxious gases.” Moreover, most houses and tenement apartments were not fumigated after people died of small pox, scarlet fever, and consumption.<sup>60</sup>

The spread of typhoid fever was a particular concern. Without indoor plumbing in most of the frame homes and brick rows in South Wheeling, many residents drank water directly from the river or hillside wells. In addition, most utilized “dry vaults” or simply dumped human waste (“night soil”) in backyards or street gutters. The John Coleman Drug Company on the South Side proclaimed, “people of Wheeling are drinking nothing more than practically sewage!” According to the City Health Department, between 1873 and 1913, 1,583 people died from typhoid fever out of at least 15,000 cases reported. Discovering infected water north of town, one observer from the health department warned: “Now we are drinking the filth of the upstream cities from Pittsburg to Martins Ferry. No wonder it is bad!” Most times the river appeared clear; however, it could be very colorful from industrial wastes. During the summer of 1909, shocked residents witnessed a horrid sight as a “scum” gathered on the river, giving it almost an

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<sup>59</sup> *Report of the Health Department of City of Wheeling, West Virginia, for the two Years ending June the thirtieth Nineteen Hundred & Thirteen* (Wheeling: City Health Department, 1913), OCPL, 12-3, 16-7; *Wheeling Register*, July 1, 1912, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, January 7, 1907, 4.

orange color, “only broken up by the thousands of dead fish” passing by Wheeling. With this constant problem, most working class residents had to boil their water.<sup>61</sup>

City wells tested for high levels of the deadly *coli bacillus*. The highest contamination was the five city hand pumps near the Center Market house and the Tenderloin District. Health inspectors blamed this on the close proximity of “privies and cesspools.” In the Fifth Ward alone, there were 135 outside privies within a few blocks of the wells. In a heavy traffic region utilized by about 1,150 people daily, this contamination endangered many immigrant families. Public school fountains also consisted of “river water.”<sup>62</sup>

The daily worry of contaminated drinking water contributed to the popularity of working class saloons. Channeling this fear, local brewers stressed notions of “cleanliness” and “purity” in their advertisements. The local Pabst Brewery claimed their Blue Ribbon Beer as a “Clean Food,” and noted how by using sterilized tubes and pipes with hermetically sealed tanks “every known safeguard is established to prevent any possible contamination.” Likewise, Schmulbach Brewery dubbed their prime lager “the beer of the home” and was “Highest in purity; Highest in healthfulness.” The company encouraged working fathers to order their beer as the “ideal family beverage,” healthier than the local water or milk. Many immigrant families took the advice of the Irish saloonkeeper Mr. Dooley to heart: “liquor is food. It is though. Food –and drink.” It should not be surprising the local saloons were seen as the friend of the working class.<sup>63</sup>

Municipal sanitation reached a breaking point following the 1907 spring flood. City Health Officer W.H. McLain warned there were 226 deaths in the year’s first quarter (annual

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<sup>61</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, January 7, 1908, 1; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 5, 1909, 12; *Report of the Health Department of City of Wheeling*, 1913, OCPL, 16-7.

<sup>62</sup> *Wheeling Register*, August 30, 1914, 12; *Wheeling Daily News*, January 6, 1907, Section 4, 8.

<sup>63</sup> For example brewery advertisements, see for Pabst *Wheeling Daily News*, May 3, 1906, 3; for Schmulbach Brewery, see *Wheeling Majority*, September 5, 1912; Duis, *The Saloon*, 95-6; Finley Peter Dunne, *Mr. Dooley’s Philosophy* (New York: R.H. Russell, 1900), 149.

death rate of 20.26 per thousand people). This number had been spiking. For 1905 it was 15.94 per thousand, and in 1906 it was 17.04 per thousand. He blamed the high death rate on the lack of an efficient crematory, no process of fumigating homes, poor garbage collection, and on the poor inspection of impure milk.<sup>64</sup> Through the City Health Department and settlement house workers from the Associated Charities, the city began inspecting impure milk in 1907. Immediately, the number of children's deaths dropped by 50% in 1908. By 1912, almost 90% of all milk tested by the City Health Department was below dangerous levels. A greater success was garbage collection. Until June 1910, refuse was collected through a private contract system. Garbage often piled up in the streets, further polluting water. After 1910, Health Department policy required garbage to be drained and wrapped in paper, and city wagons went semi-weekly to all residences.<sup>65</sup> Even with improvements, the city's mortality rate remained highest for those living in the working class wards. For 1912 and 1913, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Wards had the first and second most of all disease deaths. Immigrants showed a spike in disease deaths from 35 (1912) to 43 (1913). These numbers do not reflect the many foreign born deaths that went unrecorded.<sup>66</sup>

Like other Progressive reforms, municipal sanitation targeted immigrants. Many subscribed to the views of social scientists and eugenicists stressing the dirtiness and these lower races' inability to change personal habits. More sympathetic progressives wanted to help, but still viewed the Poles as naïve and unable to help themselves. As a result, local officials used coercive health ordinances to force immigrant cleanliness. Antone Postovitch and Frank Kukay received fines for violating a law in 1912 against throwing decaying animal carcasses (in this case a dead cat and "putrifying [sic] meat") in the streets and gutters in an alley near the "Little

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<sup>64</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 10, 1907, 1 for Health Officer's report.

<sup>65</sup> *Report of the Health Department of City of Wheeling*, 1913, OCPL, 32-5.

<sup>66</sup> *Report of the Health Department of City of Wheeling*, 1913, OCPL, 41, 45, 49; "violence" as discussed here included murder, street violence, and knife and pistol deaths. It often neglected those killed at the steel mills.

Poland” neighborhood at 26<sup>th</sup> Street. According to the local judge, “The foreigners evidently thought they could do in Wheeling what they do in their own countries.” Another Polander, Frank Kusic, also received a verbal condemnation and fines for a similar act.<sup>67</sup> For many years, Poles were continually in police court. Bronick Chasitaski violated three ordinances relating to keeping outside vaults and water closets. Polish men grew increasingly angry at sanitary officers and even their Polish neighbors patrolling their homes. Felix Swakvoarke failed to comply with a quarantine on his home and family after a child contracted scarlet fever. When several Poles testified against him, Swakvoarke alleged that “if sent to the workhouse I will give all the prisoners scarlet fever.”<sup>68</sup>

For the new Polish and Slavic immigrants arriving in South Wheeling, the most pressing environmental crisis was flooding. Lying in a low flood plain, and lacking proper flood walls along the river, immigrants were constant victims of spring thaws. Rapid industrialization negatively affected the environment in several ways. Along with the spread of chemicals into the river and streams, and smog-like pollution that covered the valley, a related problem was the clear-cutting of trees. Because of the building boom of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the overlooking hills (Chapline, Mozart, and Harmony) were clear-cut for housing. This disfigured the land. Throughout the state, excessive timbering led to soil erosion and forest fires. Soil often washed from the hillsides, or fell into Wheeling Creek and other streams polluting well water. With the timber cut from the tops of the high hillsides, the ground was exposed to wind and heavy rains, causing springs to dry up. As the water and waste ran off the hillsides, it picked up drainage from the meat packers, tanneries, coal mines, glass factories, and steel mills located along

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<sup>67</sup> For health reformers’ views the Poles’ poor sanitary habits, see James S. Pula, “The Progressives, the Immigrant, and the Workplace: Defining Public Perceptions, 1900-1914,” *Polish American Studies* 52, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 58-9, 62; *Wheeling Register*, July 3, 1912, 5; July 4, 1912, 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 26, 1915; *Wheeling Daily News*, July 11, 1915, Part V, 1. The spelling of the men’s names is based on that reported in the press, even though misspellings were often common.

Wheeling Creek and near Caldwell's Run at 29<sup>th</sup> Street. With this soil destruction, the watershed could not hold the heavy rain water in the early springs.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the first fifteen years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw an increase in the number and strength of floods, as well as terrible droughts.<sup>70</sup> Often these floods came with little notice. To understand the devastation, it is necessary to briefly look at the two worst floods in March 1907 (50.1 feet) and in late March 1913 (51.1 feet).

In the early morning hours of March 13, 1907, the Ohio River began rising rapidly. Following a strong and steady rain for 48 hours, starting at 16 feet at 6:00am, the river eventually reached a height of 50.1 feet, these floodwaters struck South Wheeling residents most viciously. Most major steel mills were below flood stage (i.e., Whittaker Creek mill was 30 feet; Benwood mills were at 34 feet).<sup>71</sup> In addition, transportation routes were completely blocked, isolating South Wheeling from the rest of town. For those out of the direct path of the floodwaters, terrible damage occurred because of numerous mud slides on Chapline and Mozart Hills overlooking South Wheeling. According to some observers, "tons of earth rolled down . . . [and] did not consist only of dirt, but of huge rocks, trees, brush, and other debris." Even sewers flooded. The sewer located under the B&O railroad track at 48<sup>th</sup> Street became clogged with debris and flooded all of North Benwood. No matter where one lived, the flood took a heavy toll.<sup>72</sup>

Stories of suffering by the immigrant working class filled the newspapers during both the 1907 and 1913 floods. The South Side was "the heaviest loser of all the water-infested

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<sup>69</sup> For the description of the effects of timbering on the water quality and propensity for flooding in Appalachia and West Virginia, see Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 269-73.

<sup>70</sup> According to city records, fifteen massive floods hit Wheeling between March 1903 and March 1913. 1908 was a year of extremes. There were large floods in February (42.8 feet) and March 1908 (39.6 feet); however, by October 1908, the Ohio River was in the midst of a major drought that had hit the entire state very hard. The river measured only 2 inches on October 12, 1908. For this data, see "Wheeling Floods: 1762 to the Present" via the Ohio County Public Library <http://wheeling.weirton.lib.wv.us/history/events/floods/floods.htm> (1 December 2012).

<sup>71</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 14, 1907, 1, 9; March 15, 1907, 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 14, 1907, 9.

portions.” Some residents, thinking they were further away from the river, were surprised when river water backed up from Caldwell’s Run, the dividing line of South Wheeling at 29<sup>th</sup> Street. The main street traffic stopped along Jacob Street from 39<sup>th</sup> all the way to 48<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1907, four feet of water covered this region, suspending operations at Bloch brothers’ Tobacco Factory and the Wheeling Can Factory. In 1913, most streets were flooded from two to eight feet. Immigrants sat looking out second floor and third floor windows, as they were “held captive by the swirling Ohio.” Benwood was “practically inundated” and a “scene of direful desolation;” most residents could only navigate by small boats and skiffs. On Harmony Hill, the dual effect of landslides and rising water left “the foreign inhabitants of this locality are almost terror stricken as several houses have been caved in by large masses of earth falling against them from the hill.” At least eighteen to twenty-four inches of mud covered the streets for days. Flood waters overturned numerous outhouse privies and even one poorly built wood-frame cottage occupied by a group of foreign boarders. In 1913, the worst in need were the hundreds of new immigrants who lived in “small shacks close to the river banks.” Most of these wood-frame houses and “shacks” were small and nearly knocked off their foundations by the high currents.<sup>73</sup> In the Polish neighborhood starting at 40<sup>th</sup> Street, the river extended “clear to the hills and is several miles wide.”<sup>74</sup>

Unable to cash or collect their paychecks, unemployed immigrants found relief as several relief organizations distributed free lunches and the Board of Public Works enlisted gangs of immigrant men to clear the mud and debris from the streets. In the 1913 flood, Mayor Harvey L. Kirk (1913-1917) organized relief boats and helped avert a bread famine for those living on the Island and South Wheeling. Police utilized motor boats to reach the hungry, and patrolled the

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<sup>73</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 15, 1907, 6, 8; *Wheeling Daily News*, March 29, 1913, 4-5, 7; *Wheeling Daily News*, March 28, 1913, 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, March 28, 1913, 1-2; March 28, 1913, 8; March 29, 1913, 4-5, 7.



South Side to prevent looting and arrest those overcharging people to haul their personal possessions and families. In addition, city officials and private charities converted the Webster School at 26<sup>th</sup> Street and the German Columbia Club near St. Alphonsus into temporary relief stations to house hundreds needing shelter and warm food. Even so, Benwood and much of South Wheeling remained entirely cut off from assistance by the railroads or even the Wheeling Traction Company, whose streetcars could go no further south than 27<sup>th</sup> Street. The only humorous flood stories occurred for the “denizens of Wheeling’s red light district.” The “gay times” included stretching pontoon bridges and docks about the houses, allowing for merry boat rides. Of course, business continued as a result of these modifications.<sup>75</sup>

The most horrific sight during these numerous floods shocked the immigrant population during the night of March 15, 1907. Reporters for the *Wheeling Daily News* graphically recounted the human suffering of the night’s atrocities. In a story titled “River is Yielding Up its Dead,” following a devastating fire and explosion at the Warwick Pottery Company, police and concerned family members flocked through Center Wheeling looking for survivors. Thirteen people died immediately, four others drowned, and another six were reported missing as a result of the panic that spread among the immigrant neighborhood near the factory. Almost all the dead immigrants, mainly Syrians,<sup>76</sup> lived on 22<sup>nd</sup> and Main Street near the Warwick factory. Many Lebanese died in the chaos that followed. Many dove from high windows of a foreign boardinghouse near the river and quickly drowned in the rapid current. The *Daily News* reporter summed up the horrific conditions: “There in the water, darkness, which appeared hideous blended with the lurid glow from the pottery fire, a terrible fight for life was witnessed by a

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<sup>75</sup>*Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 20, 1907, 7-9; *Wheeling Daily News*, March 28, 1913, 1-2; March 28, 1913, 8; *Wheeling Daily News*, March 29, 1913, 4-5, 7.

<sup>76</sup>For the purposes of historical accuracy, it should be noted that these are Lebanese immigrants who lived near the factory. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the group was referred to as “Syrians” even though they were from Lebanon. This was done to distinguish them as Maronite “Syrian” Catholics from Arabs.

dozen [or so] persons who were powerless to take action.” The Syrian neighborhood suffered terribly. Philip Cushman, his wife and their four small children all died during the explosion. Mike Bretries leaped from the boardinghouse and perished holding his nine-month old son in his arms. A boat capsized, drowning two infants immediately as their mothers shrieked. Fast currents caught many after their boats capsized. The swollen waters also took Polish immigrant Rosa Luswic (age 9) and Petar Sutti (age 24) along with an Italian John Festicci. Many policemen struggled to help the immigrants holding onto telephone poles and windowsills “screaming piteously for help.” The most unforgettable sound that night was the constant “dull splash” of people diving into the water, sealing their fate.<sup>77</sup>

While many city officials and private charities assisted the needy, the immigrants’ plight continued. Lacking the money to replace their destroyed furniture, families moved in with neighbors, found temporary housing, or moved elsewhere. Angry citizens blamed the devastation on the “folly of timber destruction” and the increasing clear-cutting of the timber from the hills overlooking Wheeling and Benwood. With nothing to hold back the water, the Ohio River became “little more than a sewer.” Most working class immigrants had only the solace of their fellow countrymen. At an impressive service at the Cathedral, Bishop Patrick Donahue delivered a touching address in front of hundreds of grieving residents. While they represented a variety of nationalities, Donahue spoke of how the dead and the living in the region “were bound together by the ‘link of Catholicity.’” His words spoke of the relief provided by a variety of Catholic organizations organized by the lay women of St. Joseph’s Cathedral. Even in

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<sup>77</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, March 16, 1907 details many more of the horrific stories of that night.

these difficult times, the Catholic Church functioned as key institution seeking to unite and organize the newly arrived immigrants and care for their many needs.<sup>78</sup>

With the growing immigrant population, the public held very polarizing views of their actions. Some were furious when it was learned that a number of immigrants on the South Side took advantage of the flood assistance, taking in stocks of free provisions, when they and their families suffered no losses by the flood. Speaking in a deriding way about the nature of the newcomers, one official criticized those “prompted by a spirit of selfishness into practicing the lowest forms of deception in a desire to get something for nothing.”<sup>79</sup> However, reporters also noted terrible scenes of suffering, especially among the immigrant population of Benwood. Virtually the entire town between the two large steel mills was flooded above the second story, with many houses completely under water. The scenes following the rise of the floodwaters were “pitiful”:

“Hundreds of the foreigners who are employed in the mills and reside in the city fled with what early [sic] possessions they could grab, at the first signs of a record-breaking flood and with terror-stricken hearts took up their abodes on the rough hillsides, sheltered by any kind of tent or shack which could be quickly raised over their heads . . . With fear in their hearts and their losses uppermost in their minds they are still hovering about the fires on the hills, discussing their plight in their native tongue . . . a stranger would pass the encampment under the impression that a band of gypsies had been flood bound.”<sup>80</sup>

The image of the immigrant working class as a “band of gypsies” presented them as a horde of foreigners, largely unprepared for the danger. However, the description speaks to a level of sympathy for working class families, who lost all their possessions and their modest homes.

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<sup>78</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, March 16, 1907; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 20, 1907, 12; March 21, 1907, 1, March 22, 1907, 1. The next chapter will highlight the role of ethnic Catholic parishes in providing relief and solace for newly arriving immigrants. While focusing on the Polish and Slavic immigrants, the Irish-led Cathedral and diocesan lay organizations were crucial in efforts to unite the various Catholic groups via relief service beginning after 1900, as well as efforts to Americanize ethnic folk practices.

<sup>79</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, March 30, 1913, Section 4, 1, 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, March 30, 1913, Section 4, 5.

The floods of March 1907 and 1913 left many working class immigrants with important choices to make. Some could return to their homes after a few days, only to spend weeks clearing away mud and debris. Others risked contracting disease, as an “extreme dampness” covered everything south of Wheeling Creek. Intact houses lost porches and attached kitchens. Finally, building and loan companies advertised the fact that many working class residents should “Move in your own home out of the Flood. Buy a lot at Mozart, High and Dry.” Following the 1907 flood, and the city’s beautification campaign that replanted trees and grass on the hillsides, developers began encouraging people to move from the flood plain. Completed homes cost as low as \$900 and 30’ by 120’ foot lots sold between \$100-600. Even with these cheap home prices, these inducements for homebuilding on the hillsides and interior valleys led to a gradual outmigration of the native born and old German families, leaving most working class immigrants to continue to live in the cheaper housing in South Wheeling and Benwood.<sup>81</sup>

### **“Wide-Open” Wheeling and the Politics of Vice South of the Creek**

Just as Polish and Slavic immigrants settled in Center and South Wheeling, evolving city policies contributed to that region being associated with vice, prostitution, and crime. This occurred for several reasons. First, it was in response to local progressive reform movements. However, it also reflected the larger social forces remaking the city around the turn of the century. Wheeling and its surrounding industrial suburbs and towns had greatly expanded since the 1890’s. As David Rose has argued, this social transformation bred many negative attributes: poverty and prostitution, decaying tenements and housing stock, inadequate sanitation, and impure water supply. Wheeling lacked proper urban services for lower class people, and the declining skill levels and wages bred many neighborhood hostilities. According to the City

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<sup>81</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, March 30, 1913, Section 3, 2; Section 4, 5; March 30, 1913, 1; March 31, 1913, 3; for this earlier process of suburbanization in response to the growing environmental concerns see, Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87-137.

Health Department in 1911, the leading cause of death was “violence,” which included “industrial accidents, homicide, and suicide.” Crime rose as the city’s population expanded in the crowded streets of South Wheeling and into Benwood. By 1902, the city appropriated more money for police surveillance, so that there were 38, mainly German and Irish, “beat” policemen. As a result of its growing raucous character, South Wheeling’s police patrol increased from four to seven by 1911.<sup>82</sup> The city also saw a rise in all types of crime. Arrests for disturbing the peace rose from 359 in 1900, to 468 in 1902. Assault and battery arrests rose from 7 in 1900 to 57 in 1901, and to an astounding 121 in 1902. Larceny also saw a spike from 10 cases in 1900 to 71 by 1902. By 1914, Wheeling had a real crime problem with 634 arrests for disorderly conduct, 410 cases of loitering to commit prostitution, 71 arrests for street fighting, 149 arrests for gambling, 70 cases of petty or grand larceny, and 90 arrests for pistol toting.<sup>83</sup>

By the 1890’s, Wheeling’s reputation as a “wide-open” town was renowned. While reformers decried the evils of prostitution, they were slow to realize how vital the vice trade was to the city’s economy. Social historian David Rose vividly recalls Wheeling’s “subterranean economy of vice,” which dates back to the siege of Fort Henry and that Wheeling’s riverboat and transpiration hubs brought thousands of young men to the city seeking pleasure. The earliest vice districts dotted downtown Wheeling near the upper market house and in East Wheeling

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<sup>82</sup> Rose, “The Trial of Alice Bradford,” 17-18; *W.L. Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1903-1904* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1904), 27-8; *W.L. Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1904-1905* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1905), 29; *W.L. Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1905-1906* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1906), 31; *W.L. Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1907-1909* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1909), 34; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1911-1912* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1912), 36, Ohio County Public Library (OCPL).

<sup>83</sup> Rose, “The Trial of Alice Bradford,” 17-18; for the statistics on various kinds of crime, see *Bulletin of the Department of Labor—Statistics of Cities* (Washington, D.C.), Vo. 30, September 1900, 935; *Bulletin of the Department of Labor—Statistics of Cities* (Washington, D.C.), No. 36, September 1901, 840; *Bulletin of the Department of Labor—Statistics of Cities* (Washington, D.C.), No. 42, September 1902, 916. During each of these years, the total number of arrests continued to rise with 1,649 in 1900, 1,705 in 1901, and 1,984 in 1902. By the start of statewide prohibition in 1914, the number of arrests ballooned to 2,901. Cases of drunkenness remained the highest crime (1900, 433; 1901, 735; 1902, 511; 1914, 1,101). For 1914, see *Wheeling Register* July 10, 1914, 6.

along Wheeling Creek.<sup>84</sup> From a practical perspective, Wheeling's political leaders saw the saloon and vice trades as something to be "contained" in segregated districts, monitored by police surveillance, a licensing system, and court fines when flagrant abuses occurred.<sup>85</sup>

This regulation of vice provided needed tax revenue for the city government, but also placed local politicians at the whims of those in the brewing, saloon, and vice trades. Some neighborhood constables demanded bribes to keep silent. In a telling case before the Board of Control in 1910, former constable John Madden revealed the payoff system for policemen walking the Tenderloin district, especially Lieutenant Bert McConnell. According to Martha Blair, who ran a house of prostitution at 2628 Main Street, during one conversation she was harassed for five dollars payoffs. When she refused to pay, one officer cursed at her, and threatened to "get back" at her with a "friend on the police force." Blair called in Lt. McConnell and explained the badgering to him, wanting to know if a new officer Moran "could make any trouble." Blair feared that "We had to be careful quiet there and not make any noise and I thought may be if he heard them laughing or speaking loud that Mr. Moran might come in there while I was gone and arrest one of the girls." McConnell made Moran give back the bribe. When asked about kickbacks, Blair merely said "that's the way it was" in the vice district.<sup>86</sup>

Around 1900, various Protestant ministers coalesced into a reform movement, known as the "Committee of One Hundred." They pressured the administration of Mayor Andrew T.

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<sup>84</sup> Rose, "The Trial of Alice Bradford," 6.

<sup>85</sup> The subject of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century vice and the various moral reform movements against them have attracted a long interest for scholars. For Wheeling, see Rose, "The Committee of One Hundred," 2-3; Zane L. Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati: Urban Politics in the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>86</sup> Testimony of Martha Blair at hearing of Wheeling Board of Control, *John Madden vs. Wheeling Police Force*, November 22, 1910, Ohio County Court Records, envelope #393A-1, OHI 785, Ohio County Court Records-Ohio County (WV), A&M 31, WVRHC; Blair's prostitution house at 2628 Main Street was next door to a Polish family with five Polish young men boarders working at the nearby Belmont mill; see 1910 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, West Virginia, Wheeling, Ward 6, Enumeration District 131, accessed via Ancestry.com (2 October 2012).

Sweeney (1899-1905) and the chief of police to strictly enforce a range of local ordinances against the “vice trust.” Led by Reverend R.R. Bigger of the Third Presbyterian Church in South Wheeling and Reverend J.L. Sooy of the Fourth St. Methodist Church, the Committee attacked “the liquor interests [who] . . . are organized in Wheeling for political aggrandizement and public plunder. They have bartered votes and never neglect to protect groggeries and low dens.”<sup>87</sup> These included bans on slot machines in saloons, high liquor licenses, Sunday closing laws, and the closure of the infamous “fake hotels” and “houses of ill fame.” Reformers worried that these vices were spreading throughout town, especially in South Wheeling.<sup>88</sup> Especially problematic were the “fake hotels,” where saloons and restaurants allowed prostitutes to receive men on the upper floors or even in adjoining “stalls.”<sup>89</sup>

The fake hotels’ expansion occurred in Wheeling’s “Tenderloin,” located just south of the creek near the Warwick China Company and Wheeling Stamping Factory. A *Register* reporter noted how the region became populated by an “undesirable class of tough men and women” occupying the many tenements facing the alleys. After 1904, “Cyprians of a low class” rented out rooms, selling their wares. Reformers merged moralistic arguments with an economic one stressing the “corrupting power of trusts.” In Wheeling, the close connection between saloons and the “fake hotels” seemed to confirm this attack. In this way, “red-light” districts were marketplaces, and the Vice Trust, working with the Beer Trust, “bought and sold prostitutes to fill district brothels.” This reinforced the power of big brewers over politics to

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<sup>87</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, April 7, 1900; Rose, “The Committee of One Hundred,” 5-6.

<sup>88</sup> Rose, “The Committee of One Hundred,” 3; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, May 14, 1902, 5; October 7, 1903, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 7, 1905, 4.

purchase patronage positions, undermine anti-saloon ordinances, and the continued profitability of the Tenderloin's brothels, gambling halls, and coffeehouses.<sup>90</sup>

These reforms neglected the real causes of the vice trade. Prostitution occurred in Wheeling's working class districts in East Wheeling, Alley C near the upper market house, and near the Fifth Ward market house. In these working class neighborhoods, prostitution was a form of low wage work, an occupational opportunity for young women when low pay factory jobs and domestic work were limited. While a reporter noted that "These harpies find it frequently necessary to despoil their victims" of all their wages, many did not notice the low class position of the harpies themselves. In the areas near the Market House, prostitution became virtually integrated into the local market trade for "commercial sex" for out of town farmers bringing goods to market and for local single factory workers seeking a "thrill" on their Saturday night paycheck binge. In fact, police "mandatory" raids only reinforced the degraded image of these young women as a subordinated under class. Even worse, with the increasing number of female wage workers in South Wheeling's tobacco, glass, stamping, and pottery factories, many "virtuous" women had to walk to work through these back alleys in the Tenderloin. While noting how these girls "through force of circumstances are compelled to work for a living," one reporter noted graphically the actions of "harpies" near the pottery: "the sight of these depraved creatures dressed in negligee clothing of flimsy material and gaudy pattern, with the don't-care appearance of a person who has had a good time, has a tendency to make these hard-working girls dissatisfied with their lot and easy victim for the tempter."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The region was also referred to as "Paper Mill Alley." *Wheeling Register*, March 5, 1905, 3; Mara L. Keire, "The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2001), 5-6, 12-15; Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America*, 195-200, 277-9.

<sup>91</sup> Rose, "The Trial of Alice Bradford," 7-9; *Wheeling Register*, March 5, 1905, 3.



The exploits of Wheeling's most infamous madam, Alice Bradford, led to the eventual arrangement of vice in South Wheeling. Bradford rented out a series of houses along Alley C from the early 1890's through 1903. However, after some conflicts with city council and police raids, she became the center of a heated trial in the summer of 1904. Bradford took three Pittsburgh minors away from their South Side homes and forced them into prostitution in Alley C. Public outcries forced local politicians to feel the political heat of years of tolerance to the vice trade. The *Wheeling Register* encapsulated this sentiment: "The whole district should be cleaned out as the moral cess-pool and pestilence breeder it is. It has far too long been a sort of Augean stables, a blot on the city, the shame and disgrace of Wheeling. Away with it!"<sup>92</sup>

However, public officials took no action for seven months after the mass indictments in August 1904. More puzzling was Chief John Ritz's closure of the Alley C brothels in November 1904. David Rose argues persuasively that Ritz's action was politically motivated; an attempt to crackdown on vice "under the ideological cover of regulation," would aid his reelection. This was crucial, since the municipal elections in January 1905 were a turning point in Wheeling's political history, a referendum on the twin issues of prostitution and the saloons.<sup>93</sup> Chief Ritz's crackdown led most prostitutes to relocate to South Wheeling from 1904-1905. Since the Chief's order only applied to Alley C houses, the prostitutes were able to move to the growing "lower-class" slum near the Center Market House. Quickly, citizens realized that the city had no intention of closing down prostitution in Wheeling. In fact, these incidents showed the financial importance of the vice trade to the city's political machinery. As Rose argues, Ritz essentially continued the policy of municipal control by "redrawing the boundaries of its containment."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 23, 25, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, June 26, 1904; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, 27, 1904; for quote, see *Wheeling Register*, July 19, 1904.

<sup>93</sup> Rose, "The Trial of Alice Bradford," 10-6.

<sup>94</sup> Rose, "The Trial of Alice Bradford," 16-7.

A related aspect of the “Vice Trust” was the proliferation of saloons. At its height in Wheeling’s history in 1904-1905, there were 52 just south of Wheeling Creek, and around 200 in the city proper. In the early 1890’s, Benwood had a population of 3,000 and had twenty-one licensed saloons (one for every 135 people). By January 1906, Benwood had 45 licensed saloons.<sup>95</sup> While most saloons were downtown, the South Wheeling’s saloons were distinctively immigrant working-class spaces. One local negatively summarized their clientele as “foreign vandals . . . viciously and remorselessly tramping American law under foot.”<sup>96</sup>

The saloon underwent a significant change during the 1890’s. In Wheeling and elsewhere in industrial America, the older neighborhood saloons run initially by lower middle class Irish and German immigrants became less independent. Rapid industrialization and the growing separation of work and leisure time led to the growing commercialization of the saloon business.<sup>97</sup> Beginning in the 1890’s, the saloon business became more difficult to enter because of high liquor licenses and the cost of beer. Around the same time, Wheeling’s brewing businesses grew through consolidations to become one of the city’s most prolific industries. Through business mergers and technological innovations, Henry Schmulbach (1844-1915) rose to prominence. His dominating style, command over much of the city’s brewery business, and controlling interest in a local empire of street railways, bridges, the telephone company, and member of the Board of Public Works from 1892-1896, earned Schmulbach the role as a political boss. Reformers dubbed his control “Schmulbachism,” a system of machine politics tied to the saloons, but also linked to gambling houses and prostitution.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 12, 1906, 9; *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1903-1904* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1904), 677-9; *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1905-1906* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1905), 707-8.

<sup>96</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, May 12, 1891, 3.

<sup>97</sup> Roy Rozenzweig, *Eight Hour for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 49.

<sup>98</sup> For a fine explanation of “Schmulbachism,” see Rose, “Prostitution and the Sporting Life,” 20-23.

The brewers and neighborhood saloons provided a friendly environment for working men to relax, have a cheap beer, and even public amusement. Mozart Park, opened in 1893 by Schmulbach, provided the most affordable working-class leisure for South Wheeling's immigrant population. Competing with Anton Reymann's Wheeling Park, Schmulbach catered to workers by providing cheap amusements and easy access via an incline railway. The park had the state's largest dance hall, holding 5,000. There was a roller coaster, casino, bowling alley, outdoor stage, bicycle track, garden, and concession stands to sell large mugs of Schmulbach beer costing 5 cents, and a large Kaiser roll sandwich costing 5 cents. The park hosted German singing societies, vaudeville shows, and a parachute jump. A failed attraction was a zoo, which halted when a frenzied crowd killed and ate a caged bear on display!<sup>99</sup>

His control led to calls of corruption against Schmulbach and his willing supporters on city council and the Board of Control. In spring 1902, a jury acquitted councilmen indicted for conspiring to sell votes to the City Railway Company, of which Schmulbach had a controlling interest. Schmulbach constantly fought with U.S. Senator Nathan Scott, a Wheeling glass manufacturer, over patronage positions and his Senate seat. By 1903, native-born Republicans sought to end Schmulbach's "imperial title to the boss-ship" of the local party. They sought to end his policy of nominating who would run for local political office in both the Republican and Democratic Parties. However, Schmulbach's style of saloon politics continued.<sup>100</sup>

Wheeling's saloons were often subsidized by one of the city's largest brewers. Even though high liquor licenses made it increasingly difficult to operate, many saloonkeepers took

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<sup>99</sup> Peter C. Boyd, "Old Mozart Park Popular Hilltop Spot," *Wheeling News-Register*, August 26, 1951; "Ancient Cellars Once Used to Store Beer May Serve Wheeling as Air Raid Shelters," *Wheeling News-Register*, February 8, 1942, 8; for the growing commercialization of working class leisure, see Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 171-90; Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 96-119.

<sup>100</sup> Rose, "Prostitution and the Sporting Life," 20-23; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, May 29, 1902, 1; May 30, 1902, 5; November 3, 1903, 1

advantage of the “tied-house” system. After making an arrangement with one of the breweries, the brewer contributed to the rent, license fee, and sometimes supplied the bar fixtures and artwork. In exchange, the saloonkeeper agreed to sell no other brand of beer and reimbursed the brewer by having to pay a special tax added to each barrel of beer. This created a reciprocal relationship, which helped make saloons the headquarters for ward political machines to get out the vote. The brewers then assisted with fighting city council’s attack on the saloons.<sup>101</sup>

The brewers’ power was seen in the battles over liquor license renewals and the Sunday closing law. For years, the state legislature dictated high licenses; however, city council often lowered the fees or issued tax credits. Because of the brewers’ financial “influence” on city council members, in 1905 Reymann and Schmulbach Breweries saw their average taxes cut by about \$500-600 a year.<sup>102</sup> This support also helped immigrant “coffeehouse” owners get liquor licenses. In 1903, council approved 120 such licenses, including “coffeehouses” and social halls run by Polish and Greek immigrants.<sup>103</sup> Dry advocates criticized the corrupting influence during the license renewal process. In 1900, several saloonists forced to explain their “reputation” were caught trying to bribe city officials for up to \$500 each.<sup>104</sup>

The Committee, frustrated by city council intransigence, endorsed George Laughlin’s Liquor Bill in January 1901. This bill would have placed the liquor license renewal in the hands of a circuit court judge, pre-empting the “influence” of city council. The city brewers, wholesale liquor dealers, and saloonkeepers fought the bill by starting a “petition against it in the saloons,

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<sup>101</sup> Jon Kingsdale, “The ‘Poor Man’s Club’: Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon,” *American Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (October 1973): 474, 482-4; Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 27-9; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, February 28, 1903, 5; March 25, 1903, 3.

<sup>102</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 6, 1905, 3; May 20, 1905, 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, March 25, 1903, 5 for the list of “coffeehouses.” The new immigrants included Ciukus & Shiligusky at 4421 Jacob Street, John Prezelenski at 4504 Jacob Street, Louis Bischof’s social hall at 4303 Jacob Street, J.C. Bartolas at 2701 Chapline Street, and August Dueker at 26<sup>th</sup> & Chapline Street (used as a German and trade union hall), and Agnic & Visnich’s at 2514 Main Street.

<sup>104</sup> *Morning Herald (Baltimore)*, December 13, 1898, 4; *National Labor Tribune*, August 21, 1902, 5; Rose, “The Committee of One Hundred,” 6; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, April 30, 1902, 5.

the consideration for signing being a free drink.” The bill failed, and things continued as usual. In the spring of 1902, against Mayor Sweeney’s ordinance that all license applicants must have an individual hearing, council overrode him and approved all the liquor licenses in mass. This led to the largest number of licenses ever issued in Ohio County—340.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, the anti-saloon forces urged strict enforcement of the Sunday selling ordinance. Beginning in the 1890’s, police constantly harassed violators. Most of the saloons targeted were located in South Wheeling, and were immigrant-run or catered exclusively to working class immigrants. Some saloonkeepers found themselves indicted numerous times. Eberhard Hofreuter’ saloon at 3501 Jacob Street was charged with Sunday selling an amazing twenty-five times between 1895-1902. They also went after saloons that acted as halls for local labor unions, such as L.C. Driehorst’s saloon at 4421 Jacob Street. The surveillance was not limited to Germans. Even Polish owner John Przelenski, who ran a saloon in the heart of the Polish community at 4504 Jacob Street, received five indictments in 1901 and 1902 alone.<sup>106</sup>

Reformers attacked the perceived rowdy and violent character of saloons. With the closeness of tenement houses, saloons, and the steel mills in Benwood, shootings were common. Waso Linewitcj learned this the hard way as he returned from work at the National Tube Company. Upon arriving at the appropriately titled “Last Chance Saloon,” Waso was shot at

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<sup>105</sup> For the gradual evolution of the prohibition movement in West Virginia, highlighting Wheeling politicians’ role, see Michael J. Buseman, “Vending Vice: The Rise and Fall of West Virginia State Prohibition, 1852-1934,” (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 2012), ch. 4; John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 210; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, February 1, 1901; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, February 24, 1903, 1; April 29, 1902, 8, April 30, 1902, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Hearing, Indictments, *State vs. Hofreuter, Eberhard*, November 16, 1902, Ohio County Criminal Court, envelope #384E-1, OHI 781; *State vs. Bishop, John*, August 25, 1901, April 24, 1903, Ohio County Criminal Court, envelope #384E-3, envelope #386E-2; *State vs. Finnegan, Thomas, Finnegan, Michael*, October 25, 1903, August 15, 1897, October 24, 1897 March 23, 1902, Ohio County Criminal Court, envelope #386E-2; *State vs. Driehorst, L.C.*, November 16, 1902, Ohio County Criminal Court, envelope #384E-7; *State vs. Przelenski, John*, March 23, 1902, February 26, 1901, March 1, 1901, Ohio County Criminal Court, envelope #384E-7, Ohio County Court Records-Ohio County (WV), A&M 31, WVRHC.

from the hillside near Boggs Run. He was lucky in just being hit in the hand.<sup>107</sup> Stories of “Hunkies” wreaking havoc in local saloons catered to the newspapers’ native-born audiences.<sup>108</sup> In crowded, dirty, industrial neighborhoods, the availability of beer seemed to confirm the saloon’s negative effects on immigrant families. However, this hid the nature of city council and the police’s collusion in “regulating” saloons, prostitution houses, and gambling. Providing tax revenues, while not improving sanitation, this politics of vice exasperated the struggles that new Polish and Slavic immigrants faced upon arriving in Wheeling. With this vice district and saloon traffic heaviest south of Wheeling Creek, immigrants were unwillingly included as part of the crime problem, which only served to neglect the dire living conditions they experienced.

However, for immigrants the saloon had more positive functions. Protestant reformers’ preoccupation with Sunday closing laws flew in the face of ethnic Catholic workers’ cultural norms. Most immigrants saw these reforms masking an “ethnic insult.” The lack of tolerance of working class “low culture,” led workers to actively evade the temperance laws.<sup>109</sup> For most, saloons were sites of an evening of moderate drinking and socializing for Italian, Polish, Hungarian, and Croatian immigrants in Wheeling’s factory districts. For new migrants to the city, the saloons run by German, Irish, and Slavic saloonkeepers served as informal employment bureaus, advising immigrants on how to bribe factory foreman to get an unskilled position. During hard times, the foreign-owned saloon could provide aid and assistance for unemployed workers, and even provide a “free lunch.” In the early 1890’s, one saloonkeeper surmised that a working man can “board round” by spending fifteen cents a day for beer. The common price of a nickel for a drink and lunch and a dime for a fill of a “growler” pail and meal were common.

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<sup>107</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, November 3, 1903, 3; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 26, 1905, 3.

<sup>108</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 26, 1905, 2; December 18, 1905, 12; *Wheeling Register*, February 14, 1908, 8; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, November 3, 1903, 4.

<sup>109</sup> Madelon Powers, *Faces Along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman’s Saloon, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 49-50, 51-4; Duis, *The Saloon*, 233-34, 282.

John Ramsky opened his establishment in 1893 with a “grand free lunch.” Conrad Utermoffen’s saloon at the corner of 36<sup>th</sup> and Wood Streets, near the Hobbs, Brockunier Glass Works, served a free lunch every day from nine to twelve in the morning. These free meals were sorely missed during periods of long unemployment. During the 1907-1908 recession, the South Wheeling and Benwood saloons could no longer meet the demand of needy immigrant families after a few months.<sup>110</sup>

In South Wheeling and Benwood, saloons were as varied as their clientele. There were really three types of saloon spaces. The first were largely run by Irish and German saloonkeepers catering to a wide number of immigrant patrons. These “universals” were usually located in key regions of the community, near factories and transportation hubs. Some examples would include the “Last Chance” saloon near the mouth of Boggs Run near the Benwood steel mills, and even the La Belle Saloon at 31<sup>st</sup> Street just across the street from the gate of the La Belle nail and tinplate works.<sup>111</sup>

Second was the neighborhood, “ethnocentric” saloons. These were often run by Germans, Poles, Italians, Croats, and Czechs, often found in the center of homogenous ethnic neighborhoods and near Catholic parishes. Benwood’s Second and Third Wards had many ethnic saloons near the many immigrant boardinghouses. Two examples highlight the saloon’s relation to other ethnic spaces. Julius Lohse, a German dealer in imported and domestic wines and liquors operated an ethnic neighborhood saloon at 2145 Market Street. This location was ideally situated in the middle of the German neighborhood near the Center Market House. His saloon was located on the same block as Menkellmeyer’s Drug Store and St. Alphonsus Catholic

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<sup>110</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 10, 1891, 9; *Wheeling Daily Register*, November 4, 1893; December 23, 1893; February 6, 1895; February 8, 1895; *Wheeling Register*, January 10, 1908, 10; for the banning of the free lunch, see *Wheeling Register*, June 29, 1909, 10.

<sup>111</sup> For more on “universals,” see Duis, *The Saloon*, 145-6; *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1905-1906*, 708.

Church, along with a variety of German-run candy stores, livery stables, grocers, druggists, meat dealers, and cigar stores.<sup>112</sup> A similar pattern of ethnic saloons developed in the growing Polish neighborhood in South Wheeling. By 1905, there were three Polish-run neighborhood saloons. One run by Paul Rudzinski at 4526 Jacob Street and John Schedwinski's place at 4504 Jacob Street were on the same block and close to St. Ladislaus Catholic Church at 45<sup>th</sup> and Eoff Streets. Immigrant saloonkeepers often had trouble maintaining their business, as was the case with the Polish saloons. Several years later John Przelenski had taken over the saloon formerly owned by Schedwinski. Both Polish saloonkeepers maintained their neighborhood saloons up to the enactment of statewide prohibition in 1914, helping cater to the fastest growing working class neighborhood of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>113</sup>

The third type of "saloon" was more than just a drinking site. Even though they served beer and liquor, these were larger bar spaces that also had a stage for minstrel shows and later silent film viewings. Over time these spaces evolved into large social halls attached to an ethnic fraternal club, mutual aid society, or ethnic Catholic parish. These social venues helped unite the immigrant community around shared cultural events and reinforced ethnic, class, and religious ties to the old country. These immigrant social halls operated as Jon Kingsdale argued as "an institutional support of working-class and ethnic values, an obstacle to assimilation," and a competing ethnic subculture to the dominant white, Protestant culture.<sup>114</sup>

A great example of this type of ethnic saloon, social hall was seen in the life of Ivan Ljubic. Emigrating from Bosiljevo, Croatia, Ivan was born in 1854 in a small village of Orisje.

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<sup>112</sup> *Wheeling City Directory, 1888* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, 1888); *Wheeling City Directory, 1890-1891* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, 1891); *Wheeling City Directory, 1892-1893* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, 1893); 1880 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 5, Ohio County; 1900 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ward 5, Ohio County, accessed via Ancestry.com; *Sanborn Insurance Map*, Wheeling, W.Va., 1884.

<sup>113</sup> *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1905-1906*, 708; *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1907-1909* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1907), 703-4; *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1913-1914* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1913), 747-8.

<sup>114</sup> Kingsdale, "The 'Poor Man's Club,' 488; Duis, *The Saloon*, 145-6.



After marrying and starting a family, Ivan migrated in 1889 to settle in North Benwood. Unlike his many Croatian countrymen who flocked to the Wheeling area for unskilled jobs in the blast furnaces and rolling mills, Ivan became a saloonkeeper and boardinghouse owner. Anglicizing his name to John Lubic, he became a natural leader in the Croatian neighborhood. His everyday encounters with his immigrant countrymen made him very aware of the dreadful conditions of their work and family life. In 1893, he formed the Croatian Lodge. In September 1894, representatives met in Pittsburgh and formed the National Croatian Society, with Lubic as the first President. The society provided assistance to members and their families in case of death, disease, accident, and unemployment. The society was also a leading promoter of Croatian culture. By 1905, Lubic's saloon, its bar stock, and its fixtures changed hands several times, before being owned by fellow Croat "Bozo" Kasonovic. By the same time, Lubic's original saloon had expanded and evolved into a Croatian social hall, later dubbed the Dalmatian-Croatian Incorporated Company at 277 Marshall Street. In early January of each year, the National Croatian Society held a holiday dance in Lubic's Hall, the Croats' largest social event that included imported bands of Croatian musicians, Croatian foods, and local beer. The local Croatian neighborhood hosted several winter dances at Lubic's Hall for the benefit of the largest "foreign colony" in North Benwood.<sup>115</sup>

### **Street Fighting and Turf Battles of Immigrants in Crowded Neighborhoods**

Living in dangerous and often environmental hazardous neighborhoods fostered ethnic tensions in South Wheeling and Benwood. Frustrated by the lack of services, low wages, and poor working conditions led some working class immigrants to fight their neighbors. Poles

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<sup>115</sup> "Ivan Ljubic: A Biography by Father Robert Lubic," accessed via <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bosiljevo/names/iljubic.html> (2012 September 4); *Callins Wheeling City Directory, 1913-1914*, 747; *Wheeling Register*, January 5, 1905, 18; January 25, 1905, 11; March 7, 1905, 6.

encountered public (i.e., streets) and private spaces (i.e., social clubs and saloons) with other ethnic groups. This interaction most often led to incidents of crime and street fighting.

Most engagements occurred at boundaries between immigrant neighborhoods or within multi-ethnic areas. By the 1910's, Poles settling along with Syrians and Greeks working in the nearby steel mills and stamping factory, lived in a region from 23<sup>rd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> Streets associated with vice and gambling. Those “quartered in the Greek colony” often bore the brunt of this cultural association with “organized crime,” even before the rise of Wheeling’s crime boss William Liaskokos. The police targeted the Greek coffeehouse district, arresting those caught playing card games and betting on sporting contests.<sup>116</sup> Many ridiculed the rows among the Greeks. In one vivid encounter entitled “When Greek Meets Greek,” a reporter replayed a battle between warring Greeks in the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, highlighting their perceived riotous tendencies:

“The fight was in the Greek colony in Alley B below Twenty-fifth street [sic]. Several of the sons of Sparta were engaged in a game of cards, when one accused another of cheating. Then the war commenced. Bottles, chairs and other implements were thrown promiscuously around, and a keg of salted fish that was in the room was overturned adding zest to the melee.”<sup>117</sup>

After 1900, the migration of newer immigrants into these older Irish and German working class neighborhoods made them a center of gang violence. Rival urban street gangs grew in response to massive urbanization and influx of newer immigrants, and they fought to maintain their own ethnic turf through intimidation and violence.<sup>118</sup> The Irish “Dirty Dozens” gang of Goosetown often crossed over into the Fifth and Sixth Wards to attack Italians. In South Wheeling, gang activity was even more pronounced. The Dirty Dozens’ arch-rivals were the

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<sup>116</sup> Indictments, *State vs. Christos, George*; *State vs. Horatagis, Angelo*; *State vs. Markis, Pete*, July 11, 1917, Ohio County Court Records, envelope #400A-3, OHI 789, Ohio County Court Records-Ohio County (WV), A&M 31, WVRHC; *Wheeling Daily News*, July 14, 1913, 4; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 12, 1917, 5.

<sup>117</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 15, 1905, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Barrett, *Irish Way*, 16-41; Barrett and David Roediger, “The Irish and the ‘Americanization’ of the ‘New Immigrants,’ in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 24: 4 (Summer 2005): 3-33.

“Figtin’ Irish” and the “Howleytown Gang.” They clashed with the Syrians, Greeks, and Italians located between 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Streets, near the Belmont Mill, and around the Center Market House. To the south, gangs clashed with the established Polish neighborhood. They even fought with the African-American community between 29<sup>th</sup>-33<sup>rd</sup> Streets, which saw black migrants arriving during World War I to work for the foundry and for the B & O in South Wheeling.<sup>119</sup>

All of this interaction made the Sixth Ward region from 23<sup>rd</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> Streets and the industrial district from 29<sup>th</sup>-37<sup>th</sup> Streets a “rowdy” stretch. Irish “street toughs” patrolled “about that end of town doing as they pleased,” accosting many new immigrants taking a stroll through the neighborhood or on their way to work. Martin Loftus Sr. and his son serve as an example. Loftus was born in Ireland and immigrated in 1891 to Wheeling to work in the iron mills. By 1910, he was a skilled roller working at the Belmont Mill. His son, born around 1893 grew up in the largely Irish Catholic neighborhood between 29<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Streets. The younger Loftus benefited from the Irish control over low-wage labor jobs. Irish lodges protected Irish Catholic boys by giving them a chance to learn a trade. They also supported parochial schooling at Immaculate Conception Parish at 36<sup>th</sup> Street. Loftus’s son got an apprenticeship along with his older brother at the Northwood Glass Company. Arrested in 1913, one officer noted how “They were marching up the street causing all kinds of trouble, and defying all comers.”<sup>120</sup> Young Irish and Polish Boy “yeggs” mugged workers of their paychecks and stole women’s purses in South Wheeling’s factory district, especially near the 29<sup>th</sup> street streetcar interchange, and swiped glass tableware from the Northwood Glass Company.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, May 13, 1891, 4; Rose, “The Trial of Alice Bradford,” 18.

<sup>120</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, July 29, 1913, 3; Rose, “The Trial of Alice Bradford,” 18; for background on the Loftus family, see 1910 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, West Virginia, Wheeling, Ward 6, District 134, accessed via Ancestry.com (2 October 2012); for the Irish lodges, see Quentin Skrabec, Jr., *Michael Owens and the Glass Industry* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Co., 2007), 65-8.

<sup>121</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, May 27, 1902, 1; *China, Glass and Lamps*, October 10, 1903, cited in William Heacock, James Measell, and Berry Wiggins, *Harry Northwood: The Wheeling Years, 1901-1925* (Marietta, Ohio:

The Irish were not the only street fighters in South Wheeling. Newer immigrants living in crowded, dirty, almost slum regions filled weekly court dockets. Most of these foreign-born workers fought at the boundaries between ethnic neighborhood turfs. For example, Polish immigrant John Majesky of the “Polish colony” at 45<sup>th</sup> Street was arrested for a “cutting affray” with two Russians near the 48<sup>th</sup> Street boundary with the mixed Slavic North Benwood neighborhood. Because there was no discernible, physical boundary, 48<sup>th</sup> Street became a very contentious site. The start of World War I increased violence between immigrant groups. By the fall of 1915, frequent street fights occurred on the imaginary boundary, often “over bitterness between the Austrians and the Russians.”<sup>122</sup> One example was an attempted robbery and murder of Croat Mike Kostolich a week before Christmas 1915. Operating a small confectionery near 48<sup>th</sup> Street and being a community leader during the floods and frequent unemployment of the period, he was killed by two German men living in a mixed immigrant boardinghouse nearby.<sup>123</sup>

Frustrations over dire working and living conditions merged with the racial epithets applied to new immigrants. Terms like “Hunky” and “Polander” reflected these groups’ low class positions and dirty work on blast furnace and rolling mill crews. “Hunky,” a corruption of Hungarian, became a pan-Slavic slur applied indiscriminately to all new Eastern European immigrants.<sup>124</sup> Foremen gave the most dirty and dangerous work to “Hunkies.” As a result of the constant dangers of their work, and ridicule from native-born workers and foremen, Slavic

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Antique Publications, 1991), 24; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 7, 1903, 4; for a fine examination of the social realities of life as a pickpocket and street criminal, see Timothy F. Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

<sup>122</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, April 15, 1915, 4; May 27, 1915, 4; June 17, 1915, 4; September 23, 1915, 4; October 28, 1915, 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, December 23, 1915, 2; January 27, 1916, 2; February 10, 1916, 2; *Wheeling Register*, January 26, 1916, 10; Mike Kostolich’s confectionery was at 352 Market Street in North Benwood. In 1920, it appears his son and wife were still running the same business there, 1920 Manuscript Census, Benwood, Marshall County, West Virginia, Ward 1, District 56, page 25, accessed via Ancestry.com (2 October 2012).

<sup>124</sup> David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 37-9.

immigrants developed a defensive attitude. In Thomas Bell's *Out of This Furnace* (1941), his Slovak character observes how hunky revealed an "unconcealed racial prejudice," and a "denial of social and racial equality" which often "marked, stunted and embittered whole generations."<sup>125</sup> Management utilized these racial ideas to justify why certain immigrants worked in very specific trades. The blast furnaces in steel mills were staffed by Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, and Croatian laborers, who worked according to one investigator in jobs that were "too damn dirty and too damn hot for a white man." These practices convinced many of the new immigrants' undesirable racial status, while working to segregate workers on the shop floor to prevent labor solidarity.<sup>126</sup>

Coverage of the Polish immigrant "colony" in the press magnified these racially "in-between" classifications.<sup>127</sup> Some stories stressed "Polanders'" docility and aggressive tendencies in odd disturbances in South Wheeling and Benwood, while having "a warm old time." In one example, several "hunkies" got on the "outside of two or three quarts of tangle foot" and had a wild time in their boardinghouse near 45<sup>th</sup> Street. After hours of raucous laughing, the police arrived, whereupon the Hunkies threw a lamp and some furniture from the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 43-5; Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 123-5.

<sup>126</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 120-1; Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 216-7; for the best summary of the role of immigrant "in-betweenness," see James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (Spring 1997): 3-44, quotes 7, 16. For the issue of job competition, see Dominic Pacyga, "To Live Amongst Others: Poles and Their Neighbors in Industrial Chicago, 1865-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (Fall 1996): 55-73; Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991); major arguments about the race issue and the working class, see Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 39-58. Guglielmo's argument accepts much of the in-between argument, but differs on the central point of most of the whiteness scholarship that in reality new immigrants were deemed "white on arrival." Italian and Slavic immigrants were not excluded from voting and could become citizens. While their "racial" desirability could be questioned as Southern Italians, Poles, and Southern Slavs by their employers and native born workers, their "color" status was protected in neighborhood institutions, the census, and leisure spaces.

<sup>127</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson's work notes the way reformers and the state thought of immigrants in terms of an imperial rhetoric of "backward and in need of civilizing," language of empire in need for Americanization. See especially, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 6; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign People at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), 179-220.

window before being caught and taken downtown. Sometimes, Polish immigrants engaged in attacks among each other. One big fight near Boggs Run put one man “out of business.” It appeared that as the men were walking home, for no reason, “they began pelting each other with stones.” The wounded man was hit by what the reporter called vividly “a well directed stone thrown by a husky son of Kosciusko.” This description highlighted several perceived stereotypes of the Poles, their propensity for aggression and their large, husky appearance.<sup>128</sup>

A propensity for fighting was also applied to the Poles’ most numerous neighbors, the Croats. They also predominated in unskilled jobs at the Wheeling steel mills and coal mines. Management promoted differing wage scales and divided shop floor departments by nationality, so Poles, Croats, Ukrainians, Serbs, and Hungarians competed against one another daily. This competition naturally carried over to the neighborhoods. In what one reporter dubbed a “Free for all fight among the Croatians,” a riotous mob wielding clubs, stones, and even pistols led Benwood police to make a round of all the foreign saloons and boardinghouses.<sup>129</sup> However, immigrant groups could unite against overbearing police activity. In one incident the police officer patrolling the Riverside works arrested “two Polanders for attempting to create a disturbance.” As the officer took the Poles to the lockup, “a horde of foreigners swept down upon him, threatening, gesticulating wildly and flourishing clubs.” The mass included fifteen to twenty Croats, “Polanders,” other Slavs, and Hungarians. Officers continued to note an “unsettled state of affairs in the foreign colony,” which led them to monitor the foreign colony.<sup>130</sup>

More often, it was police officers who got trigger happy when confronting immigrants. Upon arriving at the Polish boardinghouse in North Benwood, Officer Harry Roseberry arrested

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<sup>128</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 20, 1906, 2; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, September 21, 1903, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Barrett and Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples,” 15-6; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, March 3, 1903, 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, March 17, 1903, 1; April 3, 1903, 3.

several drunken and carousing Poles. As he took the prisoners to jail, a large crowd of Poles threatened the officers, throwing rocks, and intimidating them. After firing his pistol into the air, the Polish crowd leader Jacob Manskenich crowded into him and was shot at close range. In a later trial, the local court exonerated Roseberry of all charges, claiming self-defense. These types of police shootouts did lead to immigrant retaliation. One awful exchange came on February 26, 1917, when Patrolman Henry Seamon was called to 4338 Wood Street by a small boy saying “Pap has a gun and he’s going to shoot Mom.” Upon arriving the woman’s husband Frank Przelenski came out and he and the officer got involved in a struggle. As Seamon tried to take Przelenski’s gun, the Polish man got loose and fired a shot into Seamon’s neck. Przelenski took the officer’s gun and put on his hat as he escaped around the corner, only to be caught several blocks uptown. Seamon was only the fourth policeman killed within the city limits.<sup>131</sup>

Tensions ran high as well during immigrant weddings, which were crucial cultural events in the lives of Catholic immigrant families and communities. After the wedding at the local parish, often the Poles would return to a large social hall or saloon for the reception. The presence of such a large “colony” and the large amount of drinking and merriment often led to fighting. Mike Koloski, a coal miner, “out of the largeness of his heart donated his home” for a Polish couple’s ceremony. However, “Mike’s undoing is his unlimited generosity,” as the guests enjoyed the “booze and hilarity” so much that they began destroying Mike’s fine chinaware. After going after a “strapping big Polander,” Mike went to jail after he missed and hit the man’s wife with a glass pitcher.<sup>132</sup> Even more dangerous were fights when the groom’s countrymen tried to kiss his young bride. During Antonio Lonstack’s wedding near the Hitchman row houses, a group of foreign miners got into a melee after hours of heavy drinking, celebrating,

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<sup>131</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, April 8, 1915, 4; Wheeling Police Department, *Fallen Officers: A Memorial Tribute, Established January 16, 1806* (Wheeling: 1500 Chapline Street, 2007), OCPL.

<sup>132</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 17, 1906, 8; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 15, 1903, 2.

dancing, and singing when one man kissed Lonstack's new wife. After some time, the entire street was full of men fighting to the point that the "Street was covered with blood." The worst of the fighting included razor blades, clubs, and even several gunshots.<sup>133</sup>

However, there were supporters of the immigrant working class. In a negative rebuke of South Wheeling, the *Wheeling Register* chided: "The numerous bloody brawls of foreigners in this vicinity are periodical reminders of the undesirable character of this class." Coming to the defense of the "abused foreigner" was Father John W. Werninger of St. John's Catholic Parish in Benwood. The local Catholic parish priests were the foremost defenders of the immigrants, wary of nativist attacks as masked attacks on all Catholics. Werninger criticized the press for never living among the immigrants and concluding that "when a number of violations of the law are chronicled against them, you draw the conclusion that all are disturbers of the peace."

Werninger spoke of the thousands of Hungarians, Croats, Slavs, Czechs, Poles, and Italians living in South Wheeling and Benwood as "industrious" people. As one living "in the midst of them, [who] see them every day upon the streets," he deemed them respectable people.

Even though Fr. Werninger admitted as Catholic immigrants "few are burning and shining lights," the area's Slavic immigrants were due respect. Werninger placed most the blame on the saloon interests, not the immigrants, as the cause of the many brawls in South Wheeling. For him, immigrant "intemperance," was "fomented by the greed of liquor sellers." If these violations could be stopped, then crime would decrease.<sup>134</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Father Werninger's editorial was not unusual in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Although divided by ethnicity, he and other Irish and German Catholic leaders heartily defended their immigrant

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<sup>133</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 17, 1906, 3.

<sup>134</sup> J.W. Werninger, "Defense of the Foreign Element," *Wheeling Register*, January 22, 1906, 4.



parishioners because of their shared Catholic heritage. Industrialization drastically increased Wheeling's Catholic working class population. As Polish and Slavic immigrants struggled to find ways as a community to respond to the trials of industrial life, their greatest ally was the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. By 1900, the arrival of many former peasants from Southern and Eastern Europe gave the Catholic Church more social and political influence, but also sparked debates over whether these "new immigrants" would worship in Irish/ German territorial parishes throughout the city or in newly created "national parishes," seeking to maintain old world traditions.

## Chapter 4

### Living on the Historical Margins in *Stanisławów*<sup>1</sup>: The Communal Response of Polish Catholics at Wheeling's St. Ladislaus Church, 1890-1917

Caroline Lakomy's best memories of life in South Wheeling came from the functions associated with St. Ladislaus Polish parish. In much the same way that the Polish village revolved around seasonal Catholic holidays, South Wheeling's cultural climate reflected the social and cultural traditions of its largest ethnic group. Prior to Lent, the Poles held a renowned three-day festival, the Paczki Ball. From Sunday through Tuesday, the ladies of the St. Hedwig's Society and the Rosary Society made the traditional pre-Lenten feast, while for three successive nights dances were held in the St. Ladislaus school auditorium. Immigrant parents would teach their children the polka, but also the livelier oberek. Decades later, Mary Martinkosky could vividly recall the pomp that occurred each May with the annual May Processions, as the local children marched throughout *Polonia* in the traditional Polish garb. She also could recall the solemnity of the Polish mass and the veneration of the "Black Madonna" within traditional religious devotionism. Mary Pietras Robbins and Rebecca McGuire also reminisced about the significance of religious holidays for Polish-American children. No matter the occasion, South Wheeling's Poles held a strong attachment to their Catholic religiosity.<sup>2</sup>

Experiencing what historian Robert Orsi refers to as "popular lived religion," these immigrants found solace at mass on Sundays but also during their festival times. When walking down any of these streets, observers seemed transported to a Polish village in Europe, with the air full of smells of native foods such as cabbage dishes, kielbasa, and of course fresh cooked pierogies. During the Lenten season, visitors saw scores of Catholic immigrants marching in

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<sup>1</sup>*Stanisławów* in this specific context refers to the fictional place of South Raysburg in Keith Maillard's novel, even though parish histories also use the same reference in the 1920's.

<sup>2</sup> Sean Duffy and Jim Thornton, *The Wheeling Family: A Celebration of Immigrants and Their Neighborhoods* (Wheeling: Creative Impressions, 2008), 146-7, 157-60; oral interview with Mary Martinkosky, August 10, 2008.

processions recreating home traditions from as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. These Poles relived part of a cultural past in their new homes. With celebrations to their patron, St. Ladislaus, minister of the Poles' social welfare and architect of national parishes, and to the Holy Mother of Czestochowa, these hard-pressed workers recast their reality within a religious context.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines how the first generation of Polish immigrants created their own distinctive cultural and religious identity in South Wheeling. St. Ladislaus Polish parish was actively responsible for the creation of a unified Polish community. Father Emil Musial led the development of an inward-looking Polish community, which possessed the necessary social, financial, and cultural institutions to survive on its own. By 1917, St. Ladislaus was the epicenter of a recreated Polish community, or *Polonia*. Musial maintained this close-knit community by uniting the German, Russian, and Austrian Poles together around a shared Polish Catholic nationalism. This ideology united the Poles by merging Polish popular religion with a structured Polish ethnic education. Thus Musial along with lay societies and fraternal organizations aided in constructing an intra-ethnic accommodation to American society.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will address two aspects of the historiography on ethnic communities. First, how did the process of creating a community bring all the various groups in the community together? The chapter will examine three important aspects of this development: the building of the church and hiring of Fr. Musial, the purchase of the Polish Hall, and the building and staffing

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), xiii-13. For a better understanding of Polish society and culture in Poland and in America, see William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group* (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1918-1920); on Wheeling Polish Catholic practices of worship see, "Wladyslawa, Kosciol Sw.," in *Memories of a Church Still Loved: St. Ladislaus Catholic Church*, in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (hereafter cited DWC); Keith Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> June Grantiar argues against the interpretation that ethnic churches were a defensive reaction from immigrant's supposed alienation to American society. In accommodating European structures to urban space, immigrants were not assimilated against their will. See, June Alexander Grantiar, *The Immigrant Church: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), xviii-xx.

of a school. Second, this chapter will consider the benefits and drawbacks of this process. Musial's plan succeeded in creating a strong, thriving ethnic community, but it also isolated the Poles. This process created intense rivalries with other ethnic groups, especially with the Irish and Germans in the Wheeling Diocese. Constant battles occurred between Musial and Bishop Patrick Donahue over allocating resources to build a Polish community in South Wheeling. In addition, this process of community formation also witnessed the beginnings of class divisions. South Wheeling's *Polonia* was majority working class, but the need to create an inward-looking community required the skills and services of an ethnic small business class. Many businessmen benefited materially from the growth of St. Ladislaus and its institutions. Stronger class tensions emerged in the 1920's, but it is necessary to highlight earlier stratification. The chapter will examine pew rents from St. Ladislaus as well as advertisements in parish anniversary books to highlight the differing social status of parishioners.

Popular religion explains how an ethnic Catholic religiosity radiated throughout all of community life.<sup>5</sup> Popular religion and cultural nationalism contributed to the interior worldviews of South Wheeling's Polish immigrants. One's personal and lived ethnic identity was part of an active, religious-centered community. Church institutions and popular religion also awakened immigrants to the nature of American politics, industrial capitalism, and mass culture. This explains why ethnicity remained such a dynamic part of the lives of Wheeling's Poles into the 1920's and 1930's.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Orsi emphasized the role of the *domus* in relation to Italian Harlem's annual veneration of "la Madonna del Carmine," and this term also applies to Wheeling's Polish Catholics. While the *domus* included all members of the extended community family, it also encompassed the actual physical home, or community itself. This broad-based community's religious traditions, social institutions, and housing, represented the immigrants' cosmology and views of life in America. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, xxix-xxi; 75-7.

<sup>6</sup> Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The importance of popular religion on community development is seen in Dominic Pacyga's notion of how Polish immigrants formed their communities in America.<sup>7</sup> Initially, in their *communal response*, they forged small, inward looking communities that were distinctively Polish. Once firmly established within the industrial working class, Poles developed an *extra communal response*, reaching out to cooperate with other ethnic groups. This later response characterized the period from World War I through the New Deal, as Polish immigrants only gradually branched out into a larger immigrant coalition.

