

**A LABOUR ARISTOCRACY:  
SKILLED LABOUR IN AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA, 1891-1914**

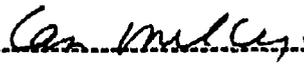
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Peter M. Latta

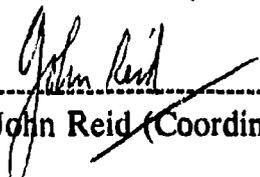
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## ABSTRACT

Peter M. Latta

A Labour Aristocracy:  
Skilled Labour In Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1891 - 1914

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This thesis explores the meaning of the term "labour aristocracy" and its development in Britain and Canada. The limited use of the term in Canadian historiography is discussed and its validity in a Canadian context is questioned. The characteristics of a labour aristocracy, as defined by British historians, are applied to skilled workers in Amherst, Nova Scotia. These characteristics are level of pay, tendency toward defensive activity, marriage patterns, attitudes toward property, associational life, and adoption of a leadership role for the working class.

Within the boundaries of a single town, a group of skilled workers emerges who demonstrate many aristocratic tendencies. The identification of an upper strata of workers allows a useful approach to understanding some of the activities of the working class in Amherst.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Very few projects of any merit can be done in isolation. Even though I have worked on this thesis many miles away from the sources and amenities of the university, I cannot say it was written alone. I received help and encouragement from several institutions, whom I would like to thank now for their perpetual willingness to assist in even the vaguest of requests. These are the staffs of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, the Patrick Power Library, the Killam Memorial Library, the Ralph Pickard Bell Library, and the Registry of Deeds for Cumberland County. A special thanks must go to the Centre for Canadian Studies for allowing me pleasant surroundings on countless weekends in which to piece together my findings. I wish to thank Laurie Glenn of the Cumberland County Museum, Dorrit Amos and Fred Haines of the Town of Amherst, and Bev True of the Cumberland Regional Library, each of whom made accessible documents in their care, even at the most awkward of times. Thanks too, to Christene Mills for preparing the tables on short notice.

As a part-time student, I appreciated the efforts of Colin Howell and John Reid in making class schedules fit work schedules. Ian McKay has provided more than academic guidance, patience, and innumerable references to this project. His breadth of understanding of labour and Maritime history stimulated my interest in the very subject explored here. While I could never hope to cover the ground as exhaustively as he would wish, I have learned from him there is no

substitute for thoroughness.

Throughout this entire exercise, Diane Tye has never ceased to provide me with the encouragement, thoughtful discussion, and a great deal of the inner strength needed to see it through. It is to her that I owe the greatest thanks.

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## INTRODUCTION

The questions underlying this study first formed during a reading course with Dr. Ian McKay in 1987-1988 that surveyed interpretations of the labour aristocracy. The issues surrounding this stratum of workers intrigued me and I began to think about them in terms of the labour force of Amherst, Nova Scotia whose history was familiar, but puzzling to me. I wondered if theories of the labour aristocracy might help explain something about the workforce in Amherst, where unionization was slow to develop. The Provincial Workmen's Association had a lodge established there from 1890 to the early 1900s, but, beyond this, moulders were the only skilled metal workers to form a union until machinists established one in 1913. If unions were, as much contemporary historical writing implies, the focal point of working class culture, then where did this leave the workers in Amherst, particularly the skilled? The reliance on union involvement and strike action as the sole barometer of labour's sense of solidarity and militancy troubled me. I wondered if skilled workers in Amherst were able to achieve any sense of unity as a group, either within or outside the workshop through expressions other than formal union activity.

Before addressing any of these questions concerning a specific group of workers, I needed to determine the appropriateness of the concept of the labour aristocracy for a Nova Scotian context. Was it a term and theory that had been or could be applied? Second, how does one identify members of this group? A careful reading of British historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and Robert Q. Gray suggested patterns and characteristics that might apply to Nova Scotian workers. Despite the fact that Canadian historiography on skilled craftsmen rarely addresses the labour

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aristocracy directly, and almost never adopts the term, I continued to be intrigued by the concept's applicability for Amherst's skilled labour force.

I chose Amherst as the subject of my research for two reasons. First, it is the town whose history is most familiar to me. Most of my earlier historical research has focused on aspects of its past. Second, as a community whose economic well being depended on at least six major industries from the beginning of its industrialization in the 1860s until World War I, it had a large pool of skilled labour. If Nova Scotia had a labour aristocracy, Amherst seemed a reasonable place to begin the search for it.

Having selected the study community, an initial and consistent challenge throughout my research was identification. In order to explore the reactions of skilled labour to political and social issues, I had to define the group. This proved difficult for there is almost a complete absence of employee and wage records for the major industries up to 1914. Some records of Robb Engineering survive, but mainly from the period after its business reorganization of the 1920s. Records of Rhodes, Curry Co. have not yet been discovered, and may well be lost. Other sources of information were sought, but these were largely secondary and could only suggest certain conclusions. While this lack of sources remained a frustration, there were some bright spots. Marriage records and deeds have been the responsibility of the province, and as such have survived in good form. Fortunately, the records of the Odd Fellows lodge in Nova Scotia were microfilmed some years ago. When their office burned just before I wanted to consult them, it became only a matter of waiting before having access. Marriage records, land transactions, and lodge

membership lists and other records proved to be valuable resources in identifying trends among skilled workers.

Much evidence had to be gleaned from newspapers and secondary sources. Of the several newspapers published in Amherst during the study period, only scattered issues remain of the daily papers except the Evening News (for which 1891-1895 issues survive) and the Amherst Daily News (for which a constant run from 1895 exists). Unfortunately only one viewpoint is preserved as both the Daily News and the Evening News voiced the Liberal political perspective. Nevertheless, lively debates take place between the editors of the papers and their readers and occasionally accounts published in other newspapers are referred to or reported. Even taking into consideration the bias of the newspaper editors, these papers remain a vital source for those interested in Amherst's past.

My exploration of skilled labour in Amherst begins with a review of the major British works that identify the labour aristocracy and discuss its role. How Canadian historiography treats the subject of skilled labour and the labour aristocracy is another focus of chapter one.

Chapter Two establishes the context for the study through an overview of Amherst's history and an outline of the development of the major metal working firms, particularly Robb Engineering. The chapter introduces the skilled workers, especially those who were employed at Robb's during the period 1891-1914.

The social world of Amherst's skilled labour is the subject of chapter three. Here the search for the labour aristocracy and its influence extends beyond questions directly related to economic determinants, examining trends in marriage, property

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ownership, and fraternal lodge activity. Skilled labour's position in the town and its inter-relationships with members of both the upper and lower echelons of the town emerge.

The final chapter turns to the arena of civic politics. Since so very few unions of any type existed in Amherst, one of the only places to discover skilled labour's leadership role is in municipal politics. I review the participation of skilled labour in several pertinent elections, tracing their development as a group in the early twentieth century to their eventual decline in influence just prior to World War I, when spokesmen for unskilled workers enter politics in greater numbers.

**"LABOUR ARISTOCRACY": A CONCEPT TO WORK WITH**

Since the term "aristocracy of labour" was revived in British historiography in 1954 by Eric Hobsbawm, it has received considerable attention. Because of the breadth of study, it seems appropriate to begin by reviewing the nature of this scholarship, and any relationships with Canadian historiography. This chapter will provide a brief review of selected literature about the labour aristocracy with the intention of introducing some background about the conception of the term in its historical sense. The chapter will also discuss how the concept of the labour aristocracy has been treated by Canadian labour historians, and seek to answer whether or not it has been an acceptable idea in Canadian historiography.

The following review of literature demonstrates that one of the main difficulties in understanding the apparent dichotomy between British and Canadian sources lies not so much in evidence but in nomenclature. British and European studies which refer to "aristocrats of labour" suggest that many of the characteristics and responses to industrialisation of skilled labourers were, if not unique, to them, at least prevalent among its members. While most Canadian scholars identify many of the same characteristics of skilled workers as those noted in British scholarship and recognize the validity of the notion of an aristocracy of labour, they do not adopt either the term or its concept. In the study of Canadian skilled labour, the emphasis has been on theories of worker's control, which forms only a small part of the character of the aristocrat of labour. Only recently, in the writings of Bryan Palmer and Craig Heron, is the wider experience of the skilled worker approached

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in a manner which reflects the British and European study of the aristocracy of labour.