### **Father Musial and St. Ladislaus Church**

In the urban North, Catholicism and its "parish boundaries" form the essence of the long-term attachment of ethnic groups to their communities. A shared sense of collective ownership fosters a genuine and vigorous support for community cohesiveness.<sup>8</sup> Catholic history helps historians understand many of the social and cultural traits of community life. Was it the community's industries, labor movement, or the religious/ social institutions that held the people's allegiance? Wheeling novelist Keith Maillard, who grew up in the 1960's, sheds some light on these topics. Maillard's narrator, army veteran Jimmy Koprowski, describes the timeless feeling of his childhood community:

Our neighborhood is a narrow strip from 43<sup>rd</sup> Street down to 48<sup>th</sup> Street where Millwood [Benwood] starts. One set of railroad tracks runs along the river, and then there's three Streets and another set of railroad tracks and, bang, you're slapped up against the side of

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<sup>7</sup> Dominic Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-4; 5-6. Pacyga speaks from a historiographical background rooted in the Polish sociological studies found in Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Pacyga's analysis of urban immigration also developed from the studies by "consensus" school historians during the 1950's and later by the "new social historians" of the 1960's. While these earlier works examined large encompassing studies of the immigrant experience, Pacyga's book acts as a labor and social history to explain how a particular ethnic group responded to trials in America. For the best understanding of the historiographical debate over urban ethnic immigration see, Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1951); and, John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> John McGreevy argues that this idea of "place and parish" factored greatly in the white ethnic Catholic reaction to interracial public housing in the 1940's and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 8-15.

the Hill. That's South Raysburg [South Wheeling]. We just called it Polish Town, but the old Folks called it *Stanisławowo*, you know, after the church, and they got that right because St. Stanislaus was pretty much the center of everything.<sup>9</sup>

Maillard provides a vivid physical description of the Polish perception of life in South Wheeling.

The increasing numbers and varied backgrounds of Polish immigrants in South Wheeling made it necessary to establish a strong ethnic community to meet their pressing interests. The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston saw the need for the construction of a Polish parish by the 1890's. This was especially true with the Poles spread out over South Wheeling, Benwood, and elsewhere. Polish immigrant steelworkers began arriving around 1880, and many of them came from the Prussian Poland. As a result, many of these Poles migrated toward the center of Wheeling in the vicinity of St. Alphonsus German Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> Despite the stigma of worshipping in services with German-language homilies and represented by a culture that politically dominated their homeland, the small number of Poles pressed on through the 1880's.

By the early-1890's, Polish immigration to Wheeling swelled to a point that the Poles pressed for their own ethnic church. The process of ethnic parish construction reflects the direct actions of immigrant laypeople. Unlike in Europe, American parishes often faced financial troubles since most of their funding derived from lay initiative and members' contributions in place of state subsidies.<sup>11</sup> For most immigrants the process of coming together collectively to build the church was their first sacramental act as a community in America.<sup>12</sup> The process

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<sup>9</sup> Keith Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 2. Many places used are fictional.

<sup>10</sup> Unknown St. Ladislaus parish history, in *Parish History File, Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)-incorporated into St. Alphonsus, DWC*.

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Savidge Sterne, "Bringing Religion into Working-Class History: Parish, Public, and Politics in Providence, 1890-1930," *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 155.

<sup>12</sup> Sterne, "Bringing Religion into Working-Class History," 159. For further evidence on this type of collective solidarity, see Leslie Tentler, "Present at the Creation: Working Class Catholics in the United States," in R. Halpern and J. Morris, eds. *American Exceptionalism? U.S. Working-Class Formation in an International Context* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

usually included the formation of religious societies for the men and sodalities for the women, which along with honoring patron saints reflected a strong ethnic religiosity.

While many attended St. Alphonsus uptown, other Wheeling Poles sought spiritual assistance from Immaculate Conception Church located on 36<sup>th</sup> Street. As the Polish began congregating near the Benwood steel mills in South Wheeling, the largely Irish Catholic parish began holding regular missions for the Polish population. Father Joseph Mullen helped bring in a Polish priest to minister to the Polish Catholics during the Lenten season and later on a regular basis. This priest, Father Ladislaus Miskiewicz from St. Adelbert's Parish on the South Side of Pittsburgh, started ministering to the Poles in the early 1890's. In 1892, a St. Stanislaus Society observed the feast of St. Stanislaus in early July, hosted by Fr. Mullen at Immaculate Conception. Fr. Mullen advised the Poles to continue forming the necessary ethnic societies to attract assistance from first Bishop Kain (1874-1894) and then Bishop Donahue (1894-1922). Thirty men formed the St. Ladislaus Society, while the women later formed as the St. Hedwig's society.<sup>13</sup> By 1896, Fr. Miskiewicz conducted missions for the Polish and Slavic populations in South Wheeling, which had grown to the point that it would not "be many days before the congregation will be compelled to secure the services of a Polish priest." By 1901, the St. Stanislaus Society acquired title to three lots on the Southeast corner of Forty-fifth and Eoff Streets. Measuring 75 feet long and 100 feet deep and costing \$1,900, the *Church Calendar*

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<sup>13</sup> Unknown parish history, *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus*, DWC; for the early mission at Immaculate Conception Parish, see, *Wheeling Daily Register*, June 18, 1892, 4; July 4, 1892, 5; August 26, 1893, 5; June 11, 1896, 5. Bishop Donahue was aware of the migration of Slavic immigrants to Wheeling. Father Simony writing from the Elk County, Pennsylvania informed the Bishop in 1898 that many "Hungarians, Slavons [sic], and Polanders" were arriving in Northern West Virginia. He noted that "about 400 Slavonic miners" and about 1,000 Croatians and other Slavic immigrants were arriving in Benwood. See Rev. F.J. Simony, Slavonic priest, Kersey, Elk Co., Pennsylvania to Reverend Edward Weber, November 15, 1898, Box #5, Folder #19, Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Correspondence.

praised the “Wheeling Poles are a thrifty and industrious people and have been very loyal” allowing them to work together to achieve their own community.<sup>14</sup>

Bishop Patrick Donahue also played an important role in the development of St. Ladislaus. Donahue began his service as the Bishop of Wheeling in 1894 at a time when Wheeling and the state suffered from anti-Catholic nativism. In the late 1890’s, Donahue fought vigorously against the American Protective Association’s attack on immigrant workers.<sup>15</sup>

Donahue used his influence to gain concessions from state politicians. Complaining that some schools disseminated nativist literature, Donahue convinced Democratic Governor William MacCorkle to reject any “criticism of the Catholic religion” and to order “that the dissemination of any such intolerant doctrine should [not] be tolerated in any institution of the state.”<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, Donahue cultivated a close ally and friend in the Republican Party, U.S. Senator Stephen B. Elkins, who ensured that state Republicans did “not sympathize in any way with the A.P.A. movement.” Elkins hoped to secure the Republican victories in 1896, and even utilized Donahue to appeal to Catholic voters against his Democratic rival John T. McGraw.<sup>17</sup> However, Donahue remained an influential advisor for politicians in both parties. In the 1906 midterms, state Democratic Party Chairman John T. McGraw urged the Bishop to “get the Catholic vote” in Harrison, Lewis, and Marshall Counties for the party’s congressional candidate. For Catholics tending to vote Republican, McGraw urged that “a word in the right channel from you” would

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<sup>14</sup> Father Miskiewicz’s comments are cited in, *Wheeling Daily Register*, June 11, 1896, 5; for the St. Stanislaus Society’s role in purchasing the property, see *Church Calendar*, December 1, 1901, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Tricia T. Pyne, *Faith in the Mountains: A History of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, 1850-2000* (Editions du Signe, 2001), 29.

<sup>16</sup> John T. McGraw to Governor W.A. MacCorkle, May 8, 1896, Box #1, Folder, Jan-June 1896, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, DWC; Gov. W.A. MacCorkle to John T. McGraw, May 11, 1896, Box#1, Folder, Jan-June 1896, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, DWC.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen B. Elkins to Bishop Donahue, October 25, 1898, 1898 Box, Folder #5, E, 1898, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, DWC; Stephen Elkins to Bishop Donahue, July 29, 1900, Box #5, Folder #9, E, 1898, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, DWC. The first letter is dated 1894, which is a misprint based on the box’s contents.



secure their switch to the Democrats.<sup>18</sup> Donahue, in turn, espoused the diocese's positive contributions in the monthly *Church Calendar*, the state Catholic newspaper, which countered the secularism of the local papers and fostered the "nourishment of the soul."<sup>19</sup> This medium allowed Donahue to address pressing Catholic issues, particularly his editorials attacking socialism and promoting a more conservative trade unionism.

A notice from the Executive Committee of the Polish Catholic Congress added further reasons for establishing a Polish ethnic parish in South Wheeling. Donahue learned, in November 1901, of a threat felt by the national Polish Catholic clergy. Speaking on the depressed state of the Poles, the circular addressed the national dilemma caused by schismatic Polish clergy, who argued that the Roman Catholic Archbishops and Bishops of America cared little at all for the poverty of the growing Polish population and were taking virtually no action to improve their economic position or meet the group's spiritual needs.<sup>20</sup> This independent movement criticized a church that had not one Polish bishop, asserting that "the Irish and German Bishops object to it, because they consider the Poles unfit for such dignity."<sup>21</sup> This statement had implications for Bishop Donahue, who constantly fought against anti-Catholic statements, but also because he was an Irish Catholic Bishop. While the committee did not advocate the selection of a Polish bishop, they suggested the hiring of more ethnic Polish priests,

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<sup>18</sup> John T. McGraw, Democratic State Executive Committee Chairman, West Virginia to Bishop Patrick Donahue, Wheeling, October 28, 1906, Box #24 ("Madz-R"), Folder #2 (Mc 1906), *Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection*, DWC. It should be noted that the Diocese's archives have gone through extensive changes since I began this research in 2007. The original sorting of the Bishop Donahue collection was listed as *Bishop Donahue's Correspondence*. However, as of 2013, his papers are listed under the title, *Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection*. For the purposes of this chapter, the more recent title will be used for the newer materials located after the archives were moved and new documents were opened for viewing.

<sup>19</sup> Pyne, *Faith in the Mountains*, 29. The questionable newspapers were the Socialist *Wheeling Majority* and the *Wheeling Intelligencer*.

<sup>20</sup> Executive Committee of Polish Catholic Congress, Chicago, Illinois to the Archbishops of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States gathered in Washington, D.C., November 21, 1901, *Bishop Donahue's Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>21</sup> Executive Committee of the Polish Catholic Congress, November 21, 1901, DWC.

the formation of more Polish societies and sodalities, the increase of Polish ethnic parishes, and for parochial schools to inform their students against this movement.<sup>22</sup>

Because of lay initiative and pressure from broader church issues, Bishop Donahue supported the construction of a Polish church and initiated a search for a youthful and energetic Polish leader. As in the case of the construction of any new church, Catholic or Protestant, there are many difficulties and snares that arise along the way. These growing religious bodies require the leadership of a clergyman who can guide the new church as well as settle any disputes. These disagreements may be between the bishop and the parishioners or the common intra-parochial conflict between various factions within the church.<sup>23</sup> As a result, an intense search process of the various seminaries, particularly in the Midwest, resulted in Donahue selecting young twenty-seven year old Emil Musial.

For Wheeling's Poles, Father Musial was the heart and soul of their community at St. Ladislaus. Born in Zaborze, German Silesia on October 3, 1873, Musial came with an "inborn stubborn persistence and set purpose of mind."<sup>24</sup> At the time of his Diamond Jubilee, celebrating his fifty years of continuous service to St. Ladislaus, Musial described how he worked to build the church by the sweat of his and many other brows. Musial also reminisced about the vibrancy of the community and deplored that the "old family ties that once held people together have disappeared and instead we are living as individualists."<sup>25</sup> For many of the first generation, Musial's fears of subsequent generations of Polish-Americans losing their cultural and ethnic past were very relevant and pressing issues. Local novelist Keith Maillard emphasized this

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<sup>22</sup> Executive Committee of the Polish Catholic Congress, November 21, 1901, DWC.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie Woodcock Tentler, "On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993): 106-7; note Tentler's book on the problems of intra-factional strife in the Detroit Diocese.

<sup>24</sup> *Diamond Jubilee-Very Rev. Emil Musial-Pastor St. Ladislaus Church, 1901-1951*, in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, DWC.

<sup>25</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 22, 1951, DWC.

attitude with the disillusioned Polish-American Jimmy Koprowski. He spoke at length on the struggles and achievements of the first generation that made it through the 1919 steel strike and the Depression and had “hung on to their bits of property any way they could and kept up their houses real nice, and they sent their sons off to war.”<sup>26</sup>

Maillard’s book also gives a very personal and amusing biographical sketch of Musial.

Gleaned from personal knowledge of Musial, Jimmy recalls,

Our priest was old Father Joe Stawecki [Emil Musial]. He was a little guy with a face like a bulldog, and he used to brag that he could say mass faster than any priest in the Ohio Valley, and he wasn’t kidding-in and out of there in twenty minutes flat. He’d get cranked up, he’d be going faster than a hillbilly auctioneer . . . You go make your confession to him, same thing-in and out of there, bingo, five minutes tops . . . He preached short and sweet too, all in Polish, and he’d get real personal sometimes. ‘Hey, I heard Stas Rzeszusi’s been stepping out on his wife again. He better stop that.’ No parish priest today could get away with that.<sup>27</sup>

Maillard’s account suggests a man whose understanding of his place in life developed out of his experience in Europe. A Polish language history from 1926 highlights some of the key aspects of Musial’s character. As a young man still learning to be a priest, he had worked as a private tutor in Prussia. However, a 1926 account reported that because of so much constant traveling, doctors discovered that his blood was very diluted, making him suffering from weakness. With the help of a German doctor, and an event that more than likely toughed young Musial, to thicken his blood, doctors tied him to a tree or column three times a day and then poured frozen cold water over him for a half hour at a time. This odd treatment must have worked, because the history notes that he was made strong enough to “easily turn a mill.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka*, 25-6.

<sup>28</sup> “Zyciorys Wiel. Ks. Prob. Emila Musiała Jubilata 25-Ciolecia Swego Kapłaństwa,” in *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiała, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Krola, Wheeling, W.Va.* (Wheeling, WV, 1926), 6, 7, 9, 15, 16 in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, DWC. This and subsequent passages were translated by the author with the assistance of Donata Blobaum in 2009-2010.

Born within the German partitioned part of Poland, Musial met several roadblocks to achieving his goals. Early on, the Prussian school system hindered his academic progress, which often slighted young and intelligent Poles. After beginning his preparatory studies in Krakow in the 1880's, Musial was drafted into the Prussian army in his late teens. As a true Pole, he was sickened by the possibility of serving the occupier and "predatory army" of his country and perhaps fighting against Polish rebels. As a result, Musial cast his eyes for the famed freedom he had heard of in America. In the middle of one night, he fled leaving his family to seek a life doing "pastoral work." After going off to Torino to finish his philosophical and theological studies in the 1890's, he went in service of "Polish castaways" in need of a spiritual guide, and in 1900 Musial entered the SS. Cyril and Methodius Polish Seminary of Detroit.<sup>29</sup>

From the scant writings on Musial, a picture develops of him as a benevolent leader who strove past considerable odds to provide a church for Wheeling's Poles. However, this blurs the true historical picture somewhat. While he showed great zeal upon arriving in 1901, Musial almost chose not to serve in Wheeling. In a long correspondence between Bishop Donahue and Emil Musial from the spring of 1901, through his appointment in November 1901, Musial shared his reservations about Wheeling. Writing from seminary, Musial expressed that he wanted to minister to the many Poles in Wheeling, but that his only difficulty was that he did not speak English well enough.<sup>30</sup> Then in June, while preparing for his exit examinations, he delayed going to Wheeling as he assisted the Detroit Archdiocese with an outbreak of smallpox.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Diamond Jubilee-Very Rev. Emil Musial*, DWC; "Życiorys Wiel. Ks. Prob. Emila Musiała Jubilata, (Wheeling, WV, 1926), in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*; "Father Emil Musial," Clergy Record Form, Diocese of Wheeling, August 1944, Deceased Priest Files, DWC. I thank Diocesan archivist Jon Erik-Gilot for finding these records that were thought to be lost on the backgrounds of old priests.

<sup>30</sup> Emil Musial to Right Reverend Bishop from Detroit, Michigan, April 27, 1901, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>31</sup> Emil Musial to Reverend Father Chancellor Weber from St. Cyril's and Methodius's Seminary, Detroit, June 16, 1901, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

Musial shocked Donahue on September 5, 1901, by informing the bishop that it would be “virtually impossible for me to labor as a priest in the diocese of Wheeling,” since he learned in Baltimore that “the Poles are very much scattered in W.V. on which a polish [sic] priest is obliged to be always on missionary journey.”<sup>32</sup> Even after being told he was misinformed about Wheeling’s Poles, Musial disgustedly inquired whether Bishop Donahue would ever decide to set him free from the Wheeling diocese.<sup>33</sup> However, for what remains a mystery, Musial changed his mind, decided not to join the Baltimore diocese, and was ordained in Wheeling on Thanksgiving Day November 1901. From the Bishop’s correspondence, it appears that Father Morys of the Baltimore Diocese fabricated much of the false information about Wheeling’s Polish Catholics as well as Musial’s plans. Nevertheless, by August 2, 1902, Musial was on hand for the laying of the cornerstone of St. Ladislaus Church at Forty-Fifth and Eoff Streets in South Wheeling with exuberant processions taking place the entire day around the church.<sup>34</sup>

The events that led to Musial’s ordination and appointment to the Diocese of Wheeling were mired in confusions developing between the chancellery in Wheeling and the Archdiocese of Baltimore. During the months leading up to his ordination, Musial was the focal point of a dispute between Bishop Donahue and Rev. Morys of St. Stanislaus Church in Baltimore. In mid-November 1901, Morys claimed that upon his last visit, Musial personally saw the archbishop of Baltimore and that application procedures and acceptance were already under way.<sup>35</sup> Later, Morys seemed quite befuddled by the fact that Musial was somehow “tied” to the Wheeling

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<sup>32</sup> Emil Musial to Right Reverend Father Weber from Polish Seminary, Detroit, September 5, 1901, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>33</sup> Emil Musial to Rev. Edward Weber from Detroit, Mich., November 1, 1901, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>34</sup> Legal Statement of Emil Musial signed at Chancellor’s Office, Wheeling, W.Va., November 6, 1901, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC. For a description of Musial’s ordination at St. Joseph’s Cathedral and the nature of the ceremony, see *Church Calendar*, December 1, 1901, 1. For the laying of the church cornerstone ceremony, see *The Church Calendar*, September 1, 1902, 1, DWC.

<sup>35</sup> Reverend Thomas Morys to Bishop Donahue, Nov. 18, 1901, Donahue Folder #5, McF-Mourt, 1901, Bishop Donahue’s Correspondence, 1901-1906, DWC.

diocese by a secret contract he signed in Wheeling. In September, Morys informed Donahue of Musial's acceptance to the Baltimore diocese. Morys obviously assumed that Musial would serve in the Baltimore Diocese since he had discussed with Musial his possible role as a co-editor for a local parish weekly newspaper in Baltimore.<sup>36</sup> Even so, Morys agreed to part with Musial on the condition that Donahue forward him the \$60.00 for payments that Morys had already given to Musial for training and expenses.<sup>37</sup>

While Musial decided against working in Baltimore, what remains uncertain is what changed his mind. Was he bargaining with both Wheeling and Baltimore to see which diocese would provide a better opportunity financially and for his ministry? Did he simply feel more needed in founding a new parish rather than working for an established Polish church? Or did Donahue, Weber, and the Wheeling diocese actively work through the Detroit seminary to ensure Musial's appointment. Donahue received a notice in 1900 of the schism created by the Polish Catholic Congress and its desire to have more ethnic Polish priests to minister to the steady arrival of Polish immigrants. According to the 1926 parish history, Musial's mocking colleagues argued that his life would be wasted "buried in the wild Virginia mountains;" however, they failed to dissuade him from ministering in Wheeling.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps more important for Wheeling was Musial's training at the SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary. Founded in Detroit in 1886 by Fr. Joseph Dabrowski, this seminary functioned as a primary bulwark against the full Americanization of the Polish ethnic clergy. It was one of the few schools of theology in America that actively promoted an ethnic education

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<sup>36</sup> Rev. Thomas Morys to Bishop Donahue, Nov. 18, 1901; Rev. Thomas Morys to Chancellor Edward Weber, telegram, September 20, 1901, Donahue #5, McF-Mourt, 1901, Bishop Donahue's Correspondence, 1901-1906, DWC.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "Życiorys Wiel. Ks. Prob. Emila Musiała Jubilatą 25-Ciolecia Swego Kapłaństwa," (Wheeling, WV, 1926), in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, DWC.

and the unity of Polish Catholicism with Polish nationalism.<sup>39</sup> Musial's success as a student led Fr. Dabrowski to hope he would remain as a professor to instruct other young Polish priests.<sup>40</sup> Musial's negative experiences in German Poland, his devout support of Catholicism, and his ethnic, nationalist training all shaped his personality and his understanding of what constituted a Polish national identity.

Emil Musial acted as an intermediary to assist in attracting Polish ethnic clergy to the Wheeling Diocese. As the first Polish-appointed priest in West Virginia, Musial recruited other seminarians from SS. Cyril and Methodius. This process was a key extension of his conservative ideology of fostering strong, inward-looking ethnic communities. By attracting young Polish clergymen sharing his ideological beliefs, Musial hoped to promote his goals on a diocesan level.

Musial was selective in choosing other Polish priests for the diocese. After recruiting several fellow seminarians, he and Bishop Donahue learned that these students had engaged in an "open rebellion against the authority of the Seminary," while at SS. Cyril and Methodius.<sup>41</sup> They were among the thirty students who openly protested for the removal of the Vice-Rector of the seminary and threatened to utilize the newspapers and other media if Dabrowski took no action. Not viewing these men as good stewards of Christ, Dabrowski removed them from his seminary and the path to the priesthood. In January 1903, Donahue, with the tacit consent of Musial, accepted the resignation of the recruits because he wanted respectable young priests to serve the growing numbers of immigrants in his diocese. Musial likewise wanted Polish priests

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<sup>39</sup> William J. Galush, "Polish Americans and Religion," cited in John J. Bukowczyk, *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 87-8.

<sup>40</sup> "Życiorys Wiel. Ks. Prob. Emila Musiała Jubilata 25-Ciolecia Swego Kapłaństwa," (Wheeling, WV, 1926), in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, DWC.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Gryczka to Bishop Donahue, January 27, 1903, Donahue Folder #4, GL-GR, 1903, Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906, DWC; Father Joseph Dabrowski to Bishop Donahue, January 28, 1903, Donahue Folder #9, DI-DY, 1903, Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906, DWC.

sharing his ideological views and willing to act properly, so that their loyalty to their congregations would not be questioned by the Polish laity and the diocese.<sup>42</sup>

Following the removal of the Polish seminarians, Fr. Musial continued to attract Polish clergy to the diocese. In 1904, Dabrowski's successor praised the abilities and sensibilities of Master Leo Dzicek, who recently arrived in Wheeling to serve the diocese. Fr. Musial informed him of Dzicek's appointment, and he talked of his good, moral behavior as a young priest.<sup>43</sup> Over the years Musial assisted in attracting many more priests in line with his efforts to promote other Polish communities. As he became well known throughout the entire diocese, Musial achieved a position of authority in assisting not only the religious, but also the social and political needs of Polish Catholic immigrants. As a member of Bishop Donahue's Council and later as Consulor under Bishop John Swint, Musial became an important Catholic figure.<sup>44</sup>

His authority in the diocese and knack for often conflicting with the policies of the Irish hierarchy stemmed from his early activities in the Ohio Valley. While hired to serve as the parish priest at St. Ladislaus, analysis of his travels in his first decade in Wheeling show him serving a much more significant role. For all intents and purposes, Musial was the first Polish priest stationed in West Virginia and the Upper Ohio Valley. Therefore, he not only ministered to his own flock, but traveled around the region observing religious holidays, administering the sacraments, and officiating at weddings and funerals for any and all Polish immigrants. The constant traveling by both streetcar and the B&O railroad must have taken a toll emotionally and physically on Musial, and confirmed what he thought in 1901 that any new Polish priest would

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<sup>42</sup> Bishop Donahue to Father Joseph Dabrowski, Jan 30, 1903, Donahue Folder #9, DI-DY, 1903, Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906, DWC.

<sup>43</sup> Reverend Vitoldus Bukaczowski to Bishop Donahue, May 26, 1904, Donahue Folder #4, Boy-BU, 1904, Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906, DWC.

<sup>44</sup> *Church Calendar*, April-May, 1921, DWC.



be constantly on “missionary journey.” In February 1906, Musial wrote the Bishop asking for a “Central Passenger” ticket book or a note that would allow him reduced rates on the railroad.<sup>45</sup>

Musial spent much time in the first decade of the Twentieth Century traveling. From his ordination in November 1901 till the opening of St. Ladislaus in February 1903, Musial served as an assistant to Father Joseph Mullen at Immaculate Conception, caring for the many Poles attending there.<sup>46</sup> When finally built, St. Ladislaus served all the Poles located in Wheeling, Benwood, and Fulton. However, Musial also received numerous calls for assistance to minister to the missions of Poles, and even Ukrainians and Slovaks throughout the Ohio Valley. One way to track Musial’s movements is through the parish’s baptismal records. Because of their working class status, most Poles outside of Wheeling could not afford the travel fare to go to St. Ladislaus to have a child christened. As a result, Musial often took a week or two to travel the region and baptize many Polish babies. Table 4:1 shows some of the locations where Musial baptized Polish couples’ children.

**Table 4.1: Baptisms by Fr. Musial and Assistant Pastors from St. Ladislaus, 1901-1910**

City	1901-2	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Wheeling	25	47	72	89	82	88	90	98	111
Benwood	0	3	15	34	26	49	21	24	13
McMechen	0	3	3	7	3	8	6	3	5
Moundsville	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	3	3
Bellaire, OH	0	2	1	0	0	0	5	9	5
Martins Ferry, OH	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	4	2
Yorkville, OH	0	3	5	3	3	3	4	1	3

Source: St. Ladislaus, Baptismal Records, December 22, 1901 to September 2, 1923, Microfilm Roll #10, DWC.

<sup>45</sup> Emil Musial to Right Reverend Father Weber from Polish Seminary, Detroit, September 5, 1901, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*; Reverend Emil Musial to Right Reverend Bishop P.J. Donahue, Wheeling, February 9, 1906, Box #24, Folder #4, “Mo-My, 1906,” Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection, Correspondences, DWC.

<sup>46</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1, 1901, 1; January 1, 1902, 3.

While most of his traveling was in the adjacent communities in Marshall and Ohio Counties, he also traveled extensively in Ohio, primarily to the mill towns and smaller coal mining camps. For example, after 1904 Musial traveled to the Polish enclaves in Neffs and Lansing, Ohio where many Slavic coal miners worked. After 1907, he traveled to even smaller mining camps in places like Short Creek, Glens Run, Pipe Creek, Rayland, and Rush Run.<sup>47</sup>

Musial's duties expanded as industry expanded in the Upper Ohio Valley. After 1900, Polish immigrants increasingly came to work in steel mills outside of Wheeling. They clustered in Steubenville and Martins Ferry, Ohio and Weirton, West Virginia. Others increasingly found work as unskilled workers in the booming pottery factories of Chester and New Cumberland. Musial traveled there to find hundreds of Poles and Slavic men, mostly unmarried living in a "secluded neighborhood" on a "lofty ridge" two miles from New Cumberland. The men earned \$1.50 a day, with 50 cents deducted for boarding in a makeshift "Barracks." Bishop Donahue appointed Rev. Julius Javorek to minister to the Poles in a new mission. Assisting Father Musial, this would allow for someone to cater to the needs of this growing flock of young Polish men, while Musial could devote more attention to community building in the core of *Polonia* in Wheeling.<sup>48</sup>

However, his busy and overextended schedule often meant that Musial upset other settled priests. A fine example of the animosity toward his inability to be in all places at once was with Fr. William Sauer of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Chester, West Virginia. His parish was located near the growing Polish enclave working at the pottery factories and steel mills in the Chester-New Cumberland region. Unable to properly minister to them, Fr. Sauer consistently requested Fr. Musial's assistance. From 1904-1907, Sauer grew increasingly angry with Fr.

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<sup>47</sup> St. Ladislaus, Baptismal Records, December 22, 1901 to September 2, 1923, Microfilm Roll #10, DWC. Thanks to archivist Jon Erik-Gilot for calling these to my attention.

<sup>48</sup> *Church Calendar*, September 1, 1904, 2.

Musial and all Polish priests in numerous letters to Chancellor Edward Weber. When Lent and Easter season came, Fr. Sauer informed the bishop that “Rev. E. Musial of Wheeling promised to come by last Christmas but did not come. He disappointed both the Poles and myself.”<sup>49</sup> If they could not get a Polish priest from the Wheeling Diocese, they would have to travel to East Liverpool to receive Easter sacraments. In addition, Sauer noted a similar problem that Musial experienced in Wheeling that the “Poles all work in the mill and could not very well get off during the week.” By Easter 1906, Sauer again noted how Polish steelworkers had “to stay up all night to go to Communion after one o'clock [sic] in the morning. Many go to work at four O'Clock in the morning and these poor fellows complained that it was too hard for them to stay up all night and work hard the next day.”<sup>50</sup> Without regular sacraments, those in New Cumberland could fall into more secular temptations. Sauer apparently did not think it important that “Father Musial was to do a funeral at Clarksburg the day before” coming to Chester.<sup>51</sup>

Because of his busy schedule and the growing Polish population in the Ohio Valley, Fr. Musial received help from assistant pastors. After the complaints from Fr. Sauer, Chancellor Weber sent for Rev. Julius Jaworeck. Serving as assistant pastor at St. Ladislaus, Jaworeck would often administer the sacraments, especially baptisms, in many of the small towns and coal camps when Fr. Musial was sick or officiating at St. Ladislaus. For example, Sauer asked whether Fr. Jaworeck could assist the families at the King's Creek mission only two miles from

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<sup>49</sup> Reverend William J. Sauer, Chester, West Virginia to Reverend Edward Weber, Chancellor, Wheeling, West Virginia, March 10, 1904, Box #18, “P-Z, 1904,” Folder #5, “Sa-Sc, 1904,” Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Correspondences, DWC.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Reverend William J. Sauer, Chester, WV to Rev. Edward E. Weber, Wheeling, WV, March 22, 1906, Correspondences, Box 1906, Folder #1 (“SA, 1906”), Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection, Correspondences, DWC.

<sup>51</sup> William Sauer to Reverend Edward Weber, Chancellor, March 12, 1904, Box #18, “P-Z, 1904,” Folder #5, “Sa-Sc, 1904,” Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Correspondences, DWC.

New Cumberland.<sup>52</sup> In late 1905, Musial got assistance from Father Manteuffel of St. Joseph's Rectory in Passaic, New Jersey when he was sick again. However, within a few months Fr. Sauer again desired Fr. Musial to come to Chester and marry Anthony Socha and Mary Kasica, who wanted only a "Polish priest to perform the marriage."<sup>53</sup> Sauer was even angrier following the death of a Polish man who contracted typhoid fever. Even without the aid of a Polish priest, Sauer complained he could "not make the Poles understand that I can in case of necessity absolve them," but that their souls would be in danger "if I don't [sic] fully understand them."<sup>54</sup>

In the end, Father Musial and Father Smoger of Steubenville, Ohio did not endear themselves to the Irish-American Father Sauer. In an angry letter from April 1907, he again complained about both Polish priests failing to answer his queries. Figuring he would have to inquire to the Pittsburgh Diocese, Sauer criticized how "I really do not see how these Polish priests can be so head strong and show so less intrest [sic] to the souls of their kind." By this point, Sauer had tried to start learning Polish, but again showed his discriminatory views by admitting that "I could learn the hogs' language about as soon as the Polish."<sup>55</sup>

The problems with Father Sauer differ from the Poles of Weirton. Musial played a greater role in the development of the Sacred Heart of Mary Polish Church in Weirton. With the growing number of Polish immigrants flocking to this new industrial city after 1909, Weirton's Poles required an ethnic priest who could understand their culture and language. After several

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<sup>52</sup> Chancellor Edward Weber to Rev. William Sauer, Chester, March 14, 1904, Box #18, "P-Z, 1904," Folder #5, "Sa-Sc, 1904," Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Correspondences, DWC; St. Ladislaus, Baptismal Records, December 22, 1901 to September 2, 1923, Microfilm Roll #10, DWC; Reverend William Sauer to Reverend Edward Weber, Wheeling, October 18, 1904, Box #18, "P-Z, 1904," Folder #5, "Sa-Sc, 1904," Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Correspondences, DWC.

<sup>53</sup> Bishop Patrick J. Donahue to Reverend Val. Chlebowski, P.P., St. Joseph's Rectory, Passaic, N.J., December 29, 1905, Box #19, Folder #6 ("Ch-CON, 1905"), Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection; Reverend William Sauer to Reverend Edward Weber, Wheeling, February 12, 1906, Correspondences, Box 1906, Folder #1 ("SA, 1906"), Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection, Correspondences, DWC.

<sup>54</sup> William Sauer, Chester, WV to Rev. Edward E. Weber, Wheeling, WV, October 23, 1906, Correspondences, Box 1906, Folder #1 ("SA, 1906"), Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection, Correspondences, DWC.

<sup>55</sup> William Sauer, Chester, WV to Rev. Edward Weber, Wheeling, WV, April 11, 1907, Correspondences Box 1907, Folder "S-1907," Bishop Patrick James Donahue Correspondences, DWC.

other priests, Donahue appointed Fr. Andrew Wilczek on Oct. 15, 1916, to lead the Poles in erecting a church. On October 24, 1920, Emil Musial served as celebrant and assisted Donahue in consecrating another addition to the Polish faith in the Northern Panhandle.<sup>56</sup>

Once committed to Wheeling, Musial and his Polish laity embarked on a two-decade-long campaign to forge a strong and successful center for the Polish Catholics. This locale over the years allowed them to meet their spiritual and economic needs, but also provided a place to discuss their homeland, politics, and labor activities. The task of constructing the church and allocating the necessary financial support placed many burdens on this small ethnic community. During an interview in the 1950's, Musial remembered how his community around 1900 only numbered about eighty families living between 43<sup>rd</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Streets in South Wheeling.<sup>57</sup> With such a small support base, one wonders how the construction of the church ever got off the ground. Part of it was the determination of a Polish ethnic working class that struggled for autonomy within the industrial capitalism of the era. However, much credit goes to Fr. Musial, who put in long hours and sweat, which consequently earned him the gratitude of not only the Poles but many city officials and city organizations. Parish histories note how he helped organize not only Polish and Catholic organizing drives for moral issues, but also city-wide religious groups that held a wide influence in Wheeling.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Musial was adept at avoiding the rivalries and conflicts that often afflicted ethnic parishes, resulting from merging

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<sup>56</sup> *75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book, 1911-1986, Sacred Heart of Mary Parish, Weirton, West Virginia*, 1. Sacred Heart of Mary Parish, Weirton, West Virginia Parish History File, DWC; *Church Calendar*, November 1920.

<sup>57</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 22, 1951.

<sup>58</sup> *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiala, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Króla, Wheeling, W.Va.* (Wheeling, WV, 1926), in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, DWC.

peoples of differing class and regional origins.<sup>59</sup> Musial appears to have experienced only minor conflicts of opinion with parishioners and was, for the most part, a beloved person.

### **Building the Parish**

On February 22, 1903, the Southside witnessed the exuberant festivities that went along with the founding of a Catholic church. With a massive march starting at the Cathedral on 13<sup>th</sup> Street and proceeding all the way to St. Ladislaus on 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Wheeling witnessed a lively parade headed by Musial, followed by the St. Ladislaus and St. Stanislaus societies, the Knights of St. George, the Mullen and Parke Divisions of the AOH, the Grand Opera House Band, the city's four Croatian Societies, ending with Bishop Donahue and the clergy. The ceremony also brought leading Polish clergymen from as far away as New York City and Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>60</sup> There are many possible explanations for the general success of Fr. Musial and his parish's long devotion to him for sixty years. The most plausible explanation stems from his putting the needs of the Poles in South Wheeling and elsewhere ahead of the Catholic Church in general. While he contributed necessary funds to the diocese for regular curia and special diocesan collections, he often ran afoul of the local diocese. Before the dedication in February 1903, Musial was struggling to complete the necessary building projects with limited funds. On December 31, 1902, with most of the building complete, the debts of the church were \$13,402. Musial owed large sums of money to the South Wheeling Bank, the Fahey Brothers, as well as to

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<sup>59</sup> For debates on ethnic intra-parish conflicts, see Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 111-31; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Seasons of Grace: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 137-65.

<sup>60</sup> "St. Ladislaus' Church Dedicated—New Polish Church on the South Side Opened with Impressive Ceremonies and Magnificent Street Parade," *Church Calendar*, March 1, 1903, 1; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 23, 1903.

his own St. Ladislaus Society.<sup>61</sup> As seen in Table 4.2, Musial’s list of debts also included two individuals, Ciak and Klos, who loaned him a total of \$2,900 with interest.

**Table 4.2: Debts and Liabilities of St. Ladislaus Church, 1902**

<b>Debt:</b>	<b>Amount Owed:</b>
St. Ladislaus Society	\$800
Vincent Ciak	\$1,700
Stanislaus Klos	\$1,200
South Wheeling Bank	\$5,000
Fahey Brothers	\$1,306
Stoltze-plaster	\$76
Schenerten & Pratt	\$200
Plumber	\$400
Painter	\$220
Altar and Pews	\$1,400
Furniture, Chalice, etc	\$1,100
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>\$13,402</b>

*Source:* Bishop Donahue’s Correspondence, December 31, 1902, DWC

This sort of outside borrowing was necessary for any beginning parish, and over the years this practice became characteristic of Musial’s financial philosophy. Assistance from his laity and private institutions fostered a level of ownership, which tied the Polish Catholics intimately to their church. In 1994, an older Polish-American parishioner spoke candidly on this relationship, showing disdain for the proposed closure of St. Ladislaus: “Everything belongs to the diocese . . . We built it, yeah, our parents and all built this church, mortgaged houses and all to build this church, but it ain’t [sic] ours, no way.”<sup>62</sup> She was disappointed the diocese ignored this strong sense in the Polish community about the collective ownership of their local church.

Musial’s financial practices often exasperated diocesan leaders. Using some diocesan funds, Musial in the spring of 1902 contracted through Fahey Brothers for the principal ironwork

<sup>61</sup> “List of Debts and Liabilities of St. Ladislaus Church, Wheeling, W.Va., Rev Emil Musial, Pastor, December 31, 1902, *Bishop Donahue’s Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC. Catholic histories focus on how ethnic parishes solicited financial help from outside persons and their own parishioners in order to pay for necessary construction.

<sup>62</sup> Interview of a Polish-American of St. Ladislaus Church, interviewed by Michael Kline, October 31, 1994, in “Pierogi Making at St. Lad’s,” transcript, Wheeling Spoken History Project, Ohio County Library (hereafter OCPL), <http://wheeling.weirton.lib.wv.us/history/wahp/other/96-021.htm>.

and carpentry for all of the church's façade, setting the price at \$5,644.<sup>63</sup> In the fall of 1902, Musial increased the overall price of the church with his plans to add a tall steeple, but the bishop stipulated that the total cost of same will not be more than \$1,000."<sup>64</sup> Then during the Easter Season of 1904, Chancellor Weber wrote to Musial requesting that he send his obligatory Good Friday Collections as well as the interest on his loans.<sup>65</sup> These records are vital to understanding not only the financial difficulties of the church in its early years, but they also provide a more detailed breakdown of the things Musial saw as necessary for his parish.<sup>66</sup> These few records reveal that Musial saw fit to stretch the money he collected and borrowed as far as possible to help create a church that was beautiful in appearance and effective in acting as a spiritual and community meeting place.

Musial made several other plans to expand his church's influence in South Wheeling. While a church edifice was important to effectively minister to the Poles the church needed to purchase necessary buildings and residences throughout the area. The first was a better parochial residence for Musial himself, located directly across the street from St. Ladislaus. This convenience eased his burden as a renter and gave him a larger residence where he could host his parishioners.<sup>67</sup> He also hoped to expand the realm of the church's influence by expanding its parish school, which he led in the parish's basement with less than standard equipment.

In 1906, however, Musial delayed these plans until he paid off his growing debts. When Musial explored further purchases for the community around St. Ladislaus, Bishop Donahue finally addressed his spending habits. Expressing his position strongly, Donahue instructed

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<sup>63</sup> Contract Fahey Brothers to Bishop Donahue, May 22, 1902, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>64</sup> Chancellor Weber to Emil Musial, September 10, 1902, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>65</sup> Chancellor Weber to Emil Musial, April 27, 1904, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>66</sup> No real calculation of his debts can be made because the diocese does not hold the *Annual Reports* for Wheeling parishes from 1900-1910.

<sup>67</sup> Emil Musial to Chancellor's Office, March 8, 1905, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.



Musial that “it is my will that you borrow no more sums of money from parishioners or other people or from any private persons or banks or corporations of any kind.” Although willing to help, the bishop wanted a detailed account of Musial’s “indiscriminate” spending for 1905 and the interests and loans of all parties involved.<sup>68</sup> This letter illustrates the tensions between Musial and the diocese over his efforts to seek collateral from Poles and private financiers. Hoping to preserve the community’s *Polishness*, Musial desired to build a strong economic base so that the church could function with almost complete self-sufficiency, even when it meant conflict with the bishop.

### **Social Life of St. Ladislaus’s Church**

As Musial’s church gradually grew in numbers, St. Ladislaus also became the center for the social and cultural life of this edge of the city. Sponsoring numerous religious societies and sodalities, these organizations added a Polish flavor to the Catholic culture in Wheeling. With these avenues for social interaction, St. Ladislaus boasted a large participation in many social events for both men and women. Musial maintained Polish identity by having the mass and many of the songs in Polish, and he worked at passing down various ethnic and cultural experiences at St. Ladislaus. Common events included the Polish Catholic processions, which became a fixture of the Wheeling cultural scene after 1900. Such processions were often the clearest way for the entire city to witness the unique religiosity of the ethnic parishes.<sup>69</sup> Delores Skrzypek recalled vividly how the first generation of Polish immigrants taught many of the children how to dance the Polka Bianca while wearing the native Polish garb. Another important annual event, especially for the children, were the May Processions, when children joyously marched around the school and neighborhood in white dresses and carrying flowers celebrating

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<sup>68</sup> Bishop Donahue to Rev. Emil Musial, February 9, 1906, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>69</sup> For an Italian Catholic example of the religious importance of these seasonal processions, see Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 6-8.

the Lenten and spring seasons.<sup>70</sup> The community came together and maintained religious customs involved in an infant christening, marriage, and even funerals. No matter the occasion, these events always centered on St. Ladislaus.

One of the largest social and religious events for the Polish community was weddings. For Polish immigrants, weddings helped tie together families and even united lovers separated by the migration process. A great example of this was the marriage of John and Katie Klocon at St. Ladislaus on May 6, 1905. The “pretty romance” extended over several years, and the story of the courtship “reads more like fiction than facts.” First meeting in 1902 “among the hills in southern Austria” (Galicia), John was prevented from marrying his love by Austrian law. Emigrating from Galicia to Benwood for work, he spent the next three years “struggling as a common laborer in the mills to save a sufficient amount to bring his girl lover to this country.” When able, he wrote to her and gave her money and instructions on how to get from New York to Benwood. Making the entire journey all alone and unable to speak English, she arrived to meet her lover. The romantic event, repeated many times, led the “foreign colony to turn out in mass” and celebrate with the happy couple.<sup>71</sup>

The wedding ceremony at the parish was followed by a series of exuberant and joyous celebrations throughout the street and homes of the Polish community. After the wedding at St. Ladislaus and festive street procession, families and friends would return to the home of the couple and have a raucous celebration. According to one observer, “A Polish wedding is the signal among those of that nationality for prolonged jubilation, generally lasting two or three days.” The party atmosphere was full of singing and dancing. In fact, “Without dancing a Polish wedding is not complete, and the assembled guests danced till they were exhausted only to renew

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<sup>70</sup> Delores Skrzypek, interview by Michael Kline, October 31, 1994, OCPL.

<sup>71</sup> “Pretty Romance Will End To-Day: Sixteen-Year-Old Austrian Girl Crosses Atlantic to Join Her Lover,” *Wheeling Register*, May 6, 1905, 7; Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*, 138-40.

it all again.”<sup>72</sup> The nature of the “Old Country Celebration” was seen in a Hungarian wedding at the parish. Going to Benwood city hall, a reporter described the nature of the immigrant scene. Reflecting on aspects of peasant culture, participants were “Whirling around with a quickness and gracefulness” foreign to outsiders.” It amazed the native resident how they “jigged and waltzed, skipped and twirled, leaped and hopped until one would imagine that the participants were machines in the hands of a skillful mechanic regulating his revelry apparatus.” These long wedding parties often led to criticism from natives and factory managers as primitive; however, dancing, processions, and other cultural events connected the Polish migrants with the peasant traditions of their homeland. Some wedding receptions lasted as long as a week. Even when fights did break out, more times than not the Polish guests were angrier that this meant an end to the dancing and ethnic music. For example, after he “kissed the blushing bride at the wrong time,” the fight among John Brojoska and his countrymen left the “poor bride” and more so “others of the fair sex seemed to be more put out over the fact that the dance, which was to have lasted for two days, was broken up.”<sup>73</sup>

The church’s religious societies and sodalities proliferated with the growth of the church to assist in the moral and civic duties of the parishioners. During the church’s early years, these social groups incorporated many individuals in the community, and they also worked to give women in the church a strong place of authority. A pamphlet celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the parish lists those prominent parishioners during the first generation of the church; among the fifty-two people mentioned, twenty of them were women. Many were influential in numerous church functions and sodalities, and some even assisted in providing major public needs for the

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<sup>72</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, September 16, 1903, 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Wheeling Register*, January 18, 1905, 9; “Brilliant Celebration-Interesting Hungarian Romance Comes to Fitting Ending at Benwood,” *Wheeling Daily News*, May 7, 1906, 8; quotes on Brojoska incident and wedding, from “Kisses Bride at the Wrong Time,” *Wheeling Daily News*, January 13, 1907, Section 4, 2.

community.<sup>74</sup> For example, one of the parishioners, Rose Matulewicz, acted as a housekeeper at 4509 Eoff Street, in an area predominately populated with Polish boarders. This was part of Fr. Musial's initial plan to provide boarding houses headed by Polish women to assist in the acculturation of the influx of Poles to the region.<sup>75</sup>

Catholic historians emphasize the important part of women within the numerous Catholic Church societies. The Women's Rosary for adults and the Blessed Virgin Mary's Sodality for young girls both provided moral uplift but also brought working women together for the social welfare of the Polish community. Since its inception, one of the largest events for the church was the making of pierogis for the annual bazaar held each year to benefit the church community and raise necessary funds for the upkeep of the church. Led by the women of the St. Hedrick's Society, Jane Murray remembered how vital these events were for women during the Lenten Season and the Forty Hours Devotion fast times.<sup>76</sup>

The men and women of St. Ladislaus also worked in promoting Polish Catholic community building outside Wheeling. On June 26, 1904, 150 men of St. Ladislaus traveled on a B&O train to Fairmont, and then to Monongah. They marched in a fine ethnic processional with their own Polish band, joined by the band from the newly formed Stanislaus Kostka Parish. Along with the St. Ladislaus and St. Stanislaus Societies, the Monongah and Wheeling Poles showed a strong level of ethnic solidarity. Even Bishop Donahue encouraged the Polish congregants, "while not in the least surrendering their own language, customs, and observances."

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<sup>74</sup> "Czescl Pozdrowienie Wielebnemu Ksiedzu Jubilatowi," in *Pamietnik Uroczystosci Zlotego Jubileusza Swieccenn Kaplanshich Przewielebnego Ksiedza Emila Musiala, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Wladyslawa Krola, Wheeling, W.Va.*, (Wheeling, WV, 1926), in *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus, Wheeling, WV (1902-1995)*, DWC.

<sup>75</sup> *Polks Wheeling (West Virginia) City Directory, 1928* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Company, 1927), WVRHC.

<sup>76</sup> Jane Murray, interview by Michael Kline, October 31, 1994, OCPL.

The ladies of St. Ladislaus had arrived in advance of the ceremony to assist with the ethnic celebration and preparation of food.<sup>77</sup>

Many of these societies promoted social engagement, but the primary purpose was for spiritual uplift. Especially important were the young people's sodalities, which addressed issues surrounding what many parish priests saw as a "sexual revolution" in the years prior to 1914. St. John's in Benwood, the neighbor parish of St. Ladislaus, most directly addressed this pressing issue with the creation of the St. Aloysius Abstinence Society in 1905. This society, along with that parish's Blessed Virgin Mary Sodality, sponsored many activities for teenagers such as bowling, roller skating, and dances without the threat of "serious scandal."<sup>78</sup>

As St. Ladislaus grew in numbers and influence during the 1910's, many other social, educational, and civic organizations formed to unify the community religiously, but also along ethnic and political lines. Musial was in the middle of these actions, which often involved the community's efforts to pay off the debts incurred in building St. Ladislaus. Church building caused financial difficulties for many Poles, as they mortgaged their homes and held many fund raisers to pay off their debts. Following his financial policy, Musial made sure that during each year he allocated money to help pay off the church's construction. In 1915, all the early debts were paid in full. This did not mean that Fr. Musial halted his efforts. Instead, he became more aggressive in solidifying the community by purchasing the Polish National Assembly (later the Polish American Club) in 1916 at a cost of \$19,130. Table 4.3 tracks the financial highs and lows of the parish during the 1910's.

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<sup>77</sup> *Church Calendar*, July 1, 1904, 3. The St. Ladislaus Society was led by President Frank Templin, while the St. Stanislaus Society was led by President A. Matielewicz.

<sup>78</sup> Tentler, *Seasons of Grace*, 211-3; Unnamed Parish History of St. John's in Benwood, 22-3, in *St. John's Parish History File-Benwood*, WV, DWC.

**Table 4.3: Financial Records of St. Ladislaus Church, 1911-1919**

	<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Pew Rents</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Debt</b>
1911	\$7,599.14	\$438.90	\$6,988.01	<b>\$7,600</b>
1912	\$8,074.74	\$2,993.25	\$7,160.80	<b>\$6,600</b>
1913	\$8,817.70	\$600.50	\$8,817.70	<b>\$2,600</b>
1914	\$6,707.37	\$505	\$5,268.92	<b>\$1,600</b>
1915	\$7,613.03	\$2,860.65	\$6,328.59	<b>\$0</b>
1916	\$29,984.78	\$2,936.70	\$29,612.90	<b>\$19,130</b>
1917	\$16,490.29	\$2,569.20	\$16,134.09	<b>\$18,650</b>
1918	\$24,544	\$2,668.90	\$24,512.65	<b>\$14,400</b>
1919	\$11,446.56	\$2,794.60	\$11,295.43	<b>\$13,200</b>

*Source: St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1911-1919, DWC.*

Many outside donors from the community and city loaned money at the start, but most of the money after 1910 came from the parishioners in the form of pew rents and other collections. There are no exact records of how much money certain families paid in pew rents in the 1910's; however, later anniversary books show this was a time of social mobility within the community. Prospering families probably paid more, but the inward-looking nature of the church community tried to downplay any class-based struggles.<sup>79</sup> Finally, Musial felt that purchasing the Polish National Assembly would more adequately serve the men of the community if it came under church control.<sup>80</sup> This purchase assisted in the continued growth of the fraternal lodges of the Polish National Alliance (PNA) and the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America (PRCU).

The PNA sponsored a Boy Scout troop during the 1910's known as the "Harczerze," which differed from its American counterparts by conducting all events and activities in Polish. By February 1920, the Boy Scout troop numbered around 175 boys, and Musial himself praised the organization's efforts "to show him [the Polish-American youth] what a truly great country

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<sup>79</sup> *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiala, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Króla, (Wheeling, WV, 1926), in Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995), DWC.*

<sup>80</sup> *St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1915-1916, DWC.*

he is permitted to call his own.”<sup>81</sup> In addition, the PNA held many Polish folk dances and supported a baseball team.<sup>82</sup> The PRCU also sponsored sports teams, including semi-professional Polish baseball and basketball teams. Many of their functions took place in the new “Polish Hall.” Both the PRCU and Musial utilized this social space in the 1920’s to show silent films, organize wedding receptions, communion breakfasts, and even political rallies. Later during the Jazz Age of the 1920’s, Polish Hall became renowned for its pre-Lenten “Paczki Ball” as well as the performances of first the Mamushka Orchestra and later the American Rhythm Teams.<sup>83</sup> With the positive additions of these social spaces in the 1910’s, Fr. Musial provided his parish with religious and social venues to keep intact his flock’s ethnic heritage and to hold off the challenge of Socialists and labor unions.

Fraternal organizations also provided monetary assistance. As far back as 1897, several Polish men led by Jan Malkowski formed the Tadeusz Kosciuszko Society Z.P.R.K. of the Polish Roman Catholic Union. This early fraternal unit suffered from poor organization and lost members. In 1902, Fr. Musial worked to reorganize the group, and it was renamed St. Stanislaus Society. However, it was also split by political infighting and disputes, so that in 1914 68 members formed the St. Joseph Society, Group 213 of the ZPRK. Very quickly the society provided accidental and death insurance. By 1926, 416 men and women took out insurance, worth over \$275,000. These plans provided some of the most reliable insurance premiums for immigrant families. For example, in 1916 the society set up a sick and disease fund that would pay \$7.00 in weekly assistance checks for the cost of 50 cents a month to members. By 1926,

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<sup>81</sup> *The Church Calendar*, March 1920.

<sup>82</sup> Unnamed Parish History, *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus*, DWC.

<sup>83</sup> Unnamed Parish History, *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus*, DWC; Unnamed “Polish-American,” interview by Michael Kline, October 31, 1994, OCPL.

this program paid out \$7,037. After 1921, the St. Joseph’s Society branched out by establishing the St. Alojzy Department for Youth, to provide them with sick and accidental death insurance.<sup>84</sup>

Musial also made Polish Catholic education a priority for his parishioners. Before 1910, he conducted some classes in the basement of the church. However, the steady increase in students, seen in Table 4.4, encouraged Musial to seek better school facilities, and encourage families to send their children.

**Table 4.4: Souls at St. Ladislaus and Children in Parochial School, 1911-1920**

	<b>Souls</b>	<b>Students</b>
1911	1200	153
1912	1200	185
1913	1500	215
1914	1500	216
1915	1500	205
1916	1500	265
1917	1200	245
1918	1500	315
1919	1450	295
1920	1300	336

*Source: St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1911-1920, DWC.*

To meet demand, Musial sought the assistance of the Felician Sisters of Detroit. In 1911, four nuns arrived and aided in providing the necessary staff to educate children of all ages. As in other cities, the parochial school played a critical role in the Polish Catholic experience, as immigrants hoped that their cultural traditions would remain sacred for their children. To hold onto these “ethnic truths,” Catholic orders trained teachers to embrace and instruct their pupils in the Polish language, religion, culture, and history.<sup>85</sup> Delores Skrzypek recalled that the Felician Sisters, who took care of the interior of the church, visited the sick, and provided an exemplary

<sup>84</sup> “Historija Tow. Św. Józefa, Grupa 213 Z.P.R.K.,” in *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Ksiedza Emila Musiala, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Króla, Wheeling, W. Va.* (Wheeling, WV, 1926), 41, in *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus, Wheeling, WV (1902-1995)*, DWC.; for Polish immigrant insurance programs and fraternal lodges, see William J. Galush, *For More Than Bread: Community and Identity in American Polonia, 1880-1940* (Boulder, Colorado: Eastern European Monographs, 2006), 45-53.

<sup>85</sup> Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*, 144-6.



parochial education: “we studied Polish and English up to the eighth grade. You had your Polish religion and English religion, Polish history, English history.”<sup>86</sup> By 1920, the rising numbers of students forced the parish to purchase a three-story building with eight classrooms.<sup>87</sup> With this parochial institution, the Polish Catholics possessed a fully self-sustaining community.

### **Ethnic Interaction and Early Class Divisions in *Polonia***

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Wheeling’s Poles established a thriving ethnic community on the margins of the “Friendly City.” However, a major component of their life in South Wheeling revolved around interacting with and living in close proximity to scores of other immigrants and communities. To the North, Polish Catholics intermingled with Germans, Austrians, and Bohemians, while Hungarians, Croats, and Serbs congregated to the south in Benwood. Although ethnic animosities traveled with immigrants from Europe, the relationships were more complex in America. Dominic Pacyga argues that Chicago’s Poles faced more ethnic conflicts with their Lithuanian neighbors than with the larger ethnic groups.<sup>88</sup> Other scholars examine the range of ethnic and racial animosity felt by Polish urban immigrants, particularly toward African-Americans. Poles, like other Southern and Eastern European immigrants, sought to position themselves within the city’s ethnic diversity.<sup>89</sup>

Arriving later than the Irish and Germans, South Wheeling’s Poles were relegated to an inferior position when obtaining work as. Although equal with Wheeling’s other new immigrants, they had advantages over blacks, who lived in large numbers in several neighborhoods in South Wheeling, both near the Poles.<sup>90</sup> However, due to the small African-

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<sup>86</sup> Delores Skrzypek, interview by Michael Kline, October 31, 1994, OCPL.

<sup>87</sup> Unnamed Parish History, *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus*, DWC.

<sup>88</sup> Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants in Industrial Chicago*, 154-5.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>90</sup> African-Americans congregated next to the Belmont Mill from 25-27<sup>th</sup> Streets and from 31<sup>st</sup>-33<sup>rd</sup> Streets.

American population of Wheeling at the time, the larger conflicts and tensions occurred principally between ethnic groups in Wheeling. In 1904, Bishop Donahue asked all priests to send him a survey of the ethnic compositions of their parishes. This document is fascinating, for it suggests some of the ethnic tensions between the immigrants near St. Ladislaus. The document lists the two major divisions within the parish--542 Poles and 325 other Slavs. The document then notes that Musial did not want Hungarians or Croats in his parish. He is even more forceful with his request that he absolutely does not want any Italians.<sup>91</sup>

This document suggests that Musial's primary goal was to provide a solid religious, social, and cultural base only for the Poles of South Wheeling. This institution was for Poles, and Poles only, in the minds of Musial and his parishioners. Although not unique for its time, this does reflect a desire to maintain the ethnic purity of the immigrants in this area. A related issue involved debates over interethnic marriages. Fr. Musial worked to facilitate marriages between people of Polish descent. According to a sample from the 1920 census, there were only a dozen or so couples of differing ethnicities out of 188 marriages. Musial supported this policy from the beginning. According to the parish's marriage book, from 1902 through 1907, of all marriages where both participants' background is known, 87% united persons from the same Polish region.<sup>92</sup> At least in the first generation, evidence points to the fact that Musial wanted to keep his flock ethnically intact. This was a conservative ploy of Catholic priests, but it also reflects Musial's desire to keep his community unified as they tried to gain the necessary economic and political footholds to advance as a group.

Musial's efforts to maintain a traditional community mirrored those of many ethnic parish priests of the era as they contested the growing influence of Irish and German Catholics

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<sup>91</sup> Emil Musial to Chancellor Weber, December 20, 1904, in *Bishop Donahue Correspondence, 1901-1906*, DWC.

<sup>92</sup> 1920 Manuscript Census Schedules, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, WVRHC; St. Ladislaus Marriage Book, 1902-1908, *St. Ladislaus Sacramental Records Collection*, DWC.

within local dioceses. As Irish leaders sought to alter the Church to the needs of “modernity,” they crafted an institutional structure of social, fraternal, and religious societies that worked to “Americanize” and unify all Catholics. Territorial parishes promoted Catholic Americanization, such as St. John’s in Benwood. Father Werninger opened a school in the Fall of 1906 to teach English. Immigrants were told strongly the benefits of Americanization, since “they must be able to read and write Teddy Roosevelt’s English before they can qualify as citizens.”<sup>93</sup> However, prior to 1917 these efforts largely failed in South Wheeling, as seen in the financial debates between Donahue and Musial.

Since the late nineteenth century, the Irish Carroll Club and German Arion and Columbia Clubs dominated Wheeling’s Catholic social and cultural scene. Both of these older immigrant organizations included members across class lines. The Carroll Club included many of the influential community figures of the era, including G.W. Lutz, A.P. Welty, Ignatius Donnelly, John Coleman, Colonel Thomas O’ Brien, and even Bishop Donahue. The Arion Club’s members included recognizable Wheeling Germans like Edward Stifel, Augustus Pollack, Paul Reymann, and Edward Seabright.<sup>94</sup>

While it did lead to some ethnic tensions, the Irish-American brand of Catholicism also stressed a surprising degree of social justice and ethnic tolerance. The Catholic hierarchy reached out to the working class immigrants and the impoverished by fostering lay societies led

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<sup>93</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90-4, 130-46; for St. John’s see, *Church Calendar*, October 1906, 5. According to historian James Barrett, “This story of Catholic Americanization remains largely untold.” Dominated by the Irish hierarchy, women religious, and lay leadership of diocesan charity organizations, they stressed a strong devotional version of Catholic practice, which highlighted the central role of the parish priests and the church hierarchy. However, this conservative Catholic adherence to authority should note lead to the conclusion that this was a conservative, coercive form of Americanization, rather this Hibernian cast also included a strong belief in charity, reform activism in the community, a sense of solidarity with other oppressed immigrants, and an advocacy of variant of progressivism based around Catholic social teachings. James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), ch. 2, quote, 59.

<sup>94</sup> *The Wheeling Blue-Book: An Elite Directory and Family Register, 1901-1902* (Pittsburgh: The Elite Publishing Company, 1901), 3-9, 17-186.

by female, middle class progressive. Most of these societies ran through St. Joseph's Cathedral and had a distinctive "Hibernian" feel. However, they sought to provide relief and assistance to the growing immigrant population. The most important was the ladies' Immaculata Guild from St. Joseph's Cathedral. Created on December 8, 1903 to honor the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Irish-American women sought united action to "devise practical means of assisting and helping the poor."<sup>95</sup> In always seeking to "soften the hard lot and relieve the wants," the ladies sponsored charity events, eucharists, and donation drives to collect clothes for the "deserving poor." Operating in a non-sectarian fashion, the women gave out hundreds of garments and food every winter. During the recession in early 1908, they investigated homes of destitute foreign-born families to provide food and clothing for children. Throughout the early 1900's, the Guild and the St. Vincent de Paul Society were the only lay organizations, whose sole purpose was alleviating the local poverty and sickness that "grows heavier each year."<sup>96</sup>

The Guild played a major role assisting the immigrants' suffering during the March 1907 flood. The women quickly formed a Cathedral Relief Station and set up committees to investigate the needs in each city neighborhood. They addressed the many "pitiful tales of destitution," especially in South Wheeling. Many of the women were appalled to see foreign families on the Southside "scantily clad." The most sympathetic case involved a Polish widow and her two small children, who lost everything they owned in the flood. The ladies discovered them all sleeping on a wet mattress, covered with rags. Upon receiving a consignment of food

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<sup>95</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1, 1904, 1; for the Irish-American support for Catholic charity and social settlement work, see Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Deirdre M. Molony, *American Catholic Lay Groups and Transatlantic Social Reform in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Barrett, *The Irish Way*, 76-89.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*; October 1, 1905, 1; February 1, 1906, 1; January 1907, 1; November 1906, 1.

and a clean mattress, the Polish mother gratefully “tempted to kiss the feet of her benefactress.”<sup>97</sup> As the years progressed and the city suffered through the recession of 1907-1910, the ladies’ guild commented on the increasing “misery and distress” as men could no longer find employment to care for their families.<sup>98</sup>

This Irish-American Catholic reform impulse expanded in the first two decades of the century to meet the growing concerns of the poor. While many did not necessarily cater to immigrants, they reflected the Church’s willingness to care for the material, not just the spiritual needs of its members. The Immaculata Guild’s concern for poor children expanded with the creation of a Home for the Aged. Bishop Donahue was particularly concerned with the growing numbers of “old people thrown upon the world without a roof over their heads” with no assistance to care for them in their most vulnerable time.<sup>99</sup> During the same period, the services and reach of the Diocese’s Orphan Home in Elm Grove were expanded, as were the efforts of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd home on Edgington Lane.<sup>100</sup>

Most of the city’s preeminent Catholic organizations ran directly through St. Joseph’s Cathedral. As the Irish-dominated seat of the diocese, this gave Donahue a venue to urge meetings, bazaars, and entertainments (including black minstrel shows) to reinforce the tenets of an Irish-American, Catholic modernity. During the 1910’s, the Cathedral hosted the annual Holy Name Society rallies, distributed diocesan literature against socialism, and organized charity efforts by the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Women’s League for Protective Work. The latter served to protect “young [immigrant] girls coming into Wheeling.”<sup>101</sup> These female-led

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<sup>97</sup> *Church Calendar*, April 1907, 1-2.

<sup>98</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1908, 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Church Calendar*, February 1, 1906, 1.

<sup>100</sup> *Church Calendar*, January 1907, 1; October 1908, 1; January 1909, 1.

<sup>101</sup> October 1910-May 25, 1913, *St. Joseph’s Cathedral Announcement Ledgers, 1898-1918* in Parish History File, *Cathedral of St. Joseph, Wheeling, WV (1828-Present)*, DWC.

reform organizations allowed Donahue to help foster Americanization, especially for children. With public schools opening night schools to teach English to immigrants, Donahue appointed several Sisters of St. Joseph to teach the English language to an initial class of thirty-nine girls of Hungarian, Bohemian, Slavic, and Polish descent.<sup>102</sup> Even within the Cathedral, there were physical metaphors to emphasize the “supremacy” of the Irish-American brand of Catholicism. On November 16, 1913, Cathedral members were told that, “The Chapel in the basement of the church is for the use of the Italians and for no one else; hence you are requested not to intrude.” This came after many references to Italians who were continually coming upstairs during masses.<sup>103</sup>

Bishop Donahue’s goals were very clear. The *Wheeling Daily News* highlighted the significance in an editorial entitled “American Spirit,” in regard to classes and programs for “inculcating true American spirit into the little ones of the foreigners.” Many progressives and Catholic lay leaders were critical of the more scientific theories on Americanizing the foreign born population—especially the more coercive trends. Not following “outlandish experiments,” the press hailed the Catholic Church’s efforts of catering their uplift project to providing amusements for the young. In universal terms, “Children are children the world over, whether Italian, American, English or Turk . . . Left in the slums, Italian children have no opportunity to imbibe [the] healthful American atmosphere.”<sup>104</sup>

Despite this inter-ethnic squabbling, Musial increasingly felt the need for South Wheeling’s Poles to work together with different ethnic Catholics. The primary vehicles for this were the Holy Name Societies of Wheeling’s Catholic churches and their annual Holy Name

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<sup>102</sup> *Wheeling Telegraph*, January 4, 1913, 2; *Church Calendar*, January 1912, 1.

<sup>103</sup> November, 16, 1913, *St. Joseph’s Cathedral Announcement Ledgers, 1898-1918* in Parish History File, *Cathedral of St. Joseph, Wheeling, WV (1828-Present)*, DWC; *Church Calendar*, January 1907, 5.