In his review of "The Origins and Incidence of the term 'Labour Aristocracy'," Michael Shepherd, a critic of the modern historiographic concept, works from the idea that "labour aristocracy" means:

a collective interest group, unitary and having a place in a definite social hierarchy, such that its members felt more in common with the select of diverse crafts than with either the middle class on the one hand, or the rest of their respective trades on the other.<sup>1</sup>

This is about as far as Shepherd seems willing to go in defining the term. Tracing the term from its earliest use in 1845, he notes that its definitions vary from both time to time and user to user, and, with each context, its meaning and sense has also changed. While the term was originally introduced from outside the realm of labour it became, toward the end of the nineteenth century, adopted by labour. Since its most intense, contemporary use in mid-Victorian times, "labour aristocracy" has enjoyed several resurgences.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Shepherd concludes that after the resurrection of the idea of a labour aristocracy in the later nineteenth century, two usual senses of the term emerge:

the moral sense of earnest self-elevation and the political sense of selfish conservatism. The two senses could co-exist together, and we should not assume that F. Harrison's and F. Engels's concentration on the latter sense was typical of their time. Contemporaries seemed far more familiar with the former sense. Certainly, they

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Shepherd, "The Origins and Incidence of the term 'Labour Aristocracy,'" Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History 37 (1978): 51.

<sup>2</sup> Shepherd 51-67.

never expropriated the term as an elastic, universal explanation, stretchable to include all the phenomenon (liberalisation, stabilisation, reformism, chauvinism, etc.) which modern Marxists want it to explain.<sup>3</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm introduced the concept to modern scholars in his 1954 essay, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain." Here, Hobsbawm draws upon the incidence of a term in Victorian Britain which referred generally to noble labourers, or the kind of worker Shepherd refers to in the "moral sense" of the term. Hobsbawm identifies many of the characteristics which go toward making an aristocrat:

What is a labour aristocracy? There is no single, simple criterion of membership of a labour aristocracy. At least six different factors should, theoretically be considered. First, level and regularity of a worker's earnings; second, his prospects of social security; third, his conditions of work, including the way he was treated by foremen and masters; fourth, his relations to the social strata above and below him; fifth, his general conditions of living; lastly his prospects of future advancement and those of his children. Of these the first is incomparably the most important.<sup>4</sup>

Hobsbawm goes on to discuss some possible ways of identifying the composition of the group. He dismisses the analysis of proportions of women and children, and the aged in industry, as being too nebulous and inconclusive to trust. He does however, place great emphasis on the examination of illiteracy. Hobsbawm argues that an area with an aristocratic component will likely be more economically stable than

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<sup>3</sup> Shepherd 62.

<sup>4</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain," in John Saville ed., Democracy and the Labour Movement, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954) 202.

others, resulting in a greater emphasis on education, as well as reflecting a strong trade that refused entry to cheaper forms of labour such as women, children and the elderly.<sup>5</sup> The assumption, of course, is that the levels of skill required would be too high for uneducated and untrained labour, and this in turn would create a protective attitude on part of the work force which would effectively prevent a dilution of the trade by the unskilled. This is not as likely to be a factor in late nineteenth century Nova Scotia as in eighteenth century England to which Hobsbawm referred. Associated with this strong, well paid labour aristocracy would be a higher level of literacy than could be otherwise expected in a working class place. As these characteristics appear in varying quantities among significant numbers of the working class he studied, Hobsbawm concludes that this group was not a construct of the Marxist imagination. It was fluid in its membership, depending on the strictness of the rules applied to its characteristics, but its existence was not in doubt, nor the fact it behaved in certain ways.

Hobsbawm's emphasis in this early work, as he himself recognizes later, places more emphasis on economic determinants than he might do now. He writes:

As against several colleagues who have primarily stressed the cultural element in the labour aristocracy - its lifestyles, ideology, etc. - I remain sufficient of a traditionalist Marxist to stress its determination by the economic base. Of course, nobody would deny the autonomy of the cultural element, and I may well have pushed the economism a bit further in 1954 than I

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<sup>5</sup> Hobsbawm, "The Labour Aristocracy" 237-239.

would today...<sup>6</sup>

By this is meant a dependence on wage evidence and in his early study, he develops a limit of thirty shillings which serves as an identifying boundary. Hobsbawm however, may have become convinced of the accuracy of this limit largely because of the strength of the records available to him. After thirty-five years of discussion and examination, it appears that the question of the aristocracy of labour cannot be determined on economic evidence alone. As major studies of the group have shown since Hobsbawm's early work, the economic factor is more appropriately considered only as one of several determining elements.<sup>7</sup>

Building upon the idea of the aristocracy of labour as identified by Victorian observers, Hobsbawm also addresses the matter from the point of view expressed by Frederick Engels and V.I. Lenin. Engels and Lenin argue that the skilled craftsmen, and their propensity to exclusionist union and social behaviour is one reason why labour, as a totality, did not advance in its struggle. Artisans of all levels, according to Lenin, were too ready to accommodate the wishes of industrial capital. Skilled labour tended to support craft unions, which he thought diminished the ability of all labourers to acquire any measure of control over the workplace. Even though Lenin's image of the labour aristocracy was very broad, historians like John Foster find it to be useful in the analyses of craft groups. Foster, for example,

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<sup>6</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Debating the Labour Aristocracy," Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984) 220.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert O. Gray, Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) and Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society Kentish London, 1840-1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

sees the labour aristocracy as an almost sycophantic group, inducing, in consequence, an opposite reaction in the unskilled.<sup>8</sup> Hobsbawm refutes this idea and so have most other writers, in particular Henry Pelling and Robert Q. Gray.<sup>9</sup> It is Pelling who most explicitly states that rather than trying to accommodate capital, the aristocracy of labour in fact played the role of organizer and stimulator of labour's struggle.<sup>10</sup> That is, it actively maintained the unionist attitude of collective bargaining and action at a time when labour tended not to be as organized as the crafts, and also to provide the leadership in some of the more radical movements.

In his argument, Henry Pelling notes the original source of the labour aristocracy's accommodation of conservative principles is its reference to the Chartist period. Skilled labour's attitude however, changed as industry changed. Pelling writes:

It may well be that this interpretation has some rough correspondence to the facts in the period of acute distress in the Chartist period, when the more moderate elements were to be found among the comparatively prosperous craftsmen, such as the London Working Men's Association, while the 'physical force' men were mostly the unemployed factory operatives or dispossessed handloom weavers of the North. Later on, however, when 'physical force' was out of the question, the evidence almost invariably suggests that it was the more prosperous workers who were the more politically militant and radical, while the lower ranks displayed

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<sup>8</sup> John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early industrial capitalism in three English towns (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974) 237-238.

<sup>9</sup> Hobsbawm, "Debating the Labour Aristocracy" 215-216.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Pelling, "The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy," Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain: Essays by Henry Pelling (London: MacMillan, 1968) 55-56.

either apathy or conservatism.<sup>11</sup>

By reviewing the historical context in which the theory of labour aristocracy's conservatism was formed, Pelling is able to observe that solutions to group problems changed with the economic milieu.<sup>12</sup> The focus on the attitudes of skilled workers towards capital, once it became evident that these attitudes could be as radical as conservative, now includes the cultural as well as the economic. As Marx identifies the propensity of the skilled, "regrettably self-satisfied body of workers" to organize for their own protection, and this to the exclusion of other workers, later historians note that the existence of the group is not in doubt, but, rather, the meaning of its behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

In earlier studies, the emphasis was upon wages, entrance to the group and activity within craft unions. More recently, several British historians have worked toward understanding the complex role of the skilled artisans' life, conforming to Shepherd's identification of the coexistence of the moral and political lives of the artisans. Foremost in this analysis has been R.Q. Gray and Geoffrey Crossick.<sup>14</sup> These scholars advance the idea that a true representation of this group is possible

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<sup>11</sup> Pelling 55-56.

<sup>12</sup> In a later chapter, we will see how a similar disregard for context has led to a misrepresentation of the labour force in Amherst.

<sup>13</sup> Pelling 37.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert O. Gray, Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh and The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain ca. 1850 - 1914 (London: MacMillan, 1981); Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society and "The Labour Aristocracy and its Values: A Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London," Victorian Studies 19 (1976):301-328; and Charles More, Skill and the English Working Class, 1880-1914 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

only by recognizing the complex layers of their activities. In particular, Gray and Crossick undertake comprehensive studies of labour aristocrats in the respective communities of Edinburgh and Kentish London. By looking at the details of artisan life which range from unions to membership in the local militia, a picture of an active, committed and collectively consistent group emerges. It is now possible to review here the characteristics of the aristocracy of labour with greater assurance than a narrowly economic definition would allow.

While the details of artisan life have been examined by Canadian scholars for nearly twenty years, the majority of studies focus on the political responses and union activities of all strata of the working class. Research on skilled labour continues to develop with recent work on steel mill employees and carpenters complementing earlier studies on printers and various craft unions. The use of the term "aristocracy of labour" in the historiography of Canada's working class is, however, extremely limited. Of the handful of scholars who use this term, none attempt, or apparently feel the need, to define the kind of worker to which they refer. The inherent assumption is the labour aristocracy is a known quantity, making further definition unnecessary. Some examples of this treatment are Ian McKay's "Class struggle and Merchant Capital", The Craft Transformed, Wayne Roberts's "The Last Artisans," and Greg Kealey's "Work Control".