<sup>104</sup> *Church Calendar*, May 1, 1906, 5.

parades. The Holy Name Society included all men in a parish, and they worked to regularly attend confession and communion services, as well as showing unified reverence to the “name” of the Lord.<sup>105</sup> Over time, these conservative Catholic societies began to express a more overtly political message, protesting the social wrongs committed overseas and particularly the plight of working class people. While one of the Holy Name Societies’ primary purposes was to counter Socialism, these groups actively pushed for social justice in the community, so that workers would not opt to follow radical anti-Catholic doctrines. The annual parades were a chance for Catholic communities to unite in processions against the evils plaguing society. On October 13, 1912, a massive Holy Name Parade coursed through the streets of Wheeling to stop at the Cathedral. Marching, without caring about “class divisions,” the men sang hymns and listened as Bishop Donahue spoke about the evils and terrors he saw while visiting the southern coal fields of West Virginia, where “there is bitterness and strife between man and man, and between class and class.”<sup>106</sup> St. Ladislaus parish gained a prestigious position in this procession, as the second parish marching behind the bishop. In these acts of Catholic unity, working-class Poles could reaffirm the tenets of their faith.

At the same time, Musial attached his parish to the Bishop's political agenda. Donahue utilized many of the Irish lay societies and the *Church Calendar* to espouse the Church’s disdain for Socialism. He steadily increased his political influence during this time, and his public rhetoric forced other ethnic priests to support his position. Early in 1909, he spoke around Wheeling of the “two great perils looming of the future,” Socialism and divorce. Following the church’s social teachings, Donahue also argued how the right to private property was sacred. Even though there was a growing concentration of wealth, “private property is necessary so that

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<sup>105</sup> Tentler, *Seasons of Grace*, 208-9.

<sup>106</sup> *Church Calendar*, November 1, 1912.

wages may secure *their true value*.”<sup>107</sup> Donahue saw that “Christianity . . . is made opposed to Socialism as light to darkness . . . They are totally irreconcilable!” Moreover, he emphasized how the Socialists were incorrect in saying that the Church was always “arrayed against the weak and the indigent” in unwavering support of capital and power.<sup>108</sup> Donahue served on a state commission investigating the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes, and drafted the main report on the miners’ conditions throughout the state. In his report, he condemned both the repressive nature of mine guards but also the radical UMW leadership. Donahue noted how labor “has no right to coerce by threats or violence anyone to become affiliated with it.” He also highlighted “the abundant evidence before us that a reign of terror was attempted to be organized in the strike district,” suggesting that socialists were responsible.<sup>109</sup>

While the Holy Name Society helped bridge some of the divides between Wheeling’s ethnic Catholics, a more positive force for social interaction was the efforts at St. John’s Church in Benwood. Located in Center Benwood, between the two large steel mills, the Irish long dominated the parish. By the 1890’s, St. John’s developed differently than St. Ladislaus by serving as a territorial parish for an inter-ethnic mill town community. While the Irish led the principal lay societies, newer immigrants also helped bridge links between the Irish, Polish, and other immigrant groups. As the Slavic population increased in Benwood, Fr. Musial and the South Wheeling Poles worked with the St. John’s parish. In the spring of 1905, a Polish priest from Cleveland arrived in Benwood to assist both parishes to confirm the applications for

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<sup>107</sup> Undated speech by Bishop Donahue from 1909, pg. 4, 6-10, Box, B.D. Sermons, etc, 1916-1920, Folder #26, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, DWC.

<sup>108</sup> Undated speech by Bishop Donahue from 1909, pg. 18, 36, DWC.

<sup>109</sup> State Commission Report of P.J. Donahue, et al to Governor William E. Glasscock, November 27, 1912, pgs 14-5, Box, Bishop Donahue, Finances-Invoices, 1898-1918, Folder #44, Mining Investigation Kanawha County, 1912, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, DWC.



membership in the “Polish church and the Slavish society.” The priest received over 500 applications, leading to a “busy day” of work at the formal ceremony at St. Ladislaus.<sup>110</sup>

Clearly, Musial relied on a small but growing Polish business community to help him thwart the appeal of secular working-class organizations. However, by the 1910’s, the ethnic community also exhibited early signs of class divisions. Rising Polish businessmen like Stanley Duplaga, John Raszkievicz, and others arrived in the late 1900’s and early 1910’s and carved out niches for themselves within *Polonia*. During World War I, the increasing number of Poles entering the small business class showed the successful opportunities *Polonia* could offer. Marcel Olszta and his sons opened a successful funeral parlor and monument business that operated near the parish at 4510 Jacob Street.<sup>111</sup> Leo Merge was a successful druggist, operating out of his residence at 4315 Jacob Street during the war years. Down the street was Stanley Owoc, who ran a barber shop near the Polish-American Hall. In later years, Owoc acted as editor of the *Polish West Virginian*.<sup>112</sup>

One indication of the influence of this ethnic business class involved the collection of pew rents. From 1915 through 1919, pew rents averaged between \$2,500 and almost \$3,000 annually.<sup>113</sup> These increasing sums were critical to Musial’s response to neutralize the Socialist threat and to offering Catholic social spaces that could rival their secular counterparts. Mutual benefit associations, small businesses, and even the Polish-American Club all became vital institutions within *Polonia* during this period. The Polish-American Club was itself purchased in

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<sup>110</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 15, 1905, 9.

<sup>111</sup> *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1918), 513; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1920), 681; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1921), 938, OCPL.

<sup>112</sup> *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918*, 441, 517; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920*, 614, 686; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922*, 848, 944; *Polk’s Wheeling City Directory, 1928*, OCPL.

<sup>113</sup> *St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1911-1919*, DWC.

1916, probably with the financial assistance of many of the rising businessmen, who later became its principal leaders.<sup>114</sup>

Finally, St. Ladislaus subtly endorsed this emerging business class leadership. The parish promoted local small businesses in their pamphlets, church circulars, but also in their anniversary books. This advertising reflected a direct link between the parish and those community leaders who gave higher amounts of money to the parish and assisted in purchasing buildings like the Polish-American Club. Musial fostered these connections even more after 1915. Anniversary books highlight the relative social status of particular businessmen. Successful Poles like Stanley Duplaga, the Lukaszewicz Brothers (they owned a bakery and a service station), and Frank Lewandowski all bought full page ads. Duplaga's advertisement came on the second page of the anniversary book. In contrast, the Olszta family undertakers, Louis Merge, and John Raskiewicz purchased only quarter page ads.<sup>115</sup> All of these men by 1926 had been in their respective businesses for some time; however, some could purchase larger ads than others. Small businessmen like Stanley Owoc and Louis Loges, who both changed occupations or took on second jobs, bought one-eighth of a page advertisements. All other parishioners received a small block among twenty others on a page.<sup>116</sup> These advertisements reveal much about the importance of class in the successful formation of a strong community.

## **Conclusion**

America's entry into World War I marked a transition for St. Ladislaus's first generation, which forged a unified community from diverse regional European backgrounds. The Poles, under the leadership of Fr. Emil Musial, shored up a community through strong religious and

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<sup>114</sup> *St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1916*; Mary Martinkosky confirmed the role of small business owners in the Polish-American Club, see Oral Interview with Mary Martinkosky, August 10, 2008.

<sup>115</sup> *Pamiętnik Uroczystosci Zlotego Jubileusza*, 2,10,18,30,42,58, St. Ladislaus Parish History File, DWC; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920*, 1020; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922*, 771, OCPL.

<sup>116</sup> *Pamiętnik Uroczystosci Zlotego Jubileusza*, 62, 66, St. Ladislaus Parish History File, DWC.

cultural traditions. Marking the end of the parish's *communal response* to life in urban America, the Poles by 1917 possessed the institutions to adequately address the pertinent social and labor issues that developed in the years to follow.

Why were these communal responses based around the parish, their Catholic faith, and ethnic culture important to Musial and many Poles? As seen throughout the 1910's, Polish working class immigrants were increasingly drawn, like many other workers in Wheeling, to the class-based appeals of the labor movement and the Socialist Party. While it seems Fr. Musial's vision for the Polish community was triumphant, there was a legitimate fear that without a structured, moral community, Poles might drift toward socialism under the increasingly desperate and intense working conditions in Wheeling and Benwood's factories. Even with the strong attachment to an ethnic cultural nationalism, the rising importance of the labor movement in the lives of these blue collar immigrants provided another secular avenue for moral regeneration in industrial America.

**Chapter 5**  
**“Finding a Good Job and a Good Union for *Polonia*: Class and Ethnic Dimensions of the Labor Movement in Wheeling, 1890-1915”**

Waking up to the sweltering heat of July 23, 1915, Wheeling’s Southside appeared ready to erupt, as 500 workers of the Wheeling Can Company discussed a strike. Tensions finally reached their breaking point when management demanded that employees work added overtime and fired those refusing to comply. Angered by the unfair demands, the can workers organized themselves by passing out flyers to workers as they left the factory at 6:00 p.m. That evening, they held a mass meeting at Scherwinski’s Hall at Forty-Sixth and Jacob Street, just several blocks from the plant. Most of the strikers and hundreds of others listened intently as Walter B. Hilton, Socialist editor of the *Wheeling Majority*, and L.M. Greer and Smith Calvert of the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly helped the strikers draft their demands. They sought a nine-hour day, time and a half for overtime, a return to the wages of 1912, pay for lost time caused by machine break downs, recognition of their union, reinstatement of the fired employees, and the weekly payment of wages.<sup>1</sup> The next morning, the strikers set up a picket line around the plant at 7:00 a.m., shutting down the plant for that day. Another mass meeting occurred that night at Polish Hall on Wood Street, below Forty-Fifth. This “meeting was larger and more enthusiastic than the last one,” as the largely immigrant audience agreed to hold out. After management supported all of the demands, except for union affiliation, another meeting at Scherwinski’s Hall led to a “loud and unanimous demand for affiliation with the American Federation of Labor.” While members of the local Socialist Party and the Trades Assembly were present, “none of

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<sup>1</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, July 29, 1915.

these spoke” so that the workers’ decision “could not be twisted by the Can Factory Management into a claim that ‘the agitators’ had influenced them against their will.”<sup>2</sup>

The role of recent Polish immigrants in this strike makes it all the more intriguing. During the meeting at Scherwinski’s Hall, when the strikers sought AFL affiliation, Charles Ajmar of Bridgeport, Ohio, translated the demands and meeting minutes into “Polish for the benefit of a large number of girls” who worked at Wheeling Can. Enthusiastically, the women “flocked to the front and paid their initiation.”<sup>3</sup> That these recent female Polish immigrants vigorously supported organizing efforts by the local Trades Assembly and prominent Socialists, surprised the local Catholic leaders, especially since they met in spaces usually reserved for Polish social functions and the Catholic religious festivals of St. Ladislaus Polish parish. The strikers also promoted a lawn fete in expectation of selling over 3,000 tickets for “probably the biggest [fete] ever held in the Eighth Ward.”<sup>4</sup>

The “radical” use of Polish Catholic social spaces contrasted greatly with the goals of the parish priest, Fr. Emil Musial, and much of his Polish Catholic laity. As seen in Chapter 4, for Musial, the successful formation of a thriving Polish community was tied to a vigorous Catholic collective language, seen most vividly through Polish popular religious practices and Polish cultural nationalism. By disseminating these ideals through the parish, social halls, fraternal organizations, and the parochial school, Musial sought to unite the Poles scattered throughout Wheeling to combat the trials of life in industrial America. This vision was particularly important because the Catholic Church and the immigrant working class felt embattled as

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<sup>2</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, July 29, 1915; for further coverage of the strike, see *Wheeling Majority*, August 12, 19, 26, September 2, 16, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, August 26, 1915; for quote, see *Wheeling Majority*, July 29, 1915.

<sup>4</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, July 29, 1915; for the importance of immigrant working class social and recreational spaces, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Dominic Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the Southside, 1880-1922*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), Ch.4.

nativists attacked their culture and ability to participate fully as citizens. But Musial was no reactionary. While rejecting socialism, his brand of Catholicism offered a moral critique of economic individualism and reinforced a working class activism based on the social teachings of *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and nourished by Catholic culture and religious practices within ethnic parishes.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, these two visions of how to best promote the needs of the Polish community--one advocating class solidarity, the other Catholic ethnic solidarity--clashed in the streets of South Wheeling in 1915.

This chapter will explore the interaction of immigrant class formation by focusing on the Polish experience. For them, ethnic identity and class experiences were linked. Poles and their immigrant neighbors in South Wheeling did not compartmentalize their ethnic, religious, or class feelings. Core values of cooperation, equality, and mutual assistance were vital to each of these sentiments in South Wheeling and in the old country.<sup>6</sup> Still the question remained: which way would this working class immigrant community go? Would they follow their Catholic, ethnic traditions, or the class consciousness promoted by the socialists and trade unionists?

Class consciousness developed slowly for the Poles and Slavic immigrants because of the early antagonistic treatment they received from skilled workers in the local labor movement.

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<sup>5</sup> James P. McCartin and Joseph A. McCartin, "Working-Class Catholicism: A Call for New Investigations, Dialogue, and Reappraisal," *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 99-110; Laura Murphy, "An 'Indestructible Right': John Ryan and the Catholic Origins of the U.S. Living Wage Movement, 1906-1938," *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 57-86; For those who offer a more complex view of the role of Catholicism in influencing working-class political activism, see Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); for the role of Catholic anti-individualist philosophy on Catholic working-class political activism, see John McGreevy, *Catholicism and Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> The "subculture of opposition" is important to the debates about the processes of class formation within the work of social and working class historians; Richard Jules Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 60-7; James R. Barrett, "Unity and Fragmentation: Class, Race, and Ethnicity on Chicago's South Side, 1900-1922," *Journal of Social History* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1984): 37-55; James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

Arriving in large numbers in the early 1890's, native born Irish and German tradesmen mostly viewed the Poles with contempt for accepting lower wages, taking work as strikebreakers, and working in ever dangerous conditions. Many saw them as a danger to the gains made by the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly (OVTLA). Early on the Assembly stressed craft unionism and supported immigration restriction. Trade unionists criticized new immigrants while suffering defeats and lockouts by companies implementing mechanization.

The labor movement's position toward the immigrants only changed with the rising influence of the socialists within the OVTLA, the devastating depression from 1907-1910, and the fact that an increasingly large number of unskilled immigrants, women, and children made up Wheeling's labor force by World War I. Socialists forced the Assembly to slowly support a version of industrial unionism and organized campaigns to promote solidarity among the various groups of workers. Labor leaders began meeting immigrants on their own terms, sponsoring cultural events, Labor Day parades, and providing foreign-born interpreters and organizers. By the early 1910's, they may not have succeeded in converting all the Poles to socialism, but they were the most visible new immigrant group within organized labor. In addition, this evolution will suggest how the socialist threat and union organizing of the period was one underlying motivation behind Fr. Emil Musial's actions in vigorously developing the Polish Catholic community around St. Ladislaus parish. Building from the discussion of the previous chapter, these events were all linked during a period when the Catholic Diocese promoted social welfare and an endorsement of trade unionism to fight off the attraction of socialism. In this way, this chapter highlights the evolving nature of how Polish immigrants developed and fit within the labor movement's own "response to industrialism."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); I follow much of Dominic Pacyga's methodological model in this chapter's structure, stressing the exclusion of the Poles

## Polish Position Within Local Labor Struggles

For the Irish and German craftsmen who dominated city politics and the labor movement, maintaining their economic foothold was becoming increasingly difficult as the arrival of new immigrants threatened their status as skilled workers. While Poles competed with Hungarians, Slovaks, Croatians, and Ukrainians for the jobs at the bottom of the ladder in the steel industry and other factories, they continually raised the ire of the entrenched workforce. Wheeling was transformed by the restructuring of the steel industry beginning in the 1890's. With the move to tin plate production, the Wheeling steel mills increasingly utilized unskilled Eastern European immigrants in their local steel mills, coal mines, and blast furnaces.<sup>8</sup>

Even with the changes brought by corporate restructuring, skilled Irish and German craftsmen maintained their power and presence on the South Side. Outside firms, such as the American Tin Plate and the National Tube Company, owned many local mills, requiring skilled rollers and heaters. Owners paid tonnage rates to crew leaders, who in turn paid their helpers. The work process was highly mechanized and complex. Heaters placed steel bars in furnaces until they glowed red, and then passed them to "roughing" crews that sent the bars through a series of rolls flattening them "like rolling pins flattening bread dough."<sup>9</sup> Heaters re-heated the sheets, and then roller crews sent them through rollers in a complex process of folding, until the

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from the local labor movement, but also suggesting some of the points that began to develop that solidarity, while the Poles clung to their strictly "communal response" to industrialism. World War I would aid in the "extra-communal response" that continued through the ethnic issues of the 1920's and the New Deal periods. See, Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*, Ch.4.

<sup>8</sup> For skilled workers loss of autonomy over production processes, see David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9-31; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Lou Martin, "Working for Independence: The Failure of New Deal Politics in a Rural-Industrial Place," (Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 2008), 76-82.



sheets reached the correct “gauge” or thickness. Heaters used much practical knowledge that machines could not replicate yet. Furnace temperatures were judged “by the heaters’s eye.”<sup>10</sup>

Even with the mechanization and consolidation in the local steel industry, Wheeling’s many other skilled workers exerted control in their respective industries. According to the State Commissioner of Labor in 1890, “In Wheeling we find the standard of living of the working people nearly on a parallel with that of their employers, while their personal independence is maintained at all times.”<sup>11</sup> Table 5:1 shows a sample of hours and wages for various types of workers in Wheeling in 1890 and 1893-94.

**Table 5.1 Representative Workers’ Hours and Wages in Wheeling, 1890 and 1893-94<sup>12</sup>**

Occupation (1890)	Nationality	Hours/Day	Wages/Day	Occupation (1893-94)	Nationality	Hours/Day	Wages/Day
Potter	American	10	2.20	Furnace Hand	German-American	10	1.35
Glass Blower	American	9	5.60	Furnace Hand	American	10	2.00
Laborer	Irish	10	1.35	La Belle Blacksmith	American	10	3.30
Nailer	American	10	2.50	Stamping Co Driver	Irish-American	10	1.25
Laborer	German	10	1.50	China Decorator	English	10	3.12
Foreman	German	10	5.00	Foreman	American	10	2.10
Glass Cutter	Irish-American	10	2.50	Brewer	German	10	2.50
Steel Roller	Irish	9-12	5.00	Brewery Driver	German	12	2.50
Heater	German	10	5.00	Tobacco Packer	German-American	10	1.25
Stogie Maker	German-American	10	1.50	Tobacco Worker	American	10	1.60
Machinist	American	10	2.50	Welder(Riverside)	German-American	12	3.00
Steelworker	German	12	4.33	Laborer(Riverside)	German-American	10	1.10

<sup>10</sup> Martin, “Working for Independence,” 78.

<sup>11</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Labor of the State of West Virginia, 1890-1891* (Charleston: Moses W. Donnally Public Printer, 1891), 41-2, 45-52.

<sup>12</sup> The Labor Commissioner’s reports do not consistently look at the same types of job classifications for each year, so this is as close of a random, representative sample that can be derived. After the 1893-94 report, there was no reporting on wage rates in this detail.

*Source: Report of the Commissioner of Labor of the State of West Virginia, 1890-1891* (Charleston: Moses W. Donnally Public Printer, 1891), 41, 45, 47, 49; *Report of the Commissioner of Labor of the State of West Virginia, 1893-1894* (Charleston: Moses W. Donnally Public Printer, 1894), 29, 42-3.

However, labor leaders began to worry about the growing numbers of immigrant workers. They looked with contempt at those who “degrade the character and dignity of citizenship, and in the end become a burden and expence [sic] on the community.” Arguing that most foreign-born workers came here under false promises by the “greed for gain of employers,” the Commissioner warned of what unrestricted immigration would do to Wheeling: “It is a fact that where this class is introduced in large numbers, the standard of living among laborers descends to a low grade, and the morality of the people is affected from the fact that these foreigners seem to live as if they had no hope in this world.”<sup>13</sup>

Rank-and-file workers also stressed their anger at the increasing numbers of immigrants. In the early 1890’s, the State Commissioner of Labor asked workers what they believed were the most pressing concerns for organized labor in the state. Most workers stressed the need for a “good trade union,” supported the “single tax,” high protective tariffs, child labor and mine safety laws, the 8-hour day, and weekly payment of wages.<sup>14</sup> However, virtually every workingman queried raised the problem of non-American labor. The strongest criticisms came from those where mechanization was deskilling the labor force and replacing it with foreign, single male workers. “Foreign labor is the downfall of all good wages,” stated an iron worker. A carpenter took it further that “Immigration has effect on all trades.” At the growing steel mills in Benwood, a steel worker objected to being “invaded by certain classes, that come over here and stay a few years and then go back.” Animosity at these “birds-of-passage,” was beginning to be seen in the glass houses around town as well. For these men, the only solution was some

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<sup>13</sup> *Report State Commissioner of Labor, 1890-1891*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-72.

form of restricting immigration. Like other laborers, a foreman at Bloch Brothers Tobacco Warehouse summed it up bluntly: “The government has shut out the Chinese, but we have amongst us a more deadly viper in the shape of criminals of Italy, Poland and Hungary.”<sup>15</sup>

The devastating economic depression of the 1890’s fostered many of these fears and animosities. Conditions worsened in many factories in the summer and fall of 1893. Several firms failed, most notably Hobbs, Brockunier Glass Works on the South Side. All the pent up anger against the growing presence of foreign workers finally reached its breaking point among the city’s steel workers. Throughout the 1890’s, every time a mill closed and laid men off, when conditions improved they immediately hired a large number of new immigrants. For several weeks in late August through September 1893, Benwood residents noticed the quiet arrival of these “strange faces” coming from McKeesport and Homestead seeking work. When this “swarm of Hungarians and ‘Polanders’” were at the gates of the skelp mill seeking work, only old employees were rehired. They waited near the Riverside Tube Mill for it to start again.<sup>16</sup>

The resumption of the large steel mills started a decade-long trend in the Wheeling area of small “riots” between native-born and immigrant workers over the latter’s willingness to work at reduced wages. The blast furnaces in Benwood first saw this change in the workforce. In 1892, a sheet roller noted how the Wheeling Iron & Steel Company employed “ten Huns and Italians to one American.” He claimed they were paid \$8 per month, and about forty lived in an “old barracks of a building.” The Wheeling firm contracted these men directly from Germany, and this fact aroused many workingmen about hurting local “free labor.” The trend was seen in fall of 1893, when the Riverside Tube Mill, the largest employer in the region, announced it

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 64-7, 69-70; *Second Report of the State Commissioner Labor of West Virginia* (Charleston: Moses W. Donnally Public Printer, 1892), 30. Others warned of the dangers to the foreign-born undermining trade unions, especially the mine workers and steel workers.

<sup>16</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, August 31, 1893, 2; September 5, 1893, 6; September 7, 1893, 3.

would rehire workers at a 10-15% wage reduction.<sup>17</sup> For the next month or so, the local press reported on a variety of “Pitched Battles,” “rows,” and how the Riverside Mill almost saw “Quite a Riot.” On September 18, 1893, a reporter noted how gangs of Hungarians, Italians, and Polanders arrived at the mill’s gates in “squads” and “practiced drilling.” This use of military imagery continued when over 200 tried to bolt into the factory complex and were repulsed by a crowd of fifty American boys with bricks, iron pieces, and other projectiles. The boys tied a red flag to a pole and charged at the immigrants and routed them from the mill. According to observers, the boys “evidently had declared war” because the immigrants, particularly the “Polanders” agreed to work as laborers for only 90 cents a day. They even agreed to bribe the foreman for \$10. Another war commenced at the start of the shift turn, but the “two factions battled for over an hour” to a stalemate. After police arrested several “Polanders with unpronounceable names,” the Americans thought they had won. However, “the foreigners again formed” near Boggs Run and viciously attacked the boys.<sup>18</sup>

Often these “crowd actions” acted as a form of lower class politics to defend neighborhoods, ostracize certain types of groups, but also assert democratic rights. The increasingly bloody labor confrontations, like the Homestead Strike of 1892, were used to support businessmen’s arguments about the inherent volatile nature of the working class. Eastern European immigrants became the primary symbol of social instability in newspapers, magazines, and even vaudeville plays. Dubbing these incidents as “riots” or “mob battles” worked to further discredit labor unions. It also painted the average striker as “dark and manly,” part of an alien, savage mob lacking restraint and control. After the melee near the Riverside, many assumed the Polanders would attempt “more serious trouble.” This seemed confirmed as

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<sup>17</sup> *Second Report of the State Commissioner Labor, 1892*, 30; *Wheeling Daily Register*, September 15, 1893, 5.

<sup>18</sup> “Pitched Battles Between Foreigners and Home Workmen at the Riverside,” *Wheeling Daily Register*, September 19, 1893, 6.

rumors continued to spread about the danger of the Poles, Hungarians, and Italians who were “getting hungry and trouble is feared.” A reporter went to a boardinghouse and noted that “For dirt, filth, and stench it goes beyond imagination.” Angry citizens had warned of the presence of this “filthy element,” even before “500 Polanders gathered on the [streetcar] track and stopped the running of the cars.” As noted in Chapter 3, these early incidents helped form the racialized views toward new immigrants by many citizens, businessmen, and labor leaders. Soon thereafter, labor bosses fired many Poles to assuage the growing fears.<sup>19</sup>

Growing desperation with unemployment and stiff labor competition drove this “war.” An iron puddler named “Justice” wrote an editorial in the *Wheeling Daily Register* highlighting how the future was “rather discouraging.” From his point of view, “Oppression and depression has brought a dark cloud of misery and destitution to iron workers in general.” With manufacturers cutting labor costs, desperate workingmen were constantly forced to accept reductions “when bread is needed on the family table.” These efforts coordinated by mills owners throughout the Ohio Valley and Pittsburgh would eventually force the craftsmen “down to European starvation wages.” The producerist perspective of this skilled worker suggests that some workers realized that their increasing loss of control derived more from the power of monopoly and big business consolidations than a mob of 500 Poles.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For the role of viewing crowd actions as “riots” and “mobs” in the hegemonic struggle between business and labor at the time, see Edward Slavishak, *Bodies of Work: Civic Display and Labor in Industrial Pittsburgh* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 85-6; Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 186; for more reporting on the violence near the Riverside Mills, see *Wheeling Daily Register*, September 19, 1893, 6; September 20, 1893, 8; September 23, 1893, 3; October 3, 1893, 5; *New York Times*, October 4, 1893.

<sup>20</sup> For the role of producerism in the ideology of skilled workers of the time, see Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 205-42; “Justice,” “The Iron and Steel Situation,” *Wheeling Register*, October 8, 1893, 12.

This debate induced the immigrants to respond. In a series of editorials, “Austrians”<sup>21</sup> and a “Hungarian,” argued over the mindset of the foreign workers in the area. The “Austrians” claimed that none of their countrymen offered to work for 80 cents per day, nor bribed foreman for jobs. The writer blamed a laborer named Nicstosic, who “is known as a troublesome man . . . and has been guilty of inciting trouble in the old country.” Most Slavs acknowledged they could “barely exist upon the present wages as paid” without becoming “pauper labor.” The “Hungarian” asked native-born critics “to show me where my people ever did anything to the workingmen of this country that was not right and fair.”<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, throughout the depression years American workmen fought new arrivals. Desperate for work, John Borluski went to the offices of the National Tube Company offering to work for 75 cents a day. When an angry group of men threatened the “Polander,” he picked up a brick and struck one of them. After knocking him down, many of the young boys involved in the vicious fights with new immigrants for months, “took a hand by beating and hurling bricks at the foreigner, who was unable to rise.” Throughout this period, few seemed to notice the plight of Polish men who traveled to Wheeling with families. A Polish man named Goiske, also went to the Riverside Mill, since his family was very much in need of money for food. Immediately, Goiske was hit hard in the head with a cinder block cutting a gash on his head and almost severing an artery. After stumbling back as far as Boggs Run, he was attended to by a doctor in a faint condition. Similar acts of desperation suggest that contemporaries missed how the depression broke up Polish families. In early January 1894, the “Polish Colony of the Eighth

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<sup>21</sup> Within the articles it becomes apparent that the immigrants are Slavic and use the term “Austrians” to refer to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire to distinguish them from the “Hun” (Hungarian) or those German speakers in the Kaiserreich. The effort of the letter was to distinguish the hardworking foreign laborers from the actions of those who in an incident a week later “showed an unusual fondness for lush [growler], and a great deal of disorder has been the result;” *Wheeling Register*, October 1, 1893, 5.

<sup>22</sup> “A Card from Austrians,” *Wheeling Daily Register*, September 22, 1893, 5; “A Card,” *Wheeling Daily Register*, September 25, 1893, 6.

Ward” learned of the struggles of Mates Shedova. The couple arrived in Wheeling with another Pole three months before, who apparently was in love with Shedova’s wife. Even after going to Chicago, the man sent love letters to her. After having the man arrested, Mrs. Shedova argued her infidelity stemmed from the fact “her husband could not provide for her. She planned to leave him and go to work in Pittsburgh as a domestic.<sup>23</sup>

Skilled workers faced a dire situation by the turn of the century. In response to plant mechanization and new management systems, workers struck in increasing numbers to force better wages and working conditions. While collective action and solidarity was strong among craftsmen, they were faced with what to do with the growing divisions of the workforce by age, gender, and nationality. Craft unions gained their strength from the continuing levels of power skilled men held over the labor market. Unions sought to protect their members from the intrusion of new workers, halt or slow the effects of automation, and provide an avenue for political organizing.<sup>24</sup> This was an era of heightened strike activity. Most involved trades like coal mining and streetcar workers, trades with more autonomy on the job, over issues related to tonnage rates of coal and working hours. More common were those workers in the larger factories, where strikes resulted from the breakdown in collective bargaining agreements. More semi-skilled workers also struck over lack of union recognition, reduction in piece rates, and especially the “speed up” in assembly line production. These workers were most affected by the industrial changes in Wheeling after the decline of the cut nail industry. Glass blowers, potters, tobacco rollers, machinists, iron puddlers, rollers, and heaters all struck for concessions to the

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<sup>23</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, November 8, 1893, 6; November 12, 1893, 6; November 9, 1893, 6; January 18, 1894, 4.

<sup>24</sup> David Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the Twentieth-Century Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 119-20.

changing management systems. Their attempts suffered from trying to organize employees in different occupations and departments often divided along racial and ethnic lines.<sup>25</sup>

The steel workers' struggles highlight this growing tension between organizing strategy and the role of the new immigrants. Even during the era of the Knights of Labor, skilled employees fought against any inclusive style of unionism and affiliated with the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. In the late 1880's, a split occurred between the Amalgamated lodges and the Knights of Labor Assemblies who claimed workers at the steel mills of the Riverside in Benwood, Bellaire, and the Belmont and LaBelle Nail mills. The disputes stemmed from the Riverside Lodge #12 of the AAISW placing the Riverside mill on the Trade Assembly's boycott list for furnishing steel for non-union nail plants. They alleged that the Knights controlled the mill, and were helping in the underpaying of steelworkers. Likewise Bellaire's Amalgamated lodge claimed the Knights' wage rates at the Riverside undercut their own contract. The Benwood KOL Assembly 2323 tried to defend its actions to represent all the workers in the Benwood mills, even though more denunciations followed. In response, Nail City's Lodge had to revoke its contract over the Riverside Mill. After further arguments between KOL and AAISW lodges over wage scales in the mills, by May 1888 Washington Assembly 638 (Benwood) and Fidelity Assembly 2065 (Bellaire) withdrew from the Trades Assembly.<sup>26</sup>

These divisive stands came at a poor time for the steel workers at mass production sites like the Riverside Mill. Skilled nailers held great power over the production process since the plant's opening in 1872, but things changed when the factory retooled in 1886 to build a Bessemer steel plant, along with the tube works. Management abandoned the nail works in 1888

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<sup>25</sup> Nelson, *Managers and Workers*, 122; Montgomery, *Workers Control in America*, ch.3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, Minute Book, No. 1, April 22, 1888, 12-13, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, West Virginia & Regional History Collection (hereafter WVRHC); OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 1, May 27, 1888, 22-23, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, WVRHC.



shortly after the disputes between the KOL and AAISW. This enabled the business to manufacture steel steam, gas, and water pipes. With this shift from nail to steel tube, the Riverside operations expanded to over 90 acres by 1902. Several large blast furnaces were added, which led the Wheeling Iron & Steel Company's Benwood plant to shift to producing steel tin plate. By the early 1890's, most Wheeling iron factories had opened tin plate mills. The Bessemer converters gave control of the process, its size, and quality to managers, who then expanded by creating continuous rolling mills.<sup>27</sup>

Excessive competition in the industry led to a series of corporate mergers from 1898-1901. The Riverside Mill was sold to the National Tube Company in March 1899, and then in the spring of 1901 to the new United States Steel Corporation. Increasingly, the larger mills needed the strong backs of hundreds of unskilled immigrants. However, many of the tin plate and other finishing mills still required large numbers of skilled workers (especially heaters and sheet rollers) in the hot mills and tin houses.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the labor disputes at this time were "control strikes" by the skilled employees over wage rates, standardization of production processes, and longer work days. Several large walkouts occurred in the Wheeling mills from 1898-1900. In early 1898, Wheeling Iron & Steel Company's plate mill forced its hourly day laborers and all the tonnage men to take a reduction in pay. Immediately there were calls for solidarity to preserve mutual interests. This was the second wage cut since the summer of 1897 reduction of 10-25% for all employees. Assured that

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<sup>27</sup> Gibson Lamb Cranmer, *History of Wheeling and Ohio County, West Virginia and Representative Citizens* (1902), 363-4; Henry D. Scott, *Iron and Steel in Wheeling* (Toledo, Ohio: Caslon Co., 1929), 110-13; Lou Martin, "Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike in the Wheeling District," (MA Thesis, West Virginia University, 1999), chapters 1-2, and 16-7; those opening tin plate mills included: Wheeling Corrugating (1894), Martins Ferry Laughlin Mill (1895), LaBelle Iron Works (1895).

<sup>28</sup> U. S. Commissioner of Corporations, *Report on the Steel Industry*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911-1913), 1:1-8; Cranmer, *History of Wheeling and Ohio County*, 364; Martin, "Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike," 20-1.

wages would return when the business climate improved, skilled workers grew angry when the company appeared disingenuous. For example, President Hubbard chose to miss a scheduled meeting with the workers to meet with the company's stockholders instead. Setting all workers on the tonnage rate hurt the unskilled. For example, the "first helpers" got \$2.00 a day under the old scale, but would earn only \$1.60 a day on the tonnage rate. The company also stipulated that a "turn" would be extended from five to six heats. While the wage reduction raised the most enmity, the increase in turns reflected a broader problem. The Benwood mill made five heats in seven and a half hours. At the Riverside mill, steel workers labored for seven and a half heats per day; at the Belmont and LaBelle mills the daily turn was a rigorous ten heats.<sup>29</sup>

The success of the Wheeling Iron & Steel Company's scale reduction spread throughout Ohio Valley's companies for the next few years. The mill immediately asked that their coal miners in Benwood accept a cut from 40 to 33 and one-third cents per ton. At the Riverside, the company cut tonnage wages from 10 to 40 cents per hundred tons. Unlike the across the board cut of all employees in April 1897, this reduction only targeted the skilled heaters, rollers, shearmen, vessel makers, etc. The Riverside plate mill again cut wages in the fall of 1900, leading to another strike; however, the issue at hand was also the company's refusal to recognize the Amalgamated Association in negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

The key turning point for the Amalgamated and the local labor movement came with its strike against the U.S. Steel Corporation in 1901. The Amalgamated sought to extend their

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<sup>29</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, January 23, 1898, 5; January 25, 1898, 2, 4; January 27, 1898, 6; January 28, 1898, 5; January 30, 1898, 5. According to Henry Scott's history of the local iron and steel industry, an average heat was 1.5 hours long, see Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 65-6. The workers did go out on strike when the new scale went into effect and after another round of failed meetings with management. Within weeks, the helpers reluctantly returned to work at the reduced scale, see *Wheeling Daily Register*, February 21, 1898, 6; March 8, 1898, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Wheeling Daily Register*, March 17, 1898, 4, 6; March 20, 1898, 5; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 1, 1900, 8; November 6, 1900, 3; OVTLA, Minute Book No. 3, October 14, 1900, 47; October 28, 1900, 50; January 13, 1901, 65, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC.

union contracts to cover the non-union mills of the subsidiary companies comprising U.S. Steel. When the union threatened a strike in July 1901, corporate executives asked for a conference to mediate the dispute at a time when the public was upset about the monopolistic nature of the company. When negotiations broke down, first after a conference in Pittsburgh and then with J.P. Morgan in New York, union President T.J. Shaffer called for a general strike against the “United States Steel Trust” on August 6 as the “central fight for unionism.”<sup>31</sup>

Wheeling was the center of the strike, and organizers focused on the large Riverside Mill. This seems unique, considering that most of the plant’s 3,000 employees were immigrants. For months prior, the Amalgamated sent several “missionaries” to educate them about the benefits of unionism. These men, who before were chastised for wanting to “scab,” now were willing to join the union in its fight. With the Benwood plant as the “Storm Centre of the Strike,” the union set up an organizing center at Bischoff’s Hall on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street hall in South Wheeling and began recruiting members. Early success came with organizing the United Lodge of 400 skilled men of the steel and plate mills of the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company in Benwood.<sup>32</sup> Shaffer spoke to a mass meeting of strikers on Wheeling Island. A parade of the local lodges webbed its way through town, cheering as they passed each factory. There was much popular support for the strike among other skilled workers, the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly (OVTLA), and concerned citizens worried about the power of the trusts. Even state officials condoned the strike. Labor Commissioner I.V. Barton informed Governor A.B. White the strikers had the

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<sup>31</sup> Martin, “Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike,” 27-31; *National Labor Tribune*, August 1, 8, 1901; David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Non-Union Era* (1969), 61-66; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, August 10, 1901, 1; the turn of the century merger movement created multi-state corporations that brought together subsidiary plants within a given industry. This process accelerated from 1897-1904, giving these firms oligopolistic powers to set national price standards and destroy competitors. See Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), ch. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, July 26, 1901, 1; July 27, 1901, 1. The first organized were skilled men from the Riverside plate mill (125 in number), *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, July 29, 1901, 2

“approval of all law-abiding citizens” and that in “conducting a peaceful campaign” there was no need for police assistance to protect the Riverside Mill.<sup>33</sup>

While generally peaceful, rumors of imported strikebreakers sparked fear on the South Side. The Amalgamated set up shifts of men to watch the railroad depots. They worried when about two hundred soldiers returning from the Philippines arrived, fearing they would be used to suppress the strike. While the union initially tried to organize the entire Riverside Mill, they quickly changed their strategy to focus on the 800 skilled men. For some time, the steel department of the Riverside continued to operate along with the blast furnace crews. To protect their gains, more pickets were set up around the mill and to guard the railroad depots.<sup>34</sup>

The strike situation seemed to be turning in the union’s favor. On August 10, the skelp mill workers “Drop Their Tools” in solidarity. With the prospect of the rest of their workforce joining the cause, over 1,300 attended a mass meeting in South Wheeling, stressing the “weight of moral influence” on the other men about the need for organization. At this point in the strike, only the 1,000 men of the steel works and blast furnace remained at work. Vice President Walter Larkins was surprised by the speed of organization at the Riverside, where prior union efforts failed. Later, the *Pittsburgh Press* reported “Strikers Win Big Victory” in tying up the entire Wheeling District after the remaining skilled steel workers struck. However, the press noted the unskilled blast furnace men still worked, not being members of the Amalgamated Association.<sup>35</sup>

The ultimate failure of the blast furnace workers to organize suggests that many Slavic immigrants did not join the union’s cause. However, many new immigrants worked in other departments. The nature of immigrant allegiance highlights an important aspect of working class

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<sup>33</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, August 15, 1901, 1-2; July 29, 1901, 2; I.V. Barton, State Commissioner of Labor to Governor A.B. White, August 12, 1901, Box #14, Folder #2, A.B. White Papers, A&M 110, WVRHC.

<sup>34</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, August 8, 1901, 5; August 12, 1901, 2; August 14, 1901, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Pittsburgh Press*, August 10, 1901, 1; August 13, 1901, 1.

formation and fragmentation. Workers living in the city for some time were more willing to support the union cause. During the strike, the Amalgamated attempted to build worker solidarity. At a meeting at the Blue Ribbon Hall in Benwood, several hundred mill men attended an entertainment. While there, “Music, songs, and witty stories beguiled away the hours.” In addition, the union organized local committees to solicit money for the general strike fund. South Wheeling and Benwood were divided into two sections. Prosperity Lodge No. 5 of the LaBelle Tin Mill covered above 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, while Wheeling Lodge No. 5 of the Riverside went south of 43<sup>rd</sup> Street. Several Polish and Slavic men contributed to the effort. A steelworker S. Kolonsky gave \$1, Croatian leader John Lubic gave \$1, John Schlanski 50 cents, and tin worker Fred Warceski 25 cents. The saloonkeepers gave financial contributions as well as organized a charity baseball game between the saloon men and the bartenders.<sup>36</sup>

These moments of class solidarity were fleeting. By late August, union leaders learned that “strange Slavs” were brought into Benwood to operate the Riverside Mill. At the same time, union officials intercepted a group of Benwood Slavs solicited to go to a Pittsburgh mill currently on strike. Through their efforts, “the foreigners were persuaded by more than a forcible argument” to return to their boardinghouses in the “brick row” of Benwood. Upon going to another immigrant boardinghouse, the officials found many Slavs desiring to go to work at the Riverside. A few days later, strikers learned twenty-five Slavs arrived on a B&O train and snuck into the Riverside, led by a Slav who formerly worked at the factory. Cots and mattresses were brought into the LaBelle Mill for scabs as well. By the end of the month, a foreman at the tube works reported “A sufficient number of men have arrived here to-day by the Ohio River

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<sup>36</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, August 19, 1901, 2; August 21, 1901, 8; August 22, 1901, 5; August 23, 1901, 5; August 24, 1901, 5. S. Kolonsky may be A. Kolinskie living near 48<sup>th</sup> Street; see *Wheeling City Directory, 1901-02* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin Co., 1901), 351; Fred Warceski is more likely Fred Warsinsky, a tinworker living at 4208 Water Street, see *Wheeling City Directory, 1901-02* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin Co., 1901), 604. John Schlanski was not listed in a close spelling in the city directory of 1900 manuscript census.

road to operate the mill.” The strike failed in the Wheeling District because the union did little to reach out to new immigrants working in the mill yards, plate mill, and particularly the blast furnaces. At the Bellaire works across the river, organizer Mat Colibas failed in getting the blast furnace men “who are largely foreigners” to join the Amalgamated. While they agreed not to work during the duration of the strike, their action suggests that the union did little to promote solidarity across ethnic backgrounds.<sup>37</sup>

The failure of the 1901 strike fit within a broader policy of craft unions in the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly. One early critic of the anti-immigrant hatred of most unions was Valentine Reuther, who emigrated from Germany in 1899. Upon arriving in South Wheeling, Valentine lived in “a very proletarian boarding house jammed with immigrants” located at 2600 Jacob Street.<sup>38</sup> Through the help of a relative, he got a job as a laborer at the Riverside. He worked the “long turn” of 72 hours, six days of 12-hour shifts and earned just \$1.50 a day. After coaxing the shop foreman to let him learn the heater’s trade, Valentine got his first taste of trade unionism, attending meetings of the local lodge of the Amalgamated Association. However, he grew concerned at how this craft union overtly discriminated against Eastern Europeans. Reuther tried to bridge the cultural divide, reaching out to the new arrivals by speaking several languages. He vigorously argued this exclusionary form of unionism only perpetuated the way the employers exploited the “racial” differences between workers. During the U.S. Steel Strike, “Val” walked the picket line encouraging the immigrants. In the end, the strike made him an enemy of both the company and the union.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, August 24, 1901, 5; August 26, 1901, 2; August 31, 1901, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Victor G. Reuther, *The Brothers Reuther and the Story of the UAW: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), 12; 1900 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, Wheeling, 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, WVRHC; *Wheeling City Directory, 1901-02* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin Co., 1901), 508.

<sup>39</sup> Reuther, *The Brothers Reuther*, 12-4.

For many years, the Trades Assembly was very anti-immigrant. Like many local craft federations and even the AFL, the Assembly supported a brand of working class republicanism defending the democratic rights of producers in local factories, while also affirming their own whiteness. This fueled the support for excluding immigrants. Hearing about Italians working on a Wheeling & Hempfield Railroad project in the late 1880's, the Assembly lashed out at "the manner in which the Dagos lived." Heated debates about immigration restriction legislation often divided unions in the Assembly. During the 1897 coal strike, miners and Gabriel Jackson, the black head of the Hod Carrier's Union, favored "totally restricted immigration." During one debate, delegate T.L. Lewis of the steelworkers' union "traced the evil effects that had followed the displacement of English-speaking labor by an illiterate foreign element." Companies cut wages by one-half and immigrant laborers were "in charge of the English-speaking foreman." When it came time to vote on the issue, the assembly overwhelmingly endorsed immigration restriction by 36 to 9. The Assembly also endorsed enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act and sent petitions to West Virginia congressmen to pass literacy tests for potential immigrants.<sup>40</sup>

Another divisive issue was the role of immigrants in local politics. During the 1896 presidential election, skilled steelworkers, mostly Democrats living in the Irish-dominated Wheeling 6<sup>th</sup> Ward and in Benwood, complained about how for weeks in September the Republicans sent a Polish and Slavic organizer from Cleveland canvassing the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward and Upper Benwood to elicit his countrymen to register and vote for their "little god [William] McKinley." Throughout the campaign season, the Riverside hired many "unmarried aliens"

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), ch. 6; David Javersak, "Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, 1882-1915," (Ph.D. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 1977), 206-8; OVTLA, Minute Book No. 1, April 7, 1888, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, July 12, 1897, 5; August 23, 1897, 5; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 4, February 23, 1902, 23-4; April 13, 1902, 52, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC. For the role of union exclusion and working class whiteness, see James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3-44.

while skilled “Americans” lost their jobs. Days prior to the election a “Riverside Laborer” accosted the Republican mill owners for employing the Polish operative from Cleveland whose job was to “speak to the Polanders and tell them they must vote for McKinley or lose their jobs.” Angered by this tactic of stealing Polish votes, he called upon his fellow Americans to act as “free men” and not allow their jobs to be given to “Polanders.” Even with his disdain, political historians show that in many urban locations Polish workers maintained their ties to the Democratic Party and were drawn to Bryan’s campaign. Most Polish workers saw the GOP as anti-Catholic, anti-labor, and against the saloon. However, this trend occurred mostly in metropolitan centers; in smaller industrial towns ravaged by the recent economic depression, Poles turned slightly to support McKinley’s “Full Dinner Pail” politics.<sup>41</sup>

While it is difficult to determine how Poles voted in 1896 and 1900, there is some legitimacy to the “Riverside Laborer’s” viewpoint. In 1896, 77 immigrants from Eastern European backgrounds officially naturalized. Although many more probably voted through the efforts of party managers, their naturalization petitions suggest that GOP operatives seemed more active in targeting South Slavic groups. Hungarians (21), Austrians (25), and Croats (18) registered in the highest numbers. In fact, most Polish naturalization came during the 1892 (12) and 1894 (21) election campaigns. Many of these Polish immigrants lived in distinctively Democratic precincts in the Irish-dominated 6<sup>th</sup> Ward. In 1894 these registrants included Mike Gredovich, Stanislaus Klos, and Joseph Kowalski, all German Poles living in a boardinghouse at

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<sup>41</sup> For the Republican Party’s immigrant strategy, see David J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 74-5, 83. Because they realized that immigrants provided the key voting bloc in their victory in 1896, many GOP politicians wavered on supporting immigration restriction for many years. For an understanding of Polish Catholic voters in 1896, see Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 300-1; *Wheeling Register*, September 20, 1896, 5; December 13, 1896, 3; December 20, 1896, 3; *Riverside Laborer*, “A Card,” *Wheeling Register*, October 25, 1896, 7. In 1900 there was an obvious drop in the number of immigrants naturalizing. In 1896, there were over 400, which included mostly Irish and Germans, but in 1900 only 175 naturalized. See, *Wheeling Register*, November 2, 1900, 3; November 4, 1900, 8.



22-26<sup>th</sup> Street near the Belmont Mill, along with Frank Dunbrowski of 2636 Main Street.

Furthermore, many Polish migrants of the 1890's could just as often lash out against Polish authority figures. A Polish labor boss at the Riverside Mill, Joseph Kolinski, was struck with a pick in the head, after two Polish workers "became incensed at his manner" toward them.<sup>42</sup>

### **Politicization of the New Workforce**

Immigrant communities provided mutual assistance during periods of economic want, but by 1908 Wheeling's immigrants pushed for more substantial changes. Eastern European immigrants were increasingly politicized "from the bottom up" by their experience on the job and local labor unions.<sup>43</sup> Although low levels of naturalization and voter restrictions limited immigrants' political voice in national and state elections, some cities allowed immigrants to vote in municipal elections. Wheeling's 1907 city charter, its first since 1836, granted the vote to all males living in the city limits for at least one year, without any reference to state citizenship, and to all non-resident males owning at least \$200.00 of city property.<sup>44</sup> These voting restrictions disfranchised many recent immigrants, but they did not negate all Polish

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<sup>42</sup> In 1892, 5 German-Poles registered along with 7 Russian-Poles. In 1894, 15 German Poles and 6 Russian Poles registered; *Declaration of Naturalization: Ohio County, West Virginia, 1889-1896*, WVRHC. For the sample, see *Declarations of Naturalization*, 143, 146-7; *Wheeling Register*, December 26, 1897, 9.

<sup>43</sup> James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992): 997-8; 1000; for an interesting interpretation of Polish political attachments at home and abroad, see Stanislaus A. Blejwas, "Polonia and Politics," cited in John J. Bukowczyk, ed. *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 121-51; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 136-46.

<sup>44</sup> Charles A. Wingerter, *History of Greater Wheeling and Vicinity: A Chronicle of Progress and a Narrative Account of the Industries, Institutions, and People of the City and Tributary Territory-Volume 1* (Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 257-8; Tom Dunham, *Wheeling in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Bloomington, IN: 1<sup>st</sup> Books Library, 2003), 23.

voting. In a 1910 sample of South Wheeling's Polish households, about one quarter owned their own homes.<sup>45</sup>

Local political machines canvassed immigrant communities, like Wheeling's Eighth Ward. Of particular emphasis for the Poles were the efforts by the Democrats and the Socialists of the Trades Assembly. Often, Poles supported the Democratic Party in the early 1900's because the party had close ties to the Catholic Church, and it opposed prohibition and immigrant restriction.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Wheeling Socialists were vital to the growth of an immigrant political consciousness on the Southside. Socialist literature was distributed and discussion groups were started in several of the city's iron factories as early as July 1897. The predominately German Socialists criticized the failures of craft unionism and the corrupt nature of Wheeling municipal government, and began pushing the Assembly to unite local workingmen behind pro-labor candidates. As early as 1900, members of the Eugene V. Debs Branch of the Social Democracy and Germans, including Assembly President Albert Bauer, openly criticized the "accursed competitive system that places the value upon dollars instead of humanity . . . that would drive Boys, Girls and Women into mills and factories." Bauer argued persuasively that conditions for these new types of workers would not be ameliorated "until we recognize the fact that labor is entitled to all it produces and arrange our labor organizations with that object in view, organizing ourselves of the political field as well as on the economic." He advocated for the public ownership of all means of economic production to halt the trusts' power.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Manuscript Census Schedules, 1910 and 1920, Ohio County, West Virginia, WVRHC. The sample size for 1910 included 115 Polish households (29 owned, 77 rented, and 9 were unknown) and the sample for 1920 included 239 Polish households (69 owned and 170 rented).

<sup>46</sup> Edward R. Kantowicz, *Polish American Politics in Chicago, 1888-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 38-42, 49-52; Blejwas, "Polonia and Politics," 132-4.

<sup>47</sup> Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, Minute Book, No. 3, November 25, 1900, 57, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, July 9, 1897; July 27, 1897; for Debs role in the early formation of the Social Democracy in Wheeling, see Fred Barkey, *Working Class Radicals: The Socialist Party in West Virginia, 1898-1920* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2012), 8-10;

For several years, this politicization focused attack on local political corruption and the poor urban services that affected thousands of working people. In May 1901, the Assembly criticized the Board of Public Works “against the filthy and disgraceful condition of the streets” that needed a system of cleaning and garbage collection. Labor leaders also expressed anger at the collusion between the city and street railway companies over unfair franchise rates that hurt workingmen’s pocketbooks. By 1902, leftist delegates in the Trades Assembly resolved: “That we the delegates of the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly believe it would be to the interests of the City that the Assembly take a more active part in Municipal Affairs.”<sup>48</sup>

Educating the working class was vital to the growth of class consciousness in Wheeling. This is critical to understanding how socialists sought to win the hearts and minds of American and immigrant workers. During a machinists’ strike in 1903, the Assembly provided monetary aid and the local socialists sponsored speaking events, headlined by Frank and Katie Richards O’Hare. In August, they gave a series of open air lectures attended by hundreds, if not more. At the Center Market house, they spoke about the history of “Capitalism and its effects on the conditions” it had created. Following a “Miniature War” near the Riverside Mill between union and non-union members, when over 1,000 gun shots were fired, over 1,500 attended another rally at the Market house. F.C. Roberts of the AFL highlighted the horrible conditions at 10-14 hours a day at the Riverside, where for every \$2 earned in wages, each worker earns \$12 for the company. Katie O’Hare spoke on the power of force used by the corporation in importing

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Delegate Roe made a similar appeal on the plight of women and children in the factory system, see OVTLA Minute Book, No. 3, February 24, 1901, 78-9; Albert Bauer address, OVTLA Meeting, OVTLA Minute Book, No. 3, January 13, 1901, 65, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC.

<sup>48</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 3, May 13, 1901, 101; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 3, April 28, 1901, 95-9; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 4, March 23, 1902, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; Frederick Allan Barkey, “The Socialist Party in West Virginia from 1898 to 1920: A Study in Working Class Radicalism,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1971), 13-20, 242.

strikebreakers and armed detectives, and implored all that “We should forget race, sex, creed, political beliefs and work the common interests of all labor organization.”<sup>49</sup>

Immigrant workers learned about the need of organization as they suffered the most from the dangerous working conditions in the large rolling mills, factories, and mines. The summer of 1903 saw numerous injuries to Polish and Slavic workmen at the Riverside, suffering crushed limbs and broken bones.<sup>50</sup> The increasingly unjust treatment led organizers to reach out to firms employing large numbers of immigrants. Such action occurred during the UMWA’s strike in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ohio Sub-District (Eastern Ohio and Northern Panhandle) in April 1906. The most important mine in this campaign was the Hitchman Coal & Coke Company in Benwood. Opened several years before and employing 165-190 men, organizers attended a meeting to hear the grievances of the miners, organized as UMW Local #1825. Hitchman recently attained the contract to supply the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad engines at their yards in Benwood. Mr. Zolenka, a Slavic UMW organizer from the sub-district, helped the miners draft their strike demands. After refusing to return to work at the old wage scale, Manager Koch requested a court order to force the miners, mostly foreign-born, to vacate the company’s housing. Union leaders claimed that the company’s housing leases were difficult for miners to understand, since the men had not yet been discharged. The men held firm to the union demands. Setting the stage for the anti-labor precedent set in the *Hitchman Coal & Coke* (1917) Supreme Court decision, manager Koch expressed a willingness to sign a new wage scale, but refused to recognize the union. The failure of the strike and the company’s stand on forcing miners to sign “yellow dog” contracts to refuse

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<sup>49</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 4, June 3, 1903, 177; in April 1903, the Assembly had endorsed “all locals out on Strike in the City,” OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 4, April 12, 1903, 162-3, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; *Wheeling Register*, August 7, 1903, 2; August 8, 1903, 5; August 14, 1903, 3; August 16, 1903, 1; August 18, 1903, 5, 9; various organizing efforts raised substantial strike funds through the summer and fall of 1903, see OVTLA, Minute Book, October 11, 1903, 200, 203; October 25, 1903, 209; November 8, 1903, 210-11, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC.

<sup>50</sup> *Wheeling Register*, August 19, 1903, 9; August 21, 1903, 4; August 22, 1903, 4.

to join the UMW during their time of employment, led many immigrant miners to seek work elsewhere. One example was Slovak immigrant John Mikus, the first miner called before the local court over the housing eviction. Mikus along with his wife and child emigrated in 1904, working in various mines including Hitchman Coal & Coke. Following the failed strike, he and his family moved north living near the coal mines on Cross Creek in Brooke County.<sup>51</sup>

The “Banker’s Panic” of 1907 boosted the Socialists' political influence. Capitalizing on workers “seriously questioning the value of capitalism,” the Trades Assembly and local glassworkers, stogie makers, and miners unions advocated for an independent United Labor Party.<sup>52</sup> The Assembly appealed to immigrant workers’ disillusionment with the Republican Party’s support for protective tariffs and corporate mergers. The Wheeling Socialists also presented their class-based appeals in “religious rhetoric.” Through their weekly newspaper, the *Wheeling Majority*, the socialists spoke of how Jesus Christ was a worker: “The working man of today who tries to preach an uplift doctrine to fellow workers is . . . set upon by the hired thugs of Privilege, enjoined by Judge Dayton and eventually surrounded by troops and arrested. So was Christ--all except the injunction, and the Federal Judge is of a newer birth.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the local socialists hoped to tap the sentiments of Catholic social teaching and *Rerum Novarum* that were so important in Wheeling’s Polish neighborhood.

The Wheeling Socialist Party grew amid the escalating labor conflict of the early twentieth century. One of its key leaders was Valentine Reuther, father of future UAW leader Walter Reuther. After the failed U.S. Steel Strike, Reuther got a job driving a beer wagon for the

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<sup>51</sup> *Wheeling Register*, April 9, 1906, 1; April 16, 1906, 3; May 6, 1906, 15; May 13, 1906, 16; May 30, 1906, 5; for Mikus, see *Wheeling Register*, May 13, 1906, 16; 1910 Manuscript Census, Cross Creek, Brooke County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0003, Roll T624 1677, Page 14B, reprinted via Ancestry.com (21 June 2013).

<sup>52</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 6, October 25, 1908, WVRHC, and cited in Barkey, “The Socialist Party in West Virginia,” 65-6; Javersak, “The Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly,” 110-2.

<sup>53</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, December 30, 1909.

Schmulbach Brewery. As he immersed himself in the German working class culture of South Wheeling, he organized brewery workers, helped halt the construction of a Carnegie Library in downtown Wheeling, and became President of the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly. Building off his earlier advocacy of industrial unionism during the U.S. Steel in 1909-1910, Reuther saw that with the power of the trusts, the blacklist, court injunctions, and boycotts:

It becomes apparent that labor must organize politically and elect such men who will carry out the wishes of the people . . . Whenever the workers become class conscious and unitedly cast their ballot in support of the workers' party then the ruling of the trust owned courts and the enactment of corporation laws will vanish from the so-called land of the free and home of the brave.<sup>54</sup>

The U.S. Steel Strike of 1909-1910 further broadened the Socialist influence among Wheeling's immigrant working class. Many American and immigrant steelworkers would agree with Reuther that the strike was a "struggle for liberty." Beginning in July, the Wheeling District was the center of much of the resistance to the "open shop" drive. U.S. Steel shifted production to other sites, imported strikebreakers, and hired company agents to entice skilled workers to break the picket line, touching off considerable violence in Wheeling. More violence occurred as a large crowd surrounded and then beat up U.S. Steel agent William Eagan as he left the LaBelle mill. This led to an injunction from Judge Alston Dayton against any interference with the persons or property of the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company or the placement of pickets near their South Wheeling mill. Later, the threat of an armed mob of over 700 across the river in Martin's Ferry, Ohio raised the danger that strikers "were looking for another Homestead." As for scabs, the *Majority* jokingly remarked how in "Wheeling some scabs . . . fell down and hurt themselves in different parts about town."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Reuther, *The Brothers Reuther*, 12-31; *Wheeling Majority*, January 20, 1910.

<sup>55</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 6, January 9, 1910, 107, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 71-2; Martin, "Causes and Consequences," Ch. 3, 47-9, 58-9; also, *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 30, 1909 for Eagan incident; for quote, *Wheeling Majority*, December 16, 1909.

The defeat of unions in Wheeling owed much to the influence of the city's business community. They feared that labor radicalism would force U.S. Steel to move capital investment from Wheeling. American Sheet and Tin Plate officials warned leading businessmen that the company was withholding \$200,000 for improvements to Wheeling's plants. Realizing that the "difference between capital and labor has probably kept Wheeling back twenty years," Wheeling businessmen promoted more cooperation between the community, business, and the city government.<sup>56</sup> The Wheeling Board of Trade, which helped form the Municipal Improvement League to promote "progressive" notions of civic betterment to keep Wheeling beautiful, became business-friendly. Adopting the slogan "Wheeling Means Business," the League and the Board of Trade publically promoted the new Market Auditorium, public playgrounds, parks, and anything else "to make Wheeling brighter and more attractive" and to show the "substantial growth of that civic pride and local patriotism which after all is at the bottom of all civic advance."<sup>57</sup> Board of Trade Secretary R.B. Naylor highlighted how "Upward of 500 letters were sent to prospective industries . . . inviting them to consider Wheeling's advantages and resources." According to Naylor, "there have been some unfavorable features in our industrial situation . . . [but] Wheeling is in the procession of progress."<sup>58</sup>

While the Board of Trade downplayed the level of labor unrest in 1909-1910, the lingering economic conditions still plagued the city's working class. Particularly troubling was the high cost of foodstuffs and other consumer goods. Also, inefficient municipal organizations failed to provide necessary services during the spring of 1910. Especially pressing was the rehabilitation of the municipal lighting system. While the public had been "paying for the fun at

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<sup>56</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 113-4; Martin, "Causes and Consequences," 55-8.

<sup>57</sup> *Wheeling Board of Trade Yearbook for 1911* (Wheeling, W.Va.: Secretary's Office-Board of Trade Building, 1911), 18-21, WVRHC.

<sup>58</sup> *Wheeling Board of Trade Yearbook for 1911*, 7, 17.

the rate of more than \$20 per day,” local Socialists quipped that the Board of Control’s recommendations were sidetracked by the undue influence of the Electric Light Goods Trust and political cronies working for the “political boss of this bailiwick, the defender of the Steel Trust and Senator [Nathan B.] Scott.”<sup>59</sup>

As a result of the economic crisis from 1907-1910, the Socialists made a more concerted effort to enter into politics by targeting key municipal issues. Early in 1910, the Socialists informed the public about excessive taxes on electricity, as well as supporting a bond issue for the completion of a new filtration system to break up the business influence on the Board of Control.<sup>60</sup> They also set up a viable trade union ticket for the 1910 midterm election, running *Majority* editor Walter Hilton for State Senate and Valentine Reuther for the State House of Delegates. They pushed a strong platform, advocating for home rule, the initiative, referendum, recall, short-term franchises for public utilities, direct labor employment, the eight-hour day, free textbooks for public schools, opposition to the use of private detectives, and other issues.<sup>61</sup>

Voting returns from South Wheeling’s Ritchie District show the relative growth of the Socialist influence among the immigrant working class. Table 5.2 shows that even though the party’s trade union candidates lost, the Socialist vote swayed many races in the 1910 election to the Democrats. This election demonstrates the degree to which Democrats and Socialists mobilized the working class vote. Although the Poles were not the major ethnic group in the ward in 1910, their close proximity to local party leaders and the organizing of both parties

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<sup>59</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, March 3, February 24, 1910.

<sup>60</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, February 24, March 3, 1910.

<sup>61</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, July 28, September 8, 1910.



forged networks that only grew as more Poles arrived.<sup>62</sup> The Ohio County Democrats won the race for Congress, the State Senate, and elected four Democrats to the House of Delegates.

**Table 5.2: Midterm Election Totals for Ritchie District, 1910**

	<b>Congress- Pre. 7-9</b>	<b>Congress- Total Ritchie</b>	<b>State Senate- Pre. 7-9</b>	<b>State Senate- Total Ritchie</b>	<b>House of Delegates- Pre. 7-9</b>	<b>House of Delegates- Total Ritchie</b>
<i>1910</i>						
<b>Republican</b>	<b>35.9%</b>	<b>40.9%</b>	<b>33.4%</b>	<b>37.6%</b>	<b>33.1%</b>	<b>35.8%</b>
<b>Democrat</b>	<b>36.7%</b>	<b>37.4%</b>	<b>36.0%</b>	<b>37.7%</b>	<b>38.2%</b>	<b>41.1%</b>
<b>Socialist</b>	<b>26.2%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>28.7%</b>	<b>23.6%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>
<b>Prohibition</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
<b>Total (N=)</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>1296</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>1273</b>	<b>1854</b>	<b>4954</b>

*Source: Wheeling Register, November 9, 1910. Precincts 7 through 9 reflected the concentration of Polish immigrants.*<sup>63</sup>

The threat of a rival Polish Socialist subculture became viable during the early 1910's. Socialist organizing intensified throughout Ohio County with the creation of twenty local branches by 1911, including various party branches in South Wheeling. Ritchie District Socialists formed a branch of about fifty members with L.C. and C.W. Driehorst as the financial secretary and primary party organizer.<sup>64</sup> L.C. Driehorst was a local saloon keeper, whose establishment on 45<sup>th</sup> Street was a key social and political center for the German and Polish Socialists.<sup>65</sup> In February, a meeting with Polish Socialists from Pittsburgh garnered much

<sup>62</sup> A sample of household heads for Ritchie District's 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Precincts highlight the ethnic diversity in 1910. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Precinct ethnic household breakdown (N=236) was as follows: Native U.S. (23.3%), German (36.4%), Polish (25.0%), English (4.2%), Irish (3.8%), Ruthenian (3.4%), and other ethnicities (3.8%). The 8<sup>th</sup> Precinct ethnic household breakdown (N=280) was as follows: German (36.1%), Native U.S. (28.6%), Polish (21.4%), Irish (5.7%), French (2.5%), English (1.8%), and other ethnicities (3.9%). Manuscript Census Schedules, 1910, Ohio County, West Virginia, WVRHC.

<sup>63</sup> These returns represent the total percentage of votes cast for the members of the given political party.

<sup>64</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, December 8, 1910.