In his study of the Halifax waterfront craftsmen, Ian McKay analyses the responses of the crafts to changes in the structure of the workplace as part of the evolution of a larger working-class consciousness. This approach, which explains the variety of ways established crafts defended themselves against encroachments of

labour surpluses and technological changes, is part of a larger body of work on the defence of crafts by historians such as David Montgomery, Robert Gray and Greg Kealey. What distinguishes McKay's writing is his recognition of the "waterfront craftsmen -- the riggers, blockmakers, coopers, sailmakers, shipwrights and caulkers --... as a defensive 'labour aristocracy'."<sup>15</sup> He explains:

A labour aristocracy emerged among the craftsmen of the Halifax waterfront because they feared, with reason, the encroachments of other craftsmen, both rural and urban, and the competition of unskilled labourers. Confronted with large surplus labour pools, they defended their craft privileges in the only way open to them: by creating an artificial labour scarcity through the devices of the restriction of numbers and of the common rule.<sup>16</sup>

Recognizing that boundaries move around crafts, and yet are exceptionally important, McKay does not attempt to define specifically the differences between one craft and another, and a craft as opposed to labour. He does however recognize in this case the primacy of apprenticeship in defining membership to a craft.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, from the ensuing discussion we can assume the term "labour aristocracy" applies to waterfront workers because of their "reasonable standard of living," tendency toward home ownership, and self interest as a group.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, in his work on the Halifax carpenters, McKay notices the

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<sup>15</sup> Ian McKay, "Class Struggle and Merchant Capital: Craftsmen and Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850-1900," in Bryan Palmer, ed., The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History, 1850-1985, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986) 19.

<sup>16</sup> McKay, "Class Struggle" 20.

<sup>17</sup> McKay, "Class Struggle" 23.

<sup>18</sup> McKay, "Class Struggle" 28-29, 36.

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importance of apprenticeship to a craft group in maintaining its status as skilled labour.<sup>19</sup> He describes the qualification of a stringent apprenticeship to union membership as "A cardinal principle, indeed the cardinal principle in building up craft union membership...."<sup>20</sup> By focusing its effort on the exclusion of the unskilled, the carpenter's union in Halifax clearly possessed one of the main characteristics of the labour aristocracy. McKay writes:

... the union tended to see its main task as excluding the unskilled and rural craftsmen, and this gave many of its policies and statements the same tone as that used by the 'labour aristocracy' in Britain - a tone of high respectability and bitter contempt for the unorganized and rural. The difference between Halifax and Britain, however, was that the local craftsmen were, to a far greater degree, on the defensive.<sup>21</sup>

While recognizing defensiveness as an inherent part of any craft union's role, too much effort in this way may have the effect of eroding the other aspects of the aristocratic character.

While the local crafts may well have been forced by capital into a persistent defensiveness, the argument of this thesis is that it is important to look further than the restrictive activities of unionism in order to test the idea of a labour aristocracy. How carpenters in Halifax behaved off the work site and outside the union hall is, properly, not of concern in a union's history. Nonetheless, the fullness of working class life must be considered if any comprehension of the group is to emerge.

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<sup>19</sup> Ian McKay, The Craft Transformed (Halifax, N.S.: Holdfast Press, 1985) 13-16.

<sup>20</sup> McKay, Craft Transformed 14.

<sup>21</sup> McKay, Craft Transformed 15.

Wayne Roberts is less helpful in dealing with the concept of the labour aristocracy. For example, in his "The Last Artisans", he makes the case the printers in Toronto were not particularly well paid or distinguished by property. Roberts asserts: "They were by no means an aristocracy."<sup>22</sup> Following a strictly economic approach this would be so. He goes on however, to describe what he feels to be the Toronto printers' salient characteristics with regard to the rest of the workforce: "But the most important reflection of their artisanal frame of mind is in their attitudes - their attitudes to their work, attitudes to their workmates, to their union, to their employers and to society at large. All of these are related in some coherent manner to the artisans mind."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, it is these very factors, along with pay scale which Hobsbawm identified so long ago, that form the basic characteristics of a labour aristocracy. In his ensuing discussion, Roberts notes the existence of a "benign sense of a proper relationship between a workman and his employer" with regard to their fraternal activities; their discipline at work and control of the workplace; their insistence on, but rather sloppy maintenance of, a system of apprenticeship; and their willingness to take an active role in their society through politics.<sup>24</sup> Determining the symptoms and factors of skilled workers' "benign sense" will be a major part of this thesis.