<sup>65</sup> Immigrant saloon "opposition centers" mushroomed in the early twentieth century and were vital for working class leisure and trade union political culture. In 1907 there were twenty-two saloons from 33<sup>rd</sup> to 48<sup>th</sup> Streets. Over half were run by German patrons, five by Irishmen, and two (John Przelenski and Paul Rudzinski) by Poles. The Polish saloons were located less than a block from St. Ladislaus. *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1907-1909* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1907), 526, 740; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1911-1912* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1911), 202, 806, 520, 818; for the wide literature on immigrant "opposition centers," see, Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, Ch. 2; Dorothee Schneider, *Trade Unions and Community: The German Working Class in*

attention. During a May meeting at Driehorst's Hall, H. Machalski and Peter Morawski welcomed several new Poles within the local, as the promoters saw "that the prospects are bright for good progress in the movement among the Polish people of Wheeling."<sup>66</sup> By that summer, Wheeling had a viable, dues-paying Polish Socialist local. As they organized for the upcoming 1912 election, the state Socialist Party praised its many diverse ward and ethnic locals in Wheeling, where the future of a Socialist subculture seemed promising.<sup>67</sup>

The Democrats also made a concerted effort to attract immigrant voters by routinely canvassing in South Wheeling. In the Progressive Era, the party increasingly conducted a politics of "class" in their daily newspapers and in their organizing tactics.<sup>68</sup> Democrats consistently espoused an egalitarian, producerist critique of industrialization and monopolization, competing for supporters of radical third parties.<sup>69</sup> Wheeling's Democrats followed a similar policy. In 1910, Congressional candidate John W. Davis came to Mozart Hall on 38<sup>th</sup> Street to argue that Republican tariffs had not prevented another depression like that of 1893-1897, and that the Democrats would not close the steel mills in the Wheeling District.<sup>70</sup> The Democratic *Wheeling Register* effectively attracted working class votes from the Socialists by appealing to the most pressing local situation--soaring unemployment. The Democrats posed a simple answer to the question "What's the matter with business in Wheeling?" With 11,300 men unemployed in all of the district's local industries, they argued that the Republicans and their protective tariffs

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*New York City, 1870-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, January 5, February 9, and May 11, 1911. Seeking to establish locals in each city ward, socialist organizing intensified with the creation of twenty local branches by 1911.

<sup>67</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, July 13, 1911; January 11, February 15, 1912.

<sup>68</sup> Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930's* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 119-20, 217; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Ch. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 57-8.

<sup>70</sup> *Wheeling Register*, November 2, November 3, 1910.

were to blame. For unskilled immigrants, the key to material advancement remained the ability of men to work consistently to have enough money for necessary items, but also to save for the purchase of their own home. The *Register* blended these immigrant needs while showing that anti-working class policies and the corrupt power wielded by Republicans, led by Wheeling industrialist and United States Senator Nathan B. Scott, were to blame.<sup>71</sup>

The votes in Wheeling municipal elections during the 1910's (seen in Table 5.3) highlight the disaffection with Republicans and their policies in the predominately Polish Fifth Precinct of Wheeling's Eighth Ward.

**Table 5.3: Municipal Voting for City Council in Wheeling's Eighth Ward, 1909-1913**

	<b>First Branch Council-Precinct #5</b>	<b>First Branch Council-Total</b>	<b>First Branch Council-Total</b>	<b>Second Branch Council-Precinct #5</b>	<b>Second Branch Council-Total</b>	<b>Second Branch Council-Total</b>
<b>1909</b>						
<b>Republican</b>	<b>58.4%</b>	<b>66.1%</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>60.0%</b>	<b>69.7%</b>	<b>3747</b>
<b>Democrat</b>	<b>41.6%</b>	<b>33.9%</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>30.3%</b>	<b>1632</b>
<b>Socialist</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>
<b>1911</b>						
<b>Republican</b>	<b>36.8%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>38.3%</b>	<b>53.0%</b>	<b>2370</b>
<b>Democrat</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>35.9%</b>	<b>24.9%</b>	<b>1113</b>
<b>Socialist</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>22.1%</b>	<b>990</b>
<b>1913</b>						
<b>Republican</b>	<b>41.5%</b>	<b>54.6%</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>45.0%</b>	<b>56.0%</b>	<b>3454</b>
<b>Democrat</b>	<b>54.8%</b>	<b>39.9%</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>50.7%</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	<b>2404</b>
<b>Socialist</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>309</b>

Source: *Wheeling Register*, May 28, 1909; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 26, 1911; *Wheeling Register*, May 23, 1913.<sup>72</sup>

In 1909, Republicans benefited from news that Thomas Beattle of the National Tube Company's Riverside Mill, which was the largest employer of Poles, would restart production after being

<sup>71</sup> *Wheeling Register*, November 5, 1910.

<sup>72</sup> The vote totals for the Second Branch Council reflect the relative totals for all the candidates on each party's municipal ballot, which in this case usually included four prospective councilmen for each party.

idle since November 1907. This gave hope to the over 8,000 inhabitants of South Wheeling, of whom 80 percent of its 2,500 industrial workers had been periodically unemployed.<sup>73</sup> However, as the 1910 midterm election indicates, when Republican promises failed to quell rising unemployment, this immigrant community voted for the Democrats and Socialists. The relatively high turnout for the Socialist Party continued for the 1911 municipal and 1912 general elections. The *Intelligencer* chided in 1912 that city and county Republicans had “no idea that the growth of the party [socialist] was so large in the county.”<sup>74</sup>

While local politicians were confused by the success of the socialists, the Catholic Church and parish priests, like Fr. Emil Musial worried about the power of this secularist appeal. As seen by his efforts in Chapter 4 to effectively mobilize against Socialism, Musial needed to offer his working-class parishioners something more than church services. Fortunately for him, these years saw Catholic leaders speak out against unrestrained capitalism and the dangers of Socialism. They promoted a corporatist alliance between capital, labor, and the government, building upon the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). This stressed the importance of the wage contract and private property, but reminded employers that the Catholic worker who “places at the disposal of others his skill, his strength, and his industry,” expects “not only the right to his salary, but also a strict and rigorous right to use it as he sees fit.”<sup>75</sup> In addition, Irish-American Catholic leaders sought a wider political voice by linking the Church more closely to the Democratic Party and diocesan organizations to “Americanize” Catholics.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 11, 12, 23, 1909.

<sup>74</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 8, 1912. The poor record keeping of the 1912 elections limits any calculation of relative percentages for each party for Ritchie District.

<sup>75</sup> Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and the Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7-9; quote in undated speech by Bishop Donahue from 1909, 8-9, Box, B.D. Sermons, etc, 1916-1920, Folder #26, *Bishop Donahue Correspondence*, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (DWC).

<sup>76</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90-4, 130-46.

Musial and the Diocese's efforts reached their height in the mid-1910's and suggest how Polish Catholic individuals and community groups addressed the class problem. The Wheeling Can Strike was a turning point. During the height of the strike, the Wheeling Socialists subtly called out Musial and the Church's duty to the female can workers, whose "Sunday work roused no church to opposition," and to the Eighth Ward's population whose "distress is known to all."<sup>77</sup> For six weeks the Socialist press spoke fiercely of the can workers' gendered discrimination on the shop floor, the unsafe working conditions, and the "locked" exit doors that eerily reminded readers of the disastrous Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911. Finally, utilizing the emerging rhetoric of "industrial democracy," the Socialists asked readers to "pause long enough in our demand for peace in Europe to demand industrial peace in the Eighth Ward."<sup>78</sup>

### **"Organize the Unorganized"**

Socialist organizing came during an evolution of the city's working class life by the 1910's. How best could the labor movement coordinate the growing sectors of the workforce—women, children, and new immigrants? Working class formation occurred on the shop floor, but also within multi-ethnic neighborhood public and private spaces. As James Barrett suggests, this so-called "Americanization from the bottom-up" was "the gradual acculturation of immigrants and their socialization in working-class environments and contexts" often by Irish and German-Americans in the labor movement.<sup>79</sup> Thus, new immigrants learned about unions and American culture in various formal and informal social networks, in such diverse sites as union halls, dancehalls, amusements parks, street corners, movie theaters, vaudeville houses, and saloons.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 105-60; *Wheeling Majority* July 29, 1915.

<sup>78</sup> *Wheeling Majority* August 12, 19, 1915.

<sup>79</sup> Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up," 997-9.

<sup>80</sup> Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 65-90; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 30-67, 172-214; Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*; Barrett, *Work and Community*

The Trades Assembly and leading socialists continued their support of municipal reforms and better services in the working class neighborhoods where new immigrants lived and labored. By 1913, they demanded more—that the city government provide public playgrounds, food and factory inspections, tenement sanitation, free public concerts, modern water filtration systems, and street car regulation. During this time, many trade unionists and “evolutionary” socialists denounced the more radical aims of the IWW, advocating for improvements to everyday concerns. Walter Hilton, socialist editor of the *Wheeling Majority*, attacked the backward nature of city government: “Wheeling today is struggling along with the laws of a village . . . our factories can maim or sicken the workers with impunity, landlords can crowd as many tenants into as miserable and dirty quarters as their greed will allow”<sup>81</sup>

The Trades Assembly sponsored labor reforms in the state legislature, especially the state Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1913. The bill provided a uniform system of compensation to injured workers, while relieving employers of liability in individual cases. It paid funeral expenses of the deceased and a stipend to the widow and children, and in case of partial or permanent disability the employee was paid a certain percentage of his salary. The system was financed by a tax on the employer and employee. Sponsored by State Senator Jesse Bloch, of Bloch Brothers Tobacco on the Southside, the bill reflected the similar company program in effect since 1896. The company’s health plan paid workers \$3.00 a week if sick or maimed. Workers were eligible to join an Employee Relief Association by paying a \$2.00 fee and then 25 cents weekly dues thereafter. Bloch Brothers’ plan included a \$1,000 life insurance policy (extended up to \$2,000 for employees with a certain level of seniority), and paid unemployment

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*in the Jungle*, 38-44, 119-31; Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead: Politics, Culture, and Steel, 1880-1892* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, March 13, 1913, 8.

benefits for up to 13 weeks a year. The company's benefits were widely praised and a result of collective bargaining with the local of the Tobacco Workers International No. 2.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately, the coal interests lobbied hard to limit the effectiveness of the law. The "compulsory" clause was removed, placing the burden of taking the claim through the legal process on individual workers. However, the Trades Assembly assisted many workers in the process of filing their claims and making sure companies paid appropriate benefits. New immigrants directly benefited from these reforms. In the awards distributed in late September 1915, many of the beneficiaries were unskilled immigrant steelworkers. Frank Woske, a laborer at the Wheeling Mold & Foundry received compensation for several days missed. John Szeligowski, a laborer at the Wheeling Iron & Steel Mill, got a substantial award following an accident of \$54 for medical costs and compensation of \$480 for 120 weeks. The Assembly worked in the behalf of Mike Stanko, who died of overwork at the American Sheet & Tin Plate Mill at 29<sup>th</sup> Street (La Belle). When the state denied his heirs the right to compensation, they wrote directly to Governor Henry Hatfield and the State Workmen's Compensation Agency. However, many immigrants, especially coal miners at Hitchman Coal & Coke never got benefits or received meager sums. In addition, many continued to suffer from the physical effects of their injuries. Woske and his family were still struggling in 1920, renting their home at 314 Coal Street in North Wheeling, as he worked at the Top Mill blast furnace. Szeligowski died tragically at age 46 on April 9, 1918 after trying to return to work at the Riverside Mill in Benwood.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> March 6, 1890, Meeting Minutes, Tobacco Workers' Union, Minutes, Local #2 (Wheeling), 1890-1905, A&M 1280, West Virginia & Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia; *Building Blochs: The Monthly Bulletin of the Bloch Brothers Tobacco Company*, Wheeling, W.Va., vol. 3, no. 5, July-August 1954; "An Original West Virginia Product," *The West Virginia Review*, (September 1930).

<sup>83</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, January 23, 1913, 10; February 13, 1913, 1. For the list of beneficiaries, see October 7, 1915, 2; OVTLA, Minute Book, 1914-1916 (Loose Volume), September 12, 1915, 87, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; for the later lives of the Polish laborers, *Callin's Wheeling City*

The actions of the radical IWW in 1912-1913 helped spur a new organizing campaign by the Trades Assembly. Committed to providing tangible benefits for the area's workers, the Assembly denounced the actions of IWW organizer Joseph Ettor, who was working among the coal miners of Bellaire advocating a general strike and direct action tactics. *Majority* editor Walter Hilton referred to the IWW as a collection of "every freak and bug." As conservative socialists, they saw economic organization and union expansion as the best avenue. According to Hilton, industrial unionism would only come by organizing semi-skilled and mostly unskilled workers through education and by utilizing the existing craft unions.<sup>84</sup>

Soon thereafter, Wheeling's socialists planned a massive organizing campaign in the spring and summer of 1913. Building solidarity would be difficult, but as Hilton argued "The fact that the skilled men have in the foolish past failed to protect the unskilled has resulted to the injury of the skilled." While the education campaign to reach new workers was crucial, the bigger problem would be convincing craftsmen that he must "adapt himself" to the fact that mechanization was yielding an "ever increasing army of the unskilled." Of grave concern were young girls and boys. By investigating factories using child labor, especially the Wheeling Can Factory, Northwood Glass Works, and many cigar factories, the socialists warned that this work was "stunting them," contributing to the subsidizing of ever lower wages, and that in time these girls and boys would be "crushed into a 'slum proletariat.'" <sup>85</sup>

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*Directory, 1915-1916* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1915), 738; 1920 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, West Virginia, Wheeling, Ward 1, Enumeration District 71; "John Szelegowski," Death Index, West Virginia Deaths Index, 1853-1973, database via Ancestry.com (25 June 2013).

<sup>84</sup> For the many debates between socialists and IWW members, see for example, *Wheeling Majority*, April 10, 1913, 1; April 17, 1913, 7. IWW organizer J.C. Greene criticized the Assembly's structure of being "split up into dozens of craft organizations" that fostered "no solidarity." See, Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*, 105-7. The campaign sought to organize workers into existing craft unions operating under a federated craft structure, that would then conduct negotiations with industries for all unions represented under the firm; Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*, 111.

<sup>85</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, April 17, 1913, 1; May 8, 1913, 1; June 12, 1913, 8; September 4, 1913, 8.



Women workers were the main focus of the organizing campaign. An investigation conducted by the *Wheeling Register* found that by July 1914 the city had at least 4,000 women working in small factories, offices, and department stores. This meant about one in five wage earners was a female. While many entered wage work with the “desire for economic independence,” the report did note that having money to purchase consumer goods or go to the movies was not the real motivation. In fact, the main factor was the city’s rapid spike in the cost of living after 1900: “So many are the homes that are pinched by poverty that it is necessary for the children, both the boys and the girls, to add to the family income.” Many small factories employed large female contingents, especially the Wheeling Can Company (200), Wheeling Stamping Company (204), and Bloch Brothers Tobacco (177), all on the Southside. As the opening story of the chapter suggests, these factory women were aggressive union supporters. In particular were the 400-500 girls in the city’s tobacco plants, working at stripping the tobacco leaves and removing the stems from the leaf before processing. When the plans for the union drive began, the most enthusiastic union was the Tobacco Strippers’ Union. The “union girls” canvassed several neighborhoods and factory sites encouraging girls to meet to talk about joining their respective unions.<sup>86</sup> Most of the organizers were from German immigrant households. At a get-together at the Odd Fellows Hall, the “militant girls” gave talks and played music. One of the girls was Elizabeth Bozenska. Born in 1897 in Prussian Poland, she lived on 12<sup>th</sup> Street and

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<sup>86</sup> “Wheeling Has Many Women Wage Workers,” *Wheeling Register*, July 19, 1914, 13. The report did note that many female workers regardless of where they lived had to work near the downtown area in offices and the many department stores. Many also had to travel to the Kraft Shirt Factory (200), Neuralgyline Manufacturing Company (175), Pollack Tobacco Company plants on 19<sup>th</sup> Street and the Southside (225), etc. For the role of the Tobacco Strippers Union, see *Wheeling Majority*, November 13, 1913, 1; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 16, November 5, 1913, 10; November 12, 1913, 12, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; *Wheeling Majority*, December 11, 1913, 1.

worked at the Pollack Cigar Factory. Latter she worked at the Wheeling Can Factory following the strike by Polish girls there in the summer of 1915.<sup>87</sup>

The campaign promoted solidarity by reaching beyond the factory gates. Organizers encouraged meetings near the “Street corners, Factory, Churches, Halls and if necessary in the Homes . . . even to call on [a] man’s wife and induce her to take a union card.” Communications were sent to all preachers and priests in Wheeling, especially Bishop Patrick Donahue, to allow ministers to speak from their pulpits on a certain date about the moral importance and “aims and object of the organized Labor movement.” They also asked that parishes observe “Child Labor Sunday” held on January 18, 1914. The socialists realized the importance of reaching into the churches, since “invariably the Church [will] be filled with people that would not go to the Union’s Hall.” The stress on morality also attacked commercialized vice in Wheeling. While Protestant Ministers had long attacked prostitution, the socialists shifted the focus. Hilton stated it directly: “The ABOLITION of commercialized vice is impossible . . . The places are not in themselves the cause so much as they are the effect.” Those who blamed the victims should be ashamed, according to the socialists, for the “environment which they were not strong enough to overcome, shaped and fashioned their lives into the hideous thing it is today.”<sup>88</sup>

Initially, organizing meetings went quite well. Machinists’ Local No. 818 and members of the Molders Union at the Wheeling Mold & Foundry attracted many unskilled workers. This is important since as noted in Chapter 2, many Polish men labored in its foundries and work yard. The Butchers and Flint Glass Workers were more reluctant to hold meetings. Skilled workers stressed key benefits brought by unionization, including “the saving of arms and legs, of

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<sup>87</sup> 1910 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, Wheeling, Ward #2; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1915-1916*, 110; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk, Co., 1918), 108.

<sup>88</sup> For reaching out to Protestant and Catholic clergy, see *Wheeling Majority*, January 1, 1914, 1; January 15, 1914, 1; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 16, November 30, 1913, 20-21; December 10, 1913, 23; *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; *Wheeling Majority*, January 1, 1914, 8.

lives and of widows,” the end of night work, and the 8-hour day. The most useful organizing technique was meeting men on their own terms in clubs and fraternal organizations, and the Tobacco “Union Girls” efforts to go to the homes of factory girls. Many initially promised to meet on their job sites, but then would not show up “for some reason or other.” The Organizing committee also printed them in at least four different languages.<sup>89</sup>

The cultural efforts of the organizing campaign to attract foreign-born workers proved vital. Living in close contact in inter-ethnic neighborhoods, socialists and skilled workers sponsored meetings, cultural events, and amusements to show the new immigrants the benefits of unions. The Polish were one of the most targeted immigrant groups. At first, the Assembly sponsored union rallies in popular theaters and vaudeville houses, which many Polish immigrants on the Southside attended for entertainment. A protest meeting was held in the Victoria Theater downtown, led by Mother Jones, against the “human exploitation in the coal mines of this state.” Marco Roman spoke at first in Italian, followed by UMW international organizer Frank Ledvinka. The latter talked for some time in “Polish, translating for the benefit of the Polish people present.”<sup>90</sup>

Unions increasingly met in ethnic social halls for entertainment and organizing events. One of the key sites in South Wheeling was the Polish Hall on 45<sup>th</sup> Street. While serving mainly the functions of the Polish St. Ladislaus Catholic Parish and Polish fraternal organizations, by 1914 unions held regular events in the space. Molders Union No. 364 from the Wheeling Mold

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<sup>89</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, February 12, 1914, 1; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 16, January 14, 1914, 33; January 21, 1914, 34; February 3, 1914, 38-9; February 24, 1914, 47; March 10, 1914, 51, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC. Fred Barkey shows how organizers were frustrated by the apathy of workers. Efforts to organize girls working at the Hinge Factory, Stamping Works, Steinmetz Box Factory, and the Northwood Glass Works seemed to stall; see Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*, 115; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 16, February 17, 1914, 45; March 17, 1914, 52-3, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC.

<sup>90</sup> William Galush, *For More Than Bread: Community and Identity in American Polonia, 1880-1940* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006). 108-112; Frank Ledvinka would lead the Eastern Ohio coal strike of 1914-1915 and be a key Polish-speaking union leader in the Ohio Valley, see *Wheeling Telegraph*, January 4, 1913, 2; *Wheeling Majority*, January 2, 1913, 1; January 9, 1913, 1.

& Foundry held its 3<sup>rd</sup> annual ball on April 3, 1914. The molders had been promoting solidarity for some time with the unskilled Polish foundry and furnace men, and this meeting in the center of the Polish community highlighted that growing support. The hall also hosted a more humorous event for Brewery Workers Union No. 53 titled a “Good-By Ball.” With the passage of the Yost Law, German brewery workers wanted to celebrate legally, asking all in the neighborhood to join them “filling with joy and jest.”<sup>91</sup>

Union organizers also made use of the most popular form of working class entertainment. Wheeling’s first nickelodeons appeared beginning in 1907-1908, showing “very crude . . . blood and thunder pictures, and sickening love stories.” By 1913-1914, they showed more mature films that were quite “educational and entertaining.” Many films spoke of American and world history, as well as current political issues, especially the conflicts between capital and labor. With their growing popularity, socialist organizers increasingly spoke of the “advisability of running slides and films in some of the Moving Picture Houses,” to encourage workers about the importance of unionization. Silent films appealed to a wide audience for their low prices and little language barrier. Photo plays about the evils of capitalist exploitation in the factory or Charlie Chaplin’s “Tramp” getting the best of the rich and local police were easy for many new immigrants to understand. While fostering a more Americanized culture, the influence of motion pictures was crucial for organizers. Averaging by one estimate 8,000 movie-goers a day by 1913, the Wheeling area boasted at least 17 movie houses. Most of the larger ones, such as the Colonial and the Virginia were downtown, but many working men could stay within their ethnic

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<sup>91</sup> The men of Molders Union No. 364 would be very proactive in promoting better working conditions, as seen with their award by the National War Labor Board in September 1918 regarding the government’s support of the 8 hour day; see, *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, No. 286, September 1921 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 164-7. The Polish Hall also hosted an affair by the Moose Milwaukee Dancing Set in April 1914; for all the union events, see *Wheeling Majority*, March 12, 1914, 1; March 19, 1914, 7.

neighborhoods attending a variety of smaller venues.<sup>92</sup> The socialists often shared the concerns of the rank-and-file on how most city nickelodeons were now ten-cent houses. The raising movie prices often led to calls of boycotts by workers of certain downtown theaters.<sup>93</sup>

With the growing popularity of silent movies, the *Wheeling Majority* appealed to working class tastes by printing reviews and synopses of certain films. While they stressed key worker-related films, most were romantic comedies, action pictures, and melodramas. Providing information on these “cheap amusements,” the labor movement kept in pace with the worker culture. While almost everyone in town attended the downtown movie houses at some point, the South Side theaters allowed workers to travel only a short distance. In addition, most offered late night showings to benefit the thousands of working men and women.<sup>94</sup>

The Trades Assembly particularly encouraged workers to attend films at the Southern Theater on the corner of 33<sup>rd</sup> and Eoff Streets. Showing both “Amusing and instructive Pictures,” the Southern opened in 1913 at the height of the unskilled organizing campaign. With a seating capacity from 480 to over 750 guests at a time, it was South Wheeling’s largest theater.<sup>95</sup> During its height, the Southern’s slogan was “Best Pictures. Finest Music at the Lowest Prices.” The Southern often provided free movie viewings for children’s groups,

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<sup>92</sup> “Wheeling Spends Much on Movies,” *Wheeling Daily News*, October 15, 1914, 8; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 16, March 24, 1914, 54, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No. 1055, WVRHC; “Wheeling Has Seventeen Moving Picture Houses,” *Wheeling Daily News*, March 16, 1913, Section 3, 4; “Shoot Price of Movies Up,” *Wheeling Majority*, September 18, 1913, 1; for the importance of silent films appeal to immigrant working class audiences, see Larry May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 35-42.

<sup>93</sup> “Shoot Price of Movies Up,” *Wheeling Majority*, September 18, 1913, 1. There were at least 7 motion picture houses found on the Southside. These included the Southern (33<sup>rd</sup> and Eoff St), Avalon (43<sup>rd</sup> and Jacob Street), Hippodrome (37<sup>th</sup> and Jacob Street), Holdermann’s (Caldwell’s Run out 29<sup>th</sup> Street), Heme (3915 Jacob Street), Rex (3304 Jacob Street), and the Castle Theater (27<sup>th</sup> and Chapline Street)

<sup>94</sup> For movie reviews of films to be shown at the Southern Theater, see *Wheeling Majority*, March 11, 1915, 2; March 25, 1915, 2; April 8, 1915, 3; June 3, 1915, 3; *Peiss, Cheap Amusements*, 139-162; Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>95</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, March 5, 1914, 5; September 24, 1914, 7; *Wheeling Daily News*, March 16, 1913, Section 3, 4; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1913-1914* (W.L. Polk, Co., 1913), 752. The *Majority*’s list of approved pro-labor local was crucial in reaching out to both men and women at this time.

nurseries, and orphans. The movie house was unique in that it alternated pictures every day. As late as 1920, each daily picture was only 10 cents. Movies ran long through the evenings (often as late as 10:30), catering to the men working in the mills, tobacco factory, and glass houses.<sup>96</sup>

All of these uses of working class culture were a necessary component of building inter-ethnic solidarity. The Trades Assembly had much to worry about regarding the Polish immigrants in Wheeling if they continued to exclude them. Coal miner and leader of the Polish socialist local Peter Morawsky informed the Assembly of the condition of his countrymen and other foreign workers in the city's steel factories. While the unorganized campaign had made tangible gains, Morawsky criticized the Assembly for not reaching out to the largest unskilled workforces at the Wheeling Iron and Steel mills, the Riverside Mill in Benwood, and the Wheeling Mold & Foundry in Fulton. He acknowledged that many Poles were "anxious to organize" but that the "I.W.W. having availed themselves of the opportunity had been working among the men for years . . . and the I.W.W. will organize."<sup>97</sup>

The Assembly took his warning seriously, and throughout 1915-1916, the two most successful organizing campaigns involved plants with large Polish workforces. One was the Wheeling Can Factory strike of the summer of 1915. As noted at the start of the chapter, Polish women were quite active in working the picket line and calling for AFL recognition. The strike was successful and the employees earned a minimum wage of \$1.00 a day, a 10-hour day, \$1.25 for overtime hours, and time-and-a-half for holidays. The company also refunded the money they should have paid into the state workmen's compensation fund.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Wheeling Register*, December 6, 1919, 6, December 28, 1919, 2; January 4, 1920, Section 2-7.

<sup>97</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 16, April 14, 1914, 60, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No. 1055, WVRHC. The IWW took an increasingly active role organizing unskilled immigrant steel workers following their success at the McKees Rock Strike in 1909; see Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 114-31.

<sup>98</sup> President Charles Huggins Report to the OVTLA, January 23, 1916, pg. 2-4, Box #2, Miscellaneous Folder, OVTLA records; OVTLA, Minute Book No. 16, Box #3, February 16, 1916, OVTLA records; OVTLA, Minute

The case of the strikes against the city's largest meat packers in late 1915-1916 suggests the extent of the solidarity across ethnic groups. With growing demands for processed meat nationally and with the start of World War I, the large meat packers F. Schenk & Sons Co. and Paul O. Reymann Company, both in Fulton, refused to negotiate with the butchers at their firms in a "deliberate attempt to destroy unionism." The Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen asked for wage increases for all butchers, meat cutters and packers, coopers, drivers, and laborers. All new workers, including immigrants, would earn no less than \$2.00 for a 9-hour day, and overtime and holiday pay. Refusing to discuss the proposal, butchers and all other workers went out on strike in December 1915. When the strike expanded to include the city's smaller meat packers, the larger firms tried to seek a court injunction to prevent picketing and then imported an "undesirable class" of strikebreakers.<sup>99</sup> What worried union men the most was how Albert Schenk apparently told these imported men that there had been "antagonistic nationalities at the plant," and that he discharged them to be replaced with "good Germans, and Austria-Hungarian races." It seems that no man could work there that was not a "good German." While trying to replace the strikers with Polish men from northern cities, the union found that most were reluctant to come as scabs. When company officials tried to "cause a split among the strikers on racial lines" they were unable to induce the foreign-born men, mostly Polish and "Austrians" to break the picket line. Even when the company tried to get a former popular saloonkeeper Alois Smalzer to organize a meeting among the Polish and Bohemian strikers, the men sternly refused to go, instead informing the Amalgamated about the underhanded tactics being employed. After a month out, 300 of 325 strikers voted to remain out for their demands.

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Book, 1914-1916, Loose Volume, July 25, 1915, 80-1; August 8, 1915, 83; August 22, 1915, 85, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC.

<sup>99</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, 1914-1916, Loose Volume, December 26, 1915, 104-5, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; *Wheeling Majority*, December 9, 1915, 1; demands reprinted by union in *Wheeling Majority*, December 16, 1915, 7.

Walter Hilton spoke to the men along with Bohemian butcher Mike Teufel and Andy Kissel in Polish. They remarked about the horrible living conditions in the Schenk company boarding house for many of these immigrant workmen. By the end of the successful strike, the German-American Butcher Workmen praised the unskilled Poles “standing as firm as a rock.”<sup>100</sup>

### **Conclusion**

By the start of World War I, Wheeling’s Polish immigrant working class, male and female, became members of the labor movement. That was a long cry from the days when “Polanders” were accosted for working in the mills at near starvation wages. Thanks to educational and cultural campaigns of outreach by the OVTLA and the local Socialists, the Poles and their families were further Americanized within the blue collar neighborhoods of Wheeling.

However, the First World War brought new trials. With the nation caught up in the wartime patriotism, Wheeling was afflicted with anti-German propaganda and renewed animosity toward immigrants plagued the city. Public schools ceased teaching German as a second language and banks and institutions took the word “German” out of their titles.<sup>101</sup> Many organizations, including the Wheeling Diocese, placed their full support behind the war effort. The first generation of Polish immigrants worked to balance their support of Catholic ethnic institutions tied to St. Ladislaus Parish with their blue collar identity as junior members of the city’s labor movement. However, by 1917, the primary threat would be an attack on the Poles’ loyalty to a conformist Americanism during the war and into the 1920’s. A renewed emphasis on Polish cultural nationalism, as promoted through the parish and other social centers, along with a patriotic zeal for fighting for democracy in France and Poland gave working class Poles the necessary tools to counter any attacks on them as a group.

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<sup>100</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, December 16, 1915, 1; December 23, 1915, 1; December 30, 1915, 1; January 20, 1916, 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 12, April 9, 1918.



**Chapter 6**  
**Proving Their Loyalty: Wheeling's Polish Immigrants During World War I**

Following almost three bloody years of global war, America ended its “neutrality” in early April 1917. With Germany reinstating unrestricted submarine warfare and the threats posed by the Zimmerman Telegram, Congress heeded the President’s call for a declaration of war. For the next nineteen months, American military involvement aided in the success of the Allies against the Central Powers. Of equal significance was the mobilization of the American home front. With perceived threats from radicals and labor unions, the Wilson administration instituted propaganda and sponsored war bond campaigns, while also strengthening the federal bureaucracy’s control over American citizens. Jeanette Keith in her study of rural southern resistance to the wartime draft sees World War I as the rise of the “American surveillance state,” which sought to monitor and even quantify those marginal people in American society.<sup>1</sup>

The coming of the war had an immediate impact in Wheeling, West Virginia. Scanning the *Wheeling Intelligencer* shows the declaration’s impact on many differing groups. Successful entrepreneur and German immigrant George Stifel and his German and Austrian clerks declared their “loyalty” to America. Sheriff Howard Hastings’s proclamation, reprinted in seven languages, promised protection to immigrants, who need not “fear any invasion of his personal property right so long as he goes peaceably about his business.” In a public display, three Austro-Hungarian immigrants applied for naturalization on April 9, 1917. From February 1-May 1, 161 immigrants filed their declarations of intent to become U.S. citizens. At the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly meeting, members enthusiastically “affirm our loyalty to our government . . . and in the language with the declaration recently announced by the representatives of the American international unions under the auspices of the American

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 9-11.

Federation of Labor.” By the time of the first draft registration on June 5, 1917, immigrants reported before their local draft board. In the mill town of Benwood, half those registered were foreign born.<sup>2</sup> Wheeling’s Catholic population of around 12,000 mobilized after the editors of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* questioned Catholic patriotism: “No American flags have been nor will be placed inside any of the Catholic churches. The church is a universal organization and does not allow the flag of any nation on inside walls.” Spurred to react, following Easter Sunday the Carroll Club Council and Knights of Columbus issued plans for an American flag rally and street parade with over 3,000 children from the city’s Catholic parochial schools participating.<sup>3</sup>

While patriotic groups “convinced” many immigrants of the need to show their loyalty, Wheeling’s Polish community gave its consent in grand fashion at a rally at the Polish Hall in South Wheeling. In a statement to the press, the 2,000 in attendance affirmed: “We American citizens of Polish descent . . . considering that not birth alone, but loyalty to American ideas makes men Americans—declare our united allegiance to President Wilson and to the government of the United States of America, and pledge ourselves by word and example to teach and impress upon our children and fellow countrymen the duty of a loyal citizen and obedience to the government.” The loyalty meeting was preceded by a mass street procession including the Polish Falcon members in military uniform. Marching from the Polish Hall, they stopped at the city hall downtown. Joseph Rosanzki gave a patriotic address, and men placed a wreath of flowers on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Back at the hall, the Polish choir sang patriotic numbers and the Prosecuting Attorney praised the “Polish people for their spirit of loyalty.” Later Fr. Emil Musial addressed the crowd in Polish saying “Poland should be a free state . . . and that

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<sup>2</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 9, 1917; April 14, 1917; May 1, 1917; *Benwood Enterpriser*, June 7, 1917, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 9, April 10, 1917.

there will not be peace until Poland receives her freedom.” He urged young Poles to take up arms for America. In this effort he “could see the freedom for all Slavic-speaking people.”<sup>4</sup>

This chapter focuses on the tensions within Wheeling’s Polish community as it confronted both the promises and dangers of being an ethnic community in a time of war. Indeed, wartime Americanization drives presented new challenges for the Poles. Much of the scholarship on World War I Americanism focuses on a “conformist American nationalism” that “suffocated [the] hyphenated identities” of immigrants by viewing their culture as potentially subversive. John Higham sees this “100 % Americanism” as forging a “new equation between national loyalty and a large measure of political and social conformity.”<sup>5</sup> Coercive conformity was stated in terms of a “civic nationalism,” which promoted the greatness of American political ideals and the benefits of American citizenship. The repression of Irish and German immigrants has largely overshadowed the more fluid notions of ethnic identity during the war years.<sup>6</sup>

This fluidity is best understood as a “pluralistic Americanism,” which promoted the inherent benefits of immigrant culture. As long as immigrants supported the country and did not engage in subversive activities, then there was no reason why immigrants could not be good Americans and good Poles at the same time. Most scholarship on *Polonia* during World War I tends to focus on the divides the war created between the two leading fraternal organizations: the more conservative Polish Roman Catholic Union (PRCU) and the secular, radical nationalist

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<sup>4</sup> “Poles Pledge Allegiance to United States,” *Wheeling Register*, May 7, 1917, 8.

<sup>5</sup> In recent years, Americanism is a vital component of the whiteness historiography, which seeks to examine how a “white ethnic identity” developed out of the crucible of World War I and the 1920’s. For a recent local study of this new trend, see Russell A. Kazal, “The Interwar Origins of the White Ethnic: Race, Residence, and German Philadelphia, 1917-1939,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 78-131; Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans,” *Journal of American History* 84 (September 1997): 557; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition (New York, 1981), 330.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the relatives of Poles back in Europe were fighting also in the German, Austrian, and Russian armies. It was not clear that support for the Entente directly translated into support for Poland until after the Bolshevik Revolution and Wilson’s Fourteen Points.

Polish National Alliance (PNA). Divided over how to support the re-creation of the Polish homeland, this focuses too much on national and international Polish leaders based in Chicago and Detroit.<sup>7</sup> By looking at Wheeling, one sees more cooperation between Father Musial and lay leaders. In addition, this national focus tends to stress the role of elites in constructing “Polishness” during World War I. This chapter will show how Wheeling’s Polish Catholic working class played the main part in working with Fr. Musial and small businessmen to carve out their own understanding of Americanism. Wheeling’s Poles showed their loyalty through a variety of cultural displays and public actions. Street parades, public meetings, Polish Catholic events, and organizing for the Polish Army in France suggest a form of politicization that was often not fully understood by the dominant 100% Americanizers. While presenting a strong pro-war loyalty for the American war effort, their actions hid a subtle critique of coercive Americanization, giving Poles ways to celebrate and promote their multiple identities as Polish and Catholic. These actions provide a sort of illusion of total consent to the 100% Americanism, while providing a way for poor immigrants to create space to support alternative worldviews. Wheeling’s Poles could fight for America and “Polishness.” Thus these everyday acts allowed for the continued growth of an alternative subculture in *Polonia*, promoting the community’s multiple identities.<sup>8</sup> As seen in earlier chapters, the Catholic parish and diocese served a

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<sup>7</sup> William J. Galush, *For More Than Bread: Community and Identity in American Polonia, 1880-1940* (Boulder, Colorado: Eastern European Monographs, 2006), 131-2.

<sup>8</sup> This chapter takes much from the work of James C. Scott on the “hidden transcripts” of subordinate groups. While I do not adhere as tightly to his notion of “infrapolitics,” Wheeling’s Polish community presented a counter space to the dominant, conformist Americanization from 1915-1930. Here, the forms of resistance are not as overt as foot-dragging, draft evasion, or sabotage, (although some immigrants did choose these forms of actions against the American surveillance state), most of the examples from this chapter are those hidden in cultural productions, especially in ethnic Catholic practices and street parades. Scott speaks of the importance of “mutuality” in these acts: “the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above . . . like folk culture the hidden transcript has no reality as pure thought; it exists only to the extent it is practiced, articulated, enacted, and disseminated within these offstage social sites.”) Later chapters will use this understanding of the “hidden transcripts” to suggest the variety of political resistance to this conformist society. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ.

dominating role in the political consciousness created during the war. Even so, the war years presented many dangers for their inward-looking community. Could Musial and his laity balance a wider interaction with other ethnic groups, the diocese, and American society without jeopardizing the community's core Polish values? Debates over "coercive" and "pluralistic Americanism" were key aspects of the World War I American home front that need clarification; the reaction of Wheeling's Poles provides a useful case study.<sup>9</sup>

### **Making the Home Front Safe for Polish Catholic Americanism**

By 1914, Father Emil Musial, the Polish Catholic laity, and the rise of an ethnic middle class all contributed to the stability of South Wheeling's *Polonia*. With the necessary social and political institutions in place, the Polish working-class had local outlets to support its welfare. Despite the size and stability of the Polish community, World War I created new challenges. Poles, like other Slavic groups were seen increasingly as "subversive foreigners," who engaged in rebellious labor strikes. Employers countered with an ambitious program to Americanize the working class, but also more reactionary methods such as calling for police intervention and hiring scab workers when necessary. The "immigrant question," long a debate within craft union circles, was now a central concern on the national domestic political agenda. This period pushed thousands of Southern and Eastern European ethnic groups into a closer relationship with the federal government and its institutions. From the patriotic propaganda of George Creel's Committee on Public Information, to war mobilization, military conscription, and the selling of war bonds, immigrants were bombarded by the efforts of a government and middle-class

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Press, 1985), 29-43; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 19, 43, 111, 117, for quote above, 118-9, 172-82.

<sup>9</sup> For the evolving natures of American civic nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Protestant society to shape them into loyal, patriotic Americans.<sup>10</sup> Through the mobilization of middle-class reformers, public school advocates, well-to-do businessmen, political speakers, and even ethnic priests and businessmen, the World War I years ushered in a new period of political identification for new immigrant groups.<sup>11</sup>

Wheeling's Polish community weathered the coercive Americanization efforts by long advocating citizenship and political participation. As early as 1904, the "Polish race" organized a meeting of the Pulaski Polish Association held at St. Ladislaus to promote Polish political action in the United States. In 1909, the Sokol Society of "Americanized Polanders" held a dance at Mozart Hall at 38<sup>th</sup> and Jacob Streets. The Sokol presented a "fine American flag to the Polish Catholic church." Contingents of Poles and other immigrants attended from South Wheeling, Upper Benwood, and Bellaire, Ohio. During a parade, one contingent marched with a brass band, riding horses draped in red, white, and blue colors.<sup>12</sup>

One of the crucial Americanizing elements in the Polish neighborhood was the Polish Falcons. A militant, fraternal organization connected to the PNA, they advocated physical fitness and Polish cultural pride. Increasingly, the Falcons sought to link Polish hopes for an independent state with Americanism by promoting Polish-American cultural heroes such as Kosciuszko and Pulaski. While supported by the middle class elites within *Polonia*, working class Poles took an active part in the emphasis on sporting events and popular Polish nationalism.

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<sup>10</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 28-33; Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41-5.

<sup>11</sup> For efforts at Americanizing immigrants via the press and settlement schools, see, *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 21, 1915, 5; December 9, 1915, 5. There has been a wide historical literature detailing the coercive aspects of Americanization. The perspective has usually been on forces "outside" the ethnic communities." See, Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 194-263; David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 45-92; for recent redevelopment historiography, see Gerstle, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans:" 525-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Wheeling Register*, June 2, 1904, 10; *Wheeling Daily News*, July 21, 1909, 4.

The Falcons were crucial to bringing the different classes and regional groups together and encouraging a shared ethnic consciousness as “Polish.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1911, Wheeling’s Polish Falcon Society built a new club house on Wood Street near 44<sup>th</sup> Street at the cost of \$50,000. A large celebration was held at its dedication, which included Falcon lodges from Pittsburgh, Bellaire, Steubenville, Bridgeport, Neffs, and Dillonvale, Ohio. In full uniforms, a party of over 1,500 marched through the South Side. Blessings by Father Emil Musial and the local officers were followed by the keynote talk by Father Skaryanci of Pittsburgh. Afterwards, the entire group sang the Polish national hymn. Founded by the first generation of immigrants, this club would help foster Polish and American political consciousness in the years before World War I, while sponsoring athletic events. The club housed a pool room, bowling alleys, and a large social hall.<sup>14</sup>

The Falcons played an important role in Wheeling and the Upper Ohio Valley throughout the decade. Shortly after the dedication, the Fourth District of the Polish Falcons held their annual convention at the Fair Grounds on Wheeling Island. Taking place on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1912, the event honored America while advocating for support of Polish independence. Local reporters called the event “Polish Soldier’s Day,” highlighting the militant political importance of the celebration. While a strictly Polish affair, organizers opened the event to Russians, Bohemians, Slavs, and even interested Americans. The festivities commenced with a massive parade of between 2,000 and 3,000 people marching from St. Ladislaus to Wheeling Island. Led by the Zlot Sokołów in full Polish military uniforms, many women and children followed dressed in

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<sup>13</sup> Galush, *For More Than Bread*, 134-6; Victor Greene, *For God and Country: The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America 1860-1910* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> “Polish Society Dedicates Club,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 1, 1912, 10; Pittsburgh had several large Polish Falcon societies on Polish Hill and the South Side that promoted region-wide sporting leagues and contests and advocated for homeland politics. See, John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 80-1, 201-2.

red, white, and blue. A large picnic was held along with seventeen sporting contests (mile race, 100-yard dash, shot put, etc.) to highlight Polish athletic prowess. The superiority of the Poles was seen in the main event, a wrestling match between Polish champion Walter Bonecki and an American. Lasting only three minutes, the American admitted that “the Poles was too strong for him.”<sup>15</sup>

Polish Catholics built off the work of the Polish Falcons to promote Americanism through St. Ladislaus. In July 1914, several Poles organized the Polish American Citizens’ League at the parish. The group sought to aid in naturalizing the city’s Polish immigrants, learning American methods of conducting themselves, and taking part in politics. While organized through the parish, the group’s leaders represented a cross-section of mainly working class members and some small businessmen. President was Frank Lewandoski, a coal miner; Secretary Paul Jurczak was a helper on a furnace at the Riverside Mill. Other organizers were Frank Templin, who worked at a tannery, and Anton Cihy (Cinkling), who ran a dry goods store and grocery in Fulton near Wheeling Mold & Foundry.<sup>16</sup>

Within weeks over 50 Poles joined the organization and were “making progress in solving the intricacies of the English language.” The society sponsored English language and other classes to prepare immigrants for applying for citizenship. Reporting on their efforts, the *Wheeling Register* highlighted the key beliefs of the city’s Poles on the eve of the Great War:

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<sup>15</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 8, 1912, 14; “Polish Soldier’s Day,” *Wheeling Register*, July 3, 1912, 8; “Zlot Sokolow Has Big Celebration,” *Ibid.*, July 5, 1912, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Wheeling Register* July 9, 1914, 12. For backgrounds on the society’s leaders, see, *Wheeling City Directory*, 1913, pg 374; *Wheeling City Directory*, 1915, pg. 361; Paul Jurczak, WWI Draft Registration Card, September 1918, Wheeling, West Virginia, Roll#1993025 in United States, Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives and Records Administration, M1509 reprinted via Ancestry.com (31 July 2013); Anton Cihy, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, roll T625\_1967, Enumeration District 120, Washington Magisterial District, Precinct 10, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920; RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reprinted via Ancestry.com (31 July 2013). The other initial organizer was named “Ludwick Stolerzwuzk” by the newspaper. No man by that name appears in any records. It may be Louis Stolarski, who worked as an undertaker and ran his own store in South Wheeling. For Stolarski, see *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-18* (Wheeling: W.L. Polk & Co., 1917), 643.



“The Polanders more than any other class of foreigners seem anxious to secure the privileges of citizenship once they have settled in this country . . . At each term of federal court they compose by far the larger number of those admitted to citizenship. The actuating motive that is impelling such a general desire among the South Side Poles to swear allegiance to Uncle Sam is undoubtedly due in a large measure to that general characteristic of all sons of down-trodden Poland—a love of freedom in all things political.”<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis on “liberty” and “freedom” suggests how efforts by the Polish Falcons, St. Ladislaus parish, and the quest for a free and independent Poland fostered an interest in political engagement.

### **Proving Their Loyalty**

Unlike other immigrant groups nationally, the Poles suffered less repression. However, this did not mean that they did not need to prove their loyalty. Many Poles emigrated from the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, making them suspect. In August 1914, it was the longstanding Polish animosity toward the Russian Empire that led some residents to question whether these antipathies for the czarist state would lead the “Polish element of the city to favor the Austro-Hungarian cause.”<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in August 1914, the immediacy of anti-immigrant reactions took America’s foreign-born populations by surprise. The central issue was loyalty. However, how does society measure a concept like national loyalty? How did individual immigrants and community leaders prove their loyalty on an everyday basis? Those who naturalized obviously wanted to become Americans, but a large number of Wheeling’s foreign population were aliens. Speaking multiple languages, worshipping differently than the WASP majority, and holding a wide spectrum of political views, those supporting cultural pluralism were becoming the minority. The war years

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<sup>17</sup> “Class Prepares for Citizenship—Liberty-Loving Poles are Anxious to Swear Allegiance to Uncle Sam,” *Wheeling Register*, July 22, 1914, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Wheeling Register*, August 1, 1914, 6. However, the Polish nationalist movement in Poland was pro-Russian in 1914.

ushered in new understandings of who was a true American. The war also created new categories of citizenship, such as the “enemy alien,” the “consciousness objector,” and deemed questionable people as “un-American” or “pro-German.” Everywhere, loyalty was hotly debated and enforced by native-born residents, police, business groups, as well as within immigrant communities. Wheeling’s immigrants would now encounter state structures for the first time. Appearing before the local draft board, filing an exemption, registering as a German enemy alien, and constantly carrying their draft papers helped to create the early features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American security state.<sup>19</sup>

In Wheeling, questions of loyalty abounded, and various immigrant groups struggled in how to respond. The city’s German population suffered the worst of the wartime hyper-patriotism, stemming from President Woodrow Wilson’s pronouncement on April 7, 1917 defining all German citizens in America fourteen years and older as “enemy aliens.” All German nationals had to surrender firearms and wireless radios, and could not travel within a half mile of any military installation. As long as no one engaged in detrimental activities the federal government would not come down on them. However, many feared the warning given by Attorney General Thomas Gregory for all German-Americans to “Obey the law. Keep your mouth shut.”<sup>20</sup>

The heavily German makeup and the local Socialist Party’s denunciation of the war put German-born party members in a difficult situation. Having made tangible gains for the working class, should they risk their successes, by coming out so vigorously against the foreign war, or remain on the fence? In August 1914 the local Ohio County Socialist Party protested the

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 174-6. The classic work on the growing surveillance of immigrants remains, William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*, 176-8; *New York Times*, April 7, 1917, 1-2.

“Killing of Workingmen in the European War.”<sup>21</sup> They followed the international socialist movement’s belief that the “workers of the various nations involved have no quarrel with each other, and that the evils from which they suffer—poverty, want, unemployment, oppression—are inflicted upon them . . . by the ruling classes of their own country.” Taking the anti-war position further, Ohio County branch of the party called on all its locals and:

“upon all foreign-born workingmen residing in this county, particularly upon those whose home governments are engaged in the present strife, to hold joint mass meetings for the purpose of emphasizing the fraternity and solidarity of all working people, irrespective of color, creed, race or nationality.”<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting their policy to reach out to the largely Catholic new immigrant working class, the local socialists also made a conscious effort to use religious imagery. They often sent appeals to affiliated labor unions along with local ministers to create solidarity between the clergy and their rank-and-file parishioners.<sup>23</sup> During a large anti-war street address near the Market Auditorium, about one thousand workers listened to G.H. Lockwood of Kalamazoo, Michigan, urge comrades to not believe the “alleged antagonism between Socialism and religion.” He stressed the Socialist Party “is not behind this movement against the Catholic church” but instead “Socialism is just as much for Catholics as for protestants [sic].”<sup>24</sup>

Internationalism remained the key principle motivating socialist anti-war protests. In late September 1914, a meeting near the Market Auditorium featured “five minute” speeches of speakers hailing from each country at war in Europe. Valentine Reuther spoke for the German immigrants, Frank Ledvinka, a Slovak organizer for the UMWA, spoke to the Austrian and Southern European immigrants, and Peter Morawski, a Polish socialist, spoke to those from the

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<sup>21</sup> Fred Barkey, *Working Class Radicals: The Socialist Party in West Virginia, 1898-1920* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2012), chapter 5; *Wheeling Majority*, August 13, 1914.

<sup>22</sup> Local Ohio County Socialist Party of West Virginia, A.L. Bauer, W.B. Hilton, Committee, “Proclamation, Of the Socialist Party of Ohio County Protesting Against the Killing of the Workingmen in the European War,” *Wheeling Majority*, August 13, 1914.

<sup>23</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, September 17, 1914, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, August 27, 1914.

Russian Empire. The main speaker acknowledged how the present war would bring prosperity only for the “captains of industry.” By 1915, the party’s county branches warned of creeping militarism and voted for an anti-war manifesto and peace program. They wanted no indemnities or transfers of land, a federation to prevent future disputes (like the League of Nations), universal disarmament, downsizing of imperial navies, industrial democracy, and universal suffrage.<sup>25</sup>

Federal and state officials targeted all of the city’s immigrant groups to ferret out potential subversives. Governor John Cornwell and agents of the Bureau of Investigation worked to track down draft dodgers and “enemy aliens” in an effort to foster a more modernized, conservative political culture in West Virginia.<sup>26</sup> This meant eliciting the support of private vigilante organizations. Working with the State Council of Defense, Cornwell sent a confidential message to all the state’s major employers, warning of the many “unnaturalized alien enemies in this State.” He wanted employers to keep strict tabs on their foreign workers, to send detailed lists of all Germans, Austrians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Turkish immigrants, and even keep track of their movements. While no record remains of how many Wheeling employers sent lists of their immigrant employees, some defended their multi-ethnic workforce. A.W. Paull of the Wheeling Stamping Company of South Wheeling, noted that many Syrians in his company’s employ “resent being classified as alien enemies,” since many lived in Asia Minor and were “therefore nominally Turkish subjects but they are not in sympathy with the Turks.” The rest of the factory employed female Germans and Austrians, but most were married and lived in the city for at least 10 years, assuring their pro-American sympathies.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Wheeling Majority*, September 24, 1914, 1; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 3, 1915, 12; *Wheeling Majority*, February 15, 31, 1916; Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*, 139-40.

<sup>26</sup> John Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 3-4, 82-3; for reports of circulars distributed urging men to refuse to register for the draft, see *Benwood Enterpriser*, May 31, 1917, 2.

<sup>27</sup> For wartime use and sanctioning of private, voluntary vigilante justice and surveillance, see Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*, ch.1 and 4; Governor John J. Cornwell and Chairman of State Council of Defense, private and

During the war, the Bureau of Investigation's main local agent, John B. Wilson, led the surveillance of suspected "pro-German" immigrants. Working with local law enforcement, along with local lawyers and factory superintendents, Wilson and other Bureau officials spent most of their energies keeping track of suspected radicals from abroad engaged in wartime espionage, supposed Bolshevik agitators after the war, and monitoring the immigrant working class areas of the city. The use of informants in local factories was a key component of this surveillance network.<sup>28</sup> Wilson mainly wanted to locate all enemy aliens, who had failed to sign their registration papers. One key informant was Thomas Hearne of the Riverside Tube Mill in Benwood, West Virginia. During May 1918, he was looking for a John (or "Jan") Schemelgeski, a German-Polish immigrant steelworker living in the heart of *Polonia* on the corner of 45<sup>th</sup> and Wetzel Streets, who was alleged to have remarked that "the German soldiers were better soldiers than the Americans . . . and would win the war." When asked about his support of the Kaiser, Schemelgeski asserted "he had pledged himself in the old country, and he would stick to it."<sup>29</sup> Hearne spent time visiting Waston Koosnick, a Russian-Pole from South Wheeling, who blamed Schemelgeski's statements on too much liquor. It proved hard to find the suspected spy's location, since Hearne failed to locate an employment record for him either in the Riverside Department or in the galvanizing department of the Wheeling Iron & Steel Company.<sup>30</sup>

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confidential circular, December 12, 1917, Box 57, Folder 1, John J. Cornwell Papers; A.W. Paull, Secretary and General Manager, Wheeling Stamping Company to Governor John J. Cornwell, December 15, 1917, Box 57, Folder 2, A&M 952, West Virginia and Regional History Collection, Morgantown, West Virginia (hereafter WVRHC).

<sup>28</sup> For more detailed coverage of the anti-communist network and a persuasive argument stressing the inherent role played by the FBI, see Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anti-Communism in the United States* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Thomas McK. Hearne, "In re: John Schmelgeski, Suspected Espionage-Wheeling, West Virginia," May 23, 1918, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-1921, "John Schemelgeski," #207754, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (2 August, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Hearne, "In re: John Schmelgeski-Wheeling" May 27 and 28, 1918, BI Case Files, Olds German Files, Schemelgeski #207754, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com. Some of the difficulty may stem from the fact that Schemelgeski's son (John) born in 1893 was also a steelworker at the Riverside. See Jan Smigielski, 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, West Virginia, Ward 8, Roll T624\_1692, Enumeration District 0117, RG 29-Records

Company informants were particularly concerned with rooting out pro-German support among the immigrants. Later, Hearne investigated Robert Stolz, who according to Deputy Sheriff Paul Juerczak stated emphatically on the streetcar that “Paul, Germany is going to rule this country.” Another immigrant Thomas Telpa confirmed Stolz’s pro-German sympathies, stating that while talking at the corner of 44<sup>th</sup> and Wood Streets near the Polish-American Political Club, Stolz stressed the superiority of the Kaiser and argued that local immigrants were “fools to take out Liberty Bonds; that the money goes into the pockets of the rich man” and not to worry because “the Dutch [Germans] are going to lick the world.”<sup>31</sup> Most investigations showed how fearful agents were of any potentially disloyal statements. A case in point was the arrest of a Slavic couple, George and Zefia Gregofsko after they cursed the U.S. and President Wilson “for killing their people.” Both were German-Poles, but their case also shows the overzealousness of local officials. After Agent Wilson spoke with fellow Polish acquaintances Alex Krew and William Lovonduski, and even General Manager Koch of the Hitchman Coal & Coke Company, he learned that the two “defendants are good, quiet, respectable people” and George Gregofsko was a “steady worker.”<sup>32</sup> The general manager spoke of George as an “industrious fellow, and has been a leader among the miners in promoting the sale of Liberty Bonds, and in contributing to the Red Cross.” It seems that the complaints came from another immigrant Peter Macekevich, with whom the couple had a quarrel, and it appeared Macekevich was using the overzealous surveillance apparatus “to get even with them.” A similar case occurred in Benwood in September 1918 among Romanian immigrants, when the case against

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of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reproduced via Ancestry.com (18 August 2013); *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1921), 1121.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas McK. Hearne, “In re: Robert Stolz, Espionage-Wheeling, West Virginia,” October 12, 1918, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-1921, “Robert Stolz,” #304366, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (2 August 2011).

<sup>32</sup> John B. Wilson, “In re: George Gregofsko and Zefia Gregofsko, Alleged Violation of the Espionage Act,” May 31, 1918, Bureau of Investigation Cases Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, #208014, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (12 August 2011).

Andy Mark was dropped after the Bureau agents discovered that those charges came from a Stan Mion, who “admitted he had never liked Mark” and that most of his charges were false.<sup>33</sup>

The role of Paul Jurczak suggests the divided nature of the Polish community during the war. Appointed as a deputy sheriff to assist the Bureau, Jurczak was actually a laborer and helper at the National Tube Company in Benwood. Born in 1881 in Austria-Poland, Jurczak immigrated to America in 1900, and naturalized in 1908. While he rented a home at 4401 Wetzel Street, during the war he apparently lived in a boardinghouse near the mill to be able to report on any unpatriotic speeches by his countrymen.<sup>34</sup> For example, Jurczak arrested Konstanty Lapinski for “alleged disloyal remarks” on August 3, 1918. Upon review of Jurczak and D.W. Sieroski, recruiting officer for the Polish Army in France, it appears Lapinski accosted a recruit, John Pawelczak in front of the Polish Hall in South Wheeling. Arriving to drive the recruiting officer around in his automobile, Lapinski called them several “unpleasant names” and told Pawelczak to “put him [Sieroski] in a wheelbarrow and wheel him into the river.” Lapinski also remarked angrily before he enlisted in any Army “he would kill three.” Lapinski, who had only a personal vendetta against Sieroski, made this speech in the presence of several notable Polish men in the community, including Wojciech Swiader, J. Klaczsrooski, and A. Jawanski. Swiader immigrated in 1907 at age seventeen. Upon arriving in Wheeling, he quickly rose to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid; Austin V. Wood, “In re: Andy Mark, Registration Matter,” September 16, 1918, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, “Andy Mark,” #8000-290725, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (12 August 2011); for similar statements by an angry Italian coal miner at the Hitchman mines who would rather “suffer having his head cut off before he would buy” another set of Liberty Bonds, see Thomas McK. Hearne, “In re: Vincenzo Madonna, Disloyalty,” August 24, 1918, Bureau of Investigation Cases Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, Vincenzo Madonna, #269280, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (12 August 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Paul Jurczak, WWI Draft Registration Card, Registration Roll #1993025, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, NARA microfilm M1509, accessed via Ancestry.com (25 July 2013); 1920 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, West Virginia, Wheeling, Ward 8, Enumeration District 109, Roll T625\_1967, Page 18A, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., accessed via Ancestry.com (26 July 2013); *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1915-1916* (W.L. Polk & Co., 1915), 361; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1918), 359; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., 1922), 676; Austin V. Wood, “In re: Registration Matters,” January 6, 1919, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, M1085, Old German Files, 1909-21, Case “Various,” #8000-3657, Page 67 (25 July 2013), RG 65, NA, Fold3.com.

become an electrician for the Pullman Company and later a shop foreman. On the other hand, Lapinski had arrived only a few years before and was an unskilled mill hand. While the other men's backgrounds are unknown, it seems that Lapinski held personal animosities against those skilled blue collar and middle class Poles in the neighborhood and their patriotism.<sup>35</sup>

Even with the overzealousness of Bureau and state officials, some Poles in the community did harbor critical views of America and even "pro-German" sympathies. This was seen in the months following the first draft call. Under the Selective Service Act of 1917 all males 21-30 and aliens who had taken out their first papers had to report to their local draft boards. In preparation of the June 5, 1917 call, Bureau agents and concerned citizens worried most about the city's working class immigrant neighborhoods. Here, thousands of alien men and boys roamed the streets, crowded into dark pool halls, purchased firearms at a seemingly higher rate, and were already suspect in their many violations of the Yost Prohibition Law.<sup>36</sup>

Draft enforcement divided immigrant communities as well. While many followed Fr. Musial and other middle class leaders' support for registering and buying war bonds, others sought a different political response. Shemek Wnuck was born in October 1889 in Niezdow, Russian-Poland. Immigrating sometime in his teens, by 1917 he was working as an unskilled laborer at the Belmont Mill. Unlike those Poles who patriotically joined the American Expeditionary Force or Haller's Polish Army, when he registered on June 5, 1917, Wnuck must

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<sup>35</sup> Tomas McK. Hearne, "In re: Konstanty Latinski, Disloyalty," August 5, 8, 10, 1918, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, M1085, Old German Files, 1909-21, Case "Konstanty Latinski," #255735, Roll #699, Page 1-3, RG 65, NA, Fold3.com (23 September 2013); for information on Wojciech Swiader, see 1920 Manuscript Census, Ohio County, West Virginia, Wheeling, Ward 8, Enumeration District 109, Roll T625\_1967, Page 14A; Albert Swiader, WWI Draft Registration Card, #708, Roll #1993025, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, NARA microfilm M1509, accessed via Ancestry.com (11 October 2013); *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922*, 738.

<sup>36</sup> Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*, 26-32; John B. Wilson, "In Re. Sale of fire arms to foreigners," March 29, 1917, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, M1085, Old German Files, 1909-21, Case "Various," #8000-3657 (25 July 2013), Record Group 65, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Archives, College Park, MD, accessed through Fold3.com digitized archive of the microfilm roles of the Bureau's Old German Files, (hereafter cited as RG 65, NA, Fold3.com).



have requested an exemption from the Ohio County Draft Board. However, when the time came to report, he evaded the meeting. After some investigating, special agent John B. Wilson informed the Bureau that Wnuck had disappeared.<sup>37</sup> Wilson had the same difficulty in locating John Mozodewska, who also filed for an exemption. After going to his address at 146 National Road across from the Wheeling Mold & Foundry, Wilson learned he had moved several times, and was believed to be in Philadelphia. Like Wnuck, Mozodewsza was also a Russian-Pole in his mid-twenties, who only recently arrived in America. Both unskilled workers, they epitomized those immigrants who constantly moved around the country, and did not support the pro-war stance of community leaders.<sup>38</sup>

There were many Slavic immigrants who tried to evade the draft in differing ways. Joseph Delenski was caught by authorities in a pool room in Braddock, PA, where he claimed he had went for work two weeks prior. In July 1918, John Socoloski, age 42, was picked up by officers on 47<sup>th</sup> Street, after evading military service for months. Some men pleaded their case for an exemption. Peter Knjezcich choked up with tears before the Marshall County draft board in August 1917. Desiring an exemption, Knjezcich stated “I’d rather be shot right here than be sent to the old country to fight.” Of Austrian birth, he then had to prove his sympathies were not with the Austro-Hungarian or German Empires, before the board reluctantly gave him the exemption form. The case of Mike Szembowski suggests how coercive authorities could be

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<sup>37</sup> Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 171-94; Shemek Wnuck, WWI Draft Registration Card, Registration Roll #1993026, United States Selective service System, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., microfilm M1509, accessed via Ancestry.com (25 July 2013); John B. Wilson, “In re: List of men failing to report to City of Wheeling Exemption Board for examination,” August 28, 1917, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, Old German Files, 1909-21, “Various,” #202600-50, microfilm M1085, RG65, NA, Fold3.com (2 August 2011).

<sup>38</sup> John B. Wilson, “In re: List of men failing to report to City of Wheeling Exemption Board for examination,” August 28, 1917, “Jon Mozodewsza, Order #336, Serial 1622, page 25, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, Old German Files, 1909-21, “Various,” #202600-50, microfilm M1085, RG65, NA, Fold3.com (2 August 2011); John Mozodewsza, WWI Draft Registration Card, Registration Roll #1992866, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, NARA microfilm M1509, accessed via Ancestry.com (25 July 2013).

toward “pro-German” sentiments. On June 5, 1917, registration day, he bragged loudly that he did not intend to register. Soon thereafter, county deputies arrested Szembowski and sent him to the county jail. While there, patriotic and “husky prisoners . . . secured an American flag and at the evening drill forced Mike to parade about the corridor” with Old Glory on his shoulder. He was forced to do this over several nights. As a result, Szembowski learned that there “are worse things than registering,” and he asked to fulfill his patriotic duty soon after.<sup>39</sup>

While draft resistance and evasion involved native-born citizens as well, in the mill district it appeared like a uniquely immigrant problem. During the second call for 600 drafted men in Wheeling in September 1917, about 20% never reported to the local draft boards and 43% claimed an exemption. To “promote” civic obligation, the *Wheeling Register* printed all the names and draft numbers of men who were supposed to appear. Of fourteen distinctively Polish names listed, seven claimed an exemption as “aliens” and four failed to report. During the same examination, Benwood’s draft board noted that fourteen immigrants failed to report, all of whom it appears were coal miners at the Hitchman Coal & Coke Company, but had since left for other coal fields.<sup>40</sup> By January 1918, Benwood’s draft board published a list of sixty “missing registrants” in the *Benwood Enterpriser*. Almost all were Croatian, Polish, and Slovak immigrants from North Benwood and other immigrant boardinghouses near Boggs Run and near

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<sup>39</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, August 12, 1917, 45; *Benwood Enterpriser*, August 16, 1917, 2; *Wheeling Register*, July 14, 1918, 3; June 7, 1917.

<sup>40</sup> *Wheeling Register*, September 12, 1917, 4; of the fourteen, four failed to report, 2 were rejected, seven claimed an exemption as aliens, and one more claimed an exemption for his wife and children; *Wheeling Register*, September 21, 1917, 2. Later in the month, the city draft board refused exemptions made by 31 men, 7 of whom were Poles from South Wheeling, see *Wheeling Register*, September 25, 1917, 10. It should be noted that Poles were not the most recognizable immigrant group in Wheeling that refused to report to the draft boards. In October of 1917, the board listed forty-eight men as deserters, of which sixteen were Greeks living in the “coffeehouse district” of Center Wheeling, *Wheeling Register*, October 5, 1917, 7.

the large steel mills along Marshall and Main Streets. As mentioned earlier, Peter Knjezcich of 301 Marshall Street still had failed to report even after requesting an exemption.<sup>41</sup>

Even with these cases of suspected disloyalty, most of Wheeling's Poles vigorously supported the American war effort. They registered for the draft in high numbers and contributed more in war bonds than many other immigrant groups in the city. However, their pro-American expressions gave them the space politically to support their multiple identities as Poles and Catholics. Ordinary Poles fought for these shared identities in both the secular and sacred aspects of their everyday lives. The recruitment for the Polish Army in France reflected this secular side, while religious processions, and related Catholic events represented the sacred.

Thousands of Polish immigrants fought in the last months of World War I on the Western Front. Organized through the Polish Falcons and with help from the French government, what became known as Haller's Army gave Polish men another avenue to show their dual patriotism to America and the revival of their homeland. Wheeling served as a recruiting center for the Polish Army, drawing men from the Upper Ohio Valley. Support for the Fatherland, according to the Wheeling Polish veterans after the war, was the primary motivation. Working to maintain Polish society and cultural heritage, thousands of Polish men heeded the call to serve. After the war, Polish veteran societies expressed the views of those who participated on the fields of France, Poland, and the Ukraine in helping make Poland a free nation again. Polish veterans in Wheeling in particular noted the inspiration they got in their adopted nation from the legacy of George Washington, and the support of President Woodrow Wilson for a Polish state.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, January 17, 1918, 2.

<sup>42</sup> "Placówka Nr. 82 Hallerczyków w Wheeling, W.Va.," in *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiała, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Króla, Wheeling, W.Va.* (Wheeling, WV, 1926), 65, 67, in *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus, Wheeling, WV (1902-1995)*, DWC; for general background on Haller's Polish Army, see Stanley R. Pliska, "The 'Polish-American Army' 1917-1921," 10, no. 2 *The Polish Review* 10, no.2 (1965): 46-59. It must be noted that Polish-Americans in Haller's Army also participated in atrocities against Jews and Ukrainians while fighting abroad.

Many Polish men in Haller's Army continued the fight against the Bolsheviks. Allied leaders at the Versailles Peace Conference used Haller's Army in the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920 on Poland's Eastern border and into the Ukraine. The army was heralded for its success in repulsing and halting the Bolshevik advance on the Eastern Front, a source of pride for many veterans once they returned to America. Like the patriotic fervor that inspired the creation of chapters of the American Legion following the war, Polish Army veterans formed various chapters of the Polish Army Veterans Association (PAVA). Their goal, as stated by Wheeling's PAVA, No. 82 in 1926 was to "maintain the Polish soul and to take an active part in celebrating" their achievements and providing mutual assistance when veterans are sick and unable to work.<sup>43</sup>

Most of the "*Hallerczy Boys*" who volunteered for service in the Polish Army shared similar characteristics. Most came from the Russian partition, and were only in America for a few years. Two of the leaders of the Wheeling's PAVA chapter No. 82 suggest these similar backgrounds. Jan Mirosław was born in 1890 in Wojciechow, arriving in America aboard the *S.S. George Washington* on September 21, 1912. Władysław Zdanowicz was born in 1888 in Plock and arrived in the 1910's finding work at the National Tube Company's pipe mill.<sup>44</sup>

Many federal and state officials worried about the intentions of the Poles. This was especially true when Lieutenant Steffen Hoffman arrived in Wheeling to set up a recruiting station for the Polish Army in November 1917. Hoffman caused some sensations early on when

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<sup>43</sup> "Placówka Nr. 82 Hallerczyków w Wheeling, W.Va.," 65, 67, 69; Teofil Lachowicz, *Polish Freedom Fighters on American Soil: Polish Veterans in America from the Revolutionary War to 1939* (Minneapolis: Two Harbors Press, 2011), 183-85.

<sup>44</sup> For their background, see Volume 42, page 362, Form A; Volume 62, page 441, Form C, in *Haller's Army Index*, Database, Polish Genealogical Society of America, 2009, <http://pgsa.org/haller.php>, accessed (27 November 2013); Jan Mirosław in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 database, arrival September 21, 1912, New York, New York; Microfilm Serial T715, roll 1944, Page 169, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, Microfilm publication, RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Władysław Zdanowicz, WWI Draft Registration Card, Registration Roll #1993026, United States Selective Service System, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., microfilm M1509, all available via Ancestry.com (21 November 2013).

he stated “I am a former officer of the German army, fighting against Germany.” In his Polish uniform, he set up his headquarters at the Polish Hall at 4414 Wood Street and began recruiting Polish men in Wheeling, Benwood, and Eastern Ohio.<sup>45</sup>

Immediately the War Department and Bureau of Investigation desired to make sure Hoffman was not potentially a German army spy. A. Bruce Bielaski, Chief of the Bureau of Investigation asked John B. Wilson to check Hoffman’s credentials, citizenship history, and political connections. Shortly after arriving, Hoffman successfully recruited twelve Poles to go to the training station in Canada.<sup>46</sup> Problems stemmed from the bureaucratic mess created by the Polish Army itself and activist recruiters like Hoffman. Based on the terms set by the Selective Service Act, General Enoch Crowder of the War Department ruled that there would be no problem enrolling men under 21 or over 30 years of age. For draft age men, the Polish army recruiters could only seek Polish immigrants termed enemy aliens (i.e., German-Poles) or those “in deferred or exempted classes,” such as Russian-Poles who were subjects of an Allied state, Russia. All Poles posed a unique problem since all were technically aliens of the German, Russian, or Austro-Hungarian Empires. This was a major issue for the War Department and local draft boards in Wheeling. After November 6, 1917, all German alien men fourteen and older had to register, later along with those of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These men would have to present photographs of themselves and be finger-printed. With large numbers coming from the German and Austrian partitions, state sovereignty over these Poles’ sovereign technically made them an enemy alien. However, it appears that Wheeling’s local draft boards endeavored to make a distinction between those of German and Austrian ethnic stock, and Poles

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<sup>45</sup> *Wheeling Register*, November 15, 1917, 5; *Wheeling Daily News*, November 15, 1917, 13.

<sup>46</sup> A. Bruce Bielaski to John B. Wilson, Wheeling, November 26, 1917 “In re: Steffen Hoffman,” Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, Old German Files, 1909-21, #97142, page 4, microfilm M1085, RG 65, NA, Fold3.com (13 July 2013).

and other nationalities from the respective empires.<sup>47</sup> Governor Cornwell inquired with Crowder about whether Hoffman could transport Polish draftees at Wheeling to the Polish Army camp at Niagara on Lake Ontario. In November Crowder informed him he could not, awaiting word on the legal issues tied up with the recruitment itself. Also, Cornwell inquired whether it was proper for Poles to claim exemptions as aliens in order to join the Polish Army. Hoffman did have to prove on several occasions that he was a legitimate officer of the Military Commission Recruiting for the Polish Army in France under Alexander Znaniecke of Pittsburgh.<sup>48</sup>

Polish men from the Upper Ohio Valley signed up for service with Hoffman through February 1918. These men won the praise of much of the South Side immigrant community. The first group of eighteen recruits left for Canada on December 12, 1917, to a rousing send-off by Polish citizens and the Polish and Slovak bands. The volunteers along with their families participated in a mass at St. Ladislaus, led by Fr. Musial, followed by a dinner at the Polish Club. Following several stirring speeches, the men left by train after receiving a carton of cigarettes, fruit, and other “goodies” from the Poles of Wheeling. In later recruitment celebrations, Polish priests from nearby parishes attended, and the Polish recruits received supplies from Wheeling’s Polish Woman’s Association. In total, 150 Polish men joined to fight in Haller’s Army, with fifty-six coming from Wheeling alone, and the rest from the other nearby mill towns. A.W.

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<sup>47</sup> Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You*, 188; for coverage of the process of German and Austrian “enemy aliens” registering in Wheeling, see *Wheeling Register*, December 8, 1917, 9. The declaration greatly affected the Croatian, Hungarian, and Slovak populations of Benwood, where it was estimated that at least 1,200 live. This created a problem for loyal immigrants whose original sovereign had been the Austro-Hungarian Empire. All coal mines and steel mills engaged in government contracts had to immediately bar from employment anyone from this background. The only outlet was for hundreds of men and women to try and fill out naturalization applications; however, these were being held up locally during the war years. For more information on this crisis, see *Wheeling Register*, December 8, 1917, 11; January 17, 1918, 5; January 19, 1918, 10; February 4, 1918, 10; February 7, 1918, 4.

<sup>48</sup> For the best scholarly treatment of the confusion created by the recruitment for Haller’s Army, see Joseph T. Hapak, “Selective Service and Polish Army Recruitment during World War I,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 41-3; Telegram of Governor John J. Cornwell, November 21, 1917; John B. Wilson, “In re: Steffen Hoffman, Recruiting Poles for French Army,” December 2, 1917, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, Old German Files, 1909-21, #97142, page 6, 9, microfilm M1085, RG 65, NA, Fold3.com (13 July 2013).

Cleahoff, a Pole from Martins Ferry summed up the sentiments of the men joining Haller's Army: "no nation can live in peace as long as German autocracy and militarism exists."<sup>49</sup>

Polish men registered for the Selective Service drafts in high numbers as well. Bishop Patrick Donahue spoke often of the importance of the draft and wartime patriotism throughout the state. At the graduation ceremonies at Mount de Chantal on June 6, 1917, a day after the first mass registration, Donahue noted "the registration of millions of young men, who went to these offices like men, like patriots and caused their names to be inscribed as possible defenders of this republic." Donahue spoke of the problems faced by many residents of the area who because of their foreign roots their "heads and hearts are in conflict." Acknowledging that many now found themselves fighting against those empires in which they had been subjects in Europe, Donahue said even those who "have love and affection for that land for which he drew the breath of life and in which his forefathers, for generations back, lived and died," he knew now that the region's foreign-born communities would now "cling to the land of their adoption and fight to the last breath for the 'Stars and Stripes.'"<sup>50</sup>

Following the first draft call on June 5, the men going off to military training camps in Virginia looked like the proverbial melting pot. For example, Benwood's contingent in September 1917 included fifty-two men. Only sixteen were native-born, with eleven Italians, ten Croatians, seven Poles, six Slovaks, and two Greeks.<sup>51</sup> While not every person who filed was drafted, the local draft board selected immigrants at a higher rate than native-born men. Many Polish men from Wheeling served abroad. Peter Templin was born in 1896, the son of Polish

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<sup>49</sup> *Wheeling Register*, December 13, 1917, 5; February 26, 1918, 10; February 21, 1918.

<sup>50</sup> "Address of Right Reverend P.J. Donahue to the Graduates of Mount de Chantal," June 6, 1917, Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Speeches and Sermons, Miscellaneous, Series V, Folder #24, Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection, DWC.

<sup>51</sup> These figures are based off a reading of the last names of those inducted as found in the *Benwood Enterpriser*, September 20, 1917, 2; Benwood continued to see many immigrant men participate in the draft and go off to Camp Petersburg or Camp Lee in Virginia. See, *Benwood Enterpriser*, March 28, 1918, 2; April 4, 1918, 2.

immigrants living in South Wheeling. Filing on June 5, Templin eventually rose to the rank of sergeant in Battery F, 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. Battery F was known by officers as the “motley crew of Mountaineers from West Virginia.” Almost a dozen men in Battery F were from Benwood. This contingent was the proverbial melting pot. Sergeant Templin (Polish) was joined by Privates Steve Bankovich (Croatian), Michael Brazdovich (Slovak), Michele Campagnia (Italian), Andrew Hlaszko (Slovak), and Alex Habak (Ukrainian). Other batteries in the unit had Polish immigrants, especially Battery C with 84 men from Wheeling and Ohio County. William Wodiske was a coal miner at the Hitchman Coal & Coke Company. Like Templin, he rose to the rank of corporal in Battery C. Another was Konstantz Vendlinski, a Russian Pole, who after his wartime service filed his military naturalization papers. As noted by cultural historian Richard Slotkin, the shared camaraderie and mixing of various nationalities provided an excellent place for assimilation in creating a mobilized, multi-ethnic army of “Yanks.”<sup>52</sup>

These units were part of the 80<sup>th</sup> Division of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), and the whole division, especially the 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, had men from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and mainly West Virginia. The men of this division were known for being overly aggressive, even during their training at Camp Lee, Virginia. Seeing much action early on, they

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<sup>52</sup> Konstantz Vendlinski, Military Petition for Naturalization, April 11, 1919, Washington, D.C., No. 3172, Military Petitions for Naturalization, 1918-1924, ARC #6051621, RG 21, Records of the District Courts of the United States, NARA, Washington, D.C., via Ancestry.com (28 November 2013); Peter Templin, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll T625\_1967, page 18B, image 331; Peter Templin, WWI Draft Registration Card, No. 24, Union Precinct, Marshall County, West Virginia, Roll 1992732, United States, Selective Service System, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, M1509, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., via Ancestry.com (24 November 2013). For background on the men of Battery F, information was gathered using *United States Selective Service System World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, M1509, Ohio county, West Virginia, Roll 1993024), via Ancestry.com. For the 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, see the compilation and historical work done by Linda Cunningham Fluharty, “History of 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery,” and “Memories of Battery F” available at <http://www.wygenweb.org/marshall/314/314th.htm>. Slotkin examines the men of the AEF’s 77<sup>th</sup> Division, known as the “Melting Pot” of immigrants New York City. He argues these men were “politicized by their experience, which would contribute to their emergence in the 1930’s as pillars of the New Deal coalition.” See, Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 3-4, quote on 10.



earned the motto “The 80<sup>th</sup> Division Moves only Forward.” The artillery batteries of the division boasted more days of straight combat engagement than any other batteries in the AEF. They were part of the mass offensives at St. Mihiel (September 12-15, 1918), and even more so during the crucial Meuse-Argonne campaign (September 26-November 11, 1918). During that later effort, the men serving in these artillery units reached many of their preset objectives quite quickly. The use of mobile infantry and artillery attacks worked well for small penetrations, but often led to men being exposed to swift German counterattacks. The 314<sup>th</sup> experienced heavy fighting in late October into early November 1918. On October 29, they executed a harassing fire, which was met by stiff artillery fire from the Germans. In the exchange, Corporal Wodiske was wounded. Several days later, the 314<sup>th</sup> was ordered to make an attack at 5:30am on November 1. The unit’s first battalion delivered a gas attack followed by zone fire; the second battalion, of which Sergeant Templin and Private Habak’s Battery F was a part, took a position to the north of the rest the night before to provide supporting fire against German machine-gun nests. The morning of the attack saw a heavy mist cover the field. When it lifted, the men of Second Battalion were too close to the German machine guns. Three were killed, and seventeen were wounded, including Sergeant Templin. The day’s attack was successful, as several hundred German prisoners were taken. Both Wodiskie and Templin survived their wounds. Upon returning to South Wheeling, Templin got work as a butcher for the Wenzel Packing Company.<sup>53</sup>

### **Catholic Americanism**

The second area that allowed for the Poles to affirm their loyalty was via the Catholic Church. During the Progressive Era, the Irish Catholic hierarchy sought to utilize the Catholic

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<sup>53</sup> For the 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, see Fluharty, “History of 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery,” and “War Diary, 314<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery,” available at <http://www.wygenweb.org/marshall/314/314th.htm> and <http://www.wygenweb.org/marshall/314/314-diary.txt>; for the 314th Artillery’s role in the late 1918 campaigns, see Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys: The Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 3-4, 43-4; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 202-5.

Church and individual parishes as a bridge between the sacred and the secular. Previous historians viewed this trend as part of the Church's efforts to protect its membership against both threats from Protestant reform movements and the "100 Percent Americanization" campaigns of World War I and thereafter. The Church feared not only Americanization, but also the effort to convert Catholics to Protestantism. However, newer scholarship has focused on the inherent connections between Catholic parishes and lay societies and their more political goals.<sup>54</sup> The Catholic hierarchy promoted a variety of issues, ranging from better wages and conditions for workers, to bond issues, public utility laws, and local political concerns. By 1917, the American Catholic Church saw that it could advocate for viable and necessary change. Following the principles of "subsidiarity" laid out in the Catholic social teachings of *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Catholic bishops and priests organized on both the parish and diocesan level to carve out a larger political sphere for ethnic Catholics during the 1910's and 1920's.

The Irish spearheaded this social movement, but immigrant parishes, clergy, and laypeople became engaged within their local ethnic communities. Without a strong voice from political machines, ethnic Catholics utilized parish and later diocesan lay societies. Historian Evelyn Sterne argues that these groups utilized "the diocesan press as a mouthpiece, religious parades as statements, and Catholic doctrine as justification" for promoting the full rights of citizenship for ethnic Catholics.<sup>55</sup> These parish societies provide social historians with tools to analyze the meaning and significance of this ethnic Catholic social movement.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Even to the present-day, John Higham's study of the general anti-Catholic ideology of the nativist movement of the 1910's and 1920's dominates this historiographical position; see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 175-82, Ch.9. For the ethnic Catholic perspective of this trend, see Paula Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), Ch.5.

<sup>55</sup> Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 141.

<sup>56</sup> While Sterne's book provides a great starting point for understanding the "hidden transcripts" of ethnic Catholic resistance and protest during the Progressive Era and World War I in Providence, social historians have followed aspects of resistance by various "dominated" minorities. See especially Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

This effort to “Catholicize” American society met its greatest threat and best hope for expansion during World War I. As the nation met the war needs in industrial production, the American Catholic Church and its various social arms sought to promote what Paula Kane refers to as “separatist integration.” Catholics integrated more into American society while seeking to maintain their distinctiveness. This mentality usually manifested itself among the ethnic parishes. While “new immigrants” were under constant attack from the Wilson Administration, labor leaders, and others for their “hyphenated” loyalty, the Irish-dominated hierarchy promoted larger organizational programs that protected these newcomers from being labeled subversives.<sup>57</sup> Taking their lead after the creation of the National Catholic War Council (NCWC) in April 1917, the Catholic hierarchy asked Catholics to “fight like heroes and pray like saints” while also urging individual parishes to form war committees. The dominant belief was that “the parish is the supreme testing place for the length and breadth and depth of Catholic patriotism.”<sup>58</sup> The members of these groups canvassed the community to promote the purchase of Liberty Bonds, donations of food, and various fund-raising drives. These local branches of the NCWC are significant, for they solicited support and unity between the diocesan clubs and societies (i.e., Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Holy Name Society, etc.) with the ethnic parish societies (i.e., St. Ladislaus society, Polish National Alliance, Polish Roman Catholic Union, etc.). For the Wheeling Diocese, the NCWC also worked to promote the actions of those men serving in the armed services to undercut anti-Catholic attacks during the war.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kane, *Separatism and Subculture*, 3; James R. Barrett and David Roediger, “The Irish and the ‘Americanization’ of the ‘New Immigrants’ in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Summer 2005): 5-7.

<sup>58</sup> Evelyn Sterne quotes the specific quotations from the NCWC Handbook in *Ballots and Bibles*, 159; also see Michael Williams, *American Catholics in the War: The National Catholic War Council, 1917-1921* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 219-228.

<sup>59</sup> Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 158-61; Reverend Henry T. Drumgoole, Chairman of Committee on Historical Record of Catholic War Activities to Rev. Edward E. Weber, Chancellor, Wheeling, July 18, 1918, Records of the

The mobilization of a vibrant Catholic social movement during World War I provided the main context within which the Polish Catholics and their Slavic brethren worked together in their parishes and with the distinctively “Hibernian” societies promoted by Bishop Patrick Donahue and the editors of the Catholic *Church Calendar*. With the growth and expansion of the ecclesiastical and social arms of St. Ladislaus parish, the community could finally expand its influence throughout greater South Wheeling. This led the Poles to work with the many Irish, Germans, Croats, and Ukrainians of South Wheeling and Benwood, who shared many common goals with the Poles. It also required the formation of Irish-style lay societies, which came under the control of Bishop Donahue and the Cathedral, but also allowed for better organization. Irish and Polish Catholics used wartime patriotism and “civic nationalism” in order to reinforce their own legitimacy. After 1918, Wheeling became a dominant Catholic center in the region with a broad coalition of support from Irish and German Catholics and the “new immigrants.”<sup>60</sup> Even before America’s entry abroad, the diocese made efforts to forge this coalition. In February 1917, the largely Slavic St. John’s parish witnessed a proliferation of Irish-American Catholicism with the formation of a Holy Name Society and addresses by the local Knights of Columbus. The latter “exhorted all young men if they wished to prosper in their lives as well materially as spiritually” to seek out the Catholic solidarity provided by the Knights.<sup>61</sup>

These Irish-dominated institutions sought to unite Slavic and non-Slavic immigrants. However, the diocese also emphasized the need for “absolute loyalty to the flag [and] our

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Chancery—Chancellor’s Office, Administrative Records-General Correspondence Files, Box 23, Folder 3, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (hereafter DWC).

<sup>60</sup> Jay Dolan highlights how Progressive Era ethnic Catholic nationalism most often benefited the needs of the Irish and German immigrants. The Poles often protested during the early twentieth-century for more power and control by getting more Polish bishops appointed. He argues this form of “pluralistic” or “cultural nationalism” largely failed. This viewpoint obscures the efforts by ethnic Catholics to gain any sort of autonomy within locally Irish and German controlled dioceses as I have found in Wheeling; Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 294-303.

<sup>61</sup> *Church Calendar*, March 1917.

sympathy should not be circumscribed by territorial lines,” to prevent any sort of radicalism that might undermine the Church’s broader efforts. The Knights of Columbus, the Women’s Catholic League, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society met the basic needs of daily life by providing clothing, food, and financial resources in order to prevent the food riots that were occurring in New York City as a result of high wartime consumer prices.<sup>62</sup> Since St. John’s represented different Slavic groups, uniting a broad coalition of working class Slavs with old stock German and Irish laborers aided in presenting these Catholics as moral and patriotic. On April 23, 1917, shortly after declaring war against Germany, the parish’s Irish Kain Club sponsored a day’s worth of “patriotic” dinners and speeches to arouse the passions of the immigrant population behind the “the red, white, and blue.”<sup>63</sup>

The Knights of Columbus also worked to shape the hearts and minds of the youth of St. John’s parochial school. Meeting together in the uptown Market Auditorium on April 13, 1917, over 2,500 ethnic youth listened attentively as Bishop Donahue and other diocesan leaders urged the need for a united patriotism. Following the meeting, the youth, their teachers, and the parish priests marched uptown to display “fourteen American flags to the fourteen parochial schools of the Wheeling District.” Each school chose a young boy or girl, characteristic of other “Liberty Boys” and “Liberty Girls,” to show the cross-ethnic support of the diocese. What is interesting is the composition of these youths, with most possessing Anglo-Gaelic last names. Parishes with mixed ethnicities like St. Vincent and St. Michael’s in Elm Grove, Sacred Heart, Corpus Christi,

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<sup>62</sup> *Church Calendar*, April 1917.

<sup>63</sup> *Church Calendar*, May 1917.

and even St. John's mostly chose to be represented by children of Irish extraction. The most un-American name listed is actually that of St. Ladislaus's Doretty Poeljesqui.<sup>64</sup>

This display of Americanism emphasized the group solidarity of Wheeling's ethnic communities, but it acted as a preemptive strike early in the war to mobilize support behind these immigrants, their children, and the broader social goals of the Wheeling Diocese. The coverage by the *Church Calendar* further reflects that within their religious rhetoric, diocesan leaders like Dr. Charles Wingerter hoped to promote:

True love of country is an act of religion. The duty to live and do, to suffer and die for one's country must be founded on the love of God and on the recognition that God imposes love of country upon us as a sacred duty—a religious duty that binds us even until death in the face of our country's foe . . . God-begotten, God-nurtured patriotism is being taught in the free parochial schools which you represent. The very reason that your Catholic parents single-handed and alone have built these schools was that you might be taught religious as well as secular knowledge . . . They chose America out of all the nations of the earth to be the land of their adoption and their love. All these races will be fused together in this great crisis. They will find as never before a union of heart and soul and purpose.<sup>65</sup>

By linking together the shared benefits of teaching Catholic religion and American history, the diocese protected its parochial schools from attacks against teaching pro-German or other subversive doctrines. The diocese also set the stage for 1920's debates within Wheeling between advocates of parochial schooling and ardent nativists.

St. Ladislaus always promoted a very strict and multicultural education. Beginning with Father Musial as the sole instructor and continuing for decades with the Felician nuns at the helm, the Polish Catholics received an education that could rival that of any Wheeling school. Students spent rigorous hours learning about an array of subjects, but colored by the nationalist

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<sup>64</sup> *Church Calendar*, May 1917; for the proliferation and significance of the parish lay societies at St. John's, see St. John's Parish History in *St. John's Parish History File (Benwood, West Virginia)*, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston archives (DWC).

<sup>65</sup> *Church Calendar*, May 1917. Evelyn Sterne spends considerable time addressing the religious rhetoric of these public displays, as well as their appeal to promote the soundness of a parochial Catholic education, see Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 153-73.

principles promoted by Musial. This included full instruction in Polish language, history, politics, religion, as well as American history, English, and civics. Mary Martinkosky recalled how: “We had Polish and English. English in the morning and the Polish in the afternoon. We [second generation Polish children] could still speak pretty fluently.”<sup>66</sup> Blanche Resczynski also stressed the rigors of this ethnic education: “Also we had geography-English geography in the morning and Polish geography in [the] afternoon. History even your English and your Polish.”<sup>67</sup>

This education encouraged a Polish cultural nationalism while also examining the nature of American life to promote a pluralistic identity via the language of American “civic nationalism.” This rigorous education continued into the 1950’s. The report cards (“*Swiadectwo Miesieczne*”) of Mary Anna Kaczor for the 1934-1935 and 1938-1939 school terms, shows that students were graded on a regular scale each month in twelve subjects-- religion, Polish reading, Polish history, English reading, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, general science, American history, penmanship, Polish grammar, and “attitude.” The report cards were still written in Polish during the New Deal, attesting to the ongoing importance of a Polish ethnic education for subsequent generations.<sup>68</sup>

Through patriotic demonstrations, ethnic Catholics challenged the nativist assumption of “100 Percent Americanism.” Through Holy Name parades, ethnic festivals, May Processions, and other folk practices, the members of the respective communities engaged in ethno-religious celebrations that “promoted a nuanced Americanism through a complex iconography that melded

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<sup>66</sup> Mary Martinkosky, interview by author, Wheeling, WV, August 10, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Blanche Resczynski, interview by the author, Wheeling, WV, August 10, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Anna Kaczor report cards, “*Swiadectwo Miesieczne-Szkola w. Wladyslawa, Wheeling, W.Va.*,” 1934-1935; 1938-1939, Parish History File-*St. Ladislaus Parish-Wheeling, WV (1902-1995)*, DWC; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 166-72.

sacred and secular, old world and new.”<sup>69</sup> Marching from the parish to the parochial school and throughout South Wheeling, these displays highlighted Slavic immigrants’ distinctive “racial” pride. While Protestant observers might disagree, instead focusing on the inherent “separatism” of these working class ethnics from the patriotic currents of American society, these displays of ethnic-religious pride projected a deeply embedded symbolism that these immigrant families saw themselves as constituent members of “many communities.” Displays of their “Polishness” could actively mix with their Catholic faith to promote a more “pluralistic” conception of Americanization. By engaging in a politicized march during the war, these Poles advanced democratic notions that they could be American, as they remained Polish and Catholic.<sup>70</sup>

From these displays in parades, processions, and other forms of popular religious devotion, Wheeling’s Poles actively promoted their many shared loyalties. Figure 6.1 shows the pageantry and symbolism expressed in local community expressions of “Polishness.” Notice in the World War I-era photograph how aspects of ethnic Catholic religious practice, the native Polish language on the placards, and the numerous small American flags mesh easily in a vibrant display of the shared identities of these immigrants and their American-born children.

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<sup>69</sup> Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 148; for an analysis of the importance of the Italian *fiesta*, see Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 6-8.

<sup>70</sup> The author benefits greatly from Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, 132-52; Gary Gerstle outlines the major break within the Americanization historiography that asked how strongly external forces determined the course of Americanization for each immigrant group. This created a dichotomy between views of “coercive Americanization” as seen with groups like the Germans and Austrians, and a more “pluralistic Americanization” promoted through the Catholic hierarchy as well as Slavic immigrants; see Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans:”525-7.



**Figure 6.1: May Procession/ Holy Name Parade, ca. 1917-1918**



*Source:* Sean Duffy and Jim Thornton, *The Wheeling Family: A Celebration of Immigrants and Their Neighborhoods* (Wheeling, WV: Creative Impressions, 2008).

By presenting an activist and pro-American sentiment, the Poles, Ukrainians, Croats, and other Slavic Catholics of South Wheeling and Benwood could at one instance follow the “conservative political impulses” of these forms of pageantry, while also establishing networks and political loyalties that gave them greater autonomy in the 1920’s. Historians like Gary Gerstle note that all Americanizing forces during this era were imbued with a sense of “conformity rather than dissent.” These forces of a pro-capitalist political ideology were rooted in the example of Henry Ford, John Wanamaker, and other icons of the emerging mass consumption culture of the 1920’s.<sup>71</sup> However, while immigrants were emerging members of this new consumerist worldview, historians like Lizabeth Cohen illustrate how the Poles and their Slavic brothers and

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<sup>71</sup> Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 6-8. For an analysis of the changing political economy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century toward a pro-capitalist mass consumer economy, see William Leach, *Lands of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), ch.7, ch.9.

sisters utilized the promises of Americanization to carve out spaces for maintaining a level of control over their religious, social, and business centers.<sup>72</sup>

As working and middle class immigrants maneuvered in the highly charged wartime political climate, their pageantry further reinforced the Diocese's growing autonomy. On June 10, 1917, St. John's Parish sponsored a parade to honor those men joining the army. The highlight of the ceremony was the erection of a sixty-nine foot high "Liberty Pole," whose flag was "donated" by the Knights of Columbus. This was followed by the various Croatian, Slavic, and Hungarian societies marching in uniforms and in military step. The parade ended with a grand spectacle of speeches by Fr. Schoenen, Thomas Garret of the local Holy Name Society, and Dr. A.J. Noome, "who is always on hand when there is a question of a foreigner and this country." In addition, other diocesan and local political leaders participated, as participants sang patriotic pledges in English and various other Slavic languages.<sup>73</sup>

These displays show the levels of negotiation in shaping the appropriate political discourse during a time of crisis. While immigrants appear patriotic in raising the "Liberty Pole," they are able to highlight their ethnic distinctiveness by wearing the dominant dress of their Polish, Croatian, or Hungarian homelands. The *Church Calendar* even mentions how the Croats honored their ethnic pride and wore the uniforms of the "Black Guard," which at the time conjured up similar but unrelated negative feelings toward the "Black Hand," the secret Serbian society responsible for the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. As long as the Croats and the other Eastern European immigrants pledged loyalty, they had a good deal of

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<sup>72</sup>Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 7-15; views on cultural hegemony derive from T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review*, 90, no.3 (June, 1985): 567-593; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Ch. 2-3.

<sup>73</sup> *Church Calendar*, July 1917; *Benwood Enterpriser*, June 21, 1917, 4.

latitude in the presentation.<sup>74</sup> Their use of American republican ideals argued subtly that immigrant loyalties and the Catholic hierarchy were the best exemplars of civic Americanism.<sup>75</sup>

Americanization provided the Church an avenue for entrenching itself within the currents of American life. In September 1917, the diocese formed the Wheeling Chapter of the Catholic War Relief Service to meet the ecclesiastical needs of over 400 Catholic clergy in Europe. Catholics also formed women's committees to make khakis and other necessary goods for the men overseas. Each parish had a branch that worked through the leadership of Bishop Donahue and Rev. Oscar Moye.<sup>76</sup> The diocesan press consistently emphasized the efforts of the diocese's societies in helping the city's needy. Throughout the war, the local Price Interpretation Committee of the Wheeling Food Administration, set the price of local commodities to prevent inflation and any food shortages. Catholics involved in these efforts sought to meet various pastoral and social needs.<sup>77</sup>

Polish immigrants had several goals in adopting a new civic role. While promoting a liberal "pluralistic Americanism," Poles were also intensely nationalistic. They hoped that the war would return a unified Poland to the map of Europe. The Poles espoused their support by helping raise "Liberty Bonds" and also by sending men off to fight. During the Second Liberty Bond campaign in October 1917, the city organized solicitation committees to collect in each ward of the city, as well as among the largest immigrant groups. The Poles contributed \$22,100, which was more than the Greeks, Italians, and Syrians. At the ceremony held at the Market Auditorium the crowd "cheered so loud and vehemently" upon hearing of the large Polish

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<sup>74</sup> *Church Calendar*, July 1917; Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe Before World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 24-83; 67.

<sup>75</sup> John Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia*, 1-4; 16-8; Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, ch.8-9; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, ch.8; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 78-91.

<sup>76</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1917; see Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, ch.7-8 for role of inter-diocesan committees.

<sup>77</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1917; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 4, 1918; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 6, 1918. Specific Catholics are not praised, but many members were probably prominent Catholic (Irish) businessmen and community figures.

contribution from Dr. M. Gaydosh. St. Ladislaus contributed ninety-three soldiers to the war effort, third behind only St. Alphonsus (177) and St. Joseph's Cathedral (166).<sup>78</sup> South Wheeling's Poles and other immigrants also raised large sums of money. While the parish contributed \$300.00 to the Polish Relief Committee, local civic leaders played off the "rivalries" between local ethnic groups showing that the Poles were third behind the Greeks and Italians for money raised.<sup>79</sup> These types of ethnic competitions over Liberty Bond subscriptions were reinforced in Liberty Loan parades, such as that celebrating the third series of loan collections. Benwood's civic organizations and industrial plants were joined in a massive parade in early May 1918 by all the ethnic societies, showing pride in how the city had quadrupled its loan quota. How well this worked as a propaganda tool is hard to say, but it is interesting that immigrant groups came together to prove their loyalty.<sup>80</sup>

St. Ladislaus Church members espoused a strong nationalistic ethos, as they actively campaigned to aid the Polish war effort. In the waning months of the war, local questions over the creation of a Polish Legion sparked various political debates. On April 7, 1918, Wheeling's Southside Poles listened to speakers of the Polish National Alliance at Polish Hall. The principal speaker was Kazimierz Zychlinski, president of the Chicago branch of the P.N.A. (the nation's largest branch). During the meeting, he, along with other speakers from Pittsburgh, informed the gathering of the German atrocities against the European Poles and asked for volunteers for the

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<sup>78</sup> *Wheeling Register*, October 21, 1917, 1; *The Church Calendar*, October 1918. Wheeling organizers followed a similar pattern for the Third Liberty Loan campaign in April 1918. Each major immigrant group's collection efforts were led by central middle class leaders in the ethnic community. For the Poles, the city was divided in half, with Dr. M. Gaydosh of 1106 Market Street taking north of Wheeling Creek, and Fr. Emil Musial organizing the efforts south of the creek, see *Wheeling Register*, April 10, 1918, 14. The 93 men that served from St. Ladislaus was 4<sup>th</sup> overall for the entire West Virginia Diocese, see "Number of Men in Service" by Parishes Reporting, in Records of the Chancery-Chancellor's Office: Administrative Records-General Correspondence Files, Box 23, Folder 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 19, 1917.

<sup>80</sup> *Wheeling Register*, May 1, 1918, 11; May 11, 1918, 12; *Benwood Enterpriser*, May 16, 1918, 2; the *Benwood Enterpriser*, May 2, 1918, 2 lists the organizers for the city's Committee on Foreign Organizations, which included many prominent middle class parishioners from St. John's representing the Czech, Hungarian, Croatian, and Italian contingents in the mill town.

Polish legion. Musial urged support from the community's youth so that "Wheeling will be above all other cities in responding to the call."<sup>81</sup> The local newspapers continued to print articles and editorials praising the efforts of the Polish and other Slavic legions. On June 25, 1918, the newspaper printed a clarification of a previous article to emphasize that this Polish legion would be "autonomous," possessing its "own national flag."<sup>82</sup>

The height of the wartime drive for loyalty occurred during a citywide "Americanization" parade set for July 4, 1918. To include up to 10,000 marchers and mammoth floats and patriotic symbols, the parades' slogan "American Citizenship offers you Freedom, Equality and Opportunities of Progress" suggested that the area's immigrants were the target audience. With a massive float of the "Goddess of Liberty" surrounded by figures representing labor, farmers, transportation, and business, the parade highlighted the need for unity in a time of war. Ethnically, the parade included 1,500 Poles, 300 Syrians, 1,500 Greeks, 500 Italians, and 150 Ukrainians.<sup>83</sup> The parade seemed to attain its goal several days prior to Independence Day when a "Flood of Foreigners" swamped the federal building desiring to fill out naturalization papers.<sup>84</sup>

The parade suggests how wartime Americanization must be viewed from different perspectives. While some of Wheeling's immigrants openly violated the draft laws, other community leaders urged fellow immigrants to participate in parades and fill out their naturalization papers. Governor John Cornwell articulated this 100% Americanism by stressing in his speech that "No man can be truly loyal and patriotic until he becomes one with and of us." During a rally after the parade at the Market Auditorium, immigrants watched a reenactment of a court scene, where seven representative nationalities acted out a scene of filling out their

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<sup>81</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 8, 1918.

<sup>82</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 25, 1918; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 4, 1918.

<sup>83</sup> *Wheeling Register*, June 27, 1918, 9; June 28, 1918, 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Wheeling Register*, July 2, 1918, 2.

naturalization papers.<sup>85</sup> However, others willingly joined in the events that included entire parish communities, as with the Polish, Ukrainian, and Syrian contingents. The merger of religious and political ideals served these groups well in proving their loyalty. In the *Wheeling Intelligencer's* editorial the next day, the foreign population was praised for bringing “themselves into closer touch with the spirit of the entire community and with the ideals of our republic.” But as was the case in many of these hyper-patriotic events, immigrants still maintained their shared loyalties and identities, as the editor noted “More than a dozen different nations, races, and creeds marched shoulder to shoulder, carrying the emblems of their own nationalities, but all with the splendid emblem of the American Republic and of human freedom.” The Poles highlighted their love of liberty and American government clearly by being the first of the foreign-born contingent in the parade. Following the Polish Society was a float with Anna Ronawjcz, a stenographer in the City Clerk’s Office, representing liberty along with Martha Wisniawska.<sup>86</sup>

Following a massive patriotic parade and rally on July 4, 1918, the Poles met at the Polish Club to publicly announce their allegiance to America. Fr. Musial read the drafted resolution to all in attendance. This document serves as yet another textual example of how Wheeling’s Poles reworked the tenets of “civic nationalism” to promote a level of autonomy. The first two paragraphs highlight the rhetorical aspects of freedom and democracy promoted by Wilson in his Fourteen Points that America pledged “herself specifically to restore an independent Polish state, with free access to the sea.”<sup>87</sup> The next section directly addressed the “100 Percent” Americanizers, stating that Poles have “already allied themselves morally and politically with the United States” in the present crisis. With no hints of subversion or disloyalty,

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<sup>85</sup> *Wheeling Register*, July 5, 1918, 11.

<sup>86</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 5, 1918, 4; *Wheeling Register*, July 5, 1918, 11; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, Co., 1917), 568, 724.

<sup>87</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 4, 1918.

the resolution then concluded by stating that all Poles and Polish-Americans exempted from service in the American army would serve in the Polish legion forming in France.<sup>88</sup> In a well constructed resolution, the Poles not only refuted the negative calls of coercive Americanism but argued persuasively for how their loyalty should allow them to serve their homeland abroad.

The growing power of the diocese did not sublimate all of the ethnic tensions. The Irish and German hierarchy continued to have troubles with the ethnic Catholic immigrants. At the November 11, 1917, Holy Name Rally, Fr. Stanislaus Grennen, who was presiding over the ceremonies, urged the immigrant men of the diocese to continue to prove their loyalty. However, of all the churches mentioned, only St. Ladislaus did not have any members listed. Later that month, Bishop Donahue voiced his displeasure at the lack of parish donations to the Knights of Columbus War Fund. In words eerily similar to the debates he had with Musial in the early 1900's, Donahue spoke of how "it would grieve all patriots and Catholics to think that this poor showing [only one half of the \$21,000 quota] is a real index of our charity and our faith." He added: "I do not hesitate to assert that it is binding on the conscience of every Catholic to contribute to this most urgent and sacred cause."<sup>89</sup>

More than most ethnic Catholics, Father Musial asserted his independence from the diocese during the war years. For example, in 1917, when the diocese celebrated its patriotism at the Holy Name rally, Musial and much of his laity celebrated the Forty Hours Devotions in Weirton, joining in the jubilation over the opening of the Polish parochial school at Sacred Heart of Mary. Many Polish clergymen from the state and the Pittsburgh area were present as Musial gave a major address along with Father Michalski of St. Stanislaus Parish in Monongah, West Virginia. Praising the devotion of the Weirton Poles for building the new school, they urged the

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<sup>88</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 5, 1918.

<sup>89</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1917.

crowd to promote an ethnic Catholicism that was patriotic to America. Fr. Michalski also reinforced Polish ethnic pride by accepting appointment as Chaplain to the Polish Legion, which was being recruited in America and Canada for service in the war.<sup>90</sup>

This occasion shows how Musial hoped to expand his and the Poles' influence in the panhandle by promoting a thriving and independent-minded Polish community in Weirton. Musial spoke in the ceremony alongside Mr. Loeb of the Phillips Tin Sheet Company of Weirton to eulogize the magnificent efforts of Fr. Wilzcak and the Sisters of Sacred Heart of Mary, "who were giving their lives of love to bring the Catholic Church of Weirton to that pedestal whereon she never stood before in this town."<sup>91</sup> They spoke of a "boosterism:" "It is a fair assertion to make at this time that if this good work goes on in less than five years the people of Weirton will learn to love the Catholic Church. The town will have churches and schools that any like village may be proud of."<sup>92</sup>

There is mixed symbolism in the juxtaposition of Musial, the Polish crowd, and a representative of the largest employer of these working-class immigrants. One can assume that Musial is aiding the local industrialists, who hope to keep a pliable, cheap labor force happy with better schools and infrastructure. A few months earlier, the *Church Calendar* was happy that "The Company at Weirton is paying such good wages and has such a grand body of capable foreman that men are coming daily to seek positions." A local steelworker emphasized this point even more: "It is not the money that makes us happy . . . it is rather the kindness we receive away (from our dear ones) from the highest officials who make us feel we own the plant every time we happen to meet them."<sup>93</sup> These positive hopes of development brought by the company present

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<sup>90</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1917; *Church Calendar*, June 1918.

<sup>91</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1917.

<sup>92</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1917.

<sup>93</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1917.



some of the early values promoted by the welfare capitalism of the 1920's. During this time, the "enlightened corporation" sought to meet the "moral" and material demands that workers sought from labor unions. The hope was that better wages, company unions, incentives and promotions, paid vacations, and other things would encourage workers to "identify their personal futures with that of the company."<sup>94</sup> Advocating for a sort of corporatism between the immigrants, the Church, and the local industrialists promoted the benefits of an industrial society where all worked together in unison. As a result, it was necessary for the community to possess strong social and religious institutions so workers would feel tied to Weirton. Therefore, Musial and the other Polish Catholics were present to promote the broader goals of ethnic community development that were the core of Musial's philosophy and efforts at St. Ladislaus.<sup>95</sup>

Musial and his ethnic clergymen proffered a version of Americanism that sought to achieve better gains for the Polish community during a time of heightened animosity toward new immigrants. Even so, St. Ladislaus began contributing to the diocesan War Fund of the Knights of Columbus in January 1918, along with Benwood's National Tube Company. While this support for local industrialists stymied socialism, these Polish priests saw their goals as not counter to labor, but counter to atheistic radicalism. Illustrative of this emerging corporatism is how the Sacred Heart of Mary parish continued to cooperate with the Phillips Tin Plate Company "who are most solicitous for the moral, spiritual and social welfare of their many thousands of employees." Even Bishop Donahue urged foreign workingmen to contribute to the cause that American business also aided. In a proclamation issued throughout the fall of 1918, Donahue appealed directly to coal miners urging them to increase production and that now "Coal

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<sup>94</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 161, 174.

<sup>95</sup> *Church Calendar*, December 1917; *75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book, 1911-1986, Sacred Heart of Mary Parish, Weirton, West Virginia*. Sacred Heart of Mary Parish, Weirton, West Virginia Parish History File, DWC; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 27-9; 247-50.

is King! You are his willing subjects.” Urging no strikes, the bishop acknowledged to his multi-ethnic congregants that “Every additional ton will build a fire to burn despotism to ashes. Every car you load helps to hasten the death knell of Kasierism. I therefore earnestly beg you to acquit yourselves like true men and patriots.” Donahue was concerned that “our miners of foreign birth will not have too much scruple” and worked with parish priests and the United Mine Workers of America to reprint his appeal in multiple languages for the state’s immigrant coal diggers. He was the major speaker for the city’s Fourth Liberty Loan campaign in September 1918, and he spoke in glowing terms of the benevolence of the coal companies and the coal miners in Southern West Virginia towns like Williamson, Gary, and Pocahontas where “patriotism is aflame” and miners earn anywhere from \$8-15 a day.<sup>96</sup>

Musial and other ethnic priests increasingly assisted the needy through the organization of branches of the National Catholic War Council (NCWC). In its efforts to organize the diocese’s charitable arms in a more “military” style, the NCWC also gave more power to local Catholic clergy and laity to direct the collecting of charitable assistance in their local communities. Also, in September 1918 came the news that Bishop Donahue appointed Fr. Emil Musial to his Board of Diocesan Consultors. This was a point of great pride for Musial. As the only Slavic clergyman, Musial would possess a larger voice in representing the needs of the Slavic immigrants in Wheeling and throughout the state. What makes his appointment interesting is how both he and Donahue had an often contentious relationship over the years. Starting with the confusion surrounding his appointment, through their quarrels over his use of parish funds, to his opting for a Polish Catholic celebration instead of attending diocesan rallies, Musial asserted considerable independence. His appointment as a Diocesan Consultor speaks

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<sup>96</sup> *Church Calendar*, February 1918; *Church Calendar*, May 1918; for Donahue’s proclamation, see “Bishop Donahue’s Appeal to Coal Miners,” *Wheeling Register*, September 19, 1918, 4; September 22, 1918, 1; “Bishop Urges More Coal,” *United Mine Workers Journal*, October 15, 1918, 5.

volumes about the changing nature of the Catholic hierarchy by 1918, and the growing voice of Polish Catholics in the Mountain State. Donahue's act may have been placating Musial by giving him a higher position that entailed many more duties to the diocese, but the appointment also gave Musial exactly what he needed to advance the goals of the diocese's Poles.<sup>97</sup>

In the months before the end of the war, the Poles and Slavic immigrants of the Wheeling area continued to expand their influence. In early October 1918, Bishop Donahue urged the formation of local councils of the NCWC. St. Ladislaus's Council, led by Musial, consisted of a wide variety of persons within the community. The Chief Organizer was Joseph Rozanski, while the head of "publicity" was John Marchlenski, who owned a small grocery. Frank Templin, an ironworker who appealed to the largely working-class men working at the steel mills, took over as head of the parish's speakers. Moreover, Musial recruited the community's children to promote the war effort. Organized into "Liberty Boys" and "Liberty Girls," they were led respectively by widow Lucy Jannozewska and Felician Sister Filipina. This mixture of people fit with the goals espoused by the Bishop, which required these councils to "inspire" support throughout the city, and to jubilantly "Organize! Organize! Organize!"<sup>98</sup>

The role of parish level and diocesan Americanization adds much to the historiography of the domestic front of World War I. The American Catholic Church provided many avenues for achieving a sense of shared loyalty, but also the desired autonomy. Its institutions allowed Fr. Musial and his laity the ability to advocate for a "pluralistic Americanism" in the face of fears of the "foreign menace." This period also brought together ethnically fragmented groups in the hopes of appealing for broader social and economic changes. A circular distributed by members

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<sup>97</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1918.

<sup>98</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1918; *Church Calendar*, November 1918; also see Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, ch.7 for related efforts of diocesan Americanization by branches of the NCWC. Information on the background of these Polish community members derives from, Manuscript Census Schedules, 1920, Ohio County, WVRHC; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920* (Wheeling, WV: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1920).

of St. John's parish is very illustrative of this point. Entitled "Just American," the patriotic prose flows in such a manner as to promote the growing solidarity felt by such a diverse community:

Just today I chanced to meet/  
Down upon the crowded street/  
One-I wondered whence he came,  
/ What was once his nation's name./  
So I asked him: 'Tell me true,  
/ Are you Pole or Russian Jew,  
/ English, Scotch, Serb, Rumanian,  
/ Flemmish, Belge [sic], Swiss, Moravian,  
/ Dutch or Greek or Scandinavian?'/  
Then he raised his head on high/  
As he gave me THIS reply:  
/ "What I WAS is Naught to me/  
IN this land of LIBERTY!/  
In my soul as man to man/  
I am just-AMERICAN!"<sup>99</sup>

Wheeling's Polish middle class also effectively forged a more united cultural/ ethnic identity during World War I. Polish immigrants were good Americans, good Catholics, and good Poles. This was reflected in the sorts of fraternal organizations and lay societies created after 1918. In January 1919, twenty-four Polish nationals organized the Polish-American Political Club "to be aware of what was happening in American politics." While members gathered on evenings to "chat, read newspapers, and useful books," they also discussed policies and procedures on how best to "take an active part in National matters and the politics of this country" while maintaining ties to Eastern European politics.<sup>100</sup> The Fulton Local 2395 of the Polish National Alliance (PNA) continued these connections between the new world and the old by proudly displaying fine portraits of revolutionary heroes like George Washington, Thaddeus Kosciusko, and Casimir Pulaski, and the nationalist leader of Poland during the 1920's Joseph Pilsudski. Finally, the Benwood Local 2353 of the PNA fully captured the essence of what the World War I experience taught the Poles:

Christopher Columbus gave us an example that we can courageously accomplish these things and not pay attention to anyone's sneering and exist in this New World. The most intelligent will not be discouraged. With determination we will strive for this purpose. We can work for someone and be able to decide if we will work in a factory, in an office,

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<sup>99</sup> *Church Calendar*, October 1918.

<sup>100</sup> "Historia Klubu Polsko-Amerykanskiego Politycznego w Wheeling, W.Va.," [History of the Polish-American Political Club in Wheeling, W.Va.], translated by John Mysliwiec from *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiała, Proboszcza Parafii Św. Władysława Króla, (Wheeling, W.Va, 1926)*, 57 in *Parish History File-Wheeling, WV-St. Ladislaus (1902-1995)*, DWC.

or if we want to work for ourselves. Interestingly in this place we can organize members so that we can foster approval, courage, our Urge for knowledge, and our creative talents.<sup>101</sup>

No Bishop, President, or native could summarize better than this Pole the true essence of the benefits of a pluralistic Americanism.

## **Conclusion**

World War I was also heralded by Wheeling's Poles for bringing to life again the republic of Poland. At a meeting on January 26, 1919, the Polish Hall was adorned with American and Polish flags, as men, women, and children from across the Ohio Valley celebrated "the first free election of the Polish people." Following President Wilson's call, these Poles joyfully could praise their efforts and dual loyalties as they had fought to "defeat imperialism and bring about democracy for their people and the world."<sup>102</sup> These ideals reflected both the culmination and the hope for Wheeling's Poles in the post-war years. Having shown their loyalty to their old and adopted countries, they would now need to address the problems of industrial democracy at home. And as during the war, they would unite with other nationalities and native-born workers to secure their democratic rights in the massive post-war strike wave.

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<sup>101</sup> "Historya Tow. Gwiazda Oswiaty: Grupa 2395 Z.N.P.Z., Fulton, Wheeling, W.Va.," [History of the Educational Star Society: Group 2395 of the Polish National Alliance from Fulton Wheeling, W.Va.], translated by John Mysliwiec from *Pamietnik Uroczystosci Zlotego*, 77; "Historya Towarzystwa Oswiata: Grupa 2353 Zwiastku Nar. Polsk, Benwood, W.Va.," [History of the Education Society: Group 2353 Polish National Alliance, Benwood, W.Va], translated by John Mysliwiec from *Pamietnik Uroczystosci Zlotego*, 71.

<sup>102</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 21, 1919, 5.

## Chapter 7

### “Those so-called Hunkeys are the cleanest union men:” Immigrants Battle the Open Shop in Wheeling, 1918-1924

The First World War both demonstrated the need and gave the opportunity for the labor movement to incorporate Eastern European immigrants. Government support for unions in mass-production workplaces peaked during the war. Increasingly, labor councils looked for union organizers from the diverse ethnic communities to educate blue collar immigrants about the need for unionization. Luckily the Wheeling labor movement had a Polish organizer, Joseph Rozanski, to appeal to the large unskilled Polish and Slavic labor force. Born in 1876 in the German-Polish partition, Rozanski arrived in Pittsburgh in the early 1890's and eventually found work as a plate mill laborer at Wheeling's Belmont Mill. Initially, he struggled like many other Poles in finding regular employment; for 1900, he was out of work for eight months. But, by 1903 he was a catcher at the Belmont Mill, and eventually became a highly skilled heater in the tin mill. Rozanski also became quite active in the local labor movement. Speaking Polish and English, he communicated well with the skilled and unskilled workforces in the mill. A popular figure, by 1906, he was one of the grand marshals for the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly's Labor Day Parade.<sup>1</sup>

As with many leaders in the OVTLA, Rozanski still lived within his ethno-religious culture. Merging union and parish leadership, Rozanski served as a lay leader at St. Ladislaus.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rasanske, 1900 Manuscript Census, Webster District, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0131, Roll 1769, RG 29, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Washington, D.C; Josef Rozanski, New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 database, Arrival July 5, 1893, via S.S. Obdam, Rotterdam to New York, New York, Microfilm Serial: M237, Roll#613, Page 24, Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897, RG 36-Records of the U.S. Customs Service, NARA, Washington, D.C; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1901-1902* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin, 1901), 504; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1903-1904* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1903), 494; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1904-1905* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1904), 543; Jozef Rozanski, World War I Draft Registration Card #5469, Ohio County, West Virginia, Roll 1993025, United States, Selective Service System, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives, Washington, D.C., M1509, via Ancestry.com (1 November 2013); for a photograph of Rozanski leading the Labor Day Parade in 1906, see Evelyn K. Harris and Frank J. Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings: The West Virginia State Federation of Labor, 1903-1957* (Charleston: West Virginia Labor History Publication Fund, 1960), 317.

During the First World War, he was the chief organizer for the Diocesan United War Work campaign. Afterwards, as the Catholic Church sought to unify Catholics against nativistic attacks, he was a lay delegate and organizer among the Poles for Wheeling's District #1 of the National Catholic Welfare Council. Organizing the Men's Council branch utilized his talents of bringing together the Polish men living throughout the city. However, his organizing talents were best used as a leader in Stogie City Lodge #25 of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers. When steelworkers went on strike in 1919 and when Wheeling Steel locked them out in 1921, Rozanski, a "member of the Amalgamated Association for many a long year," was a central figure and go-between for the union and the Polish and other Eastern European immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

New immigrants were among the most willing members of the Amalgamated Association lodges. Throughout Wheeling, immigrant workers organized in what national strike leaders saw as the most peaceful, successful, and longest lasting of the local strikes. Rank-and-file meetings of new steelworkers' lodges cropped up starting in September 1918.<sup>3</sup> Led by Irish and German-American skilled workers from the OVTLA, these new immigrants took active roles in manning picket lines and holding out for union recognition. Why were the organizing attempts in Wheeling so successful so quickly? Clues are in the tight, ethnic networks in South Wheeling's neighborhoods and the early efforts by the OVTLA and local socialists to promote industrial unionism among the working people of Wheeling.<sup>4</sup> Trade unions were in these years the most

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<sup>2</sup> *Church Calendar*, November 1918, 2; Bishop Patrick Donahue, Miscellaneous Correspondence, Box, 1904-1922, Folder #6, Bishop Patrick J. Donahue Collection, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (DWC); *Amalgamated Journal*, January 11, 1923, 11.

<sup>3</sup> The Interchurch World Movement, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike of 1919-Supplementary Reports of the Investigators to the Commission of Inquiry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), 154-5, 170, 167.

<sup>4</sup> Wheeling's labor movement has only been discussed in two major veins of scholarship. During the 1960's and 1970's social history revolution, the OVTLA was viewed as critical to the political and social culture of Wheeling in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, these earlier studies tended to focus on the assembly's limitations and conservative trade unionism. These works noted a "flirtation with socialism," and the Assembly's

effective Americanizing force, because they focused on common problems present in ethnic communities that could only be solved through a working-class led organization.<sup>5</sup>

This multi-ethnic solidarity was visible quite early. In Benwood, organizers made strike demands and news understandable to the immigrant workforce by having foreign speakers present. What is more intriguing is how the union merged elements of “industrial democracy,” socialism, and ethnic culture by having one of their largest mass meetings at the Polish Hall on 45<sup>th</sup> Street. This was the main social hall for the Polish neighborhood and the social functions of St. Ladislaus Catholic parish. For organizers to allow National Secretary William Z. Foster and the editor of the socialist *Wheeling Majority* to speak to an audience of mostly ethnic Catholics shows how Wheeling’s immigrant steelworkers started bridging the gaps between their multiple identities.<sup>6</sup> Even as the strike began to falter elsewhere, Wheeling’s immigrants held strong. At the end of November, a spontaneous street parade of around 3,500 strikers snaked its way from Benwood through Wheeling and back. Steelworkers from all seven Amalgamated lodges in Wheeling, coke and electrical workers, and female can workers participated along with many of

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consistent admonishment of the IWW and direct action. Recently, working class historians have shed new light on the Trade Assembly’s role in beginning to advocate for industrial unionism by the early 1910’s. It made a concerted effort to attract immigrants and women workers. These later works focus on the role of the OVTLA’s main organizers, who were mostly German or Austrian immigrants with strong social democratic tendencies. For the older interpretation, see Frederick Allan Barkey, “The Socialist Party in West Virginia from 1898-1920: A Study in Working Class Radicalism,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1971); David Javersak, “The Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly: The Formative Years, 1882-1915” (Ph.D. Diss., West Virginia University, 1977); for the more recent interpretations, see Lou Martin, “Causes and Consequences of the 1909-1910 Steel Strike in the Wheeling District,” (MA thesis, West Virginia University, 1999); Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930’s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 106-9; William Hal Gorby, “Subcultures in Conflict in *Polonia*: Class, Religion, and Ethnic Tensions in the Formation of Wheeling’s Polish Community, 1895-1917,” *West Virginia History* 4, no 2 (Fall 2010): 1-34.

<sup>5</sup> James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992): 1010-11. Barrett has advanced this earlier analysis to highlight how Irish Americanizers stressed common demands of workers around issues related to the family, working conditions, and Christian ideals (usually Catholic). See, Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multi-Ethnic City* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), ch. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, October 23, 1919, 11.



the strikers' families. Protesting against returning to work under the pre-strike conditions, foreign-born strikers' demanded "Eight hours or nothing."<sup>7</sup>

This chapter will examine how Wheeling's Polish and Eastern European immigrants factored into the local labor struggles during the post-World War I open shop drive led by conservative, hyper-patriotic politicians and businessman. During the war, labor organizers stressed their own version of Americanism, promoting civil liberties, free speech, freedom of religion, and the right to organize. Labor unions saw World War I as a time to rally support for a wider "industrial democracy" among the ethnic working class. Even with these high hopes, this period witnessed coercive campaigns by corporations and state power to repress labor organization.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on the Steel Strike of 1919 and the contest against the new Wheeling Steel Corporation from 1921-1924, this chapter suggests the largely failed efforts once the war was over to develop a long-lasting pan-ethnic working class. Poles became key supporters of the union struggle early and even supported some aspects of labor's version of Americanism, but over time cleavages imposed from without and from within the labor movement broke down solidarity. In the face of stronger political and business forces, unions would again be divided by race and nationality, and disappear from the steel industry for more than a decade.

### **Red Scare**

World War I opened up new opportunities and intense debates in West Virginia and the nation about the nature of labor unions in a political culture increasingly fearful of radicalism.

The "Red Scare" that followed the Bolshevik Revolution infused politics in Charleston and

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<sup>7</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, December 4, 1919, 11.

<sup>8</sup> For the use of "Americanism" and its ideological power for a multi-ethnic working class, see David Montgomery, "Nationalism, American Patriotism, and Class Consciousness among Immigrant Workers in the United States in the Epoch of World War I," in *Struggle a Hard Battle": Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, ed. Dirk Hoerder (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), Joseph McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of the Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

spurred citizen action throughout the state's coal camps and manufacturing towns. Political leaders, newspaper editors, and Bureau of Investigation agents shaped public opinion on the supposed red hue of immigrant labor militancy. This created a heightened sense of insecurity that led the governor's administration to attack those criticizing conservative pro-business ideas.<sup>9</sup>

Nowhere was this trend more visible than in Wheeling. Starting in late 1918, Democratic Governor John J. Cornwell worked to find all potential subversives in West Virginia. Wheeling posed a major concern with its large immigrant population and strong labor movement. The OVTLA included prominent socialists and supported industrial unionism as the best path to organize Wheeling's unskilled immigrants. As labor militancy increased in the steel mills of the Northern Panhandle and in the southern coal fields, Governor Cornwell grew ever more fearful. He and other conservative politicians fashioned a broader notion of "Americanization," aimed at making West Virginia into a modern functioning state.<sup>10</sup> Wheeling's trade unionists consistently criticized Cornwell's policies, comparing the State Constabulary and "Red Flag" laws to the despotism veterans had just fought to defeat in Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany. Streetcar union President C.E. Bartlebaugh said it best that he the over 500 members of his union were not "I.W.W. or Bolsheviki . . . That we are true Americans."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1965), 113. There has been much debate on the motivating factors of the first "Red Scare." For the "paranoid" interpretation, stressing the repression reflecting the paranoia surrounding the Bolshevik Revolution, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955). For the literature stressing conservative business forces undermining the growing power of the labor movement after World War I, see David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1860-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For recent work, which views these years as a larger battle between a pro-business, and conservative political culture versus the labor movement's call for "industrial democracy," see Gary Gerstle, *The American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); McCartin, *Labor's Great War*; Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> John Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 3-4, 82-3.

<sup>11</sup> International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Iron Workers, Wheeling local union #20 to Governor Cornwell, March 8, 1919, Box 94, Folder 6; C.E. Bartlebaugh, President of the Amalgamated Association

Of greater concern for Wheeling's unionists was the Governor's order to all sheriffs and mayors regarding the formation of "Committees of Public Aid and Safety." Building on the sanctioned use of private vigilante organizations from World War I, Cornwell argued that a threatened UMW strike might "be utilized by the criminal and radical element to ply their nefarious trades and to bring a general social and industrial revolution," and assured community leaders "I am not an alarmist. I simply have information as to the accumulation of arms and ammunition . . . of which the public does not know."<sup>12</sup> To prepare for any danger, Cornwell ordered the formation of Committees of Public Aid and Safety "composed of patriotic, courageous and public spirited citizens . . . whose loyalty to the Government and its institutions is beyond question." These committees were to "alleviate the inevitable suffering" of local communities that might be without coal as winter neared and to aid public officials in preserving order and peace of private property.<sup>13</sup> West Virginia's Committees of Public Safety reflected a prevailing middle-class, conservative ideas, emphasizing the sanctity of individual rights and free enterprise over industrial democracy. However, these ideas easily lent themselves to xenophobic, and anti-radical paranoia. Any criticism of state policies or labor protest marked a person as a radical wanting to overthrow the state and private property rights.<sup>14</sup>

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of Street and Electric Railway Employees, Division 103, Wheeling to Governor Cornwell, March 1, 1919, Box 94, Folder 6, John J. Cornwell Papers, A&M 952, West Virginia & Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia (hereafter WVRHC); *Amalgamated Journal*, April 17, 1919, 3.

<sup>12</sup> For wartime sanctioning of voluntary vigilante surveillance, encouraged by the Bureau of Investigations' use of the American Protective League during the "slacker raids," see Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), ch,1 and 4; Governor John Cornwell's "Message to the Sheriffs of the Respective Counties and the Mayors of the Various Municipalities," October 30, 1919, Box 108, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>13</sup> Cornwell, "Message," October 30, 1919, Box 108, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>14</sup> Quote from Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 87, 88-9; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 9-11.

Wheeling trade unionists questioned the governor's growing fear mongering and policy to "conduct a propaganda which now needs explanation."<sup>15</sup> Walter Hilton, the socialist editor of the *Wheeling Majority* took issue with Cornwell's criticism of the State Labor Commissioner. Hilton argued that the "installing of safety devices in factories . . . has been nothing short of a revolution." He noted that the Wheeling Can Factory was "a place that was formerly notoriously dangerous" and the Wheeling Stamping Company, once known as "the finger factory" was much safer after the Labor Commissioner's work. Important benefits came through World War I era labor policy, especially the National War Labor Board and the Labor Department in solving disputes. In April 1917, the Labor Department mediated a dispute at one plant of the Wheeling Steel & Iron Co. Conciliators arrived to deal with the stoppage of needed tin plate production. The major issue for the 1,200 mill workers was the demand for complete recognition of the Amalgamated Association and its wage scale. After consultation, the company gave the union full recognition. While the Labor Department tried not to favor labor over capital, it tended to aid union organizing. The Labor Department assisted workers at small iron factories, female tobacco strippers in Wheeling's stogie plants, and machinists at the Wheeling Mold Factory.<sup>16</sup> Hilton asked whether it was not Cornwell himself, whose disregard for the working class's safety, should be seen as questionable, and even disloyal.

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Morrison, Secretary of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to Governor Cornwell, August 15, 1919, Box 107, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>16</sup> Governor John Cornwell to Frank Morrison, Secretary of AFL, August 4, 1919, Box 107, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers; Walter Hilton, editor *Wheeling Majority* to Frank Morrison, Secretary AFL, August 16, 1919, Box 107, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC; for the benefits of the Department of Labor and NWLB in Wheeling during World War I, see Barkey, "Socialist Party in West Virginia," 202-3; *Wheeling Majority*, August 15, September 12, 1918; *Reports of the Department of Labor, 1917: Report of the Secretary of Labor and Reports of Bureaus* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 18-9; William B. Wilson, Secretary of Department of Labor to Woodrow Wilson, June 9, 1917, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, Staunton, Virginia, via the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library's website at <http://ww12.dataformat.com/Document.aspx?doc=35827> (accessed 30 March 2010).