Throughout his discussion Roberts works toward establishing the

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<sup>22</sup> Wayne Roberts, "The Last Artisans: Toronto Printers, 1896-1914," in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., Essays in Canadian Working Class History, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976) 127.

<sup>23</sup> Roberts, "The Last Artisans" 128.

<sup>24</sup> Roberts, "The Last Artisans" 130-140.

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characteristics of an artisanal group. He concludes the printers maintained the status of "the old artisans," but does not pursue the idea of aristocracy. Despite his evidence about the printers which would support their assignation as "aristocrats" and the tendency of other historians to now move away from the sole dependence on wages, Roberts is apparently willing to avoid it solely because of the economic factor.

In another article, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen" Roberts raises the idea of labour aristocracy in the title, but barely otherwise. His article on the building trades in Toronto is wide ranging in its coverage. Generally, it focuses on the relative disparity of organization between carpenters, plumbers, woodworkers, ironworkers, stone and granite cutters, and brick layers. Among these the bricklayers emerge as a trade in control of its skills, "about the closest the building trade had to an aristocracy of labour".<sup>25</sup> Once again, the term has merit, but remains undefined in the Canadian context.

Like Roberts and McKay, other Canadian historians have described and written about an upper stratum of labour which has the characteristics of Hobsbawm's aristocrats. Much of this writing focuses on specific ways in which this group, usually referred to simply as being "skilled," has responded to certain pressures in the workplace. For example, an early article by Gregory S. Kealey, "The Honest Workingman," describes the ways three Toronto unions -- coopers, typographers and moulders -- exercised their power to maintain control over craft

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<sup>25</sup> Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Unionism among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1975): 113.

skills and the shop floor. After reviewing their individual efforts to maintain control, Kealey poses the question:

What ramifications do shop floor power have in terms of how workers thought about their society, how it was changing and their own role in it? David Montgomery has argued that the major impact of this early workers control was the skilled workers growing awareness that the key institution for the transformation of society was the trade union. From their understanding that they, through their unions, controlled production, it was a relatively easy step to the belief that all the capitalist brought to the process was capital. Thus an alternative source of capital would transform the society ending the inequities of capitalist production and creating the producers society that they all dreamed of. This ideology looked to co-operation administered through the trade union as the major agent of change. All the unions we have discussed favoured co-operation.<sup>26</sup>

Kealey goes on to describe the elements of co-operation between skilled and unskilled, and the few efforts when unions took on the role of capital to establish or operate industries. Beyond this, one can ask how else could the membership of a craft union, or of a craft group with strong unifying ties other than a union, influence society? Without a more complete analysis of the characteristics of a craft group or skilled labour, a better understanding of their full effect on society will not be easily achieved. While the role of a union is unquestionably important, the existence of craft groups without unions during the last of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries creates their own special problems of methodology for historians. A leading question here, and one this thesis will attempt to explore, is does a group

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory S. Kealey, "The Honest Workingman and Workers' Control: The Experience of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892," *Labour/ Le Travailleur* 1 (1976) 58.

of unorganized skilled workers behave in a unified way in their attitudes and responses to society and the workplace, and does this change with the introduction of a union?

In a later essay "Work Control, the Labour Process, and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Printers," Greg Kealey enlarges on "the Honest Workingmen" by further analyzing the printers of Toronto. His earlier contention that printers held a powerful control over their work place and process is borne out here. He argues that printers did not achieve control and maintenance of status and position without cost. In his argument the idea of David Montgomery's "autonomous control" figures largely, and thus one might conclude that Kealey sees the printers much as McKay sees the carpenters of Halifax -- that is, as a defensive aristocracy. The evidence Kealey employs in his article is heavily centred on the workplace, the strategies of the union and the employer's organizations, and some of the internal debates which informed members of their actions. It is not until he begins to sum up his position on the printers that Kealey clarifies his position about the larger role the printers played in Toronto. He calls them "the labour aristocrats of Victorian and Edwardian Canada", who, "through solidarity with their union, entered the twentieth century with much of their power and control intact." He continues:

Canadian printers were not unique in this achievement; it was shared by printers internationally. How do we account for their relatively unusual success, in withstanding the onslaught of capital, unleashed in the massive restructuring of labour processes and of the working class? No single explanation will suffice. Printers combined their old trade customs with a vigorous trade unionism to defend their position. They also achieved control of the new technology of the typesetting machine by cleverly acceding to a process of reskilling and demonstrating a willingness to work the new machines. In addition, their literacy, general standing in the community, and

leadership in the broader trade union movement all provided extra clout in bargaining. And finally, in the newspaper industry, the employers' dependence on intensely competitive local markets led to their placing a high premium on stability. In this, printers resembled building-trades workers who also maintained strong craft unions during this period.<sup>27</sup>

While he does not expand upon these points in the confines of the article, Kealey recognizes the importance of these questions for a complete understanding of the role of these labour aristocrats. He moves the study of skilled craftsmen along with his comment, abbreviated as it is, that the effectiveness of the printers in maintaining their aristocratic position may have been based, or at least strengthened, by "their literacy, general standing in the community, and leadership in the broader trade union movement."

Bryan Palmer, in "Most Uncommon Common Men" enlarges the field of study by observing that the context in which artisans functioned is much more complex and encompassing than the shop floor:

Three distinct, but interrelated, strands coalesce to delineate the character of artisan culture, the rituals and the traditions associated with life and inner workings of the shop floor; a cluster of ideas and attitudes that set the skilled craftsman apart from other social groups; and finally various institutional forms in which ritual, tradition, ideology and attitude expressed themselves concretely.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gregory S. Kealey, "Work Control, the Labour Process, and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Printers," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., On The Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986) 93.

<sup>28</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft and Culture in Historical Perspective," Labour/Le Travailleur 1 (1976): 8.

In his discussion Palmer introduces, although somewhat clumsily, the study of culture and its relationship to the working-class: "Any attempt to grasp the artisan's historical significance and presence, demands such an approach, which allows the historian to understand the levels at which culture operates, i.e. class and culture, race and culture and poverty and culture."<sup>29</sup> One has the feeling that Palmer views culture as an active ingredient in society that might be separated from others. Its function of providing a context in which those other activities develop, however, is not explored here.

Similarly in A Culture in Conflict, Palmer is not precise in his use of the word "culture" or how it might manifest itself. For example, in his chapter on culture, he includes a discussion of the funeral procession and its importance. He outlines the procession as "one of the many persistent continuities in the culture of the skilled workingman...The funeral procession...hints at the strength of the associational life of the Victorian workman, a key component of his social and cultural existence."<sup>30</sup> These continuities are referred to throughout the chapter, but only vaguely and without definition. Nonetheless Palmer achieves his goal of moving the discussion of skilled workers beyond the realm of the workplace. As commendable as the effort is to introduce a new and deeper dimension to the study, in the final assessment the cultural, contextual discussion is the weak link in this book. His analysis of the funeral, for example, points to this: "Attendance at

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<sup>29</sup> Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men" 8.

<sup>30</sup> Bryan Palmer, A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914 (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1979) 36.

funerals may have been due to a pride in recognizing the accomplishments of fellow workers, but may also have been a chance to remove oneself from the drudgery of the workplace".<sup>31</sup> This retreat to surface observation does little to aid our understanding of how nineteenth century skilled workers dealt with the real trauma of the death of a peer, and trivializes the perceptions of death and dying, the surrounding public and private attitudes to the dead, the public spectacle of grief and its associations to the respectable -- all elements which could have had a more lasting effect on members of a funeral procession than the desire for time off.

A further example of Palmer's analysis in this regard is his discussion of a union's cultural role: "At the centre of this more diffused culture stood the craft union, its disciplined apparatus organizing events of importance and meaning to its membership."<sup>32</sup> Both Palmer and Kealey perceive "artisan culture" as basically anti-bourgeois. Palmer's linking of the union to a vibrant cultural organizing role, however, is not unrealistic and he endeavours to present some evidence to that end. It is important to remember that why the union became central to the lives of skilled workers was not so much that it existed and provided structure and meaning, but that it consisted of people who, by and large, would identify themselves in similar ways.<sup>33</sup> That is, unions do not create culture, but culture is active within them.

Even with these shortcomings, Palmer moves the study of the working class

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<sup>31</sup> Palmer, A Culture in Conflict 37.

<sup>32</sup> Palmer, A Culture in Conflict 54.