Governor Cornwell encouraged surveillance of suspected radicals in Wheeling. However, few foreign born radicals were found. Cornwell often chastised local officials for not sharing his “awareness” of the inherent dangers to the state. Sheriff Howard Hastings of Ohio County found “no sign of Bolshevik or I.W.W. element.” He noted that Wheeling did “have, of course strong union men, but none who are preaching the overthrow of the Government and none of whom could be classed as Anarchists or Bolsheviks.” Even so, the governor remained quite convinced of a radical presence, arguing that there was “an active, open propaganda in the Wheeling district” and that “I.W.W. literature was circulated.”<sup>17</sup> This reaction to Bolshevik fears was seen in was seen the treatment of a group of Finnish Socialists in Weirton. Company detectives and a vigilante committee forced the Finns to publicly kiss the flagpole in downtown Weirton and then forcibly drove them from town. Afterwards, a notice was placed on the window of the Finnish Cooperative Store stating “Beware! This is America! No interference of the Finnish Red or IWW of Weirton will be tolerated.”<sup>18</sup>

Other Bureau agents investigated the political loyalties of the OVTLA. The Socialists in the Assembly were rather conservative, evolutionary socialists. They opposed revolution and the Industrial Workers of the World’s (IWW) goal of organizing the “One Big Union” in general strikes.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the Trades Assembly consistently verified its loyalty. Following the passage

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<sup>17</sup> Sheriff Howard Hastings, Sheriff Ohio County to Governor John Cornwell, November 1 and 4, 1919, Box 108, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC; for Wheeling’s socialists, see Barkey, “Socialist Party in West Virginia,” 205-8; *Wheeling Majority*, January 9, May 1, 8, September 25, October 9, 1919; Governor John Cornwell to Sheriff Howard H. Hastings, November 3, 1919, Box 108, Folder 3, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>18</sup> Parriot to Cornwell, July 12, 1919, Box 107, Folder-Bolshevism and Anarchy-Threats, July-October 1919, John J. Cornwell Papers; Governor John J. Cornwell (confidential) to Sheriff and Prosecuting Attorney Ohio County, August 27, 1920, Box 107, Folder Bolshevism and Anarchy, March-September 1920, John J. Cornwell Papers; H.H. Hastings, sheriff Ohio County to Governor Cornwell, August 30, 1920, Box 107, Folder-Bolshevism and Anarchy, March-September 1920, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC; for the Finnish Socialists in Weirton, see Barkey, “Socialist Party in West Virginia,” 213; *Wheeling Majority* October 9, 23, November 6, 1919; in Governor Cornwell’s papers, a file sent to him by the Weirton Steel Company included a Finnish language socialist pamphlet as well as a full sized Red Flag of the Communist Party, Box 110, Folder 5, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>19</sup> Barkey, “Socialist Party in West Virginia,” 148-50, 156-61; Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 118-22.

of a state bill to appoint special deputies to county sheriff offices to deal with industrial disturbances, the OVTLA urged the Sheriff of Ohio County to appoint one hundred trade unionists to prevent similar sorts of “Cossack rule” of “deputies being used to intimidate organized workers” elsewhere in the state.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Great Steel Strike of 1919 in the Wheeling District**

During the later months of World War I, AFL trade unionists agreed to organize a national campaign in the non-union steel industry. The campaign was part of a broader working class movement featuring organizing drives among packinghouse workers, coal miners, railroad workers, and others.<sup>21</sup> The campaign gained momentum in the Wheeling area with the increase in wartime production and the lingering frustrations of steelworkers. The First World War had brought an improvement to Wheeling’s steel industry. Getting important contracts for tin plate and tubing, local mills expanded their workforces. Companies expanded their facilities as well. The Wheeling Steel & Iron Company added six hot mills to the Yorkville tin mill early in 1917; the Whitaker-Glessner Company built a large sheet mill at Beech Bottom. Increased demand for unskilled workers forced the National Tube Company increased wages several times by 10%.<sup>22</sup> However, the increasing production also led to a spike in workplace accidents. A gas explosion at the Hitchman Coal Company in July 1916 injured eight coal miners, including five Slavic miners burned about their faces and hands. Danger also lurked near the B&O track lines. Herman Wycoski, driving an auto truck for the John Wenzel Packing Company on the South Side, was struck and knocked unconscious by a B&O engine. Polish workers also faced dangers

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<sup>20</sup> Clipping *Wheeling Majority*, February 28, 1918 in, A. Bruce Bielaski, Chief Bureau of Investigation to Fred W. Sonderman, secretary Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, Wheeling, West Virginia, March 28, 1918, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, “Fred Sonderman,” #8000-164393, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (11 August 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Interchurch World Movement, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike of 1919*; David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 246-62; Brody, *Labor in Crisis*.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Dickerson Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling* (Toledo: Caslon Company, 1929) , 160, 162; *Benwood Enterpriser*, April 20, 1916, 2; May 25, 1916, 4.

in the foreign tenements along Main Street in Benwood. On February 13, 1917, an explosion resulted from an ignited coal fire in an eight-room tenement where fourteen Polish men, women, and their children were remarkably barely hurt.<sup>23</sup>

In the summer of 1918, the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers (NCOISW) began its campaign, and by the time of the armistice it had made gains in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Wheeling. Clearly, the National War Labor Board's (NWLB) endorsement of collective bargaining and President Woodrow Wilson's own wartime appeals to workers predicted greater things for the union. The most notable organizing tool for the Amalgamated and the National Committee's campaign was the NWLB ruling in favor of Machinists' Local 818 of the Wheeling Mold & Foundry Company for the basic eight-hour day, time-and-one-half for overtime, and right to bargain collectively with management over extra work hours in case of a national emergency. Labor leaders locally and nationally hailed this case as a major step forward, since it was the first ruling "on the subject of the eight-hour working day in industrial plants." Wheeling unionists called for steelworkers at all non-union mills to organize, stressing the need for unity between native and foreign-born workers.<sup>24</sup>

The Steel Strike of 1919 was the direct result of a "rank and file" movement of workers dissatisfied with the traditional "turn" of seven day weeks and twelve hour days, falling real wages, and growing unemployment. Leading the NCOISTW were Chicago labor leaders John Fitzpatrick and William Z. Foster. Combining the longstanding grievances of hourly wage workers with the heightened patriotic atmosphere during the First World War, the committee

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<sup>23</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, July 13, 1916, 2; January 4, 1917; February 15, 1917, 2; February 22, 1917, 2.

<sup>24</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 214-220; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin No. 287, National War Labor Board: A History of Its Formation and Activities, Together with its Awards and the Documents of Importance in the Record of its Development* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 163-8; *Amalgamated Journal*, October 3, 1918, 1; *New York Times*, September 19, 1918; McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 94-119; *Amalgamated Journal*, September 5, 1918, 18, 28; for the industrial union strategies learned from the multi-ethnic organizing of Chicago packinghouse workers, see James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 81-101.

found a large groundswell of support from new immigrant steelworkers. While its leaders urged a policy of industrial unionism, the twenty-four AFL craft unions participating and helping finance the campaign fought to organize the steelworkers along craft lines, which undermined cross-ethnic solidarity. Therefore, even though led by the future leader of the American Communist Party, the Steel Strike was distinctly un-radical.<sup>25</sup>

The main organizing principle behind the strike reinforced the basic tenets of “industrial democracy.” The NCOISW formed near the end of World War I. Merging conservative trade union principles and a patriotic left-leaning view of Americanism, the NCOISW’s organizing appealed to many steelworkers. Starting the campaign in conjunction with the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive and the last large battle of World War I made it seem to immigrant steelworkers that joining the union was the same as purchasing war bonds and maintaining needed wartime steel production. For the immigrant, democracy came to be synonymous with the union. The struggle against the Kaiser was the same battle waged on the factory floor. One Steubenville, Ohio, steelworker summed up this sentiment best: “We are all on the firing line once more and we are going over the top as we did in 1918 over there . . . For we are determined to lick the steel barons and Kaisers of this country as we were to lick the German Kaiser.”<sup>26</sup> Appeals to industrial democracy also meant that steelworkers must organize across race and ethnicity. Organizer Matt Greer urged Wheeling mill men to reach out to the “English, Welsh, Irish, Italians, Slaves [sic], Hungarian, Polish, Servian, Greeks, Syrians, Russians, Finlanders, and Colored men . . . We must bury the past.” Many of the lodges of the Amalgamated Association reflected this notion

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<sup>25</sup> Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 61-5, 69-74, 78-81; Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 166-8; James D. Rose, *Duquesne and the Rise of Steel Unionism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 29-36; for the problems the National Committee’s organizing structure caused in the Chicago District, see Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 38-43; Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 214, 219, quote on 246.

<sup>26</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 222-3, Steubenville steelworker quoted on 241; McCartin, *Labor’s Great War*, 94-119.



of industrial democracy with names like “Democracy,” or “Liberty.” However, Wheeling’s new lodges reflected a more localistic orientation, adopting names like Mountain State, Victory, Ft. Henry, Wheeling, Stogie City, Nail City, and Ohio Valley.<sup>27</sup>

The intensifying rank-and-file discontent finally forced the National Committee to endorse a national strike. While the mill towns around Pittsburgh saw outright repression by steel companies in the months following the armistice, a general feeling of discontent and impatience was common in other steel centers such as Chicago and Wheeling. As companies began to lay off unskilled hourly workers with the onset of the postwar recession, steelworkers demanded the National Committee strike for the eight-hour day and union recognition. By the summer of 1919, the National Committee started negotiations with U.S. Steel and other steel firms. On July 11, 1919, William Z. Foster reported “Some action must be taken that will secure relief. All over . . . men are in a state of great unrest. In Johnstown, Youngstown, Chicago, Wheeling, and elsewhere, great strikes are threatening.” After continued efforts to meet with Judge Elbert Gary, head of U.S. Steel, and then President Woodrow Wilson failed, the National Committee was forced to recognize the general discontent among the steelworkers and called the national strike to begin on September 22, 1919.<sup>28</sup>

Rank-and-file steelworkers, including much of Wheeling’s Polish and Slavic working class, made tangible demands. First, they wanted the right to bargain collectively, with the Amalgamated Association being the principal bargaining agent. Second, in regard to work time, they demanded an eight hour day, one day’s rest in seven, and the end to the twenty-four hour

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<sup>27</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 221-3; Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, revised edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 69-74; Montgomery, “Nationalism, American Patriotism, and Class Consciousness,” in “*Struggle a Hard Battle*,” 343-6; McCartin, *Labor’s Great War*, 156-66; *Amalgamated Journal*, October 10, 1918, 18, November 7, 1918, 31. For the names of the lodges in Wheeling, see *Amalgamated Journal*, December 4, 1919, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 232, 236, quote by Foster on 237, 240.

“long turn” shift. Third, they wanted wages to be increased to allow for a proper standard of living, double rate pay for overtime, holiday, and Sunday work, along with standard wage rates for all tradesmen and hourly classified workers. Finally, they wanted a check-off system for union dues, seniority lines, the abolishment of all company unions, and not more physical examinations as part of the employment application.<sup>29</sup>

Although company guards and police harassed the campaign in Pittsburgh’s mill towns throughout 1918-1919, Wheeling’s foreign-born steelworkers were eager to join the Amalgamated. The first mass meeting for the National Committee’s efforts in Wheeling was held December 6, 1918, at the Polish Hall on the South Side. Louis Leonard, a leader in the Amalgamated Association from Crescent Lodge #8 and several time President of the OVTLA, led the meeting with speakers “in Polish and English.” Foreign steelworkers from the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company and National Tube Company mills in Benwood and the LaBelle tin mill in Wheeling attended the meeting. Appealing largely to the Polish immigrant working class audience, organizers highlighted how “You have more freedom in the Ohio Valley than any other place among the non-union mills. Why? Because we that are organized have fought for and maintained the right of free speech and free assemblage.” After stressing the poverty of poor workers seen about South Wheeling’s Eighth Ward, organizers emphasized the union’s benefits, especially the sick and accident insurance programs.<sup>30</sup> In the next few weeks, the union drive extended to include all the mills throughout the Upper Ohio Valley. A few days after the meeting at Polish Hall, the union held another large meeting at nearby Bischoff’s Hall, led by

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<sup>29</sup> For the list of grievances, see Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 378, footnote #43.

<sup>30</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, December 5, 1918, 17; December 12, 1918, 18; Crescent Lodge #8 was the principle local organizing force in the Wheeling District, and it had the proud distinction of being one of the oldest lodges of the Amalgamated having been created on September 6, 1879; *Amalgamated Journal*, January 9, 1919, 12. For the nature of the organizing drive and particularly violent repression of the strike in the Pittsburgh District, see Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 243-52.

William Z. Foster. The goal would be to enroll as many as 20,000 steelworkers in the organization in 1919.<sup>31</sup>

Union organizers successfully appealed to a broad cross-section of immigrant workers as lodge gatherings reflected ethnic concentrations. The Wheeling Lodge at the La Belle tin mill was largely German; the Mountain State Lodge at the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company in Benwood was led by Irish and German-American officers but had an Italian and Slavic rank-and-file.; the Fort Henry Lodge at the La Belle hot mill met in the German neighborhood just south of St. Alphonsus German Catholic Church. Meetings of union workers continued in the fraternal ethnic lodges, at the German Dueker Hall, and most notably the Polish Hall.<sup>32</sup> Organizers in the Wheeling District consistently urged non-union men to attend meetings and make them a family affair: “Bring your wife and let her bring a nonunion man’s wife along, so that your wife and the nonunion man’s wife can both understand what the union means.” At one meeting, Fort Henry Lodge held a dance at Martins Ferry’s Hungarian Hall.<sup>33</sup>

Polish Hall witnessed one of the largest early organizing meetings on January 16, 1919. A “mammoth crowd present, representing several nationalities,” the meeting was organized through unions of the AFL. District secretary Jack Peters explained to the men present that the main purpose of the organization was “to educate the workers” in the country about the benefits of collective bargaining. Various union representatives spoke to interested steelworkers. They made sure to provide addresses and literature in several languages. Ben Groggin of the Mine and Smelter Workers union spoke in Italian and Stanley Ingersky, a Polish UMWA organizer from

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<sup>31</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 14, 1918, 11; December 16, 1918, 2; December 19, 1918, 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, December 12, 1918, 30; December 19, 1918, 25; February 13, 1919, 3; March 20, 1919, 2, 3; January 2, 1919, 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, February, 6, 1919, 7; April 17, 1919, 29.

Pittsburgh, spoke in Polish. These two nationalities reflected most of the unskilled men who lived near the massive mills in South Wheeling and Benwood.<sup>34</sup>

Local organizers sought to assist steelworker families. In early May 1919, U.S. Steel shut down the National Tube Works in Benwood, laying off nearly 2,500 workers. To prevent civil unrest and disorder, Victory Lodge No. 21 in Benwood brought in a government mediator to calm the immigrant crowd. Mountain State Lodge, No. 19, claiming to represent over 1,400 steelworkers, sent out a letter protesting the closing of local plants, highlighting the wartime sacrifices of “our comforts, pleasures and enjoyments of life, even life itself, for the cause of Democracy.” They sent their protests to the Department of Labor for redress, and ordered the continued organizing of the workers in the closed plants that summer. When things became difficult for families after subsequent layoffs, Fort Henry Lodge sponsored a grand ball for union members. The event was so peaceful that even the “policeman fell asleep waiting for something to start,” as the other lodge members mingled with their families in a multi-ethnic atmosphere.<sup>35</sup>

As the “Red Summer” of 1919 grew in intensity, organizers made a stronger appeal to the immigrant steelworkers. Mountain State Lodge attracted new members from the Wheeling Iron & Steel Company plant, and worked “to try and get speakers for our Italian and Slavish brothers.” Other lodges at the LaBelle mills and other Wheeling Iron & Steel plants around town encouraged members to “keep on working like the other thrifty lodges” to continue the growth of unionism in Wheeling. In preparation for the large annual Wheeling Labor Day parade, Crescent Lodge estimated a large contingent from the newly formed lodges: Mountain State (1,000), LaBelle hot mills and tin house (400), LaBelle plate mill (250). Stating that the Wheeling labor unions “recognize no race, creed or color” the organizers bluntly asserted “The good men parade

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<sup>34</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 17, 1919, 6; January 20, 1919, 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, May 8, 1919, 6, 14; May 22, 1919, 26; June 19, 1919, 6.

and the moral coward stands on the sidewalk.” Organizers gave speeches to new unionists at the Belmont mill lodge on “Unionism and Organization,” since the factory had been non-union for years. They also found returning World War I veterans after only “one pay [have] joined the union” to continue the “battle put on for industrial freedom.”<sup>36</sup> By early August, union organizers and willing immigrant steelworkers had formed a total of six new lodges covering all the Wheeling and Benwood steel mills. On Labor Day, Wheeling’s downtown streets were filled with the unions affiliated with the OVTLA and over 4,000 Wheeling steelworkers, of whom over 75% were recent union recruits.<sup>37</sup>

As tensions built toward a strike, district committee organizers distributed thousands of hand bills in at least seven different languages, urging steelworkers to remain fast until the national called for action. When the national union announced its strike, organizers encouraged solidarity.<sup>38</sup> During the largest mass strike of the era, almost 98% (about 1,600) of the workforce at Benwood’s National Tube Company joined within the first few days. Wheeling, Fort Henry, and Nail City lodges joined forces to organize the LaBelle mill. Wheeling Lodge acknowledged that very quickly they had “organized from top to bottom, that is laborers and every man . . . and even the girls who sort the tin.”<sup>39</sup> Within a short time, over 15,000 steelworkers were on strike in the Wheeling District. A large meeting of strikers and organizers from the AAISTW, AFL, and IAM, instructed steelworkers to be peaceful. Jack Peters, Wheeling district secretary,

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<sup>36</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, June 19, 1919, 9, 10; July 17, 1919, 9; July 31, 1919, 14; August 7, 1919, 23, 28, 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, August 7, 1919, 9; the new lodges were: Nail City #24 (LaBelle iron works), Wheeling lodge (LaBelle tin mill), Fort Henry (LaBelle tin mill), Mountain State (Wheeling Iron & Steel Co., Benwood), Stogie City (Wheeling Iron & Steel, Belmont mill, Wheeling), Victory Lodge (National Tube works, Benwood); September 11, 1919, 32.

<sup>38</sup> William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1920), 184-5; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 15, 1919, 3; September 16, 1919, 11; September 17, 1919, 2; “Old Bill” of Fort Henry Lodge No. 20 expressed the importance of the union movement for those immigrants workers with “large families to support, every last one of them are consumers,” *Amalgamated Journal*, April 24, 1919, 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 22, 1919, 1; September 23, 1919, 1; *Amalgamated Journal*, September 25, 1919, 3; October 2, 1919, 25; October 16, 1919, 18.

warned strikers to be weary of believing any information coming to them from the regular print sources or word of mouth: “I want you to pay attention only to such information as you secure through your local union.” After being told to sleep in the next day and not engage in any fighting with hired company thugs or labor spies in the plants, the meeting concluded with an address to the “foreign element by Robert Matusck delivered in the Polish language.”<sup>40</sup> That a large number of the union members in attendance were Polish speaks to the fortitude of the Polish Catholic immigrants, who rather than remaining tied to their Polish enclave, worked with the AFL unions and the OVTLA.

Wheeling’s steel workers advocated for mutual assistance using the language of “Americanism.” At a mass meeting of over 3,000 strikers at the Market Auditorium, various union leaders reinforced the strike’s aims. William Roy, UMWA District 5 president, argued that after patriotically purchasing Liberty Bonds and donating to the Red Cross, how could steelworkers now be called un-American. To him, “Americans have the reputation for going out and fighting for justice.” Walter Hilton, editor of the *Wheeling Majority*, linked the wartime autocracy of Kaiser Wilhelm to “the industrial autocracy of America, ruled by King Gary’s [U.S. Steel].”<sup>41</sup> A more direct form of cooperation came in the arrangements to provide food, clothing, and other forms of relief to strikers and their families. The Pittsburgh headquarters of the national strike committee set up a system of aid and several distributing centers in the Wheeling district. Strike families received a commissary card for food allotments twice a week based on family size. Nine thousand pounds of food arrived by early November with at least 200 strike

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<sup>40</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 22, 1919, 1-2; Fort Henry Lodge #20 also warned its members that the four daily Wheeling newspapers were printing misleading articles claiming steelworkers received \$200-300 a week, see *Amalgamated Journal*, August 28, 1919, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 20, 1919, 3.

families applying for aid.<sup>42</sup> When Jack Peters could not find a suitable location to rent for distributing future food allotments, church officials offered the use of the basement of St. Joseph's Catholic Cathedral. The Cathedral provided assistance to 350 strikers' families distributing 3,000 loaves of bread, 3,000 pounds of potatoes, in all about seven tons of food. This seemed odd for church leaders, considering the following day distribution ended at noon so strikers could go several blocks from the Cathedral to listen to William Z. Foster speak. Secret Bureau informants noted that he spoke only of the strike, nothing of an "inflammatory character." While there is no mention of how Catholic leaders felt about Catholic workers attending a rally led by Foster, they had reason to worry since the "foreign-born workers are evidently in sympathy with Foster, as they applauded loudly when he was introduced."<sup>43</sup>

Generally peaceful, closer examination shows that festering tensions among immigrant workers led to hostilities during the strike. Coming during many smaller acts of intimidation and fisticuffs by immigrant steelworkers, James Parriott informed the governor that tensions had started on November 18 as a returning soldier was "badly beaten up" by five foreign workers in downtown Benwood. These incidents suggest much about the strike's local context, as strikers worked diligently to maintain picket lines and keep out strikebreakers. It also suggests that local police were rather sympathetic to the strikers' cause. After the November 18 incident, the Marshall County sheriff had to dispatch several deputies after the Benwood police refused to act, whereupon they arrested Mike Rendulic and George Sikich. Later the sheriff, five deputies, and one state police officer stood outside the Riverside Mill when it reopened for a time on

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<sup>42</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 23, 1919, 2; October 27, 1919, 12; October 29, 1919, 2; November 5, 1919, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 10, 1919, 5; November 11, 1919, 9; another consignment of food relief was distributed from the Cathedral to 294 families a week later, see *Wheeling Intelligencer*, November 18, 1919, 13; for the National Committee's relief policies see Foster, *Great Steel Strike*, 213-22; for the William Z. Foster meeting, see F.M. O'Donnell, "In re: William Z. Foster Meeting," November 14, 1919, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, "Various," #315819, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (2 August 2011).

November 24, with strikers preventing scabs from entering “but no licks were struck.”<sup>44</sup>

Regardless, Parriott noted that Benwood police still seemed unable to halt strikers congregating outside the mill.

The Riverside Mill was the center of much of the strike militancy. Many union organizers from the Wheeling Iron & Steel plants worked with the leading “radicals” at the Riverside Mill to coordinate strike activities. The presence of county and state police to monitor the situation, and company attempts to reopen the mill obviously enraged many immigrant strikers. By the last week of November, an estimated 350 men who were attempting to reenter the mill faced harassment each morning from pickets. County officials continued to press for state police, until a contingent of twelve constabulary arrived. Throughout this tenuous period, state police and Bureau informants argued “that the danger of violence lies with the foreign element and not with the Americans.” William Wagner was attacked on November 29 while on the streetcar in South Wheeling. This led to an angry public admonishment from Sheriff W.E. Clayton urging the immediate impeachment of Benwood’s chief of police and mayor for, “turning a deaf ear to lawlessness” and “making absolutely no effort toward curbing attacks they have committed on mill men who want to return to work.” Clayton went further, later declaring “Benwood is full of Bolsheviks.” Although strike leaders urged immigrant workmen not to accost anyone, it appeared that “practically all the insulting words such as ‘scab,’ ‘blacksheep,’ etc. come from the foreigners.” In response, some strikebreakers shouted back: “You d[amn] hunkies, go back home [.] We don’t want you in America anyway.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> James D. Parriott, Prosecuting Attorney, Moundsville to Governor John Cornwell, November 29, 1919, Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>45</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 7, 1919, 2; Clipping *Wheeling News Sunday*, November 30, 1919; Mayor Clark Sprouts, Benwood to Governor John Cornwell, December 3, 1919; James D. Parriott, Moundsville to Governor John Cornwell, November 29, 1919, Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.



The bloody climax to these escalating tensions occurred on the early morning of December 1, 1919. In a large gun battle outside the main gate of the Riverside mill, Sheriff Clayton and a deputy were seriously wounded, while an Austrian-Pole Matija Baron (of Victory Lodge) was killed and John Meharlow (of Mountain State lodge) was shot in the face. As a group of American-born workers got off the streetcar, foreign strikers ordered them to go home, whereupon several workers “were attacked from behind.” According to police officers, Baron attacked Deputy McCardle and tried to take away his gun, whereupon he was shot fatally. Meharlow in response fired off a shot wounding McCardle in the hand. Officers also claimed that bricks and stones had been thrown just prior to the shooting by foreign-born strikers. Fear and panic spread quickly, as authorities desperately tried to get assistance from the state police and even deputize local residents. Bureau agents learned from interviewing the wounded workers that radical foreign activities “have been very much under cover” and that the crowd of immigrants numbered as many as two hundred the morning of the riot. While in Wheeling Hospital, Clayton “advised that foreigners in Benwood are organizing to resist and attack officers.” Lawmen took precautions after several boys heard a group of immigrants in a poolroom planning to get back at the officer who wounded Meharlaw. In addition, Colonel Jackson Arnold of the State Police arrived with authority to deputize Benwood citizens under Section Fourteen of the Public Safety Act to protect citizens from future outbursts.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *New York Times*, December 2, 1919, 3; *Wheeling Register*, December 2, 1919, 1; James D. Parriott, telegram to Governor John Cornwell, December 1, 1919 (8:56 a.m.); Parriott, telegram to Cornwell, December 1, 1919 (9:59 a.m.); Cornwell, telegram to Parriott, December 1, 1919, all in Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC; John B. Wilson, “In re: Riot at National Tube Company’s plant, Benwood, W.Va.,” December 9, 1919, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, #8000-382434, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (12 August 2011); in comparing the differing source accounts, the names of the two immigrants are different; the Bureau calls Miskalow by “Meharlow” and Matto Baron by “Matija,” see union coverage of event in *Amalgamated Journal*, December 11, 1919, 6; Governor John Cornwell, telegram to J.D. Parriott, December 4, 1919, Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

In subsequent days, state police and Bureau agents attempted to link the strikers to radical Bolsheviks. John B. Wilson interviewed John Meharlow, who denied knowing of any radical plans for the morning of December 1. He also stated he knew nothing of the Union of Russian Workers. Meharlow claimed he was only a member of “the Steel Workers Union” and the local Russian Orthodox Church. After trying to entrap him, Wilson concluded that Meharlow “is more or less identified with the radicals in Benwood.” An interpreter told Wilson that Meharlow previously claimed he had gotten up early on December 1 and told his brother to “come on and we will go out after these scabs.”<sup>47</sup>

The events surrounding the fatal shootout suggest a situation that had gotten out of control of the local authorities. Even before December 1, strikers attacked several men on the streetcar going through South Wheeling. Most incidents occurred at the 45<sup>th</sup> street stop in the middle of the Polish neighborhood. The mayor of Benwood, Clark Sprouts, charged that these attacks were the result of heightened feelings created by the inflammatory Wheeling press reports over the preceding week. However, the mayor’s policies leading up to the fatal shooting raised many eyebrows. After requesting assistance from unwilling locals, Mayor Sprouts “personally called upon several men of character and ability.” This angered Governor Cornwell since several of these men “a few days ago were acting as pickets to keep men out of the mills.”<sup>48</sup> Cornwell was incensed that the strikers seemed emboldened by the fact the Benwood

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<sup>47</sup> John B. Wilson, “Riot at National Tube Company’s Plant, Benwood, West Virginia,” January 2, 1920, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, #8000-382434, RG 65, NA, Footnote.com (12 August 2011); *Wheeling Register*, December 2, 1919, 6; the attempt to link Meharlow, a Russian immigrant, to the Union of Russian Workers came about one month after the first series of the Palmer Raids by the Justice Department in November 1919 on the URW offices in New York City and elsewhere. A significant portion of these Russian immigrants were deported aboard the “Soviet Ark” the *U.S.S. Buford* on December 21, 1919. See *New York Call*, November 8, 1919, 1, 5; Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded*.

<sup>48</sup> Mayor Clark Sprouts to Governor John Cornwell, December 3, 1919; Governor Cornwell to Mayor Sprouts, December 4, 1919; Mayor Sprouts to Governor Cornwell, December 6, 1919, all in Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

police were “with them,” and that one officer had told a strikebreaker “he would be shot and thrown into the river.”<sup>49</sup>

According to the available sources, it appears the Benwood special deputies represented a cross-section of the mill town. Out of the six, three had served in World War I, and four never went on strike. The two who were strikers, Theodore Warsinsky and Joseph Ackerman, were not militant and only Ackerman had manned the picket line. Sprouts continuously denied that any policemen made the inflammatory comment to men entering the mill, and that he had worked cordially with Sheriff Clayton. After the shootout, conditions quieted down, as special deputies patrolled the main gates of the mill, and another one hundred men returned to work.<sup>50</sup>

The Polish and Ukrainian communities turned out for the funeral for the killed worker Matto Baron. Officers found a passport in Baron’s pockets, preparing to set sail soon to return to Poland. He even had his trunk prepared to leave, but his union lodge asked him to do a turn of picket duty, which he willingly obliged. Baron (whose actual name was Matej Mateusz) left \$1,500 in Liberty Bonds, \$884.20 in the Security Trust Bank, and \$205.46 on his insurance policy. Buried at Mt. Calvary cemetery, nearly 2,000 steelworkers attended the solemn event.<sup>51</sup>

The shooting in early December 1919 was a turning point in the strike. Calls for “law-and-order” prevailed as state police and deputized locals protected men desiring to go back to work at the Riverside. The Amalgamated held a meeting, placing blame for the violence on the

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<sup>49</sup> Governor Cornwell to Mayor Clark Sprouts, December 4, 1919, Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>50</sup> Mayor Clark Sprouts to Governor John Cornwell, December 6, 1919; Mayor Sprouts to Governor Cornwell, December 4, 1919; Mayor Sprouts to Governor Cornwell, December 5, 1919; Mayor Sprouts to Governor Cornwell, December 8, 1919; James D. Parriott to Governor John Cornwell, December 6, 1919, all in Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>51</sup> *Wheeling Register*, December 2, 1919, 6; December 4, 1919, 5; December 6, 1919, 5; *Benwood Enterpriser*, December 4, 1919, 2; Polish undertaker L.F. Stolarski of South Wheeling administered his estate, and a large funeral service was held at the Polish church (actually the Ukrainian church, but with a Polish and Ukrainian attendance) on 42<sup>nd</sup> and Jacob Street. Matej Mateusz Baron, estate appraisal, filed July 26, 1921 in Ohio County Court, Appraisers Record Book, Ohio County, Book 8, 211, Ohio County Clerk’s Office, Ohio County Courthouse, Wheeling, WV.

surveillance and agitation by county officials.<sup>52</sup> In the following weeks, pressure grew on strikers to return to work. The Wheeling Iron & Steel Company planned to restart its Benwood mill. Company officials noted in the *Wheeling Register* that many of the skilled union men were back at the six-inch pipe mill, along with “hundreds of foreigners.” Quickly men started returning to work. Lodges representing the Benwood mill and the Carnegie Steel plant in Bellaire, Ohio voted to return on December 9 along with the 29<sup>th</sup> Street tin mill of the American Sheet & Tin Plate Company. Within a week, nearly 1,800 men were working at the Riverside, and mills at Aetnaville and Martins Ferry, Ohio also planned to restart, but many immigrant strikers held fast. Mostly native born skilled workers returned to work. While not the only explanation, the December 1 shooting and the press reaction aided in dividing the steelworkers.<sup>53</sup>

For most immigrant steelworkers, the goals of World War I were the same as those advanced by the union organizers in their stress on “industrial democracy.” They were the first to crowd mass meetings and were the most eager to join the union. Membership rosters showed a spike in Slavic surnames. The Amalgamated Association worked to channel this immigrant support by meeting immigrants on their own terms. They printed strike bulletins in many different languages, held meetings in immigrant social halls, and brought in speakers of their own nationality. It was more difficult to organize the largely native-born skilled steelworkers. Crescent Lodge attacked the Wheeling Sunday paper for calling a meeting of only American-born steelworkers in Benwood “asking Americans to SCAB.” From the organizer’s perspective, this made it appear that “only men of foreign birth are loyal union men.” He went on to criticize

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<sup>52</sup> *Wheeling Register*, December 2, 1919, 6; December 3, 1919, 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 168; *Wheeling Register*, December 9, 1919, 4; December 10, 1919, 1, 6; December 11, 1919, 9; December 14, 1919, Section 2, 1.

those who called the Wheeling immigrants “Hunkies” since “Those so-called Hunkeys [sic] are the cleanest union men.”<sup>54</sup> Another union organizer captured immigrant sentiments:

“The poorest foreign laborer . . . wants to get organized and you don’t . . . Remember this Mr. Smart non-union American that we are coming to your tin and sheet mills and take your foreign speaking men and put them into the Amalgamated Association and then they will make you come clean. They will show you what Americanism really is, one who stands up for his rights.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Battle Over the American Plan**

Polish and other Slavic steelworkers’ role with the Amalgamated changed as a result of major economic restructuring to the Wheeling steel industry. In 1920, there were three independent steel companies-La Belle Iron Works, Whitaker-Glessner, and the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company. None of the three firms possessed a continuous mill process. For example, the Wheeling Steel & Iron Company had a tinplate mill, but needed to purchase steel bars from other companies. All three needed to make renovations, eliminate waste and undue competition, and capital expansions to survive the postwar economic market.<sup>56</sup> To address these needs, on June 21, 1920, the companies merged to form the Wheeling Steel Corporation. The new company now possessed abundant blast furnaces, tin-plate mills, plate and skelp mills, open-hearth steel works, sheet and fabricating mills, and tube works.<sup>57</sup> According to Table 7:1, by becoming the largest employer in the region, Wheeling Steel was able to provide steadier and more consistent wages throughout the 1920’s. In addition, transportation improvements made it easier for workers to travel between mill towns. If one plant closed down or laid off employees, they could find work at another facility.

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<sup>54</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, November 20, 1919, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 223; quote from, *Amalgamated Journal*, January 16, 1919, 14.

<sup>56</sup> “Steel Concerns May Merge,” *Iron Age*, June 3, 1920, 1633; Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 168-9. They also existed with mills tied to larger firms, the National Tube Company and the American Sheet & Tinplate Company.

<sup>57</sup> *Iron Age*, July 17, 1920, 1747; list comes from Henry Scott’s company history, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 158; company figures derive from Wheeling Steel Corporation-Annual Reports, 1920-1929, WJU.

**Table 7.1: Wheeling Steel Corporation Employment and Wages, 1920-1929**

<b>Report Year</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Total Wages</b>	<b>Average Wages</b>
<b>1920</b>	16,601	\$34,019,605.31	\$2,049.25
<b>1921</b>	7,609	\$11,985,165.60	\$1,575.13
<b>1922</b>	10,986	\$17,158,856.97	\$1,561.88
<b>1923</b>	16,583	\$29,354,608.24	\$1,770
<b>1924</b>	15,549	\$27,767,206.90	\$1,786
<b>1925</b>	17,348	\$31,517,435	\$1,817
<b>1926</b>	17,249	\$31,433,762	\$1,822
<b>1927</b>	15,593	\$27,756,135	\$1,780
<b>1928</b>	17,223	\$30,988,548	\$1,790
<b>1929</b>	17,631	\$31,738,739	\$1,800

Source: *Wheeling Steel Corporation-Annual Reports (1<sup>st</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>)*, 1920-1929, WJU

Following the strike wave of 1919, companies like the new Wheeling Steel Corporation sought ways to promote employee loyalty via welfare capitalism. Corporate officials nationally stressed the Americanism inherent in workers being able to labor without interference from a union, and by the fall of 1920 were pushing the “American Plan.” The American Constitutional Association (ACA) led the open shop drive in West Virginia. Initiated by business leaders, Governor Cornwell, speaking at their inaugural meeting in March 1920, stressed the ACA’s goal to “inculcate in the minds of our people, both native and foreign-born, the true spirit of Americanism.” Initially aimed at halting the UMWA’s power, the group also targeted union strongholds in cities like Wheeling.<sup>58</sup> Wheeling Steel wanted to return to “normalcy” and Americanize their foreign-born workers. This desire was explained in a circular letter from the West Virginia Manufacturers Association called “The American Plan Review” and subtitled “Let’s Wheel Wheeling, W.Va., to Industrial Sanity.” The plan called for building sanitation systems to provide “water that is fit to drink,” building good homes for the city’s 40,000 wage earners, setting up vocational schools, supporting Sunday evening “Thrift lectures,” decreasing the amount of smoke pollution, and creating proper recreational facilities. One of the central

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<sup>58</sup> Harris and Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings*, 142-3; Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia*, 97-8.

tenets included allowing employees to submit grievances to bosses to be solved by the company “without interference from outsiders.” Going even further, the plan argued that while organized capital believed in the rule of the law, labor unions only used “force, violence, and strikes.”<sup>59</sup>

The most popular element of the welfare capitalist movement was the employee representation plans (ERPs). The National Tube Company instituted its company union in February 1920. However, it appeared that most workers were “wise to his little scheme,” and continued to join the Amalgamated. By 1921, Wheeling Steel had set up a number of employee representation plans. To counter the Amalgamated, the committee at the Benwood Works set up a “Relief and Beneficial Association,” which in 1921 represented around 80% of the employees. The Association provided financial assistance “in case of sickness, accident or death for which no provision is made under the Workmen’s Compensation Act.” Mountain State Lodge objected to the company’s attempt to substitute an ERP for the agreement it had made with the union in 1920.<sup>60</sup> The ERPs attracted many immigrant mill workers as a result of the better treatment hourly wage workers received from shop foreman, after company managers greatly curtailed their arbitrary powers. The company unions allowed for a grievance procedure, similar to the Amalgamated, even though lodges vigorously encouraged workers not to join them.<sup>61</sup>

“Enlightened employers” created these programs in the hope that “mutual interest” could unite the goals of workers and their managers. Employers fought along with ethnic community leaders and the labor movement for workers’ loyalty in the 1920’s.<sup>62</sup> This meant that large companies, like Wheeling Steel adopted policies—ERPs, pension plans, grievance committees,

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<sup>59</sup> “The American Plan Review,” subheading “Let’s Wheel Wheeling, W.Va. to Industrial Sanity!” September 15, 1920, Box 107, Folder 1, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>60</sup> Alexander Glass, Chairman Wheeling Steel Corporation, *1921 Annual Report of the Wheeling Steel Corporation, Wheeling, W.Va., For the Year Ended December 31, 1921*, Wheeling Jesuit University Library (hereafter WJU); *Amalgamated Journal*, April 1, 1920, 31.

<sup>61</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, February 19, 1920, 25; March 11, 1920, 26; November 27, 1921, 17; December 1, 1921, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 161-2, quote 162.

social halls, and insurance plans that workers found in their ethnic community institutions and from the Amalgamated. As a result, Wheeling Steel could provide more lucrative benefits and wage rates than the union at that time. Throughout the 1920's, mill workers took advantage to become shareholders, pensioners, and ERP members in the Wheeling Steel Corporation. Under Wheeling Steel's plan, workers cast votes for candidates, who individually represented up to 200 mill workers. They attended regular meetings with company officials, and then implemented new policies based on the "programs which the representative body elects."<sup>63</sup>

The main goal of the ERPs was to give workers a place to address their grievances within the confines of the company. After the First World War, immigrant workers desired above all else steady jobs, good wages to be able to buy their homes, and a safe environment to work. For many, the company unions provided a more structured and efficient organization. The company developed a variety of safety programs and training classes. Working through the ERPs, department representatives formed a safety organization to educate fellow workers on proper shop floor practices. Through frequent group meetings, accident rates dropped drastically. The company also published a popular company magazine entitled "Safety Hints," that spoke about new machinery, while including personal stories about millworkers, especially those with good safety records. The company even made competitive games out of promoting safety, creating "friendly rivalry among departments." By the late 1920's, these programs were paying off.

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<sup>63</sup> "Wheeling Steel Corporation and Its Safety Program," *West Virginia Review* VII, No. 12 (September 1930): 427; *Wheeling Register*, May 27, 1928, 12. My argument here fits in a wider historiographical debate about the success of 1920's welfare capitalism. Stuart Brandes argues that welfare capitalist plans failed to gain industrial workers support, while David Brody argues persuasively that workers looked on it favorably and took advantage of pension plans, stock options, and higher wages. For Brody, and to an extent Elizabeth Cohen, it was only the coming of the Great depression and the failure of industrial firms to maintain their paternalistic support by laying off workers that the labor movement revived. See Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), 136-41; David Brody, "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism," in *Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America: The 1920's*, edited by John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner, and David Brody (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 147-78; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 184, 447-8.



According to Table 7.2, Wheeling Steel’s company unions “claimed” to represent an ever growing number of its workforce, while at the same time accident rates declined as well.<sup>64</sup>

**Table 7.2: Wheeling Steel Workers Under Employee Representation Plans and Accident Rates per 100 Employees, 1927-1929**

Report Year	Total Company Employees	Employees Claimed under ERPs	Accident Rates (per 100)
1927	15,593	11,617	5.10
1928	17,223	14,262	4.76
1929	17,631	14,539	4.33

Source: “Wheeling Steel Corporation and Its Safety Structure,” *West Virginia Review* VII, No. 12 (September 1930): 427; *Wheeling Steel Corporation, Annual Reports, 1927-1929*, WJU.

After 1920, Wheeling’s steel mills suffered from an acute labor shortage with the cut off of the flow of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. The company began recruiting large numbers of African-Americans from the South. Many worked in foundries, blast furnaces, mold shops, and for the railroad, congregating in South Wheeling where houses and apartments were more affordable. Black workers often arrived via labor recruiters going into the South. For example, an agent of the Wheeling Mold and Foundry came to Chattanooga in June 1916, recruiting a pool of black laborers. By February 1917, about one hundred and fifty black foundry workers from Tennessee alone had migrated to Wheeling.<sup>65</sup> Steelworkers blamed the companies for hiring black migrants at much lower wage levels. The Riverside Mill discharged 200-500 men for black migrants, who “Work here in the winter and beat it in the Spring . . . it takes about five of them to do one good white man’s work in the mills.”<sup>66</sup> In Wheeling, rising racial tensions grew from economic competition over access to industrial jobs and housing with the various immigrant populations.<sup>67</sup> The *Benwood Enterpriser* noted in July 1917 that

<sup>64</sup> “Wheeling Steel Corporation and Its Safety Program,” 427.

<sup>65</sup> Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 157.

<sup>66</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 15, 1920, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Thaddeus Radzialowski, “The Competition for Jobs and Racial Stereotypes: Poles and Blacks in Chicago,” *Polish American Studies* 32 (Autumn 1976): 5-18; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and*

“Benwood is no longer a lily white town.” As the B&O and the National Tube Company brought in more black migrant workers, there were an increasing number of news stories about murders and small street fights among black and white residents. By 1920, Wheeling’s African-American community numbered 1,623, fourth largest in the state. Since many of these black families relocated to between 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Street, they were segregated from the Polish and Ukrainian populations further south. However, immigrant children were well aware of the separate racial spaces. George Janeczko remembered there were two parks for children near 26<sup>th</sup> Street, one for whites and the other near cinder pits and closer to the Ohio River for blacks.<sup>68</sup>

### **Union Variations on the American Plan**

The crushing of the national steel strike in January 1920 did not mean the union movement among Wheeling’s immigrant steelworkers was dead. Many locals made tangible gains, while also educating steelworkers of the benefits of unionism. Following the murder of Matteo Baron, the management of the Wheeling Steel & Iron plant in Benwood agreed to collective bargaining with the Mountain State Lodge #19 a few days before Christmas 1919. Feeling that “the company will play fair,” the union appointed a committee to negotiate conditions. Out of this, the company agreed to institute the eight-hour day and also not discriminate against former strikers.<sup>69</sup> At an early January 1920 meeting of Mountain State’s multi-ethnic lodge, members listened to speeches in English, Italian, and Slavic and organized a

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*Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 39-58. In my research I found no examples of Poles or Slavic immigrants expressing these views of African-American migrants. For work on the black migration that looks at their interaction with other ethnic populations, see Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 264-82; John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 55-88.

<sup>68</sup> *Benwood Enterpriser*, July 26, 1917, 2; for black migrants and murders, see *Benwood Enterpriser*, January 16, 1919, 1; March 13, 1919, 1; T. Edward Hill, *Report of Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, 1921-22* (Charleston: Tribune Printing Co., 1922), 15; Sean Duffy, *The Wheeling Family, Volume 2: More Immigrants, Migrants, and Neighborhoods* (Wheeling: Wheeling History, 2012), 207-17.

<sup>69</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 1, 1920, 27; January 8, 1920, 5.

delegation to the OVTLA to urge them to “take up the matter of political action” on behalf of the working class of Wheeling. Mountain State continued to push labor to get involved in politics after receiving a “rousing” endorsement at a mass meeting at the Polish Hall.<sup>70</sup>

The most vigorous organizing continued at the mills in Benwood and South Wheeling in early 1920. For those immigrant workers and their children new to trade unionism, the Mountain State Lodge #19 promoted solidarity and education. In early January the lodge raised \$1,000 for John Meharlow, to “see that he gets justice.” More importantly, they “were slowly but surely learning to make use of the collective bargaining proposition agreed to by the company” and had “succeeded in getting a number of men who were discriminated against back on the job.”<sup>71</sup> This particular union lodge served as an example of what labor historians refer to as “Americanization from the Bottom-Up,” in that union members consistently listened to union organizers speak to them in English, but also in Italian and Slavic for the rank-and-file immigrant workers.<sup>72</sup>

By August 1920, union organizers won collective bargaining contracts at two of the largest non-union mills. Covering many immigrant workers, these contracts were for Stogie City #25 men laboring at the Belmont Mill and Mountain State #19 men working at the Wheeling Steel & Iron’s Benwood works in the Bessemer steel, tube, pipe, and plate mills. This appeared to be the highpoint of the Amalgamated’s post-war success in the Wheeling mills, as they now had contracts to cover wages and hours and provide sick and disability benefits for the largely multi-ethnic workforces. By Labor Day 1920, the Amalgamated claimed contracts at eleven Wheeling Steel mills.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 15, 1920, 6; January 22, 1919, 3; January 29, 1920, 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 15, 1920, 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 15, 1920, 6; James R. Barrett has argued the importance of the trade unions in mixed immigrant neighborhoods as acting as the most important and effective force of “Americanization” for the newcomers. See his “Americanization from the Bottom Up:” 996-1020; for similar arguments from the OVTLA, see editorial on Wheeling “Preparedness Day” Parade, *Wheeling Majority*, July 13, 1916.

<sup>73</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, August 19, 1920, 14, 28; September 2, 1920, 13.

Throughout this period, Irish-American skilled workers led most of the lodges. Jason MacHenry, who lived near the Polish and Ukrainian immigrants, led Victory Lodge. Brother McCreary chaired Mountain State Lodge in 1920-21, and “Timmie” O’Brien chaired its entertainment committee. The lodge represented many Polish and Slavic immigrants living in South Wheeling, Benwood, and Bellaire, Ohio. In addition, national leaders and old Wheeling unionists Michael Tighe and Louis Leonard (both from Crescent Lodge #8), were active in assisting the new members.<sup>74</sup> Workplace relationships among the skilled Irish-Americans and the newer immigrants helped pass on union traditions. This socialization on the shop floor and in immigrant communities of “selling the union” led organizers to convey the attractiveness of the labor movement and the nature of politics, often with a Hibernian cast.<sup>75</sup>

The strike also stimulated immigrant interest in politics. In early 1920, lodges educated members about the American political system, its inequities, and lobbying for better municipal services. The OVTLA hosted several large meetings, subtly pressing the Americanization of the foreign born, while instructing the rank-and-file on the intricacies of collective bargaining as well.<sup>76</sup> Immigrant workers warmed to political action. At a “rousing meeting” of Mountain State Lodge at the Polish Hall, Michael Tighe, former OVTLA president, addressed the mixed ethnic audience about the need for “solid organization.” In addition, Slavic organizer Larinki of the UMW and Joseph Rozanski of Stogie City Lodge also addressed the “brothers” who “came to this meeting in mighty fine shape and high enthusiasm.” After hearing both the positives and negatives of the issue in several languages, the rank-and-file “unanimously decided in favor of

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<sup>74</sup> For Victory Lodge #21, see February 5, 1920, 25; for Mountain State Lodge #19, see *Amalgamated Journal*, February 5, 1920, 10, February 26, 1920, 8; December 15, 1921, 4; for Stogie City Lodge #25, see February 5, 1920, 13; for Manchester Lodge #12, see January 22, 1920, 8, February 5, 1920, 10; for Tighe and Leonard’s presence among Slavic immigrant workers, see Mountain State Lodge #19 meeting, January 29, 1920, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up,” 997, 1004, 1008-9.

<sup>76</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 15, 1920, 6; key union members who supported educating unskilled workers about labor politics included many German-American Social Democrats like Walter Hilton, Albert Bauer, Joe Teufel and Valentine Reuther. With affiliation with the AFL in 1915, this political orientation only intensified.

entering the political field.” The OVTLA continued to advocate a policy of “vote for your friends and punish your enemies.” However, Mountain State #19 cynically reminded members “the candidate in both old parties are always our friends on election day, but not so after.”<sup>77</sup>

All lodges attacked “open shop” candidates in the 1920 elections. For example, in Benwood’s mayoral election, one candidate was a member of Mountain State Lodge, while the other man, an Irish-American named McShane, was a non-union skilled heater at the Riverside Mill. The union attacked McShane as a company tool. He had a great pension from U.S. Steel, which would keep him “true to the Steel Trust,” enabling Superintendent Beatty to “control him boots and britches.” The union saw that anyone wanting to get their pension in the future would have to “be true, no matter what I think, to the Steel Trust.” The union endorsed the pro-union incumbent Mayor Clark Sprouts, who aided steel strikers in 1919 and received heavy criticism for his pro-union views by Governor John Cornwell and local law enforcement.<sup>78</sup>

To increase its membership, the union needed to provide tangible economic advantages to attract prospective unionists. This was very important as the Wheeling Steel Corporation instituted its welfare capitalist programs. Stogie City warned to “beware of these company unions and so-called co-operative system” which might provide a “free hall” and a system for grievances, but still forces employees to struggle for 12 hours a day. Lodges tried to entice workers by providing relief funds for utility bills and housing rents to assist the needy families hit hard by the rising consumer prices. Others provided their own forms of entertainment.

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<sup>77</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 22, 1920, 3, 8; January 29, 1920, 9; March 11, 1920, 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, March 11, 1920, 11, April 1, 1920, 6; for his union sympathies, see Mayor Clark Sprouts to Governor John Cornwell, December 3, 1919; Governor Cornwell to Mayor Sprouts, December 4, 1919; Mayor Sprouts to Governor Cornwell, December 6, 1919, all in Box 110, Folder 4, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

Victory Lodge hosted dances for members' families and male "smokers." These popular entertainments promoted union themes outside of corporate-sponsored entertainment.<sup>79</sup>

During this period, Amalgamated lodges continued to attract rank-and-file support. Meeting regularly at the German Dueker's Hall, the steelworkers at the Belmont and LaBelle mills were doing their best to hold firm. In addition, Stogie City succeeded in increasing the wages for the many Polish immigrant unskilled laborers to 36½ cents per hour for up to 12 hours. Leaders appealed to disgruntled unskilled immigrants not to criticize the shop committee, promising that "If we show the company that we are a conservative organization . . . then they are going to respect us that much more . . . do not ask the committee to break our agreement; devote more time to getting more men into the organization and then we will prosper."<sup>80</sup>

Likewise, workers at the Riverside Mill maintained their numbers. In February 1920, the Victory Lodge had close to 2,000 members. Their meetings were so well attended that they had to get extra chairs and boxes for workers to sit on, as well as having two meetings a week to cover all of the issues.<sup>81</sup>

The union's sick and accident benefits were a major appeal of the lodge shop floor committees. Amalgamated lodges increasingly reached out to immigrant workers, especially after the mills began instituting ERPs. At Stogie City, a diverse group of workers from South Wheeling took advantage of the sick benefits.<sup>82</sup> Mountain State Lodge consistently worked with other locals to promote sick and death benefit organizations. Their sick committee sought to care

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<sup>79</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, January 8, 1920, 5; January 15, 1920, 6; February 12, 1920, 8; January 29, 1920, 10; February 5, 1920, 25.

<sup>80</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, March 11, 1920, 11; February, 5, 1920, 13, February 12, 1920, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Or the Riverside mill, see *Amalgamated Journal*, February 12, 1920, 8, February 19, 1920, 25; for the Belmont mill, see *Amalgamated Journal*, February 12, 1920, 29.

<sup>82</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, February 12, 1920, 29. According to their sick list, the men seeking assistance reflected many different ethnic backgrounds. Here are some names: George Pacgeski, Frank Jones, Frank Gregory, John Suecles, and Jake Vogt. For Stogie City Lodge nominee delegates, see *Amalgamated Journal*, April 1, 1920, 7. The members were Harry Sattergeld, Frank Jones, Joseph Rosanski, Herbt Tucker, and Albert Moser.

for a wide group of immigrant steel workers. Members receiving care during the spring of 1920 included Slavic workers like Joe Bebvosky, John Miharlow, J. Rolbovsky, J. Maharto, J. Rolbeskey, T. Burda, F. Burda, J. Tacia, J. Bero, J. Markensovick, and Pollosky.<sup>83</sup> Many men who suffered from disability also received claims as the recession in the steel industry worsened. For April 1920, Pete Klochan received \$15.00, Martin Skitarback (\$20.00), John Miharlow (\$65.00), and J. Martimiovich (\$35.00). By April 1921, Pete Klochan (\$5.00) and Lawrence Kalaska (\$20.00) still received assistance from Mountain State #19. Even union organizer Joe Rozanski filed a claim in April 1921 for \$40.00.<sup>84</sup> Stogie City sent out resolutions of condolences and aid to several immigrant families. Charles Cusnik lost his wife, who had been caring for their eight children. Joe Ralbowsky (age 27) suffered from lung-related conditions for several years, finally dying of consumption on December 28, 1920. His wife applied for death benefits from the local, receiving \$100 a week after his passing. These sick and death benefits were one of the ways the Amalgamated tried to maintain immigrant workers' loyalty.<sup>85</sup>

While their main adversary was the ERPs, lodges also competed with local ethnic beneficial societies, which provided their own competitive insurance premiums that were often better than the union and the ERP. Several ethnic aid societies existed in the mill district. These included the Croatian, Slovak, and the Roman and Greek Catholic First Hungarian Sick Benefit

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<sup>83</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, February 26, 1920, 8; March 4, 1920, 8; March 11, 1920, 7; March 18, 1920, 7.

<sup>84</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, July 29, 1920, 8; October 14, 1920, 7; April 14, 1921, 6; July 21, 1921, 11; Peter Klochan was a Slovak worker at the Riverside blast furnace, see 1920 Manuscript Census, Benwood Ward 2, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 57, Roll: T625\_1953, Page 3B; Kalaska was a Slovak-American laborer, see 1930 Manuscript Census, Benwood Ward 4, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0019, Roll: 2543, Page 5A, NARA, via Ancestry.com.

<sup>85</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, March 4, 1920; July 29, 1920, 8; April 14, 1921, 8. S.P. Breckinridge, *Americanization Studies: New Homes for Old* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1921), 318.

Society in Benwood, along with various Polish fraternal lodges in South Wheeling. In addition, ethnic community leaders, often tied to the Catholic parishes, maintained these aid societies.<sup>86</sup>

### **The 1921 Lockout at Wheeling Steel**

By the summer of 1921, the Amalgamated began one of its last large strikes of the 1920's against the Wheeling Steel Corporation. The dispute came from the consolidation of the firm's multiple plants and failure to sign union wage scales with all mills. After the formation of the Wheeling Steel Corporation, Amalgamated President Michael Tighe got a favorable wage scale from the company for the year ending July 1, 1921. President I.M. Scott, who had been vigorously anti-union for years, stated the company would sign union contract extensions with those mills already organized prior to the merger in 1920. The union scale covered the hot mills and tin plate works at Yorkville, Ohio and the sheet mills at Beech Bottom, Martins Ferry, Ohio, and on Wheeling Creek in East Wheeling. Since the company was one entity, the union argued Wheeling Steel must sign scales for all lodges. This included those at the Belmont Mill and the Benwood Works, which existed since February 1919, and still lacked firm contracts. These mills mostly employed Slavic immigrants, who the union argued were "all good fellows, not radicals" and desired the rights of industrial democracy that they fought for during the war.<sup>87</sup>

Wheeling Steel slowly implemented anti-union actions policies. In December 1920, the Benwood and Belmont Mills closed down for a time, as organizers demanded workers receive the 8-hour day and total union recognition. As production picked up in late May 1921, the company cut the daily wages of unskilled workers at the Benwood works from \$6 to \$3.96 for a 12-hour workday. Reflecting on the wartime experience, one union leader asked: "Is this the

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<sup>86</sup> Chapter 8 will discuss the role of ethnic aid societies. Labor historians debate the strength of ethnic aid societies. Immigrants tended to balance their finances and insurance accounts among several institutions, thus undercutting the appeal of labor union and ERP plans, see Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 56-83.

<sup>87</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, June 23, 1921, 9; for a general history of the breakdown of union contracts from 1920-1921, see the history compiled by Harry Farley of Stogie City #25, *Amalgamated Journal*, February 22, 1923, 16-7.



principle of Hun country?”<sup>88</sup> Amalgamated lodges from Benwood, Wheeling, Beech Bottom, and Yorkville, Ohio, joined a massive parade on June 5, 1921 protesting the open shop. Czech-born UMWA sub-district president Frank Ledvinka spoke eloquently and urged the solidarity of the miners to prevent the open shop’s spread throughout the Ohio Valley.<sup>89</sup>

When the lockout began, lodges faced the full brunt of open shop tactics. The company refused on August 5 to deal any more with the Amalgamated. The company hired labor spies to infiltrate the lodges and encourage workers to cross the picket lines.<sup>90</sup> Wheeling Steel also fed false reports to the press throughout the Ohio Valley to convince men to return to work.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, and most significantly, in July 1921 Circuit Judge Sommerville endorsed the company’s request to expand an earlier court injunction to prevent the Amalgamated Association picketing any nearby mills or the company’s downtown office. The Belmont Mill on 26<sup>th</sup> Street was the center of much of the picketing, and on August 27, the circuit court granted a special injunction against Stogie City #25, targeting their leaders, especially Vice President Joe Rosanzki, to stop any interference with those desiring to work and visiting employees in their homes.<sup>92</sup>

Steelworkers compared their situation to the plight of the coal miners engaged in armed battle in Logan and Mingo Counties: “West Virginia state officials are asleep at their jobs. Spies are all over the country and profiteers and grafters are in their glory.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, April 17, 1921, 7; May 12, 1921, 31; May 26, 1921, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, June 9, 1921, 1; *Wheeling Register*, June 4, 1921, 6; June 7, 1921, 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, July 28, 1921, 25; August 18, 1921, 1, 2, 25. The main agents used in Wheeling wrote via pseudonym. They were X58, Z22, and Z125; *Amalgamated Journal*, October 6, 1921, 29; Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, Minute Book, No. 8, January 8, 1922, Box#2, Folder #2, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No, 1055, WVRHC; for Landers and Wooster, see *Amalgamated Journal*, February 22, 1923, 16.

<sup>91</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, October 20, 1921, 1; November 3, 1921, 16; *Wheeling Register*, July 30, 1921, 5; July 31, 1921, Section 2, 6; this press coverage presenting things as getting better and mills opening up, see *Wheeling Register*, April 9, 1922, Section 2, 11, April 13, 1922, 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, August 4, 1921, 1, 32. The main plants involved in the strike at this point were the Belmont Mill on 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Wheeling; the Benwood mill of the old Wheeling Iron & Steel Co.; and the mills at Yorkville, Beech Bottom, Martins Ferry, Portsmouth, Ohio, and the Whittaker-Glessner mills on Wheeling Creek, see *Amalgamated Journal*, September 1, 1921, 9.

<sup>93</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, August 11, 1921, 30.

Other tactics sought to divide the strikers by nationality. Stogie City's picketing was hurt when labor bosses forged a petition saying that the strike had ended, trying to convince a large segment of the Polish workforce to report back to work. Stogie City held a meeting to tell immigrants about the nature of the company's tactics. A week later, Wheeling Steel obtained from the circuit court a temporary injunction against Stogie City Lodge, which included mostly Poles in the list of petitioners. Most were young, having immigrated between 1907 and 1913. Leo Sulek, one of those Poles that signed the petition, was born in 1896, immigrated in 1912, and worked as a finisher at the Belmont Mill. He signed along with his wife Rose, and another relative Alex Sulek, who was a skilled shearsman. Alexander was born in Gozeff, Poland in 1888, and worked as a roll hand in the Belmont's plate mill. Wladislaw Swek also signed the petition. He was born in 1893 in Grzy, near Warsaw, and during World War I was working as a laborer at the Belmont Mill.<sup>94</sup> While it is hard to validate the union's allegation that the company tricked these Polish men and women into signing the petitions, it does seem that for the Suleks and other Poles at the Belmont that some were beginning to move into semi-skilled and skilled jobs by 1921. They may have seen their future prosperity tied to the company.

By the fall of 1921, men began to cross the picket line. Wages stagnated, and by late fall 1921 unskilled men earned 19 cents per hour for 12 hours of work. However, with the lingering

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<sup>94</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, August 25, 1921, 13, 25, 28; September 1, 1921, 1; these Poles lived in the vicinity of the Belmont Mill, particularly on the 2600 block of Locust and Main Streets, see Leo Sulek, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 93, Roll T625\_1966, RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, National Archives, Washington, D.C., reproduced by Ancestry.com; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-22* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin & Co., 1921), 1175; Alexander Sulek, World War I Draft Registration Card #73, West Virginia, Ohio County, Roll 1993025, United States, Selective Service System, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 191701918, National Archives, Washington, D.C., M1509, via Ancestry.com (1 November 2013); Wladislaw Swek, World War I Draft Registration Card #122, West Virginia, Ohio County, Roll 1993025, United States, Selective Service System, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives, Washington, D.C., M1509, via Ancestry.com (1 November 2013).

recession, desperate workers had few options but return to work at such reduced wages.<sup>95</sup> With public opinion turning against the union movement, some leaders argued that the OVTLA needed to better educate workers. Joseph Rozanski thought it best for the Trades Assembly to finance its own weekly labor paper, since the *Wheeling Majority* recently went out of print. The Assembly even tried to encourage movie houses to show more labor motion pictures, especially the *New Disciple* (1921) and *The Contrast* (1921).<sup>96</sup> These films were necessary to unify Wheeling's blue collar workers as the open shop drive spread throughout the city's smaller manufactories in 1922.<sup>97</sup>

### **Impact of the Lockout on the Steelworkers' Community**

Religion came to the forefront during the steel strikes, along with the concerns over loss of economic and democratic rights. Harry Farley spoke directly to the relationship between religion and the working class, since he believed that most steelworkers were deeply devout. However, the growing antagonism was between a strictly working class religious belief and the dominant version of Protestantism, emphasizing a need to compromise with the capitalist class. For those struggling for industrial democracy, Farley stressed that "the workingman with a wife and family can't live on religion. Men have no time for religion who have to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week." They have no time to seek their own salvation when their employers' desire for greater profits meant "to starve their men into submission."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, October 13, 1921, 32; October 20, 1921, 13, 17; November 10, 1921, 20.

<sup>96</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 8, May 14, October 22, June 25, 1922, Box#2, Folder #2, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No. 1055, WVRHC. *The Contrast* would appeal to local steelworkers, since it was set in Mingo County during the Mine Wars. Contrasting the lives of operators and poverty-stricken miners, the film stressed that militant action to fight capital's exploitation. See Steven J. Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 157-60, 166-71.

<sup>97</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 8, May 28, July 23, September 24, October 22, November 26, 1922, Box #2, Folder #2, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly*, A&M No. 1055, WVRHC.

<sup>98</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, September 22, 1921, 4; for the role of the labor movement and Protestant religion, see Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915* (Philadelphia:

Since many foreign-born strikers were Catholic, local parishes suffered as they tried to provide assistance. As early as August 1919, the Benwood mills were down “for repairs.” St John’s Parish in Benwood, made up of Irish-American and a variety of Slavic families, could not celebrate the feast of St. Patrick in March 1920 since many “people still seem to be ‘boycotted’ or blacklisted” for their roles in the 1919 strike. Others found little work as coal and coke trains stopped bringing shipments to the mills across the Bellaire-Benwood Railroad Bridge a few blocks from the parish. By July 1920, men who did find work in the mills only averaged about three days a week. This caused many headaches for parish priests who needed to provide funds to the diocese, food and clothing aid, and address those dying from influenza. By March 1920, St. John’s alone had 70 funerals in just six weeks. Fr. Peter M. Schoenen of St. John’s was constantly behind on his diocesan collections during the 1919 strike on account that “only four men and nine girls are working from my parish.” The regular Orphan’s Collection was lacking by October 1921 since “My people does not [sic] have any money just now.” Schoenen was having difficulty trying to maintain the parish’s finances, especially in March 1920 after he took out insurance policies of \$5,000 on the church building and \$2,000 on all its contents.<sup>99</sup>

The despair from the long lockout continued into 1922 and 1923. In an illuminating and dire letter to Chancellor Edward Weber, Fr. Schoenen tried to summarize the conditions among the foreign working class: “you know the bad conditions of Benwood—not one hour work for over ten months, and since then three or four . . . every other week at a 60% reduction in wages. We will hope it will be better after the settlement of the miners’ strike in April.”<sup>100</sup> Predicting

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Temple University Press, 1989); for ethnic Catholic workers, see Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>99</sup> *Church Calendar*, August 1919, 2; April 1920, 10; July 1920, 22; Fr. P.M. Schoenen to Father Edward Weber, November 10, 1919; P.M. Schoenen to Father Edward Weber, March 5, 1920; P.M. Schoenen to Fr. Edward Weber, October 15, 1921, Deceased Priests Files, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (DWC).

<sup>100</sup> P.M. Schoenen to Father Edward Weber, January 30, 1922, Deceased Priests File, DWC.

that many coal miners might go out on strike at the Wheeling Steel and Hitchman Coal mines in Benwood, Schoenen spoke to the feeling of despair and frustration with the local labor climate. By November conditions were still poor, but started to slowly improve once the National Tube Company reopened in early January 1923. For the members of this multi-ethnic parish, the deprivations of the long labor battle affected all aspects of their economic and social life.<sup>101</sup>

For the Poles of St. Ladislaus, there is less direct evidence of their or Fr. Emil Musial's views of the strike. While many of the early union organizing meetings were held in the Polish Hall, by the time of the lockout versus Wheeling Steel, the space was used more so for Polish Catholic events. Poles began retreating back into their own ethnic world as the strike floundered and with rising racial antagonism directed at them from the labor movement. Institution-building increased in *Polonia*. For example, the Polish-American Political Club was chartered in February 1919 during the period of early steel organizing. Even the number of people claimed by the parish increased from 1,200 in 1917 to 1,500 by 1922. One suggestion of the growing economic troubles of the Poles, and why they went back to work, was seen in parish financial reports for the early 1920's. The parish's total receipts dropped from \$24,544 (1918) to \$11,446 (1919). While pew rents stayed about the same, money donated to special collections (a rather good indicator of a lack of Poles' extra income) plummeted from \$11,513.98 (1918) to \$4,586.65 (1919). While parish income did see improvement in 1920 and 1921, during the time before the lockout, parish receipts dropped to a low of \$10,290.35 in 1924.<sup>102</sup>

While Poles and other immigrants went back to work, skilled steelworkers increasingly saw black and Mexican migrants as a threat. Rising food prices and high rents made living conditions difficult. Victory Lodge observed that the Riverside Mill "must have about all the

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<sup>101</sup> Fr. P.M. Schoenen to Father Edward Weber, November 18, 1922; P.M. Schoenen to Fr. Edward Weber, January 23, 1923, Deceased Priests Files, DWC.

<sup>102</sup> St. Ladislaus Parish, Annual Reports, 1917-1924; Financial Reports, 1917-1924, DWC.

blackbirds from the South that they can get hold of.”<sup>103</sup> In the early summer of 1921, a group of forty blacks from Alabama arrived at night on the B&O. Coming from the tobacco districts of Alabama, one stated that “conditions in the south are completely dead as far as work is concerned.” Some brought their families, intending to remain in Wheeling for good. In 1923-24, over 4,000 arrived in Brooke, Ohio, Hancock, and Monongahela Counties. At least 1,500 black southern migrants worked in the Wheeling steel mills during the height of the strike, causing concerns over lack of housing and job competition.<sup>104</sup> Matt Greer of Crescent Lodge #8 called all strikebreakers “serfs of the Wheeling Steel Corporation. They have no manhood and principle; they are selfish. They would do anything for that job but fight for it as union men.” Of greater worry was how this practice seemed to be spreading to Polish, Greek, and Syrian immigrants.<sup>105</sup> Greer went further in calling the open shop plan the “Greek plan or some other foreign plan,” even though many Polish, Greek, and Syrian immigrants were growing increasingly desperate to provide for their families.<sup>106</sup>

Steelworkers viewed Mexican workers with total contempt. Some initially arrived in 1922, but most joined black and other Eastern European laborers in the summer of 1923. Wheeling Steel imported these men because of a lack of available local non-union labor. At the Benwood mills, this in-migration was quite large. After two years, National Tube imported as many as 500 Mexican men, with most arriving from Texas and New Mexico.<sup>107</sup> Stereotypes

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<sup>103</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, February 12, 1920, 6; February 5, 1920, 25; August 12, 1920, 19.

<sup>104</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 23, 1921, 14; T. Edward Hill, *Report of Negro Welfare and Statistics, 1923-24* (Charleston: Tribune Printing Co., 1924), 9, 46, 77; *Amalgamated Journal*, February 8, 1923, 3. By September, over 200 migrants purchased railroad tickets to return to the south, *Wheeling Register*, September 24, 1923, 5; Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2003), 38.

<sup>105</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, March 1, 1923, 1; April 12, 1923, 17.

<sup>106</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, March 8, 1923, 5; April 5, 1923, 13.

<sup>107</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, July 12, 1923, 24; for the migration of Mexican laborers for work in the blast furnaces of the Midwest, see Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit*

about Mexican immigrants grew as tensions over job competition and breaking of cultural boundaries intensified. W.J. Cashdollar of Mountain State #19 gave a very graphic description of how life had changed in the mill town:

“You would not have known Wheeling on Saturday, you could not get through the streets as you did some years ago. It used to be the foreigner but now you cannot get up or down the streets for greasers. It reminded me of Dode [Dodge] City, Kan. 45 years ago when I was there . . . The greasers looked just the same only I did not see any of them toting shooting irons, but you could not tell what they carried under their coats for those fellows can surely throw a knife and they would do it in a minute if your back was turned and they had [a] drink or two of hooch.”<sup>108</sup>

Union leaders also criticized the company for building “shanties” near the Belmont Mill for Mexican migrants, which one unionist saw as a joke, because the “greasers . . . will not work out in the open when it is hot let alone in the mill . . . I think they have run out of Greeks and Syrians.” Noting the conditions, another remarked “some hogs have better style.”<sup>109</sup>

Finally, Wheeling Steel’s new corporate policies devastated the union by enticing new workers and maintaining company loyalty. First, in April 1923 the Board of Directors passed a 10% horizontal wage increase. Second, they ended the company’s policy of 12 hour days for most semi-skilled and unskilled workers, setting the maximum at 10 hours (however, the company noted most worked just 8 hours). Third, capital investments went into expanding the company’s Steubenville Works, La Belle Nail Mill, and the 48<sup>th</sup> Street Can Factory further boosting employment. Finally, the company’s earlier attempts with employee representation plans seemed to be paying dividends. The Employee Relief and Beneficial Association offset the appeal of the Amalgamated’s health and injury policies. Many new workers liked the company’s generous pension plans, especially for those incapacitated by injury. The

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*and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 13-55; for the arrival of Mexican immigrants to Benwood, see *Wheeling Register*, July 7, 1923, 4; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 31, 1923, 13.

<sup>108</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, October 18, 1923, 24.

<sup>109</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, May 10, 1923, 24; June 21, 1923, 23; July 12, 1923, 24; August 23, 1923, 20; August 30, 1923, 24; September 13, 1923, 11.

Amalgamated claimed workers at the Belmont and Benwood plants still worked the 12-hour shift in September 1923, and that company “bulls and gunmen” guarded the Wheeling Creek Mill.<sup>110</sup>

By 1924, the Amalgamated strike was all but defeated. Polish unskilled steelworkers were desperate for money in the poor economy, and many broke ranks after a year and a half in need of the better wages offered by Wheeling Steel. While in 1921 unskilled workers’ wages were 19 cents an hour for 12 hours, by 1923 the company was paying 31-36 cents an hour. By August 1923, common laborers’ wages increased to 42 cents an hour for a 10-hour day. Twenty-nine months into the strike in December 1923, skilled workers looked angrily at the men laboring in Wheeling Steel’s mills: “ex-scabs of three or four strikes, and first time scabs of Wheeling, together with Greeks, Syrians, Negroes and Poles.”<sup>111</sup> The union no longer sympathized with the needs of immigrant families, who went back to work for consistent wages in an inconsistent 1920’s economy. In April 1924, John Moran of East Wheeling gave a long talk at the OVTLA meeting on “the undesirables brought here to work in the Steel Mills,” suggesting the final death knell of solidarity among Wheeling’s increasingly diverse labor force.<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>110</sup> For changes in Wheeling Steel’s hourly policy and hiring, see Scott, *Iron & Steel in Wheeling*, 173-5; Alexander Glass, Chairman Wheeling Steel Corporation, *1923 Annual Report of the Wheeling Steel Corporation, Wheeling, W.Va., For the Year Ended December 31, 1923*, WJU; Dr. Raymond-Lynn Boothe, *Fire on the Water: A New History of the Wheeling Steel Corporation* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 2011), 112-25. By 1925, Wheeling Steel was a fully integrated steel corporation with six blast furnaces (Belmont 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Top Mill, Martins Ferry, Benwood, Portsmouth, and Steubenville), steel rolling mills (Benwood, Top Mill, East Wheeling, Beech Bottom, Martins Ferry, Portsmouth, and Steubenville), coke ovens (East Steubenville and Portsmouth) tin mills (Yorkville and Martins Ferry), corrugated steel (Wheeling Corrugating, East Wheeling), steel cans (48<sup>th</sup> Street), and abundant coal mines to fuel the blast furnaces. For the union’s view on hours, see *Amalgamated Journal*, September 6, 1923, 15; September 20, 1923, 13; September 27, 1923, 13.

<sup>111</sup> *Seventeenth Annual Convention of the West Virginia Federation of Labor*, Wheeling, W.Va., September 8-13, 1924, 102-3, 253-4; OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 9, January 13, 1924, March 23, 1924, April 23, 1924, December 14, 1924, Box#2, Folder #4, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No. 1055, WVRHC; *Amalgamated Journal*, December 13, 1923, 2.

<sup>112</sup> OVTLA, Minute Book, No. 9, April 23, 1924, Box#2, Folder #4, *Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly Records*, A&M No. 1055, WVRHC.; *Amalgamated Journal*, January 18, 1923, 5; August 23, 1923, 18.



The high hopes of the 1919 strike faded in the harsh realities of the tightening economy of the 1920's. A good example was Polish union organizer Joseph Rozanski. After the strike, he lost his job at Wheeling Steel. By 1923-24 he worked as a chauffeur for a furniture company and later as a driver for a hardware store. While he and his wife owned their home at 2804 Wilson Street, they still required the labor of their children to meet their economic needs. By 1930, his teenage daughter Rosie worked as a tobacco stripper at M. Marsh & Sons. Through the 1930's, the family also relied on their son Edward's unskilled foundry job and daughter Elizabeth's job as a packer at the Wheeling Match Company. Throughout these years, other Polish immigrants and their children adopted a similar defensive strategy.<sup>113</sup>

While solidarity and unionism disappeared from the Wheeling steel industry, this was not a story totally without hope. Wheeling's unionists would need to educate the growing numbers of new industrial workers from Eastern Europe and those from the Mediterranean, Mexico, and the Deep South about the benefits of unionism. According to a man in the LaBelle tin mill, "there are many men here who never belonged to a union and thousands in other mills of the steel trust who don't know anything about the union—all they know is rule by the boss. These men, when they understand, will gladly come into the union and make good staunch union men, not only the man of foreign birth, but Americans."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Joe Rozanski, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ward 6 Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0015, Roll: 2550, Page 3A, via Ancestry.com; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1923-24* (Wheeling: W.L. Polk & Co., 1923), 829; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1926* (Wheeling: W.L. Polk & Co., 1926), 862; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1928* (Wheeling: W.L. Polk & Co., 1927), 777; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1930* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1930), 654; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1932* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1932), 602; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1934* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1934), 589; Joseph Rosanski, 1940 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 35-67, Roll: T627\_4437, Page 12B, NARA, via Ancestry.com. While Edward only worked for 8 weeks in 1939, his sisters Rosie and Elizabeth worked 52 weeks for \$800 each.

<sup>114</sup> *Amalgamated Journal*, August 23, 1923, 13.

## Chapter 8

### An Age of Affluence?: *Polonia* Adapts to the “Roaring Twenties”

During the 1920's, Wheeling's Polish community faced many new challenges and opportunities. In the age of mass culture and increasing standards of living, some blue collar immigrants saw a rise in their status within the urban enclave. A great example was Wojciech (Albert) Swiader. Born in January 1890 in the village of Grodziszko in southern Poland, he came to America in 1907 and settled in Wheeling in 1912. Starting out with the Pullman Company, he rose through the ranks eventually becoming an electrician, and for many years shop foreman. By 1920, he owned his own home valued at \$4,000, less than a block from St. Ladislaus Parish.<sup>1</sup>

Swiader's blue collar background and social striving helped him become a leader within Wheeling and the Upper Ohio Valley's Polish community. Starting in 1917, Swiader was a key organizer for the local and district chapters of the Polish Roman Catholic Union (PRCU) and other civic and fraternal organizations. As a leader in the popular Polish-American Political Club (PAP), founded in 1919, Swiader conducted an Americanization class for seven years, teaching English and aiding new immigrants in preparing for their naturalization exams. He was so successful that he was formally decorated by the Polish government with its “Swords of Haller” award. Among his fraternal duties and positions, Swiader was president of St. Joseph's Lodge No. 213 of the PRCU and president of District Council No. 36. He even served for three

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Swiader, WWI Draft Registration Card, #708, Roll #1993025, World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, NARA microfilm M1509; 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll T625\_1967, Page 14A, RG 29-Records of the Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin & Co., 1921), 1179; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1924* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin & Co., 1924), 933; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1926* (Wheeling: W.L. Callin & Co., 1926), 976; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1932* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1932), 686; 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0025, Roll: 2550, Page 12B, via Ancestry.com (11 October 2013).

years as vice president of the statewide PRCU. He organized community and parish events, and was one of the members of the multi-ethnic committee that helped create and sponsor the annual July 4<sup>th</sup> “Festival of Nations” celebrations at Oglebay Park. By the time he was relocated to the Pittsburgh Pullman Company office in June 1935, Swiader was an exemplar of the benefits available for social mobility in the 1920’s from within the Polish ethnic community.<sup>2</sup>

While the 1920’s provided some opportunities for advancement, the decade was also a trying one for many Polish families. Like Albert Swiader, Lukasz Piechowicz emigrated from a similar area of Galicia to the United States in 1907 with his wife Katherine and young son Jan. Working as a coal miner, the family moved for some time through Eastern Ohio. By 1913, he lived near Caldwell, Ohio with his wife and four children. Sometime after 1920, he changed professions and got work as a millworker at Wheeling Steel and the family relocated again to Benwood by 1924. However, the next few years were very difficult for the family. On April 9, 1924, Lukasz Piechowicz died at Wheeling Hospital of chronic myocarditis at age 53. His wife Katherine suffered more grief only nineteen days later, when her sixteen year old son Jan Piechowicz died in the Benwood Mine Disaster.<sup>3</sup> She struggled to maintain her family’s economic security and her own psyche. To supplement the small income from workmen’s compensation, her sons Joseph and Stanley found work at the steel mill and the Wheeling Can Factory on 48<sup>th</sup> Street. However, on June 26, 1926 tragedy struck the family again when Stanley Piechowicz fell from a truck on the corner of 27<sup>th</sup> and Main Street and fractured his skull after

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<sup>2</sup> For a great history of Swiader’s role in the community from the 1910’s-1930’s, see the article “Polish Lodge Lauds Swiader-Local Man Honored in Large Farewell Gathering.” *Wheeling Register*, June 2, 1935, Section1, 4.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Julia Zaccagnini for her excellent short family history of the Piehowiczs reprinted at <http://www.wvgenweb.org/marshall/piechowiczfam.htm>. Lucas Piehowicz, 1920 Manuscript Census, Noble, Noble County, Ohio, Enumeration District 164, Roll: Y625\_1424, Page 10B, RG 29-Records of the Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, NARA, reprinted via Ancestry.com; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1924, 777*; Lucas Piehowicz, Death Certificate #5191, Ohio County, April 9, 1924, District No. 3501-91, Series No. 368; Jan (John) Piehowicz, Certificate of Death #6402, Marshall County, April 28, 1924, District No. #2671, Series No. 138, West Virginia State Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics, West Virginia State Archives and History Center, Charleston, West Virginia (hereafter WVSA).

being crushed by a falling heavy box. He was only 16 years old. By 1930, the remaining members of the family rented a small home in Benwood for \$15 a month, and her two remaining sons both worked for Wheeling Steel. Even with this terrible history of family loss, the story was not without hope. At an early age, Katherine Piehowicz instilled in her children a love of music and ethnic culture. Anton (Andy) in particular was the most musically inclined. As a young man he performed tap dance at the Capitol Music Hall in Downtown Wheeling, paying for his lessons by working in the steel mill. He also played a variety of instruments, especially the piano, which he learned from his mother. Even with his family's tragedies, Andy Piechowicz was known for years as a "happy, jovial man and was very family-oriented."<sup>4</sup>

What explains the nature of ethnic communities in the 1920's? World War I and strikes for "industrial democracy" changed Polish and other Eastern European immigrant families. Often, studies of immigrant life in the interwar period tend to generalize how understandings of "class" and "ethnicity" evolved and affected people differently, emphasizing an overarching level of assimilationism. Was there more interaction between ethnic groups, or did the earlier parochialism tied to the parish and middle class community leaders continue? Looking at the 1920's, the main concern was to explain why Polish immigrants and their children shifted their allegiance in the 1930's to CIO labor unions and the Democratic Party coalition. Scholars first saw ethnicity as a strong force for solidarity, which encouraged Polish workers to join labor unions as an outgrowth of their "common peasant-communal experience" along with a general willingness to defer to authority. Therefore, the successful labor organizing of the 1930's only succeeded after working class solidarity shifted from more traditional institutions, like the

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<sup>4</sup> *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1926*, 807; Stanley Piehowicz, Death Certificate #8799, Ohio County, June 26, 1926, District No. 3501-91, Series No. 644, West Virginia State Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics, WVSA; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1934* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1934), 549; for Andy Piechowicz's music career, see Zaccagnini, "Piechowicz Family" History.

Catholic parish, fraternal associations, and athletic clubs.<sup>5</sup> Lizabeth Cohen took this argument further, suggesting that ethnic culture did not totally break down in the 1920's as a result of Americanization and mass culture, since ethnic small businesses, Catholic parishes, and ethnic clubs remained the pillars of community allegiance throughout the decade. These institutions were crucial for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Polish, Ukrainian, Slovak, and Croatian-Americans and acted as an intermediary "not so much [to] tear ethnic youth from their roots as help them reconcile foreign pasts with contemporary American culture."<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will address the evolution of Polish ethnicity in the 1920's. Historians see the 1920's as a time of increasing consumerism and social mobility. New immigrants moved slowly out of the poorest factory jobs, and some even opened small businesses. While this rise of an ethnic small business class was important, Wheeling's Polish population witnessed more modest levels of mobility, often only a rise from unskilled to semi-skilled positions in the steel mills. In coal mines, Poles and their children remained coal loaders. Women and young girls persisted in low wage factory jobs. Most importantly, relatively few Poles entered the small business class, let alone stayed there for many years.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter will also address whether the 1920's saw the beginning of the disintegration of ethnic communities. Thomas Gobel sees discontinuities between the immigrant and 2<sup>nd</sup> generations, as many young people left the old neighborhood. However, this argument too

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Friedlander, *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-1939: A Study in Class and Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), 95.

<sup>6</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Gobel sees social mobility overwhelming immigrant communities. It "weakened class boundaries while at the same time differentiating the class structure of the ethnic communities, weakening their homogenous character, increasing the potential for internal conflict, and stimulating economic aspirations which could only be fulfilled by leaving the enclosed world of the group." However, Wheeling's Poles followed the trend noted by John Bodnar remaining firmly in the working class. Thomas Gobel, "Becoming American: Ethnic Workers and the Rise of the CIO," *Labor History* (Spring 1988); Gobel, "Becoming American," 187-9, quote on 189; John Bodnar, "Immigration, Kinship, and the Rise of Working-Class Realism in Industrial America," *Journal of Social History* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 45-65.

overgeneralizes the issue.<sup>8</sup> For Wheeling's Polish community, the 1920's were definitively a transition period; however, it was one when the community's institutions grew and flourished and the numbers of Polish and Polish-Americans increased. While there was a small migration from the core neighborhoods of South Wheeling, most left to find work on the periphery of Ohio County in the region's expanding coal mines. In addition, the consolidation of the Wheeling Steel Corporation in 1920 and its many plants throughout the Upper Ohio Valley allowed others to move between towns within the region. Along with better streetcar traffic and more bridges over the Ohio River, the region became even more interconnected. A Polish steelworker living in South Wheeling could very easily ride a streetcar or drive with co-workers to Martins Ferry, Ohio, while still living in *Polonia*. His children could go to school at St. Ladislaus until the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, upon which time they could go to high school at Wheeling Central Catholic or the public high schools. Also, his children could find a variety of jobs in smaller manufacturing plants. This diffusion aided in the growth of Polish communities in places like Martins Ferry and Lansing, Ohio, and in the coal camps in Triadelphia, West Virginia. Rather than declining, the ethnic community expanded its reach. The parish assumed a larger role in everyday life, and those early fraternal societies multiplied and increased their memberships.

Another more worrisome change in the decade was the increasing interactions between ethnic communities and the children of immigrants on a city-wide and regional basis. Attending ethnically integrated high schools, going to movie theaters and department stores in downtown Wheeling, and playing on sports teams worked to undercut some of the ethnic community's hold on the entire Polish population. However, this chapter will also show how the era witnessed a revival of ethnicity. Festivals and dancing exhibitions throughout the region celebrated the newer immigrants' cultures. Unlike earlier festivals that catered only to specific ethnic

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<sup>8</sup> Gobel, "Becoming American," 186.

communities, these events were opened up to the public by the late 1920's, culminating in the annual summer "Festival of Nations" held at Oglebay Park. While allowing middle class leaders a venue to promote the benefits of ethnic heritage, the high participation of working class Poles shows that in the 1920's the power of ethnicity remained strong.

### **Immigrant Coal Miners' Struggles in Ohio County**

The 1920's saw a restructuring of Wheeling and the Ohio Valley's economy. While the region for years possessed a diversified manufacturing base, after World War I Wheeling's economy shifted toward steel and coal production. Glass houses and breweries declined, replaced by smaller metal shops, tobacco, tile, and textiles. To provide necessary coal reserves for local manufacturing, the Northern Panhandle coalfield witnessed a small boom period. New mines opened and older ones expanded their production to provide the highly valued bituminous coal found in Belmont County, Ohio and Marshall, Ohio and Brooke Counties in West Virginia.<sup>9</sup>

Polish and other immigrant men benefited from the expansion of the coal industry in the Ohio Valley. Mines expanded on Wheeling's periphery, dispersing immigrant populations, while increasing the ethnic diversity in Ohio County. By 1930, the county had the highest number of immigrants and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation ethnics of any county in West Virginia. Slavic coal miners still worked at the non-union Wheeling Steel and Hitchman mines in Benwood, but also at new mines in Lansing and Yorkville, Ohio.<sup>10</sup> While jobs were plentiful, most labored in unskilled occupations. One miner described the strenuous nature of the work: "You laid your track, set safety posts, drilled your own coal, shot your coal, and loaded it."<sup>11</sup> The newer mines

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<sup>9</sup> Michael E. Workman, Paul Salstrom, and Philip W. Ross, *Northern West Virginia Coal Fields: Historical Context* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University, Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, 1994), 116-7.

<sup>10</sup> West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Report, 1920-21* (Charleston: Jarrett Printing Co., 1920), 158, 174-5, 183-4.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with William H. Veasley in Keith Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to Do: The Mechanization of Coal Mining* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 11-12; description of coal loading, see pages 3-4, 13-4.

required many unskilled coal loaders with the heavy use of coal cutting machinery. As early as 1910, 86.1% of the Panhandle mines were machine cut. Mechanization still made these mines very dangerous, as miners could be run over by motors, electrocuted, or killed by the fall of a stone during the undercutting process. For example, as it expanded its workforce, nine miners died at the Elm Grove Mining Company in 1921 alone. As a result, the Panhandle Field possessed a high percentage of foreign-born miners, particularly Ohio County. By 1915, Greeks were the largest group (16%), but by 1919, Poles and Austrians predominated.<sup>12</sup>

During the 1920's, in Ohio County the three most newly hired miners were Poles, Italians, and African-Americans. The managers in Ohio County sought to employ the “judicious mixture” of dividing their workforce along racial lines. Table 8.1 shows the changes in the mines' employment over the decade. At different times, coal operators employed an even number of Poles, Greeks, Italians, and African-Americans. However, after 1925, they preferred in order blacks, Italians, and Poles.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 8.1: Ethnic and Racial Background of Ohio County Coal Miners, 1918-1930**

	Polish	Italian	African-American	Greek	Hungarian	Russian	Total Miners
1918	81	274	83	101	41	17	873
1919	57	25	62	78	0	47	796
1920	204	58	43	135	68	20	1,336
1921	165	96	93	96	125	99	1,591
1922	120	96	184	154	113	45	1,592
1923	175	167	142	121	131	77	1,994
1924	130	233	221	136	115	67	1,969
1925	188	319	175	137	172	97	2,421
1926	160	214	422	150	78	59	2,282
1927	267	326	437	151	84	84	2,467
1928	236	405	519	178	116	70	2,478

<sup>12</sup> Workman, *Northern West Virginia Coal Fields*, 118-9; WVDM, *Annual Report*, 1920-21, 158, 174-5, 183-4; WVDM, *Annual Report*, 1921 (Charleston: Jarrett Printing Co., 1921), 386-7; WVDM, *Annual Report*, 1922 (Charleston: Jarrett Printing Co., 1922), 360-1; *Wheeling Register*, July 12, 1923, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth R. Bailey, “A Judicious Mixture, Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917,” *West Virginia History* 34, no. 2 (January 1973): 141-56.



1929	228	332	489	165	101	61	2,176
1930	184	373	439	180	56	70	2,091

*Source:* West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Reports*, 1918-1930

Most of the miners flocked to the Elm Grove Mining Company, the fastest growing coal operation in the state. J.B. Chambers founded the company on land near his family’s farm along National Road east of Wheeling. In 1915, J.A. Paisley of Cleveland, who wanted abundant coal reserves for his growing steamship company to control the Great Lakes traffic, purchased the low producing mines. This purchase came just as coal production took off locally. In the Panhandle Field alone, production increased from 1,458,300 tons for 1906-1907 to 3,251,381 tons by 1918-1919. In 1918, the company produced 185,184 tons, making it West Virginia’s 98<sup>th</sup> largest coal company. To attract laborers, the company’s superintendent Thomas Skillcorn began advertising in the *United Mine Workers Journal* for miners to come work in the “suburbs of Wheeling . . . [while] Living in the country.”<sup>14</sup> In July 1920, Paisley had expanded his coal reserves to several thousand acres, and production for those years swelled to over 501,555 tons, making it the state’s 22<sup>nd</sup> largest mining company. The following year, the company mined 853,724 tons, increasing to the 7<sup>th</sup> largest company. This rapid expansion required a much larger workforce, and the company’s managers attracted hundreds of new immigrant workers and Southern blacks to live in company housing.<sup>15</sup>

The UMWA had a strong presence among Ohio County’s immigrant miners, who made their demands known to the union’s leadership. At the UMWA’s 28<sup>th</sup> Convention in 1921, a

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<sup>14</sup> Acts Passed by the Legislature of West Virginia at its Twenty-Second Regular Session, 1895 (Charleston: Moses W. Donnally, 1895), “Corporations,” 14; *Wheeling Register*, May 7, 1933; For tonnage rates, see Workman, *Northern West Virginia Coal Fields*, 116; *City Directories for Cleveland, Ohio, 1921* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Directory Company, 1921), 299; *Black Diamond*, February 16, 1918, 136; for the corporate history of the Paisley Trust as it came to be known, see *West Virginia Traction & Electric Co. v. Elm Grove Mining Co. et al*, District Court, Northern District, West Virginia, December 9, 1918, 253, No. 46; “Wanted-Miners,” *United Mine Workers Journal*, July 5, 1917, 27; WVDM, *Annual Report*, 1918 (Charleston: Jarrett Printing Co., 1918), 110, 126-7, 213.

<sup>15</sup> United States Tax Court, *Valley Camp Coal Company v. Commissioner* 26 T.C.M. 1147 (1967), Docket No. 4129-64, accessed via <http://www.taxcourtsusa.com/tax-cases/valley-camp-coal-company-v-commissioner>.

joint committee representing Locals 3229 and 4322 (Elm Grove) and Locals 3244 and 4285 (Triadelphia) demanded the union scale be set for a 6-hour day “with no reduction in pay,” that companies pay for all “deadwork” done by coal loaders, to remove imposed fines on coal loaders for leaving too much slate in the coal, and that companies employ “man trips.”<sup>16</sup> Representing immigrant concerns was Jacob Zednick, a Slovak miner living in Triadelphia. Immigrating in 1903, Zednick first mined coal at the anti-union Hitchman Coal & Coke Company before moving to the Elm Grove mines in the 1910’s. His experience at Hitchman impacted his role as a union man, and allowed him to act as an intermediary. While living in Hitchman Row, Zednick’s family rented with a Polish family and lived on the same block with dozens of Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, and Croatian miners. This experience with a multi-ethnic workforce, the shared experiences of working in dangerous conditions, and the fact he spoke English, enabled him to rise up as a union spokesman.<sup>17</sup> Union members also articulated broader social goals and critiques of the economy. In February 1921, Frank Chelminski and others of UMWA Local #4300 of Wheeling urged for a Senate investigation of the strike, the “use of hired thugs” in Mingo County, and “Governor Cornwell’s whitewash methods in the Logan County investigation.”<sup>18</sup> Chelminski was struggling to get by, as his family migrated from coal mines in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, and West Virginia. Joining the UMW provided him an outlet to express his frustrations with the economy and the repression of fellow miners in Southern West

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<sup>16</sup> Proceedings of the 28<sup>th</sup> Convention of the United Mine Workers of America (Indianapolis: Bookwalter-Ball-Greathouse Printing Co., 1921), “Resolution No. 447, Elm Grove, W.Va., August 1, 1921, pages 317-8.

<sup>17</sup> For Jacob Zednick, see 1920 Manuscript Census, Triadelphia, Ohio County, West Virginia, Roll T625\_1967, Page 6B, Enumeration District 118; for his time on Hitchman Row, see 1910 Manuscript Census, Benwood Ward 5, Marshall County, West Virginia, Roll T624\_1688, Enumeration District 0089, Page 20A, FHL Microfilm 1375701.

<sup>18</sup> *United Mine Workers Journal*, March 15, 1921, 10.

Virginia. Even so, he still needed the labor of two of his teenage daughters, Cecelia and Laura, who were laborers at the nearby Wheeling Can Factory.<sup>19</sup>

Immigrant miners in Ohio County faced a series of challenges. The Panhandle Field was a part of UMWA District #6, Sub-District #5. However, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the *Hitchman Coal & Coke* (1917) case made future organizing difficult via the infamous "yellow dog contract" "encouraging" employers to make their employees sign an individual contract. Immigrant miners tried to organize the Hitchman mine for years.<sup>20</sup> State government also undermined labor organizing. During the November 1919 coal strike, Governor John J. Cornwell worked in close association with J.C. McKinley, President of the Panhandle Coal Operators' Association to make sure coal production remained stable, thanks to the presence of the new state constabulary. However, trouble continued at the large union strongholds in Ohio County, where union miners intimidated "men who desire to work."<sup>21</sup>

Union members took determined action at the newly expanding Richland Mine in Warwood. In 1919, Italian immigrants Frank and Louis Costanzo purchased the South Warwood mines from J.C. McKinley. Employing over 1,000, the workforce of Italian, Polish, Greek, Slovak, and Croatian miners lived in company housing along Highland Avenue, where ethnic groups clustered in certain locales, like "Crohill" for the Croatian miners.<sup>22</sup> In 1919, unionists intimidated several immigrant men trying to "scab." Croatian Nicholas Sertic was pulled off a

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<sup>19</sup> Chelminski passed his unionism onto his son Frank, Jr. who became an officer of the local USWA at Continental Can in the 1940's. For background on the family, see 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll: T625\_1967, Page 13A, RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, NARA; 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 25, Roll: 2550, Page 14A, RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, NARA, reprinted via Ancestry.com.

<sup>20</sup> Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 196-200; *Benwood Enterpriser*, July 12, 1917, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), 48-51; J.C. McKinley, telegram to Governor John Cornwell, November 3, 1919; J.C. McKinley, telegram to Governor John Cornwell, November 5, 1919, all in Box 108, Folder 2, John J. Cornwell Papers, WVRHC.

<sup>22</sup> Sean Duffy and Jim Thornton, *The Wheeling Family: A Celebration of Immigrants and Their Neighborhoods* (Wheeling: Creative Impressions, 2008), 54-5, 64.

streetcar in South Wheeling and warned not to go to the mine. When Polish coal loader Mike Burda refused to join the union a Polish organizer Paul Wolanin of Warwood, told Burda that he would not be able to work there once the union had a contract.<sup>23</sup> The strike showed the divides between and within the different immigrant groups over unionization.

By the mid-1920's, the recession in the soft coal industry began to impact Elm Grove's union miners as more non-union operations opened in Central Appalachia. In order to stabilize the industry and expand the UMW's foothold in Northern West Virginia, the UMWA met with operators in Jacksonville, Florida and formalized a three year contract agreement (April 1, 1924-March 31, 1927), which extended the 1922 wage scale. It set a \$7.50 wage for an eight-hour day and a \$1.08 tonnage rate. While heralded by John L. Lewis, with Southern West Virginia operators undercutting the union mines' wage rates, union mine owners began abrogating the Jacksonville Agreement.<sup>24</sup> Beginning in the Fairmont Field, operators evicted union miners from company housing, imported strike breakers protected by the state police, and sought court injunctions. UMW organizer Van Bittner, issued a strike call on April 1, 1925 calling all non-union miners to join to fight "against starvation wages, intolerable working conditions" and in defense of "industrial freedom and the principles of collective bargaining." By May 1925, 95% of the Panhandle Field was out on strike.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mike Burda, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Richland District, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0113, roll T625\_1967, FHL microfilm 1375705, page 34A, via Ancestry.com (21 November 2013).; Paul Wolanin and Annie Salakiewicz, marriage certificate, July 12, 1922, Ohio County Clerk Office, Marriage Book, 101, West Virginia Vital Records, WVSA; John B. Wilson, "In re: Intimidation of Miners at Richland Mine, Warwood, West Virginia," November 6, 1919, Bureau of Investigation Case Files, Old German Files, 1909-21, #8000-303770, Roll#722, RG 65, NA, Fold3.com (1 May 2012).

<sup>24</sup> *United Mine Workers Journal*, March 1, 1924, 3, 5; Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 105-11; Thomas J. Robertson and Ronald L. Lewis, "Conflict at Coal River Collieries: The UMWA vs. the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers," *West Virginia History* Volume 52 (1993): 73-90; Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to Do*, 146-7; Chelsie C. Fitzwater, "The Devil Was the First Scab: Working-Class Spirituality and Union Organization in Marion County, West Virginia, 1918-1927," (MA Thesis, Marshall University, 2011), 5-6

<sup>25</sup> Van Bittner to Governor Howard M. Gore, June 20, 1925, Box #7, Folder 7-3, Van Amberg Bittner Papers, A&M 1698, WVRHC; Fitzwater, "The Devil Was the First Scab," 47-8, 56-66; *United Mine Workers Journal*, April 1, 1925, 10; May 1, 1925, 10; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 16, 1925, 6; April 17, 1925, 2; April 18, 1925, 3.

The Elm Grove Mining Company broke with the Jacksonville Agreement in spring 1926. In 1924, the Paisley interests busted the union at their Monongalia County mines then shifted to the mines in Ohio County. Local operators evicted miners from company housing, forcing the UMW to create tent colonies throughout the Panhandle Field.<sup>26</sup> In March 1926, the Paisley interests announced they would close their mines in Belmont County, Ohio, and Triadelphia unless a reduction in the Jacksonville Agreement took place, back to the 1917 wage scale.<sup>27</sup> Refusing to give into this drastic reduction, on March 25 President John Cinque of UMWA District #6, sub-district No. 5 ordered all 1,700 miners at the Elm Grove mines out on strike. Since they were the only Panhandle mines still under union contracts, the *Wheeling Register* correctly summed up the situation: “Future of Union Coal Fields in Balance.”<sup>28</sup>

The dispute intensified when J.A. Paisley informed the local unions the mines would not resume until April 1927, and that all union men needed to pay their rent a month in advance or vacate company housing in Triadelphia. Several weeks later, General Manager Joseph Arkwright posted a notice at the #3 mine stating that the company would reopen non-union immediately. He claimed that the “company cannot profitably operate the mines here on a union basis, in competition with the non-union mines all about us,” and that they had failed to renew old commercial contracts. The company would return to the 1917 wage rates, a 20% cut from the Jacksonville Agreement. Skilled tracklayers, drivers, motormen, and trip riders would earn \$6 a day (down from \$7.50). The majority working on the tonnage rates (paid \$1.08 a ton), saw their wages cut by 41% to \$0.63. John Cinque responded that “Our men are well organized and will stand firm,” and established picket lines around the mines. Cinque and Elm Grove’s miners

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<sup>26</sup> Much of the 1925 evictions occurred at the Richland Coal Company and Pittsburgh Coal Company mines in Brooke County, *United Mine Workers Journal*, May 15, 1925, 14; July 15, 1925, 13; October 15, 1925, 10;

<sup>27</sup> *Wheeling Register*, March 20, 1926, 5; March 22, 1926, 1; Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 133-5.

<sup>28</sup> *Wheeling Register*, March 25, 1926, 1; March 26, 1926, 1; March 28, 1926, 4.

agreed with John L. Lewis that only the entire unionization of the soft coal industry and a high wage economy would provide a firm standard of living. Otherwise, operators would continue to cut wages and drive labor costs to the bottom in order to maximize profits.<sup>29</sup>

Immigrant miners were at the forefront of the strike. Many stood picket duty and refused to go back under reduced wages. The real turning point came when eviction notices were sent out to 72 union miners at #3 Mine to vacate company housing by May 6 (housing about 360 miners and their families). Union members coordinated to remain in their homes and vowed to fight the evictions in the courts. While some left, the companies formerly charged 57 union miners in the Ohio County Circuit Court; almost all were of Greek, Polish, and Slovak descent.<sup>30</sup>

The court hearing offers a glimpse into the everyday problems Polish immigrant miners suffered in the mid-1920's. Joe Hanas was born in 1880 in Austrian-Poland, and emigrated in 1899. Like many coal loaders, the boom and bust nature of the industry meant he and his family often moved from one coal camp to another. In the decade before the eviction, Hanas' family lived first in Pennsylvania, then in Wheeling during the First World War, then in Ohio, and finally back at the Elm Grove #3's Boyd Mine, where \$10 a month rent was "deducted from his wages semi-monthly . . . [for] use and occupancy of that house."<sup>31</sup> While the UMWA was fighting to maintain wage contracts, Hanas and his co-workers were more concerned about mine safety.<sup>32</sup> Hanas informed the company that their outtake motor system "was a dangerous proposition." This policy violated state law, stating "Electric haulage by locomotives operated from trolley wire is not permitted in any mines worked by safety or approved electric lamps

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<sup>29</sup> *Wheeling Register*, April 11, 1926, Section 2, 9; April 26, 1926, 1; April 27, 1926, 1, for new wage rates; *Wheeling Register*, May 2, 1926, Section 2, 9; Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 135, 137-9.

<sup>30</sup> *Wheeling Register*, April 28, 1926, 2; April 29, 1926, 1; April 30, 1926, 1; May 8, 1926, 4; May 18, 1926, 2.

<sup>31</sup> "Joe Hanas," 1930 Manuscript Census, Smithfield, Jefferson County, Ohio, Enumeration District 0023, Roll 1824, Page 26B; for the trial, see *Elm Grove Mining Company of West Virginia vs. Hanas, John*, May 18, 1926, Ohio County Circuit Court, envelope #409B-14, Microfilm OHI 808, Trial Transcript, pages 4-5, 10, Ohio County Court Records-Ohio County (WV), A&M 31, WVRHC.

<sup>32</sup> *Elm Grove Mining Company vs. Hanas*, pages 6-7.

except upon the intake airway fresh from the outside.” In essence, the union miners engaged in a “sit-in” strike to force the company to comply with the letter of the law.<sup>33</sup>

The UMWA warned about the dangers of open lights and gas produced by mechanized equipment, which was largely the cause of the Benwood Mine Disaster in April 1924. Eugene Signorelly, an Italian union member at the Boyd Mine since October 1917, stated that the union men knew about the danger of “carbide lamps.” Signorelly argued that coal loaders worried that with the motor pulling trips and pushing air out, it would create sparks, pushing them toward the flames of men’s lamps. Because #3 mine “was dusty and gaseous,” the danger grew since the company let miners continue to “shoot black powder with squib and matches.”<sup>34</sup>

Andy Romanesky, a Polish assistant foreman at the Elm Grove No.3 mine, linked together the unionists’ anger over violations of basic safety and the implementation of the open shop. Romanesky started as a foreman at the Boyd Mine on May 11, 1925, having previously worked as a miner and foreman at the Wheeling Steel mine in Benwood. He quit on April 27, 1926 when the company announced the 20% wage cut, violating the union contract. He also explained the danger of the gaseous mine not operating on the intake. While a defendant in the case, the court asked that his testimony be excluded because of his union membership. In the end, the court upheld Paisley’s actions, removing the union from the Elm Grove mines.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pages 12-14, 17-19; *Wheeling Register*, March 22, 1926, 1; May 19, 1926, 5.

<sup>34</sup> “Open Light Danger-Department of Interior Warns Against Use,” *United Mine Workers Journal*, March 1, 1924, 14; Eugene Signorelly testimony, *Elm Grove Mining Company vs. Hanas*, pages 27-30, 34, 36-37. Secretary William T. Roberts of UMWA sub-district #5, District #6 testified that while a closed electric lamp “reduces the point of ignition,” if a mine does not follow the state law, but does “permit the operation of motors on a return airway, it creates a condition more dangerous than the open lights” leaving a larger volume of gas to collect along the haulage line. If ignited, it would then explode “with such force as to lift the cover off the mine almost.”

<sup>35</sup> Andy Romanesky testimony, *Elm Grove Mining Company vs. Hanas*, pages 38-43; *Wheeling Register*, May 20, 1926, 13; Anthony Romanoski, WWI Draft Registration Card, No. 116, Ohio County, Precinct #8, June 5, 1917, Wheeling, West Virginia, Roll#1993025 in United States, Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives and Records Administration, M1509 reprinted via Ancestry.com; Anthony Romansky, 1920 Manuscript Census, Benwood Ward 1, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 56, Roll: T625\_1953, Page 4B, RG 29, NARA, Ancestry.com; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918* (Wheeling: R.L. Polk & Co., 1927), 568; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1926*, 861.

The non-union years brought difficult times for immigrant union miners as many sought work elsewhere. Anthony Romanesky found work at the Windsor Powerhouse Coal Co. at Windsor Heights, Brooke County. John Hanas's family moved around the Ohio Valley after the evictions. In 1930, he worked at a mine in Smithfield, Ohio near Steubenville. By the mid-1930's, his family lived on National Road, where he worked again at the Elm Grove mines. However, by 1940, the family lived across the river from Wheeling in the Lansing, Ohio coal camps. While only John's son Anton worked in the mines, his twin daughters, Nancy and Mary, supplemented the family's income working at Wheeling Corrugating in East Wheeling.<sup>36</sup>

### **Benwood Mine Disaster April 1924**

For the immigrant neighborhoods of South Wheeling and Benwood, the disaster at Wheeling Steel's Benwood Mine was the darkest moment in collective memory. At 7:08am on April 28, 1924, a massive mine explosion took place during a torrential rainstorm. Occurring minutes after the men entered for the morning shift, a pocket of methane gas set off an explosion in the 8-North section. While the company liberated gas at new coal faces and fire bosses checked for gas, the state department of mines later learned the company used open safety lamps. Even with minimal methane gas, this was still dangerous because a small fall of slate or a ceiling brace could lead to an explosion. Coal diggers used black powder for "shooting" the coal face, then sprinkled water during the extraction of the coal. One onlooker noted that the mine's "fan should have been in operation continually so that no gas would have been permitted to

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<sup>36</sup> "Anthony Romanoski," 1930 Manuscript Census, Buffalo, Brooke County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0003, Roll: 2527, Page 28A, RG 29, NARA, Ancestry.com; "John Hanas," 1930 Manuscript Census, Smithfield, Jefferson County, Ohio, Enumeration District 0023, Roll 1824, Page 26B; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1934*, 302; "John Hanas," 1940 Manuscript Census, Pease, Belmont County, Ohio, Enumeration District 7-38, Roll T627\_3029, Page 13A, Ancestry.com. The family was still living together, even though his children were in their mid-20's. For 1939, his son Anton was unemployed, while John Hanas worked for half a year on a New Deal road project. The daughter's work at Wheeling Corrugating was a common for many immigrant families in the 1920's and 1930's when the company began a policy of hiring many young women to work as press operators. However, during the late 1930's recession these female wage earners' wages were needed to get by. Nancy worked for 38 weeks, earning \$785 and Mary worked just 16 weeks earning \$275.



generate.”<sup>37</sup> The blast demolished mine motors and secondary entry rooms, dislodged timber supports, and numerous roof collapses killed many men. The destruction was so vast, that it took several days before crews reached the bodies in Entry Shaft #8, leaving over 40 buried elsewhere throughout the mine. It would take at least six months to repair the mine.<sup>38</sup>

The Benwood Mine had a questionable safety record prior to April 28, 1924. In operation for over sixty years, it was a three-entry, room-and-pillar mine. Recently mechanized, the company employed nine underground electric mining machines. Fire bosses checked each room at 3:00am before the morning shifts. However, the company had a minor gas explosion on September 20, 1923 that killed a boss and two Italian miners. Following the 1923 explosion, the Wheeling Steel Corporation provided another intake to air out the rest of the mine. Even with the improved ventilation, the mine’s roof was “weak and treacherous” with support timbers needed every two feet, and miners left six inches of coal above them.<sup>39</sup> The explosion led to calls for better safety. State Mine Inspector R. M. Lambie, commenting on the increasing numbers of similar explosions, noted that all mines releasing any amount of gas should be termed “gaseous” and thereby use only “approved electric cap lamps, explosion proof motors and also permissible explosives.” He advised miners receive gas masks to aid in the advent of “afterdamp.” Most importantly, Lambie argued for better rock dusting regulations, “that provides no loopholes for evasion.” He was concerned about this latter issue, informing Governor Ephraim Morgan of “Rumors that Benwood Mine was not inspected.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 29, 1924, WVRHC.

<sup>38</sup> Chief of Department of Mines, R.M. Lambie, “Benwood Mine Disaster: Report on Benwood Explosion,” AR1533, reprinted via WVSA; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 3, 1924, 1; May 5, 1924, 3.

<sup>39</sup> WVDM, *Annual Report*, 1923 (Charleston: Jarrett Printing Co., 1923), 209; WVDM, *Annual Report*, 1924 (Charleston: Jarrett Printing Co., 1924), 348-9; Lambie, “Report on Benwood Mine Explosion.”

<sup>40</sup> Lambie, “Report on Benwood Mine Explosion;” R. M. Lambie, Chief of Department of Mines, Benwood to Governor Ephraim F. Morgan, May 2, 1924; Lambie to Governor Morgan, May 8, 1924, Box 24, Folder 4, Ephraim Morgan Papers, A&M 203, WVRHC.

The 119 coal miners killed represented a cross-section of the new immigrant workforce common in mechanized mines found in Northern West Virginia. The Polish community suffered the worst loss—39 of the 119 killed. In total, 103 were immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe.<sup>41</sup> Word spread quickly throughout South Wheeling and Benwood of the explosion, and hundreds flocked to the Brown’s Run shaft. Women “frantic with fear” ran through the torrential downpour, praying for survivors. One observer noted that some women roamed through the Benwood mill yards and streets “haggard of expression and wandering about aimlessly.” For two days, wives gathered on the nearby hillside around fires, awaiting word. When rescuers announced that those not killed immediately suffocated from “afterdamp,” a reporter noted how their cries “caused a moaning sound that could be heard for a considerable distance.” Immigrant workers from nearby mines and steel mills volunteered to help remove the dead. The conditions of the bodies were appalling. In one pit, they found two Italian brothers clasped together in their last moments. A makeshift morgue was first set up at the mine’s washroom, but later bodies were “too gruesome to describe.” A *Wheeling Intelligencer* newsman noted one unidentified man who was “practically baked. He was swollen to almost twice his normal size.” All were burned terribly, although relatives slowly began to identify kin as best as they could.<sup>42</sup>

Ethnic communities formed relief organizations along with St. Ladislaus and St. John’s Parishes, the Catholic Diocese, and city governments. In Benwood, Mayor James Cox set up a donation fund through the Bank of Benwood, and Donald Liberatore, head of the bank’s foreign department, made sure to distribute the money to the various immigrant families. Within a day,

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<sup>41</sup> “Benwood Mine Disaster, List of Victims, April 28, 1924, *Annual Report, Department of Mines for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1924*, reprinted via WVSA <http://www.wvculture.org/history/disasters/benwood02.html> ; Sean Duffy, *The Wheeling Family, Volume 2: More Immigrants, Migrants and Neighborhoods* (Wheeling: Wheeling History, 112 Fourteenth Street, 2012), 255-60.

<sup>42</sup> “Dead Bodies Cover Mine Floor-No Hope for Lives of Victims in Gas Explosion,” *Wheeling Register*, April 29, 1924, reprinted via West Virginia State Archives; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 29, 1924, 1, 2; *Wheeling Daily News*, April 29, 1924, 1; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 30, 1924, 1.

the local Italian and Polish societies made significant contributions. In Wheeling, Mayor Thomas Thoner also set up a committee and made arrangements to have all local motion picture houses sponsor a benefit performance for the following Sunday matinees for the grieving families. Even the Italian government via its New York City consulate sent word to Father Schoenen to ascertain the number of Italians killed or directly affected. The Italian Consulate would then send appropriate funds to provide for their countrymen. In addition, several days later, delegates of the Jugo-Slav consul in Pittsburgh also went to Benwood to provide assistance for members of their ethnicity. On May 2 John Dritsas, a counselor from the Greek ambassador in Chicago arrived to meet with officials from the Wheeling Steel Corporation to find out about the cause of the accident and provide aid to the fifteen Greek men killed.<sup>43</sup>

The two major Catholic parishes in the area served as key centers for aiding the victims' families. Fr. Schoenen of St. John's in Benwood and Fr. Emil Musial of St. Ladislaus arranged for bodies to go to Cooley Bentz or ethnic-owned funeral parlors to be prepared for internment. Beginning on April 29, an endless line of funeral corteges ran through the two cities on their way to mass burials at Mt. Calvary Cemetery east of Wheeling. For Schoenen and Musial, the images of desperation and grieve-stricken families were not new. Bishop Donahue sent both to aid in the aftermath of the Monongah Mine Disaster in December 1907. Some of the men who were identified were sent to the Bartscky, Olsztla, and Stolarski funeral parlors, all within the Polish neighborhood on the South Side.<sup>44</sup> The Catholic churches and various ethnic societies held many funeral processions, even for those unidentified. Fr. Schoenen held funeral masses

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<sup>43</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 29, 1924, 8; April 30, 1924, 6; May 1, 1924, 2; *Wheeling Daily News*, April 29, 1924, 5; May 2, 1924, 1; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 3, 1924, 2. It should be noted as is often the case with mine disasters, newspapers themselves cannot solely be relied upon for the ethnic background of those killed. I rely heavily on the magnificent and detailed work done by Joseph Anthony Tellitocci in documenting the actual names, ethnic backgrounds, job descriptions, and addresses of those men killed. For the discrepancy in names, the May 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* reported 25 Greek men killed, while Tellitocci's evidence finds only 15 men of Greek birth killed. See his findings included in Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, Volume 2, 255-60.

<sup>44</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, April 30, 1924, 1; May 1, 1924, 1

for a number of Italians from the parish. He also held a triple service for three natives of Szany, Hungary, Istvan Vargo, Ignac Orban, and Sandor Horvath. Fr. Musial and the Polish Catholic societies had a particularly trying time on the morning of May 2. Phillip Lislak and Lenard Levicki's service was at 8:00am, followed at 8:30 by a private funeral for John Galenpiowski. A half hour later, a dual service was held for Adam Dlugoboski and Walter Oblizajek. At 9:30, Carlo Ciercia's service took place at the Polish church. Finally at 11:00am, a triple funeral for Izodor Szalajka, Mike Kozienco, and Joseph Kedziorski occurred. Afterwards, the parish and entire community went to a mass burial at Mount Calvary Cemetery.<sup>45</sup>

The blast left many families in the ethnic community without a breadwinner. While the devastation hit many households, Fr. Schoenen found "32 widowed foreign women" in one single block in Benwood and a total of between 50 and 60 widows in a larger two-block area on Main Street. Throughout this section, Fr. Schoenen encountered "Crying women and weeping children are found on every door step."<sup>46</sup> The Catholic Sisters of St. John's Parish along with the Catholic Women's League of the Diocese canvassed Benwood to locate all needy families. Catholic women tried most to comfort young children, who "seemed stricken stiff." Many of the widowed immigrant mothers exclaimed that they had no food or money to purchase foodstuffs, even as the women appeared "hallow-eyed" and deadly thin themselves. At a time when the South Side Catholic community would have been gearing up to witness the pomp and jubilation of the annual May Processions, the community instead set about to provide food and shelter to the needy. Various local fund raising drives showed the generosity of many. The immigrant societies increasingly received aid from outside sources, especially the Red Cross and the local

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<sup>45</sup> "Melancholy Dirge Goes on as Hearses Line Benwood Streets-Twenty Bodies Laid to Rest in Various Cemeteries in Wheeling District," *Wheeling Daily News*, May 2, 1924, 12.; Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, Volume 2, 244. Tellitocci's grandfather was Istvan Vargo; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 2, 1924, 1; May 3, 1924, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 1, 1924, 2.

Associated Charities. Steelworkers at Wheeling Corrugating in East Wheeling raised \$515 and workers at the Martins Ferry plant contributed another \$510. Wheeling Steel assisted in the treatment of victims with the company's head "welfare" nurse, Elsie Risor providing necessary treatment to families in need. In the oddest act of kindness, considering the immigrant and Catholic background of the victims, the Wheeling Klan No. 1 of the KKK sent \$50 for relief.<sup>47</sup>

What is significant from the terrible tragedy was how the deaths brought together many of the different immigrant groups in the area. After doing an investigative piece on twin Italian brothers killed, a local reporter noted how surprised she was to find in a neighboring Italian woman's home how "many Polish friends of the family, came to view the remains." Mixed immigrant audiences wept together and tried to identify their relatives at the morgues at Coeey Bentz and Benwood's Blue Ribbon Hall. After visiting all the grieving residents, she concluded:

"The only ray of light for the living was seen in the wonderful fellowship prevailing between all the stricken families, it is a community sorrow which is tying the whole town into big family, into a bond which even the variation of languages, is no account, they speak not to each other by the tongue, but by the language of the heart."<sup>48</sup>

The large mass burial of twenty-four miners on May 5, 1924, at Mount Calvary reflected the desperation and sense of loss to the immigrant communities. An observer noted how the awful scene "would melt away all trace of racial barriers." Widows and mothers responded with desperate anguish as they watched their husbands' bodies placed within the earth. One grieving mother collapsed, screaming in her native language "My boy, my boy!" Showing the mixed background of those killed, priests from all major Roman Catholic parishes in town were present, along with Rev. Cyril Perozok of the Greek Ukrainian Catholic Church.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 1, 1924, 2; *Wheeling Register*, May 4, 1924, 1-2; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 5, 1924, 3; for money from the local steelworkers, see *Wheeling Daily News*, May 4, 1924, Section 2, 4; by May 5, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* had collected \$3,599.81 from private donations, including the Klan.

<sup>48</sup> Anne Perry, "Mike Calls Twin Brother Rocco to His Death in Mine," *Wheeling Daily News*, May 1, 1924, 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 6, 1924, 1

Even with all the public goodwill toward the needy families, many within the immigrant neighborhoods worried about the long term livelihood of the victims' dependents. Under the West Virginia Workmen's Compensation Law, every widow would receive \$30 a month for the rest of her life, along with \$5 a year for each child (until they turned 16) who lost a father. As part of their company pension plan, Wheeling Steel paid widows a lump sum of \$500 from the employee insurance fund and \$150 to help cover funeral expenses. However, the situation was complicated by the fact many men were married before coming to America, thus requiring the women to provide official marriage certificates. The Red Cross helped these women get the necessary documents sent from their home countries.<sup>50</sup> Many of the dead immigrant miners had been working to become naturalized, build homes for the families, or bring loved ones over when they were killed. Large families left without economic assistance could be found throughout South Wheeling and Benwood. The worst case was in an apartment building at 1502 High Street in Benwood, where thirteen children were left without a father.<sup>51</sup>

The terror and grief caused by this tragedy devastated South Wheeling families for years to come. Living in dilapidated and decaying housing, the Polish immigrants also lacked adequate and functioning utilities. After the failures of the Steel Strike of 1919 to forge a strong industrial union of immigrant laborers in the Upper Ohio Valley, a majority of the Polish immigrants struggled to survive on the meager earnings from the Wheeling Steel Corporation. On May 3, 1924, Fr. Emil Musial submitted a letter to the newspaper to shed some light on the "bigger" solutions needed for his people. Praising the generous nature of those in Wheeling, he wanted to voice his views concerning "the disposition of the fund subscribed for the stricken to their real and lasting benefit." After reading the various newspaper accounts, Musial targeted

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<sup>50</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 5, 1924, 11; *Wheeling Daily News*, May 4, 1924, Section 5, 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 6, 1924, 8.

something deeper that bothered him and many Poles. Noting how those killed “were hard working and industrious men, and perhaps their pride would suffer if offered aid” directly, Musial stressed that “They are not starving.” While this may sound like a leader trying to defer any criticism that his community was poor, Musial was rather worried about long term effects of the mine disaster:

“What they do need, however, is alleviation from the sufferings and burdens of the future. Many of them, having permanently established their homes in our mist [sic], bought humble homes, but their homes are, without exception, burdened with heavy mortgages, which were expected to be paid from the wages of the victims. The widows and orphans will lose their homes without some outside assistance.”<sup>52</sup>

Musial suggests how many of these immigrant families, after years of struggling by on lower wages, were finally able to purchase modest homes. Without the hopes of better conditions, thanks to organized labor and now without male breadwinners, families might lose their homes and lead to the destruction of the ethnic community. Musial left open the idea that some government or organized assistance was needed to guarantee the future stability of the community, rather than leaving families to fend for themselves individually.

How did Polish families survive the loss of the male breadwinner? Examining one family’s response suggests the strategies they employed, and growing trends within the 1920’s economy. Stiny Robinsky died at the Benwood Mine Disaster, leaving his wife Mary to take care of their seven children. At the time of the disaster, the family lived at 1520 High Street in Benwood. Whether he planned to move the family to a new home cannot be determined, but by 1930 the Robinskys owned a home on Boggs Run Road valued at \$4,000. While his wife received the \$30 a month from the state workmen’s compensation fund and the \$5 for each child, she increasingly relied on the earnings of the two oldest sons Zigman (born in 1908) and John

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<sup>52</sup> “Father Musial Suggests Plan: Stricken Families Not in Immediate Need, Pastor States,” *Wheeling Register*, May 4, 1924, WVRHC.

(born in 1912). Zigman worked at the Wheeling Calico Works and John at a local glass factory. Because of economic need, both left school early, Zigman after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and John after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The family's troubles continued during the Depression years. As late as 1940, all but one of the children still lived with their mother. The male children worked at the local Benwood steel mills, while her two daughters, Theresa and Irene, worked as machine operators at the Bloch Brothers Tobacco Factory. Common among many immigrant households, all the children went to school through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but only two of the boys went for some time to high school. In addition, wage levels for young men and women differed dramatically. In 1939, Zigman's job at the mill earned him \$1,044. In comparison, Theresa and Irene's jobs at Bloch Brothers only earned them \$520 for the same amount of time worked. While these types of wage discrimination obviously were a problem, they reflect how the practice of drawing the children of immigrants into the labor market worked to depress wage levels over time.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Polonia's 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation and the Changing Nature of the Family Economy***

Many Polish and Eastern European families were like the Robinskys with children entering the factory labor force in their teens. Poles had limited occupational choices, generally finding work via family and kin networks in the steel mills. What they most desired was economic security, seen in a steady income, decent neighborhood and home ownership, and the respect of their fellow members of the ethnic community. Children of Polish families tended to live in the home longer, substitute work for high school, and take care of their parents as they got older.<sup>54</sup> As a result, many children followed similar occupational tracks into metal factories,

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<sup>53</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, May 5, 1924, 13; Mary Robinsky, 1930 Manuscript Census, Union District, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0026, Roll: 2543, Page 5B; 1940 Manuscript Census, Union District, Marshall County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 26-23, Roll: T627\_4426, Page 10B, reprinted via Ancestry.com. It should be noted that the Great Depression also forced more children into work because of the hit taken on home values and mortgages. The Robinsky's house worth \$4,000 in 1930 had declined by 1940 to \$1,500.

<sup>54</sup> John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 93-4, 137, 139, 143.



tobacco plants, and glass factories. The family economy strategies of the Poles coincided with an immigrant “baby boom” from 1906-1925.<sup>55</sup> Even so, this second generation had outlooks drastically different than their parents. While valuing the security of family and neighborhood, having grown up in America, they sought the lifestyles and culture that pervaded 1920’s society, leading to family tensions, but not negating the family economy among Wheeling’s immigrants.

The major change in the 1920’s was Polish and Slavic women’s employment in a diverse number of factory jobs. This reflected a broader trend in the nature of female wage labor that began to peak during World War I in the Northern Panhandle. While ethnic women had worked in Wheeling’s cigar, tobacco, and glass factories in high numbers since the 1880’s, by the 1920’s they began to move into new types of jobs, especially in metal and steel fabricating. While this trend was slow, the 1930’s saw the rapid increase in women in the iron and steel factories from 355 (1930) to 1,643 (1940).<sup>56</sup>

Many worked as piece workers at the Wheeling Corrugating plants in East Wheeling and Martins Ferry, Ohio or at the Hazel Atlas Glass factory. The piece rate system, while intensifying work pace, provided an avenue for women workers to make more money depending on their skill. Many Polish, Slavic, and Italian-Americans found steady jobs. Italian Pasquale DiCesare noted that men in the early 1910’s could earn as much as 30-40 cents per hour (about \$3 a day) at Hazel Atlas. He noted how he would: “shine caps, buffing. The wheel would spin around and buff and shine them up. Nickel plate it. Then you shine it up . . . The more, the

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<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that a smaller baby boom among Polish immigrants occurred during the height of immigration from 1906-1915, followed by a much larger one from 1915-1925; see John Radzilowski, “Fecund Newcomers or Dying Ethnics? Demographic Approaches to the History of Polish and Italian Immigrants and Their Children in the United States, 1880 to 1980,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 27, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 60, 62-4, 67.

<sup>56</sup> Frances S. Hensley, “Women in the Industrial Work Force in West Virginia, 1880-1945,” *West Virginia History* 49 (1990): 118-20, 122. The six counties accounting for two-thirds of female factory jobs were the following: Berkeley, Cabell, Hancock, Kanawha, Ohio, and Wood. This tended to confirm the reality that urban areas were the real leaders in the decade in hiring female workers, since all had major cities by the 1920’s.

faster we work, the more money we make.”<sup>57</sup> Many young women worked on presses feeding tin into machines and on the packing ware department at tedious, assembly line work. In the Wheeling Steel mills, young women found jobs “flopping tin plate,” inspecting it for defects and pin holes. However, as one company executive noted, the work was “Endless, tiring, drive you absolutely crazy. Do it hour, after hour, after hour.” While the minimum age was 18 to work, many teenage girls as young as 16 lied about their age to get hired. While men earned solid piece rates, women’s starting wages were much less. At Wheeling Corrugating, female press operators made at least 6-7 cents less an hour than men.<sup>58</sup>

Wheeling Corrugating in particular targeted daughters of immigrant families to work as press operators and in related departments. The work could be very trying with pressures from managers to produce. One constant worry was breaking the die press. Girls whose presses broke down often had to take a penalty of several days off work, even if the breakdown was no fault of their own. New women hired in 1936 earned 37.5 cents per hour for an eight-hour day, while women who started years prior earned only 28.5 cents for a 10-hour day. While women were often segregated by department, better transportation lines allowed many girls from Bellaire, Martins Ferry, and Lansing, Ohio, to work at the East Wheeling plant. The shop floor was a proverbial melting pot of the second generation immigrant communities in the region, but the daughters of Slavic and Italian families predominated. Polish and Slavic-American women started entering the drum press, drum cover, and ware and trim departments between 1928 and

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<sup>57</sup> Pasquale DiCesare oral history interview, both in Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation, Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project (Wheeling, 1994) , 10-11, Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation Records, Wheeling, WV (hereafter, WNHAC); Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Cynthia “D’Accione” Thames and William W. Holloway, Jr., oral history interviews, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project (Wheeling, 1994) , 116-7, 122 “West Virginia Northern Community College and the History of the Hazel Atlas Corporation,” <http://www.wvncc.edu/alumni/hazel-atlas-glass-history/105>.

1936.<sup>59</sup> A work crew in the furnace pipe department often consisted of three to four girls. Two women put the long metal sheets through shears, while one girl tamped it down by pushing on a pedal. It then went through another press where another girl used a perforator to put holes on both sides. After going through a hemmer, the girls then folded it back over and put rivets in all the holes. Men did the heavier work cutting the metal and forming it into final shapes, but women did most of the production process.<sup>60</sup>

For the Polish and Ukrainian children of South Wheeling, the Wheeling Can Factory was one of the largest employers dating back to the 1910's. The Polish girls at the 48<sup>th</sup> Street plant were instrumental in the 1915 strike against the company for union recognition. However, plant conditions declined during World War I. The AFL contract with the company soon only benefited the most skilled men, which led to a general increase for all men's wages. In addition, older native-born men were the union leaders and "would not give ear to grievances expressed by younger members."<sup>61</sup> At that point the factory's workforce had grown to 574 (297 men and 277 women). Of the women, 121 (44%) were under the age of nineteen. All worked 55 hours a week, from 7:00am to 5:40pm. While most men received a scale of wages reflective of seniority, skill, and union positions, the women were paid uniformly. Of the 277 female operatives, 232 (83.7%) were paid 19 ¼ cents per hour. This gendered wage discrimination was

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<sup>59</sup> These employment trends derive from the excellent seniority records kept by United Steel Workers of America (USWA) Local #1248 for the "Wheeling Factory" of the Wheeling Corrugating Company. Since the lists are from July 1947, these records cannot give the full number of Polish-American women working at the plant throughout the period, since many either left for other jobs or left when they got married. However, they do give an excellent snapshot of when Polish and other Slavic-American women and men began getting jobs in certain departments. Women would also serve in many union related roles after workers got a contract through SWOC in the spring of 1937. For the employee lists, see Wheeling Factory (Wheeling Corrugating)-Local Union 1248-Seniority Lists, 1947, USWA, District 23 (Wheeling, W.Va.) Records, 1944-1960, Box 24, Folder 3, United Steelworkers of America Archives, Historical Collections and Labor Archives (HCLA), Pennsylvania State University.

<sup>60</sup> Thames, oral history interview, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project, 102-3; 108-9 for a description of the production process in Wheeling Corrugating.

<sup>61</sup> Ethelbert Stewart, Director Department of Labor, Investigation and Inspection Service, Washington, D.C., to Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson, October 24, 1918; Report of Mary H. Ely to Department of Labor, October 18, 1918, page 6, RG 174-General Records of the Department of Labor, Selected Material from Chief Clerk's File No. 20/162, Richard Hadsell Collection, A&M 2122, WVRHC.

evident in the hand soldering department where women earned 22 cents an hour, while men earned 36 cents for the same work. Overall, girls between the ages of 16 and 18, representing almost 50% of the female workforce, earned just \$10.50-\$12 per week. Since the company did not provide a living wage, judged to be \$15 per week for a single person, relief organizations discouraged anyone to work for the company. In essence, the union contracts, and the use of girls of immigrant families near the factory, helped promote the company's sexual division of labor.<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of the discrimination, many of the Polish women at the plant continued to pressure the company and government officials for better wages and conditions.<sup>63</sup> Working in old buildings with poor machinery, breakdowns and injuries were rampant. From July 1-October 5, there were 24 accidents involving "the loss of or injury to fingers." Managers refused to do more for safety than to post warning signs. It is doubtful these signs were in Polish, Ukrainian, and Croatian for the benefit of girls who worked and lived nearby. In one factory, girls faced an electric light "and frequently fell asleep from the glare and monotony." Girls also complained of health problems from the process of using muriatic acid on cans to prevent sticking. Sore throats and loss of voice for some time were common from breathing fumes. Investigators warned also of paint fumes in a poorly ventilated department worked mostly by "foreigners."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Of the men who earned 20-40 cents an hour, that represented 212 male workers out of 297, see *Ibid.*; Report of Mary H. Ely, and supplemental explanation of findings, by Elbert E. Peck, Industrial Service Section, Ordinance Department, DL; Report of Mary H. Ely, October 18, 1918, page 7, RG 174, Hadsell Collection, WVRHC. For the nature of gender discrimination in the labor unions of this period, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 156-7, 171.

<sup>63</sup> For the uptick in female workers' activism within and at times against male-dominated unions during the war and in the 1920's, see Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); for recent work on early 20<sup>th</sup> century "labor feminism," see, Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3-5.

<sup>64</sup> Ethelbert Stewart, to Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson, October 24, 1918: Report of Mary H. Ely to Department of Labor, October 18, 1918, pages 2-3, 4-5, RG 174-General Records of the Department of Labor-File No. 20/162, Richard Hadsell Collection, WVRHC.

Polish and Ukrainian women and their children also continued to do much of the production work at Bloch Brothers Tobacco's 400,000 square foot facility in the heart of South Wheeling. Women working in the stemmery building fed the loose tobacco through a breaker and then wetted it and hung it to dry out. The women's main job followed when the dried tobacco was sent to female "strippers" to be threshed. By the 1920's and 1930's, the company implemented treadle-like machines to increase production.<sup>65</sup> Young girls worked an automated machine to check for any loose stem particles in the tobacco leaf. Women also worked cutting machines that set the tobacco off into "ribbons," before being sent off to a final drying and then automatic packing machines. As the factory became more automated, young girls made up a larger portion of the company's workforce.<sup>66</sup>

### **Outmigration of the 1920's**

With the changes in the American economy in the 1920's, Wheeling's Polish immigrants and their children often moved around the northern manufacturing belt and even back to Poland to seek better work. Many left Wheeling for the higher paying blue collar jobs in the electrical, automobile, and rubber factory towns in Ohio and Michigan. However, the principle Mecca of the 1920's was Detroit. The Big Three—Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler had firm control over the labor market, using Henry Ford's high wage scale (\$5 a day) for young semi-skilled production workers on the moveable assembly line. Companies also followed Ford's use of welfare capitalism and its Americanization programs to cut down labor turnover and attract many immigrants, particularly away from the more dangerous jobs in the coal and steel industry.

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<sup>65</sup> This description of the production of Mail Pouch tobacco is very useful. It came from a forty-year veteran of the factory, Mary Drosieko. It is important, because it shows some of the technological changes that developed in the 1920's and 1930's. For her descriptions and a photo essay on the production process, see the *Arts & Advertising of Bloch Bros. Tobacco Co.: The Nation's Favorite Since 1879* (Wheeling: Creative Impressions, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> This description is of the process after years of automation in the 1920's. Prior to this time in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of these jobs were completed by skilled cutters and rollers. For description, see "An Original West Virginia Product," *The West Virginia Review*, (September 1930).

Likewise, the mechanized movable assembly line simplified jobs, which workers could learn more quickly to fashion the mass produced automobiles of the era.<sup>67</sup>

The attractiveness of the wages in the automobile industry drew some Polish immigrants from Wheeling. While an exact number is difficult to ascertain, a description of the experiences of several Polish families suggests the timing and nature of migration to the Motor City. Frank Maliowski was born on September 1, 1903 in Wheeling. His parents had both grown up in Gradyanowa, Poland and migrated to America around 1900. Working as a laborer in one of the local steel mills, Frank and his older brother Anton worked alongside their father by 1920. Shortly thereafter, their father left for Detroit, probably when the strike started against the Wheeling Steel Corporation, but Frank, Jr. and Anton continued to work in Wheeling. By 1930, the entire family lived in the middle of the Polish neighborhood of Hamtramck, Michigan. Frank, Sr. worked in a bakery shop, while Frank and Anton worked on the assembly line at the Dodge Main plant. While many families left together as units, two of Frank Maliowski's daughters Sallie (born 1906) and Lena (born 1910) remained in Wheeling.<sup>68</sup>

Like the Maliowskis, Ignatius Dobrzenicki also went with his family to work in Hamtramck. Born in 1887 in Alexandrowa, Plock, in Russian-Poland he worked as an unskilled

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Klug, "Employers' Strategies in the Detroit Labor Market, 1900-1929," in *On the Line: Essays in the History of Auto Work*, edited by Nelson Lichtenstein and Stephen Meyer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 42-44, 55-6, 63-4; for Ford's Americanization program, of which Wheeling Steel later modeled many of its safety and civic education classes, see Stephen Meyer III, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), ch. 7; for welfare capitalism plans see David Brody, "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism," *Workers in Industrializing America: Essays on the Twentieth-Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 48-81. Brody argues that welfare capitalism actually increased in popularity during the 1920's, and it was only with the crash of 1929 that put an end to the paternalism of factory managers.

<sup>68</sup> Frank Maliowski, Birth Certificate, West Virginia State Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics, #710, Wheeling, West Virginia, September 1, 1903, West Virginia Vital Records, WVSA; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920* (Wheeling: W.L. Polk & Co., 1919), 593; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922*, 817; Frank Marlenoski, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll: T625\_1967, Page 18A; Frank Malinoski, 1930 Manuscript Census, 11<sup>th</sup> Ward Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan, Enumeration District 0333, Roll: 1044, Page 9A, RG 29-Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, reprinted via Ancestry.com.

laborer at the American Tin & Sheet Plate Mill on 29<sup>th</sup> Street. While he and his wife had three sons born between 1915 and 1919 in Wheeling, Ignatius's fourth son, Walter, was born in Hamtramck in 1923. Having left sometime in the early 1920's, the family remained permanently in Hamtramck.<sup>69</sup> Many children of Polish parents relocated to Hamtramck at this time. Joseph Jozefczyk was born in Wheeling in 1893, and he and his wife Albena rented with their four daughters in South Wheeling. He worked as a skilled heater at one of the Benwood steel mills. Sometime in the early 1920's, Jozefczyk moved his family to Detroit. By 1940, he worked as a job setter at a Motor City automobile factory.<sup>70</sup> From these few migration stories, most Poles and their children left for Detroit and Hamtramck in the early 1920's in conjunction with the long, bitter struggle against the Wheeling Steel Corporation, and just as the Dodge auto plants greatly expanded their labor force.

Detroit's high paying jobs also attracted Polish coal miners as that industry declined in the late 1920's in Wheeling. Many found themselves constantly migrating throughout the industrial North. A case in point was John Radosh, who was born in Jaslo, Poland on January 19, 1896. After emigrating in 1912, Radosh worked for years as a coal loader at the Hitchman Coal Mine. Marrying in the mid-1920's, Radosh's sons John (1927) and Paul (1928) were both born in Wheeling. By the time his daughter Olga was born, the Radoshs settled in Polish Hamtramck. The family rented a home for \$22 a month, and John Radosh worked as a laborer at the Dodge plant. Arriving later than the mass of Polish immigrants, the Radosh family had to

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<sup>69</sup> Ignatius Dobrzeniecki, WWI Draft Registration Card, #1771, June 5, 1917, Wheeling, Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Roll #1993024, via Ancestry.com; Ignatius Dobrzeniecki, 1940 Manuscript Census, Hamtramck, Wayne County, Michigan, Enumeration District 82-83, Roll: T627\_1829, Page 4B, NARA, via Ancestry.com.

<sup>70</sup> For Joseph Jozefczyk, see 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll: T625\_1967, Page 7B; 1940 Manuscript Census, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan, Enumeration District 84-1579, Roll: T627\_1889, Page 7B, NARA, via Ancestry.com. Joseph Jozefczyk in 1939 earned \$1,800 for 46 weeks work at the auto factory, while his wife earned \$350 for 26 weeks of work as a janitor at a bank.

find other opportunities with the massive unemployment in Detroit after the stock market crash. By 1935, the family lived in rural Belmont, Ohio, where Radosh was again loading coal.<sup>71</sup>

Polish immigrants and their children also returned to their home country. Desiring to return to the newly created Polish Republic and purchase a farm, Poles leaving Wheeling often found difficulty if they wanted or needed to return to America. With the Immigration Restriction Laws of 1921 and 1924 effectively cutting off those arriving from Eastern Europe, families that went abroad had to negotiate a complex legal and bureaucratic environment to get back to Wheeling. A good example was the migration experience of Charles Otwinowski, born on October 1, 1911 in Wheeling. His father Michael Otwinowski was born in Poland, and in 1923 was living in Glowienka, Poland as a farmer near his family. The father immigrated to the United States in 1906, eventually working as a laborer at Wheeling's American Sheet & Tin Plate Mill, living with his wife Marya, and children Charles, Stephen, and Teddy. Sometime in 1921, he returned to Poland. By August 1921, Charles Otwinowski also traveled to Glowienka, where he resided first with his grandparents and then with his father.<sup>72</sup>

Charles Otwinowski struggled to return to Wheeling throughout 1923. What happened with the Otwinowski farm in Poland? It is possible Michael lost the farm in the difficult post-World War I climate in Poland. In addition, the rest of his family remained in Wheeling in the early 1920's, so he may have found it too expensive to finance bringing them all back to Poland. Since Charles was a United States citizen, he and other Polish-Americans needed to get a

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<sup>71</sup> John Redosh, WWII Draft Registration Card #744, April 27, 1942, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Microfilm Series M1937, Roll#41, RG 147-Records of the Selective Service System, NARA, reprinted via Ancestry.com; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1928* (Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk & Co., 1927), 751; John Redosh, 1930 Manuscript Census, Hamtramck, Wayne County, Michigan, Enumeration District 962, Roll: 1073, Page 12A; John Radosh, 1940 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District, Roll: T627\_4437, Page 9B, RG 29, NARA, reprinted via Ancestry.com.

<sup>72</sup> The family lived at 2919 Chapline Street, very near the American Sheet & Tin Plate Mill of the La Belle Works. Mike Atvenoski, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 96, Roll: Y625\_1966, Page 9A, RG 29, NARA, reprinted via Ancestry.com.



passport clearance through the Department of State. While still in Poland, he applied with the American Consulate in Warsaw to receive clearance to return to Wheeling to live with his mother. In order to receive his official passport, he needed an official birth certificate from Father Emil Musial at St. Ladislaus (sent on May 21, 1923) as well as a picture identity card issued by the Polish police at Krosno (taken on July 24, 1923).<sup>73</sup> Returning aboard the *S.S. George Washington* on January 7, 1924, by 1926 the entire family was reunited and living near Overbrook, where Charles and his father worked at Elm Grove #1 Mine.<sup>74</sup>

### **House Ownership and Finding Economic Security**

One of the most important developments for Wheeling's Polish immigrants was attaining a certain level of economic security, best achieved through home ownership and social mobility. The Poles were determined against all odds to purchase a lot, build a home, and purchase a mortgage to assist in paying off an already built wood frame or brick row house. The rugged determination for home ownership at higher rates than fellow immigrants has led to much historical debate. Were Polish families defensive in maintaining the family's survival, or did they seek to achieve some landed success? Ewa Morawska found that in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Eastern Europeans were "advantage conscious" in purchasing their homes and having their teenage children learn a better trade, so as to move into skilled or white collar employment. This attitude partly developed before arriving in America with the

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<sup>73</sup> Charles Otwinowski, Passport Application, Issued October 8, 1923, *Passport Applications, January 2, 1906-March 31, 1925*, NARA Microfilm Series: M1490, Roll#2375, RG 59-General Records of the Department of State, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C., reprinted via Ancestry.com.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Otwinowski, January 9, 1924, Arrival New York, New York, Microfilm Serial: T715, Microfilm Roll: 3439, Page 118, *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957*, Microfilm Publication Y715, RG 85-Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives and Records Division, Washington, D.C., via Ancestry.com; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1926*, 785; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1924*, 757.

commercialization of large-scale agriculture in Eastern Europe.<sup>75</sup> However, one must always keep in mind the fluctuations of the 1920's economy, which often led Poles to seek home ownership as a minimal level of security in precarious times. This "working-class realism" manifested itself in the practice of paying off the mortgage over time with the additional labor of male and female children in factory jobs.<sup>76</sup>

While not discounting the concern for social status, those living in Wheeling's working class neighborhoods worried more about security than status. This is seen in levels of home ownership. By 1930, many Polish and other Eastern European households were beginning to move into the category of ownership. However, according to the census, this could mean several things. As defined at the time, ownership could mean 1) that all debts on the home were paid and the family fully owned the lot and dwelling outright, or 2) it reflected the immigrant family's commitment to the process of home ownership, and beginning the long process of paying debts, getting a mortgage, and other costs. Often overlooked, this latter definition tends to be the home-ownership status for most of Wheeling's Poles.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike larger cities where Poles benefited from their own building and loan associations, Wheeling's Poles relied more on loans from private sources and local banks. By the 1920's, ethnic workers in Wheeling went to one of the eighteen commercial banks throughout the city, which had stable reputations and for decades served as the financial capital centers of the entire region. Immigrants also had some experience with American banking from the experience of purchasing Liberty Bonds during World War I, often collected through the local commercial

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<sup>75</sup> Ewa Morawska, *For Bread and Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>76</sup> For the more realistic approach to the economy, see Bodnar, *Lives of Their Own*; Bodnar, "Immigration, Kinship, and the Rise of Working-Class Realism in Industrial America," 45-65.

<sup>77</sup> I base my argument here on the definitions elaborated in Suzanne M. Zukowski, "From Peasant to Proletarian: Home Ownership in Milwaukee's Polonia," *Polish American Studies* 66, no. 2 (Autumn 2009): 7-8.

banks. With these earlier connections, Wheeling immigrants became more comfortable keeping their savings accounts and mortgages in banks, as most saw an increase in savings deposits after the war. Crucial as well were Polish small businessmen who gave loans and helped fellow Poles learn the banking process. In this regard, middle class Poles acted as intermediaries in larger economic gains for the city by helping get working class immigrants to invest in the city's future. While not on par with business capitalists, these ethnic small businessmen shared the goals of the city financiers as "local boosters for capitalist development."<sup>78</sup> This often entailed co-signing loans at banks, especially the South Side Bank and larger ones in Downtown Wheeling, and acting as witnesses to deeds and mortgages.<sup>79</sup>

The process of repaying debts reflected a complex social and cultural relationship based around neighborhood solidarity, personal and familial work ethic, and doing without certain household amenities until they could be purchased. Factory work by various family members supplemented this process, especially children upon finishing the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, just as often security involved old-world strategies of "making do." Many women tended small garden plots, even in South Wheeling's crowded backyards. Families settling on Boggs Run in Benwood and particularly Fulton tended large gardens and some livestock. Josephine Franczak continued farming traditions by keeping chickens and small animals behind her family's home in Fulton. John Kogut remembered that since his family came from the "Ruski Polski section" of Poland they had experience mixing life in a coal camp with old country farming and butchering customs. When the mines closed around Easter time, or when he only go only two to three days a week

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<sup>78</sup> For the role of ethnic middle class in the coalfields, see Deborah R. Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 92-6; for their increasing role in large capitalistic development see, Mary Beth Pudup, "Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), quote on page 292.

<sup>79</sup> For the approach taken by Eastern European immigrants in large cities, see Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 75-83.

underground, Kogut's father would kill some hogs he kept, dig a twenty-foot trench covered with tin sheet in his garden, to make a homemade smokehouse. After smoking the meat for about 24 hours, he would then roll together his own Polish kielbasa.<sup>80</sup> Finally, some men, when done working, would also distill moonshine in homemade basement stills for sale.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the 1920's, Polish immigrants were on the path to home ownership, but they were still firmly working class. Public records and the 1930 manuscript census suggest much about the evolving status of the city's Poles. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, the densest section of Polish settlement, 125 Eastern European households were in the process of owning their homes. However, in this working class neighborhood, 106 Eastern European households were renters.<sup>82</sup> In relative terms, the Poles were seeing some social mobility. In 1920, the same sample area had a home ownership rate of 28.9%. In 1920, 71.1% of all Polish households were rentals, but by 1930 renters dropped to 45.1%.<sup>83</sup> For those who did rent in South Wheeling, the prices were rather affordable, with the average monthly rental being \$14.75. For 1930, home values for the majority of the homes in the sample were worth on average \$3,134.71, and only three homes were worth more than \$10,000.<sup>84</sup> Most homes in this section of South Wheeling were wood

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<sup>80</sup> John Kogut, oral history interview, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project, 356-7, WNHAC.

<sup>81</sup> For the immigrant family economy, see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 71-83; for the role of rural-industrial workers, both native and foreign born, in utilizing strategies of "making do," see Louis C. Martin, "Working for Independence: The Failure of New Deal Politics in a Rural-Industrial Place," (Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 2008), chapter 4; for rural self-help strategies of Appalachian farm women, which parallel strategies of former farming families from Eastern Europe, see Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), chapter 2; Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, 151.

<sup>82</sup> On the massive increase in home-buying among the foreign-born, see "Foreigners Lead in Buying Homes," *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 13, 1924, 14. I did a complete counting of all households for the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward of Wheeling in 1930, counting all those households led by someone of Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Lithuanian, Czech, Slovak, or Yugoslavian descent. This own to rent ratio 54% owned to 46% rented. 1930 Manuscript Census, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Wheeling Ohio County, West Virginia.

<sup>83</sup> 1920 Manuscript Census, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Wheeling, Ohio County; Benwood Ward 1, Marshall County, West Virginia; 1930 Manuscript Census, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia. The 1920 numbers included some Polish households for the city line in Benwood, which by 1930 were mostly held by Croatian families.

<sup>84</sup> Of the 125 households sampled, three were worth respectively \$35,000, \$18,825, and \$10,000. Including them into the average would make the average home price \$3,570.08. 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, Ohio County, West Virginia.

frame, and increasingly many had indoor plumbing. Standard home prices remained somewhat more stable in this region of town because of the recurring threat of floods. After one in March 1924, one real estate company listed prices for available South Wheeling homes. Values depended on the distance from the river and nearby factories. Some sample homes suggest their relative value: “Eoff Street, Frame house, 7 rooms-\$3,850;” “Forty-first Street, Frame house, 4 rooms, bath-\$3,600;” “Forty-eighth street, 11 rooms, garage-\$8,000.”<sup>85</sup>

The process of home ownership took many years. The experience of mill worker Jan Zalewski and his family illustrates this point. Arriving sometime in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zalewski first purchased the deed to a home in May 1906. The lot in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward was 35 feet by 50 feet, costing \$800. After living at that house for some time, the Zalewskis agreed to purchase a house from Hannah Hoeke in July 1916. The details of the arrangement suggest the many costs involved in paying off a new home. The Zalewskis were to pay \$950 for the property, which included \$300 in cash up front and \$75 a month for six months. They also had to pay 5% on all deferred house payments already made, and all insurance and taxes, which totaled \$650. Eventually, by November 1924 the Zalewskis wanted to make sure the home stayed within the family and transferred the deed to their son.<sup>86</sup>

Despite increasing levels of home ownership, Polish families lacked the disposable income to purchase mass consumer goods. Most historians see the 1920’s as an age of mass

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<sup>85</sup> *Wheeling Register*, April 16, 1924, Section 2, 10; a comparison of increase in home values is difficult since the census did not start recording the figure until 1930. One way to think about the comparative values of South Wheeling homes can be seen in an advertisement from 1906 for a an eight-room house on Jacob Street between 44<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> Streets. The home had gas and electricity, and a bath with hot and cold running water on a lot 25 x 100 feet. The home was worth \$3,500 in 1906, *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 15, 1906, 8.

<sup>86</sup> For the details of the Zalewski’s home purchases, see J.W. Meyers & wife to John Zalewski, personal property agreement, May 10, 1906, Deed Book #122, 23-4; Hannah Hoeke to Jan Zalewski, et al, personal property agreement, July 12, 1916, Deed Book #153, 85-6; John Zalewski & wife to Bolic Bruzdas, personal property agreement, August 3, 1922, Deed Book #183, 212; John Zalewski & wife to William Joseph Zalewski, personal property agreement, November 29, 1924, Deed Book #197, 564-5, Ohio County Clerk’s Office (OCCO hereafter), Ohio County Courthouse, Wheeling, West Virginia; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1926*, 1091; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1924*, 1040. Their son William J. Zalewski worked in 1924 as a skilled crane man at the American Sheet & Tin Plate mill at 29<sup>th</sup> Street.

consumerism, as industrial workers began to use their expendable income to buy items such as refrigerators, automobiles, and radios. Workers in the Northern Panhandle possessed more radios, and they could listen to Pittsburgh's KDKA, which commenced broadcasting in 1921, and later WWVA broadcasts from Downtown Wheeling beginning in December 1926. By 1930, 46.7% of Ohio County households owned a radio set. However, according to the South Wheeling sample, few owned radios. Out of 235 households, only 36 had a radio (15.3%). Many working class immigrant families had to wait years to pull together enough money to purchase consumer goods. One female press operator at Wheeling Corrugating noted that only after her father and sister started working regularly did they have the income to buy first a refrigerator, followed by an electric stove. Not until well into the Great Depression was her family able to purchase a radio set.<sup>87</sup>

Attaining a small business was a very difficult process that often led to failure. South Wheeling for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had an abundance of small grocery stores. Most catered to the working class population living paycheck to paycheck by allowing families to "run a 'book'" and at the end of the week on payday, pay off the "book." Most sold meats, bread, milk, and basic canned foods. Some stores even delivered goods to private homes.<sup>88</sup> But, family-owned businesses survived on the edge of economic ruin. Many were undercapitalized, heavily credit-driven, and relied on a working class customer base in the neighborhood that had little disposable income. Poles often waited a few years to accumulate some capital from their wages, and then purchase a necessary structure to house their business along with stock and

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<sup>87</sup> Ivan Tribe notes that the Northern Panhandle with only 10.2% of the state's families owned 18.15% of the state's radios. See Tribe, *Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 43; 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia; Cynthia "D'Accione" Thames, oral history interview, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project (Wheeling, 1994), 128-9, WNHAC.

<sup>88</sup> John "Jack" Fahey, "40 Years on the B&O," Oral History, June 23, 1994, Wheeling Spoken History Project, transcript via Ohio County Public Library (OCPL).

equipment. The trend for many Wheeling Poles was to pay cash up front to another businessman whose business was insolvent or recently went bankrupt. In this way, working class immigrants could purchase necessary stock up front at a reduced price from a fellow immigrant usually willing to sell within the same ethnic group. For example, Polish grocer Wincenty Front, having worked at the Hoffman Tannery for several years, started a business in 1913 by purchasing the contents of Frank Kruszewski's grocery. Before he sold all available groceries and provisions along with shelving counter scales, and show case displays, Front had to pay Kruszewski \$600 up front and sign a promissory note for \$1,000.<sup>87</sup> Front would have to pay \$100 a month until the note was fully paid, which could be a high cost considering he was starting the business and the local economy could easily decline making it hard for him to meet that debt. Sometimes, parties reached confidential agreements where they agreed to exchange all the contents of a store on face value for \$10 to cover the cost of the deed. While it is hard to determine what "valuable considerations" meant in practice, it was a common legal exchange that kept stores, saloons, and other small businesses within the community.<sup>89</sup>

Certain locations would often be adapted for similar business uses even while transferred between different owners. John Marchlenski purchased all the stock, merchandise, and groceries in the storeroom at 2624 Chapline Street, along with some household goods and rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of a brick house at 2618 Chapline for his family to live in 1914. Most of the goods were simply exchanged on payment of the deed costs. Once his business expanded and he decided to relocate further south in the Polish community, Marchlenski sold out the contents of the storeroom, cash register, refrigerators, scales, and meat-slicing machines to two prospective

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<sup>89</sup> For the instability of Jewish small businesses in many of the rural coal mining counties and county seat towns of Central Appalachia, see Weiner, *Coalfield Jews*, 69-72; for Front's business, see Frank Kruszewski to Wincenty Front, personal property agreement, July 30, 1913, Deed Book #144, 118; Paul Ruzdzinski to Ada Broski, personal property agreement, November 10, 1915, Deed Book #11, 491, OCCO.

business partners, John Manakosa and Walter Jakubas.<sup>90</sup> Even when several business partners put their money together to open a store, eventually one would want to get out of the business or his partner would buy him out. Goerge Zuebel paid \$5 and sold “all rights, title, and interest [he] has in . . . Fulton Grocery Company” to Stanley Duplaga. This included all the stock, merchandise, and even the businesses automobile.<sup>91</sup> Duplaga’s Fulton Grocery boomed during the 1920’s, and it allowed him to open the Southside Department Store at 4513 Jacob Street in the heart of *Polonia* in 1923. By 1928, his operations allowed him to buy an even larger home in Elm Grove.<sup>92</sup>

Ethnic small businesses allowed for a greater economic autonomy, while still linked to the industrial working class. For those who opened businesses and saw some social mobility, these enterprises helped transcend class differences within the community.<sup>93</sup> Frank Lewandowski worked at the Hitchman coal mines from 1904-1919. After the war, he was able to operate a successful painting business among the Polish homeowners of South Wheeling during the 1920’s.<sup>94</sup> Reflecting back on his father and other immigrants’ lives, Herman Werfele surmised, “They had the same goals in mind. They wanted to become . . . small business

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<sup>90</sup> John Marchlenski to Adam Kwit, personal property agreement, August 22, 1914, Deed Book #148, 101; Adam Kwit to Aniela Marchlenski, personal property agreement, August 28, 1914, Deed Book #148, 118; Frank A. O’Brien to John Marchlenski, personal property agreement, September 3, 1914, Deed Book #148, 264; John Marchlenski to John Manakosa, et al, personal property agreement, March 10, 1924, Deed Book #192, 523, OCCO.

<sup>91</sup> George Zuebel to Stanley Duplaga, personal property agreement, February 18, 1922, Deed Book #180, 572, OCCO.

<sup>92</sup> *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918*, 208; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920*, 307; *Polk’s Wheeling City Directory, 1923-1924*; *Polk’s Wheeling City Directory, 1928*, OCPL.

<sup>93</sup> John Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 41-3; 47-50; he discusses how Polish working-class and middle class solidarities forged during the development of the community gave middle class Poles a strong pull on working class sympathies after World War I; see Bukowczyk, “The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1915-1925,” *Labor History* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 61-3.

<sup>94</sup> *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1917-1918*, 408; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1919-1920*, 546; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1921-1922*, 753, OCPL.



owners, several of them became large business owners, [and] some of them became wealthy entrepreneurs . . . But the majority of them had a comfortable living.”<sup>95</sup>

While the grocery business could be very profitable over time, other types of businesses could be harder to maintain, especially pool halls. Many Polish businessmen, especially those in the pre-Prohibition era ran saloons, moved into operating pool halls. Born in Zulkis, Poland in July 1892, Walter Prask started in Wheeling as a steelworker, but by the First World War he had opened a pool room in the center of *Polonia*. In the post-war recession and following his marriage to Lekla Wisniewska, Prask went back to work in the mills only to reopen his pool hall in 1921. However, throughout the rest of the 1920’s, Prask remained a steelworker.<sup>96</sup> Stanislaus Klos had a similar business history. Arriving in America in 1890, Klos and his wife Aleksandra Wyzykowska had the honor of being the first couple married at St. Ladislaus on February 23, 1903. Working at the Belmont Steel Mill, Klos eventually saved enough money to open a restaurant in 1915, which in 1917 he converted to a pool hall. Like Prask, he had to close his business during the post-war recession and went back to work as a skilled heater in the steel mill, briefly reopening a restaurant in 1921. Until 1928, he continued working in the mills and saving

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<sup>95</sup> Oral interview with Herman Werfele, by the author, July 23, 2008.

<sup>96</sup> In 1930, having moved north to the 2600 block of Main Street, Prask opened a restaurant/ confectionery, which he and his wife managed together throughout the early 1930’s. Even with the restaurant, Walter Prask continued to work as a skilled steelworker, where by 1942 he was commuting to work at Wheeling Steel’s Beech Bottom plant. By 1932 there were only four pool halls in *Polonia* owned by Stanley Klos (2658 Main Street), Andrew Oblizajck (58 45<sup>th</sup> Street), Alex Pasternak (27 42<sup>nd</sup> Street), and the South Side Billiard Parlor (3624 Jacob Street); *Wheeling City Directory, 1932*, 946-7; Walter Prask, World War I Draft Registration Card, June 5, 1917, #54, Precinct #7, Wheeling City, Ohio County, West Virginia, Roll#1993025 in United States, Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, NARA, M1509 reprinted via Ancestry.com; Walter Prash, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll: T625\_1967, Page 14B; Walter Prask and Tillie (Lekla) Wisniewska, Marriage License, September 21, 1918, Ohio County, West Virginia, West Virginia Vital Records, WVSA; Walter Prask, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0016, Roll: 2550, Page 19A; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1919*, 712; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1921-22*, 1462; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1924*, 787; *Callin’s Wheeling City Directory, 1926*, 818; *Wheeling City Directory, 1928*, 738; *Wheeling City Directory, 1930*, 1092; *Wheeling City Directory, 1932*, 570; *Wheeling City Directory, 1934*, 358; Walter Prask, World War II Draft Registration Card, 1942, West Virginia State Headquarters, Microfilm Series, M1937, RG 147-Records of the Selective Service System, NARA, reprinted via ancestry.com.

his money so that he could reopen the pool hall. By 1930, Klos's business was next door to Prask on the 2600 block of Main Street. Both owned homes with some value in the mill district where most rented. Prask's home was worth \$8,000 and Klos's was worth \$7,000. However, to keep his business going, Klos's children still lived at home and worked in local factories to supplement the family's income. Unlike Prask, Klos was able to retire from the business by 1940 and did not need to find work in the mills in his old age.<sup>97</sup>

### **Ethnic Catholic Parishes and Culture in the 1920's**

The 1920's witnessed a flowering of the Catholic Church in Wheeling. As immigrant groups became more established, the diocese continued its "brick-and-mortar" Catholicism by constructing new parishes, diocesan centers, and allowing local parishes to extend their influence over their communities. Aided by their role in the First World War and the loss of male social centers in the saloons with Prohibition, Catholic parishes expanded their social functions and outreach. During the 1920's, ethnic parishes preserved and refashioned ethnicity in local neighborhoods. Ethnic parishes and Catholic fraternal lodges largely helped determine what it meant to be Polish, Ukrainian, Italian, Croatian, Czech, and Slovak. However, the era also witnessed conflict. Most often historians note the tensions from anti-Catholic organizations, like the Ku Klux Klan. Of greater local concern were the tensions and conflicts within parishes, which reflected the divides growing within ethnic communities. The 1920's saw many of the children of the immigrant generation begin to reach their teen years and adulthood. While they

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<sup>97</sup> Stanislaus Klos and Aleksandra Wyzkowska, Marriage License, February 17, 1903, Ohio County Marriage Book, 444, West Virginia Vital Records, WVSA; Stanislaus Kloss, 1910 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0131, Roll T624\_1692, Page 10A; Stanislaus Klos, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 93, Roll: T625\_1966, Page 4B; Wheeling City Directory, 1911, 366; Wheeling City Directory, 1915, 382; Wheeling City Directory, 1917, 799; Wheeling City Directory, 1921-22, 711; Wheeling City Directory, 1924, 586; Wheeling City Directory, 1926, 596; Wheeling City Directory, 1928, 542; Wheeling City Directory, 1930, 456; Wheeling City Directory, 1932, 404; Wheeling City Directory, 1934, 958; Stanislaus Klos, 1940 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 6, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 35-20; Roll: T627\_4436, Page 5A, all reprinted via Ancestry.com.

still lived in their parent's homes and attended mass and parochial school, the temptations of the New Era were appealing. Movies, automobiles, dancing, jazz music, and even radical social and political ideas were all things that greatly worried native born and immigrant parents alike. Also, as their children became Americanized in a city, assimilation took place in many locales outside of the home that parents could not control. As a result, ethnic Catholic parishes and societies began to exert more direct influence over promoting ethnic culture and heritage in the 1920's. While popular in earlier times, ethnic community leaders publicized ethnic festivals and Catholic parish events for not only native-born critics but their children as well.

St. Ladislaus weathered the 1920's cultural changes quite well as the Polish Catholic community witnessed the height of its influence. Through their community building and earlier conflicts with the Catholic diocese, Fr. Musial and the parish community had virtual autonomy over shaping the cultural, religious, and economic lives of those of Polish heritage. As a local priest noted of the Polish-Americans of St. Ladislaus, "Much of their spirituality is grounded in their race as Polish people."<sup>98</sup>

Earlier ethnic festivals continued to grow in the 1920's and early 1930's and attracted an even wider non-Polish audience. The two seminal events each year were the May Processions and the crowning of a May Queen along with the newer and much larger "Polish Day" festivals, held at Oglebay Park or Lansing, Ohio. Street fairs tied to Polish Catholic religious events were crucial times for raising funds for parish renovations but also funds for fraternal lodges as well. Polish wives and daughters made homemade pierogies, cabbage, noodles, and kielbasa available for purchase. While these initially were Polish-only events, by the 1920's they were open to all Eastern European groups and even native-born residents of the Ohio Valley. They also remained a popular form of entertainment that Polish-American children waited for with anticipation.

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<sup>98</sup> Fr. Pat Condron, oral history interview, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project, 335, WNHAC.

Frank Kogut noted how “we really like processions around here. That’s one of things that makes me really love this church.”<sup>99</sup> Even non-Polish events attracted a variety of Eastern Europeans. Joe Bazo recalls the Hungarians had an annual picnic in the summer at Valley Grove. It became very popular by the 1930’s for its Hungarian dancing and fiddle music, that Polish, Ukrainian, and Slovak immigrants came from the mining camps and steel towns. A related cultural experience that kept Polish Catholic traditions alive for the next generation were the 40 Hours Devotions in early October, where children during school would be sent over to the parish every hour so as the parish would never be empty. Once the 40 hours ended, the whole community would celebrate mass together.<sup>100</sup>

These events brought the community together across class lines as well. While middle class residents played a key role in organizing events, working class families were the backbone of the community and prominent in cultural events. Take the May Processions, whose “May Queen” often came from one of the working class households and was probably a blue collar worker herself. On May 6, 1934, the community’s May Queen was Mary Kuca, leading a parade of over 300 school children, members of the Blessed Virgin Sodality, the parish altar boys, and Fr. Musial around the Southside. Twenty-five girls from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade class bore “a figure of the Blessed Virgin with ribbons leading to each of the girls.”<sup>101</sup> The event brought out everyone in the larger Polish community in Wheeling, Benwood, Fulton, and towns on the Ohio side. Kuca

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<sup>99</sup> Caroline Lakomy, in Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, 146-7; Delores Skrzypek and Ann Jurczak, “Pierogi Making at St. Lad’s,” Oral Interview by Michael Cline, 96-021, October 31, 1994, Wheeling Spoken History Project, OCPL; Frank Kogut, oral history interview, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project, 335-6, WNHAC. Kogut noted with some sarcasm that this history of processions has long made the Polish community unique among Roman Catholics in the area. When a statute of Our Lady of Fatima came in the early 1990’s, the Diocese thought best to send it to St. Ladislaus, because “you know that’s where they have all the processions.”

<sup>100</sup> Joe Bazo and Gladys Klamut, oral history interview, WNHAC Final Report, Wheeling Spoken History Project, 336-7, 365, WNHAC. There were so many Poles going to the parish for confession during the 40 Hours Devotions that Fr. Musial often had to ask for additional priests; see, Fr. Emil Musial to Edward Weber, December 1, 1921, Deceased Priests’ File-Fr. Emil Musial, Archives of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, Wheeling, WV (DWC)

<sup>101</sup> “May Procession Held in South Wheeling,” *West Virginia Register*, May 20, 1934. It should be noted that this is the Catholic weekly newspaper that prior to the 1950’s is only available in bound form at the Diocesan Archives.

herself was a working woman's May Queen. Born in 1912, she lived with her family and worked starting in the late 1920's as a seamstress for a clothing factory on the South Side. By 1932, she and her sister worked as machine operators at the Wheeling Tile Factory.<sup>102</sup>

With the growth of the second generation, by the late 1920's Polish and Ukrainian community leaders promoted ethnic culture for their children but also reproduced it for the Upper Ohio Valley as a whole. Led by parish leaders, but also lay working class women, these ad hoc festivals and celebrations on ethnic holidays served a greater and more visible purpose. Unlike the very anti-foreign climate of previous years, by the late 1920's artists, intellectuals, and civic promoters began stressing the positive elements of a multi-cultural society. This led to an interest in ethnic folk music in response to the homogenized nature of mass consumer culture. However, the ethnic folk revival also built off the growing appeal of new forms of dance thanks to the Jazz Age craze for the foxtrot and Charleston. Young people with the aid of social workers were energetic to learn the polka, oberek, and the czardas. Children of all backgrounds in Wheeling and elsewhere learned about ethnic culture, dance, and games through programs sponsored by the YWCA. Modeled after the programs started by Edith Terry Bremer and the YWCA's International Institute to teach the benefits of immigrants arts, crafts, and dance, by the end of the decade more than fifty "Y Institutes" existed sponsoring ethnic dance exhibitions. In response to the general fear and anxiety of the foreign-born through most of the decade, these inter-cultural exchanges helped encourage ethnic tolerance. Locally, native-born residents increasingly took interest in these "exotic" cultural folkways as the city's population became even more ethnically diverse. For example, Wheeling High School sponsored a presentation of

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<sup>102</sup> Mary Kuca, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0025, Roll: 2550, Page 5A; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1932*, 416; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1934*, 403.

traditional Ukrainian folk dance and music by renowned dancer Vasille Avramenko and 75 of his pupils from the Ukrainian Ballet.<sup>103</sup>

As groups interacted on a daily basis at work, in town, and in schools, they became much more interested in the diverse backgrounds all about them. This developed from Wheeling's unique ethnic composition in the state. Wheeling had the highest number and percentage of foreign-born whites and the children of foreign-born parents in West Virginia. Over one-third of Wheeling's population was first or second generation foreign-born. While this high immigrant population was not new, the composition had changed. While Germans and their German-American children still led, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest ethnic group in Wheeling and Ohio County were the Poles with 732 foreign-born and 1,743 of Polish-American heritage. This number did not include many that lived in Benwood, or those who recently moved across the Ohio River.<sup>104</sup>

While the renewed interest in Eastern European folk culture was a positive development, the Ukrainians, not the Poles, were the first to promote distinctively ethnic folkways. This developed partially from their own cultural nationalism, as they felt controlled by the much more dominant Poles in Eastern Europe, but also in immigrant communities in America. Often seen as Ruthenians or Rusins, for years they were not seen as distinct from the Poles. Many native residents often saw them as Polish. Beginning in the late 1920's, the Ukrainians, through their own parish, Our Lady of Perpetual Help (called locally St. Mary's), began to promote Ukrainian dance and music in their parochial school and for children of the neighborhood.<sup>105</sup> The revival of their unique heritage came with the arrival of a new and energetic priest, Father Humphrey

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<sup>103</sup> Victor R. Greene, *A Passion for Polka: Old-Time Ethnic Music in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 115-7; *Wheeling Register*, October 16, 1930, 4; "Ukraine Ballet in Folk Dances," *Wheeling Register*, October 19, 1930, 5.

<sup>104</sup> "Wheeling Has Largest Percentage of Foreign Element Census Reveals," *Wheeling Register*, June 14, 1931, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Our Lady of Perpetual Help-St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church, *75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1913-1988: Celebrating the Millennium of Ukrainian Christianity* (Wheeling, 1988), OCPL.

Kowalsky. Seeking to promote and unite the Ukrainian population of the area, Kowalsky worked with Ruth McIntire of Oglebay Park and the All-Nations Council to promote and sell tickets for Ukrainian folk performances. In late November 1930, Wheeling (City) High School sponsored “Glimpses of Picturesque Ukraine,” featuring a “Cossack sword dance” and “Ukrainian Cossack ballet” of forty Wheeling dancers, most from St. Mary’s Ukrainian Parish, assisted by Anna Horvechko and Luke Witenko. Organizers informed prospective viewers about the meanings of some of the dances of “this oldest Slavic race,” like the “Katerina Khersonka,” which was “a dance of the Ukrainian steppes, and suggests the golden wheat and azure sky which gives the Ukraine its national colors of blue and gold.”<sup>106</sup> In a way, this event was staging and creating a view of Ukrainian cultural nationalism. Father Kowalsky himself was a noted authority on Ukrainian folk songs and even published a book “on their meaning and use.” In attempting to promote their culture, Kowalsky noted:

“No race is richer in lore” and has songs for all daily events: “the men toiling in the fields, the women at work in their homes or gardens usually accompany their labor with songs. The subject of the songs range all the way from the warriors achievements of the Ukrainian Cossacks to the baking of a loaf of bread inn [sic] an humble peasant hut. All are characteristic of Ukrainian life.”<sup>107</sup>

The best expression of this promotion of ethnic culture was the annual Festival of Nations at Oglebay Park on Independence Day. Organized through the park staff with support from middle class promoters, each of the principal ethnic groups in Wheeling and the Ohio Valley had exhibits, dancers in full costume, ethnic cuisine, and musicians playing traditional folk music. Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Romanian, and Polish immigrant groups had the most diverse programs. At that first festival in 1930 over 6,000 came to Oglebay Park to view the dancers and

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<sup>106</sup> “Ukrainian Cossack Ballet to Be Given Monday Night-Sword Dances and Merry Folk Songs of Peasantry to Be Seen and Heard,” *Wheeling Daily News*, November 30, 1930, Section 4, 4; “Ukrainian Priest Leaves for Chicago,” *West Virginia Register*, July 1, 1934.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* Ukrainians were also different in religion from the Poles. Those who were Catholics were Uniates (loyal to pope), but with their own liturgy derived from the Orthodox tradition.

exhibitions. Like earlier smaller events, park officials noted the role of the festivities in fostering ethnic tolerance and Americanism. A procession of nations went through the park to meet a symbolic “Miss Columbia” who in symbolic fashion “received the representatives of each nation as citizens of the United States”. Even before the performances, all the participants sang together “America the Beautiful,” emphasizing their dual allegiances as ethnic-Americans. After the first successful event, the 1931 Festival of Nations broadened to include an Italian and a Hungarian contingent from Martins Ferry. Additional features included traditional handicraft displays from Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian culture. The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual event garnered what at that point was the largest gathering ever at Oglebay Park. The events were more educational, as dance leaders explained the historical and cultural significance of each dance. For example, the Polish group performed the “Mazurka” a dance with a long history among the aristocratic classes of Poland. In contrast, the Ukrainian dancers did a wider array of rural peasant dances, including the “Hopak Holom” (“The whirling dance of village youth”), the “Kolomeyka” (“An ancient wedding and festival dance of the Carpathian Mountaineer”), along with the famous sword dance the “Lytsari Zaporozha,” and ending with the Ukrainian national anthem.<sup>108</sup>

Immigrant women played a leading role in the promotion of ethnic folk dance exhibitions. Ukrainian instructor Anna Horeczko had a unique perspective based on her own heritage. Born in 1911, she and her father left Torke in the southeastern section of Poland, arriving in America in November 1923. She grew up in a true borderland region during the worst of the First World War, the post-war ethnic conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians, and during the Polish-Bolshevik War. Arriving once these conflicts subsided, her experiences played into her desire to promote her people’s unique culture and make sure it was not subsumed by the

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<sup>108</sup> *Wheeling Register*, July 1, 1930, 8; July 4, 1930, 7; July 5, 1930, 5; June 23, 1931, 14; June 28, 1931, Section 3, 2; July 2, 1931, 8; July 3, 1931, 7; July 5, 1931, 5.



larger Polish population on the South Side. The role of young women in the recasting of nationalistic culture in America suggests how Eastern European ethnic conflicts were replayed here. By late 1930, Wheeling's Polish community directly organized a response to claims that their native country treated its Ukrainian minority population "with unusual cruelty, permitting officials of Poland to act frivolously and barbaric."<sup>109</sup>

Wheeling's Polish community also sponsored its own dance group. During a November 1930 "World Fellowship week" at the Y.W.C.A., Slovak, Ukrainian and Polish dancers performed national folk dances and songs in their native language. All of the dance teams were made up of girls of immigrant families. While learning ethnic dances would seem to be something undertaken by the daughters of middle class families, an analysis of the Polish dancers suggests their strong working class roots. During the first Festival of Nations in July 1930, the Polish dance team was quite large. All of the Polish-American girls were between the ages of 12 and 24. Of those with available employment information (15), all but four worked in some sort of factory. The main assistant instructor, Anna Winkiewicz, was twenty-four and worked at the Warwick China Company. Ten of the dancers worked at unskilled factory jobs, primarily at the Wheeling Tile Company on the South Side. Several were from middle class households and worked as clerks at their father's stores. Only one saw any sort of social mobility during this time. Anna Januszewski, born in 1910, was working as a lacquerer at the Wheeling Can Company at age 16, but by her early 20's had gone to vocational school and was a

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<sup>109</sup> Anna Horeczko, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0024, Roll: 2550, Page 20A; Anna Horeczko in New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, database, Arrival November 6, 1923, New York, New York, aboard the S.S. Olympic Microfilm Serial T715, Roll 3408, page 63, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957; National Archives Microfilm Publication T715, RG 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, NARA, reprinted by Ancestry.com (12 June 2013); for the devastation caused by the post-World War I conflicts in the region, see Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920 and the Miracle on the Vistula* (London: Random House, 2003); for the Polish-American protest meeting, see "Poles Refute Propaganda at Meeting Last Evening," *Wheeling Daily News*, December 12, 1930, Section 1, 11.

typist and then a clerk at Wheeling Corrugating. This suggests the strong support for maintaining ethnic heritage within working class Polish households and passing that on to the next generation.<sup>110</sup>

The Poles also exerted much influence in popularizing Polish culture for a mass audience. Led by Alexander Oszustowicz, a series of popular Polish bands serenaded the Poles during community functions, but also played city and region-wide and over WWVA radio. Originally a musician in the Wheeling Orchestra, Oszustowicz formed his own symphonic orchestra, the Moniuszko Orchestra; however, only drawing Polish listeners, he expanded and revamped its repertoire. Reorganized as the Polish American Rhythm Kings, they played a variety of dance band music, especially Polkas. This gave them more recognition as they played for regional Polish fraternal events, and had a Sunday program via WWVA radio.<sup>111</sup>

No matter the changes seen in the 1920's, St. Ladislaus remained the center of the community and expanded its reach. Polish ethnic fraternal organizations involved more immigrant men and their children, and women saw new roles in lay parish governance and societies. Fr. Musial and the parish lay councils took great concern in growing and attracting activities for the children of Polish families. The high birth rate in immigrant families from around 1906-1925, put pressures on the small parochial school. Fr. Musial exercised his authority in 1925 by taking out a \$12,000 loan from the South Side Bank & Trust to make upgrades to the school as well as the Felician Sisters' residence.<sup>112</sup> With an increased parish population in South Wheeling, which also served those in Eastern Ohio and Triadelphia's coal

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<sup>110</sup> For the list of the Polish and other ethnic dancers, see *Wheeling Register*, July 5, 1930, 5; for the employment background on the fifteen Polish-American girls, see 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling, Ohio County, West Virginia; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1926*; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1928*; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1930*; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1932*; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1934*.

<sup>111</sup> Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, 144-5.

<sup>112</sup> St. Ladislaus, Financial Report, 1925, DWC.

mining areas, the parish saw a golden era in the 1920's. While tuition costs, usually 50 cents a month, could cut into tight family budgets, parochial schools expanded because of the pervasive piety and regard for parochial schooling among working class Polish men. While instilling Americanized and Polish subjects, Polish schools more importantly instilled important cultural values, such as deference to authority, familial and national loyalty, and accepting the limits of personal and monetary desires. For the majority of the community's population, "church schools were guarantors of traditional values" and crucial in the community's goal of "inventing ethnicity" for a new American-born generation.<sup>113</sup> Parish confirmations show as well how much the parish grew during the 1920's. Available records for 1922 and 1928 show that *Polonia's* center remained in the area from 40<sup>th</sup> Street south through North Benwood. The number of children reaching confirmation age grew from 140 (1922) to 249 (1928), before declining 176 (1931).<sup>114</sup> Chart 8.2 suggests how the parish school continued to grow. While baptisms peaked in 1925, the school age population remained large until the time of World War II.

**Table 8.2: Souls at St. Ladislaus and Children in Parochial School, 1920-1930**

	<b>Souls</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Births</b>
1920	1300	336	-
1921	1500	306	-
1922	1500	356	-
1923	-	-	-
1924	-	410	112
1925	1350	421	110
1926	1600	430	93
1927	1300	402	76
1928	1600	432	58
1929	1600	420	86
1930	-	390	40

Source: *St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1920-1930*, DWC.

<sup>113</sup> William J. Galush, *For More Than Bread: Community and Identity in American Polonia, 1880-1940*, Eastern European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 180-89, quotes on 186 and 190.

<sup>114</sup> Saint Ladislaus Church Confirmation Books, 1922, 1928, 1931, St. Ladislaus Parish Records, DWC.

While the numbers of the community and parish grew, the types of fraternal and sporting activities grew during the 1920's. While in larger cities Polish communities saw a significant decline in fraternal groups, Wheeling and the Upper Ohio Valley saw male organizations proliferate. The two largest Polish organizations, the Polish National Alliance (PNA) and Polish Roman Catholic Union (PRCU) maintained their early roles within the community. Both groups by the mid-1930's had Boy Scout Troops along with the insurance programs developed in the first decades of the century (as discussed in Chapter 4).<sup>115</sup> The number of lodges just within the Wheeling area expanded, along with more secular groups. Two of the more popular ones included the Polonia Club for young Polish-American boys and the Polish-American Political Club (PAP) formed in 1919.<sup>116</sup> Young women could be involved in a variety of lay societies that worked with the church, such as St. Mary's Sodality, the Holy Rosary Society, the Children of Mary, along with the popular St. Cecelia Chorus.<sup>117</sup> The Rosary Society itself saw the largest expansion in the 1920's among Polish women as the most popular female pious organization. Meeting regularly for prayer services, it also gave married and unmarried women a place to meet and discuss political and social issues in an approved Catholic setting. The society also sent members to care for those who were sick and assist their families in hard times. Women's

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<sup>115</sup> For the concerns about younger Poles joining in decreasing numbers in the 1920's, see Galush, *For More Than Bread*, 168-71; "Historija Tow. Św. Józefa, Grupa 213 Z.P.R.K.," in *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiała, Proboszcza Parafii Św. Władysława Króla, Wheeling, W.Va.* (Wheeling, WV, 1926), 41, in *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus, Wheeling, WV (1902-1995)*; *West Virginia Register*, December 16, 1934; February 17, 1935, DWC.

<sup>116</sup> For these organizations, see "Polish-American Political Club," Certificate of Incorporation, 1919, Incorporation Book #11, 301; "Polish-American Trading Company," Certificate of Incorporation, 1920, Incorporation Book #11, 385; "The Polonia Club," Certificate of Incorporation, 1923, Incorporation Book #14, 243, OCCO.

<sup>117</sup> *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Księdza Emila Musiała, Proboszcza Parafii Św. Władysława Króla, Wheeling, W.Va.* (Wheeling, WV, 1926), 47, 49, 51, 55, in *Parish History File-St. Ladislaus, Wheeling, WV (1902-1995)*; *St. Ladislaus Parish, Annual Report, 1928-1929*, DWC.

groups, such as the Polish Women’s Alliance, No. 414 (formed in 1924) also were crucial in the annual ethnic festivals and raising funds for the community through regular bazaars.<sup>118</sup>

Lay fundraising events were very important to the economic health of the parish during this time. After World War I, Catholic dioceses got more heavily involved in financial oversight of their ethnic, national parishes. Centralizing of diocesan bureaucracies required ethnic parish priests to submit more detailed annual financial reports. Every request for repairs or other budget items needed to be signed off by the chancery (even sacramental wine forms once Prohibition commenced). This cut into the discretionary power of the priests like Father Musial, meaning that collecting pew rents (which remained the primary monetary collection) and private giving and fund raising events was significant. Much of this money from fund-raising needed to be reported to the chancery, but could be used in a wider amount of discretionary purposes. Ethnic festivals and bazaars were thus quite popular and profitable. For example, in 1925, St. Ladislaus raised \$3,425.94 from fairs and bazaars. While not a majority of the parish’s income, the importance of those cultural events that tied the community together took on greater financial concerns as the Great Depression decade loomed. Even in 1929, parish fairs only raised \$1,774.16 and in 1930 it declined again to \$978.08.<sup>119</sup> As Table 8.3 shows, even while this was a time of increasing affluence and prosperity for the parish as a whole, much of the parish’s growth came from increasing debt from diocesan and local banking sources.

**Table 8.3: Financial Records of St. Ladislaus Church, 1921-1930**

	<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Pew Rents</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Debt</b>
1921	\$15,021.92	---	---	<b>\$11,650</b>
1922	\$11,175.02	---	---	<b>\$11,150</b>
1923	---	---	---	<b>\$9,050</b>

<sup>118</sup> “Polish Women to Celebrate,” *Wheeling Register*, June 24, 1934, Section 1, 3. For the role of female Polish Catholic societies, see Galush, *For More Than Bread*, 160.

<sup>119</sup> St. Ladislaus, Financial Reports, 1925, 1929, 1930; for the growing centralization of parish spending power, and the strains placed on priests and lay communities by the late 1920’s, see Galush, *For More Than Bread*, 154-5, 163.

1924	\$10,290.35	\$2,257.25	\$10,219.37	<b>\$8,450</b>
1925	\$25,721.65	\$7,116.65	\$23,564.57	<b>\$20,100</b>
1926	\$13,260.32	\$6,346.60	\$13,260.32	<b>\$18,100</b>
1927	\$10,508.35	\$6,108.45	\$10,471.30	<b>\$18,100</b>
1928	\$16,856.94	\$7,614.78	\$16,436.93	<b>\$18,100</b>
1929	\$11,358.35	\$5,424.93	\$11,358.35	<b>\$18,000</b>
1930	\$10,365.20	\$4,580.45	\$10,346.74	<b>\$17,900</b>

*Source: St. Ladislaus Annual Reports, 1921-1930, DWC.*

With their growing cultural presence in the city, the Polish community exerted its power over defining public space as “Polish-American.” Through the efforts of a Polish-American Political Club petition drive to the city council, the 47<sup>th</sup> Street playgrounds was renamed “Pulaski Field” in October 1930. Founded to aid in local Poles becoming U.S. citizens, the club’s building and numbers expanded during the 1920’s. Of all the local fraternal associations, the PAP was most active in civic affairs to get municipal improvements in South Wheeling. For example, they funded extensive improvements to the recreational facilities at the park, and also had gates erected and a guard posted at the railroad crossing at 45<sup>th</sup> and McColloch Streets. This eased what was for years a constant worry of many Polish immigrant parents with children getting hit and killed by fast-moving railroad cars. The PAP was also instrumental in its successful protest against a city proposal to install gasoline tanks in South Wheeling near many homes.<sup>120</sup> This vote to change the park’s name came about a week after the mayor and other city officials joined community leaders and over 1,200 Poles for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish National Alliance (PNA) and banquet at the PAP club.<sup>121</sup>

By this point, the Polish community could exert itself on a wider level and with cross-class support from the community. The PAP aided men of both the middling and working classes. This was seen in their leaders. In 1930, Secretary Stanley Owoc and President Walter

<sup>120</sup> “Change Name of Playground on South Side,” *Wheeling Register*, October 29, 1930, 4; “P.A.P. Plans for Birthday,” *Wheeling Register*, July 21, 1934, 12.

<sup>121</sup> *Wheeling Register*, October 20, 1930, 11.

Zdanowicz were instrumental in the improvements seen in the community. While Owoc ran a successful barber shop, Zdanowicz was a steelworker throughout the decade, but by 1930 was working at the local junk yard.<sup>122</sup> Bernard Klimasewski, president of St. Joseph's PRCU branch, and Joseph Kupski, president of the local PNA, were both laborers in the tin mill.<sup>123</sup> Along with the PAP club's political presence, and the local chapters of the PNA and PRCU, the community also had its own newspaper, the *Polish News*, edited by Kazimerz Obecny to disseminate local and international news of Polish concern. Reflecting the overwhelming blue collar nature of the community, there was even a Polish Workers Association led by Joseph Gozsztvla.<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

While working class families had hardships in Wheeling, many Polish-American children who came of age in the 1920's and 1930's recalled a world that was full of vigor. Two of Adam Pietras's descendants recalled the working class existence of South Wheeling with fondness. Mary Pietras Robbins remembered growing up near the Ohio River and swimming in it during the hot summers and when it froze "we would skate and ride down the river bank in cardboard boxes from Freismuth's Packing Company." As a child, one could go a few blocks and enjoy the delicious tastes of the Royal Bakery (owned by the Lukaszewicz brothers), especially their "devil dogs," and bring home fresh bread that family members "ripped off chunks and ate it on the spot." Not far away, she could stop off at Alex Habak's general store, where he made his own Polish sausage. Upon returning home, Pietras and other Polish wives could pick up some fruit and vegetables from Mr. Dzinglski's pushcart as he came by shouting "Apples, peaches!"

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<sup>122</sup> Stanley Owoc, 1920 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 109, Roll: T625\_1967, Page 9A; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1930*, 597; Walter Zdanowicz, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0025, Roll: 2550, Page 15A; *Callin's Wheeling City Directory, 1926*, 1092; *Polk's Wheeling City Directory, 1928*, 982, reprinted via Ancestry.com.

<sup>123</sup> 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia.

<sup>124</sup> *Wheeling Daily News*, December 12, 1930, Section 1, 11. No copies of the newspaper have been found. For the editor, see Kazimerz Obecny, 1930 Manuscript Census, Wheeling Ward 8, Ohio County, West Virginia, Enumeration District 0024, Roll: 2550, Page 13A, reprinted via Ancestry.com.

As children, she recalled they could get free entertainment by playing in the street or go to the nearby Marsh Theater for a dime (even though you could sometimes sneak through a “rat-hole” in the back for free). And if you saved some extra money from your factory job, one could shop for the latest consumer items from the Coeey Bentz Department Store. Regardless of their poorer circumstances, Mary Pietras recalled “everyone was glad to get whatever they could.”<sup>125</sup>

This is not to overly romanticize the difficult trials faced by the Polish immigrants. With their own ethnic village, Polish-Americans could recall with great candor the united feeling of the community. Mary Martinkosky’s parents emigrated from Lublin in the early 1910’s, and she recalled growing up in the block between 47<sup>th</sup> Street and Wetzel and Eoff streets:

I wouldn’t [sic] trade my childhood for nothing. We were poor but we didn’t [sic] know the difference . . . we had grocery stores on every block, beer joints on every block. I would say there was about fifty businesses from here to 33<sup>rd</sup> Street. That’s [sic] only about thirteen blocks . . . the playground [Pulaski Field] was always full of people. You had to stand in line to get a swing.<sup>126</sup>

This best summarizes much of the sentiment and common experiences of Polish community life in Wheeling’s *Polonia*.

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<sup>125</sup> Mary Pietras, in Duffy, *The Wheeling Family*, 159; for the Polish businesses in the region, see *Pamiętnik Uroczystości Złotego Jubileusza Świecenn Kapłanskich Przewielebnego Ksiedza Emila Musiala, Proboszcza Parafii Sw. Władysława Krola, Wheeling, W. Va.*, (Wheeling, WV, 1926).

<sup>126</sup> Oral interview with Mary Martinkosky, by the author, August 10, 2008.



## Chapter 9 Conclusion

“When I was growing up, we had two religions at my house—the Catholic Church and the USWA”—Jimmy Koprowski, Keith Maillard’s, *The Clarinet Polka*<sup>1</sup>

By the 1930’s, the Polish Catholic immigrant community of Wheeling thrived and helped its members address the many urban problems of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Wheeling. Through religious and cultural events and on the shop floor of the area’s steel mills, metal factories, and tobacco plants, Poles and their children worked with other ethnic communities throughout the Upper Ohio River Valley. While it is convenient to compartmentalize the lives and beliefs of the new immigrants who arrived from the 1880’s to 1924, the Poles and their children did not separate their ethnic, religious, or class identities. As seen in Wheeling, the Polish community balanced a left-leaning view of the need for a “moral capitalism,”<sup>2</sup> with a love of their Polish background and their conservative religious practices, all while finding ways to interact with other ethnic groups on the job, shopping in a local grocery, walking the picket line, fighting in the street, or attending cultural events.<sup>3</sup>

This study of Polish Catholic immigrants adds to our understanding of how community building, preservation of their ethnic, Catholic religion, and a tendency to support home ownership fostered a tighter group consciousness than among many others. Over time this gave them a background to help solve everyday problems, promote union organizing, and eventually work with other Catholic and even non-Catholic working class groups. Poles could be both class conscious and ethnically conscious. They often balanced being at times overly insular, choosing

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 209.

<sup>3</sup> James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

to build and run their own ethnic stores, religious spaces, and fraternal associations, with joining a broader fight for better treatment in the workplace.

However, the Poles' Catholicism and religious devotion were primary elements shaping their identities. They spent their money maintaining the parish at St. Ladislaus and building a home nearby, and they instilled in their children a love for Poland and God, even as they used their ethnic social spaces for political and union organizing activities. Being Catholic, Polish, and a strong union member were not incompatible. *Polishness* in Wheeling meant being supportive of your family, your church, your heritage, and your union.

Part of global labor migrations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Poles gravitated to Wheeling's growing steel industry, coal mines, and diversified manufacturing opportunities. Settling primarily in South Wheeling, Benwood, and eventually in the coal camps on the periphery of Ohio County, by the 1910's the city had a strong *Polonia* in South Wheeling. However, they arrived in a city with many urban problems as a result of rapid industrialization. Poles lived near the segregated vice district, where saloons were on virtually every corner, and crime and inter-ethnic street fighting predominated. Industrial accidents and even getting killed by a passing railroad car loomed for every new resident. The Poles adapted to this urban environment with the aid of Father Emil Musial by creating a unique Polish Catholic space and culture on the South Side. The parish developed its own parochial school, Polish language organizations, sports teams, and even a Polish-American Political Club to aid in the process of becoming American citizens and engaging in the affairs of the community.

World War I was a key turning point for the Poles. The community urged support for the American war effort, both to promote their own loyalty and a revived Polish state. Men joined the American Expeditionary Force or the Polish Army in France. Others donated Liberty Bonds,

and the parish promoted Polish-American Catholic patriotism. The wartime experience working with other Catholic groups, aided the Poles in then mobilizing for union recognition after the war. The Steel Strike of 1919 and the lockout by Wheeling Steel in 1921 saw Poles as vigorous supporters for trade unionism. In the coal mines, Poles fought for their union alongside other Eastern Europeans, Greeks, Italians, and African-Americans, and compared their plight to the struggles of miners in Southern West Virginia. However, solidarity faded during the long, bitter struggles, and the Poles retreated back into their ethnic community.

While the 1920's was a time of increasing wage levels and more leisure time, most Poles still labored in dangerous blue collar occupations. Many of the second generation stayed in school longer than their parents, but most still entered blue collar employment. Continuing to live at home in large families, Polish-American children were still expected to contribute to the family economy, and they clung to the benefits of their ethnic community, which gave them religious solace, their education through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and popular ethnic entertainment via public festivals. At the same time, this second generation interacted even more than their parents with other youths of different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic dance exhibitions and displays of ethnic craft goods and foods maintained a love of Polish heritage, while the multi-ethnic interaction helped break down barriers.

Historians of working-class immigrant groups have often focused on how the children of immigrants broke from their insular ethnic communities to forge broader working-class coalitions within the CIO and the Democratic Party. For them, only after breaking from these old-world traditions and backward religious practices could ethnic workers become class-conscious enough to join the labor movement. Immigrant families were seen as supportive of narrow, realistic goals, initially protected by the ethnic community, at the expense of supporting

loftier political goals.<sup>4</sup> Establishing themselves in low-wage industrial jobs enabled them to achieve a level of security within the capitalist system, and allowed for the preservation of the family unit. The story goes that only after breaking away from their immigrant parent's culture and worldview in favor of a mass consumption culture and the New Deal political order, could they foster a unified coalition advocating for "industrial democracy" in the late 1930's.<sup>5</sup>

While this story may be true for ethnic workers in places like Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Detroit, Wheeling's Polish immigrants forged a somewhat different path. For the first generation in America, they fostered a community that tried to unify migrants from a variety of class, geographical, and occupational backgrounds. Through creating an appreciation for being "Polish," they built a community from the ground-up. The pull of ethnicity, religion, and class were all equally important in providing a secure community in urban America. Labor historians too often do not appreciate this lived experience, favoring the moments when workers mobilized collectively in support of mass industrial unions and supported liberal Democratic policies. Building parishes and fraternal lodges, providing insurance programs and ethnic entertainments, and working 12-hour days in the steel mill and then returning home to work on needed repairs are just as vital to understanding the immigrant experience and how it laid the groundwork for subsequent political action. As Leslie Tentler argues, the local parish community's response to the everyday needs of its parishioners "are no less important, and no less formidable, than the creation of a class-based opposition to capitalist exploitation. For a good many workers in the United States, the creation of an ethnic identity and the institutions of which that identity was

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<sup>4</sup> John Bodnar, "Immigration, Kinship, and the Rise of Working-Class Realism in Industrial America," *Journal of Social History* 14, no.1 (Autumn, 1980): 45; John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Gobel, "Becoming American: Ethnic Workers and the Rise of the CIO," *Labor History* 29, no.2 (Spring 1988), 174-6, 185-6.; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 5-7, 209, 285, 314-5.

both symbol and product was probably a necessary antecedent to the development of class consciousness.”<sup>6</sup>

It was this localized Polish ethnic community that prepared the second generation to move beyond the ethnic group and become active in the New Deal social movements of the 1930’s. Polish immigrants created a home and a community that stressed stability, security, morality, and a sense of justice. Here at parochial school, in parish lay societies, and in fraternal organizations, Polish-Americans learned the values and pride in their culture that gave them a common language and a set of beliefs to aid in their demands on government and within the workplace. If they did come to argue for a “moral capitalism” in the 1930’s, Polish-Americans learned about what that type of society could look like daily as they grew up in South Wheeling and experienced the bonds and collective strivings of their fellow immigrants.<sup>7</sup>

For Wheeling’s Polish community, the insular sacred world of their parish was never actually divorced from the secular world of the union hall and political campaign. While it may be hard for historians to comprehend how such a large group of rural, Catholic immigrants could become Americans and be so active in the union movement, by taking a close-up view of their *Polonia* we can best understand the values that structured their lives. In his book set in the fictional South Raysburg, but based on a close association with the Polish community of South Wheeling, Keith Maillard’s third generation Polish-American narrator surveys the work of the Polish immigrants over the years:

“They kept the customs they remembered from the old country, and they stuck together . . . and they made it through that big ugly strike in 1919, and they made it through the Depression, and they helped build the USWA in the valley, and they hung on to their

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<sup>6</sup> Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 84.

<sup>7</sup> John Bodnar, *Workers’ World: Kinship, Community, and Protest in an Industrial Society, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 184; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 365.

little bits of property any way they could and kept their houses real nice, and they sent their sons off to war.”<sup>8</sup>

The Polish immigrants and their children created their own unique world in Wheeling that has affected all levels of local culture, religion, politics, and unionism. If Jimmy Koprowski wanted to best understand how the Poles were able to achieve all these things, his grandfather summed up an attitude that many of the immigrant generation shared: “You don’t gotta teach Polaks union . . . Polaks stick togedder.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Maillard, *The Clarinet Polka*, 33.

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