<sup>33</sup> Palmer, A Culture in Conflict 56.

out of the confinement of the workplace. He recognizes the complexities and originates a vast discussion on the richness of the subject. Craig Heron's Working in Steel is more successful in the study and integration of the broader cultural context. In his book, Heron attempts to include the full spectrum of working class life as it relates to his subject of the four major steel towns of Canada. The role of company or welfare capitalism, ethnicity, religion, immigration, community and the skilled and unskilled, are discussed with some detail and examples from the operating plants. Heron comes to resolve, as Pelling did earlier, that "it was the workers with the most pride in their work and the most leverage on the shop floor (the skilled) who would provide the spark for igniting that resentment into collective resistance."<sup>34</sup> Beyond any shop floor resistance, Heron does not fully explore the leadership roles of the skilled workers, although he does examine the religious, associational and neighbourhood patterns related to steel workers. We are left then, with an idea that these highly-paid, cohesive, skilled workers and leaders of labour, might be identified as labour aristocrats. As in other studies in Canadian labour, however, this concept remains undeveloped.

In conclusion, it appears that while Canadian historians have been not unwilling to draw on elements of the idea of the "aristocracy of labour" in their studies of skilled craftsmen, they are hesitant to adopt it fully. Most Canadian studies of the skilled revolve in a close orbit around the union and the workplace. The importance of the role of the skilled worker outside this sphere is undoubted,

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<sup>34</sup> Craig Heron, Working in Steel the Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988) 111.

yet remains largely unexplored. Recent studies which endeavour to examine the place of the craft worker outside the workplace begin to identify the keys to a deeper understanding of the world of these workers.

We are left to ask why, if the term is sometimes acceptable, and if the components which help to identify aristocrats of labour and skilled labour are similar, that the phrase has not been more widely adopted in Canadian historical writing. Perhaps the longevity of the debate surrounding the aristocracy of labour is seen to be exhausted, and no longer truly relevant. This is unlikely, given the direction of expanding enquiry that Palmer and Heron are indicating for historians. Perhaps the limited evidence that the term was used historically in Canada has discouraged historians from adopting it now. Certainly no one refers to themselves as an "aristocrat of labour." As Hobsbawm says, however, it does not really matter how the labour aristocracy are known, so long as they are recognized for what they were.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the concept seems to have earned a vague recognition in Canadian historiography. It appears that Canadian historians, while writing about skilled workers and examining evidence similar to that explored by their counterparts elsewhere, have avoided the use of the term, but verge on acceptance of the theoretical structures introduced by the concept of the labour aristocracy. Given the direction of labour historians, and the apparent lack of any alternative ways to identify this group in Canada, the adoption of the term would seem to be useful in clarifying an internal division of the labouring class.

This thesis will explore broad questions about skilled workers who lived and

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<sup>35</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Debating the Labour Aristocracy" 226.

worked in Amherst, Nova Scotia at a time of absent or weak labour organizations. It will examine the limited evidence regarding wages and workplace relationships, consider the kinds of "social security" available to members of a skilled workforce through marriage and fraternal lodges, examine the place of the skilled worker in the context of a larger society and their choices regarding home ownership, and review the evidence of skilled labour's participation in civic elections. These factors will be examined mainly for machinists and patternmakers of Robb Engineering but reference to other sections of the work force and town society will be made in order to preserve an appropriate context. In this analysis of skilled labour in Amherst, the term "labour aristocracy" is helpful when referring to a group of workers with some persistent and consistent characteristics. The second chapter will begin this exploration of the skilled worker in Amherst.

## II

### THE WORKSHOP AND THE TOWN

The focal place of this thesis is the town of Amherst, Nova Scotia, between the years 1891 and 1914. Situated in the north of the province, Amherst forms part of the industrialized belt of the Maritimes, which runs from St. Stephen's, New Brunswick to Pictou County, Nova Scotia. The area of the town was initially settled by Europeans in the seventeenth century, and, like many other Maritime towns, took its present form after the expulsion of the Acadians and resettlement by New Englanders and English immigrants. Amherst eventually became the mercantile and administrative centre for Cumberland County and gradually attracted a professional and merchant class of residents. By the time of Confederation, Amherst included several fledgling manufacturers, all of which would eventually grow into significant employers.<sup>1</sup>

Amherst's growth from small market village to manufacturing centre is a model of Maritime development and eventual collapse. Until the period of the National Policy it was little more than a cross roads, although by 1879 several key manufacturers had been established. The first decade of the National Policy was one of slow growth and between 1881 and 1891 the town grew by only fifteen hundred persons, from 2,274 to 3,781. This was not essentially different from other manufacturing towns in the Maritimes. For example, in 1880 New Glasgow had the well established firms of I. Matheson foundry and the Nova Scotia Forge (later Nova

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<sup>1</sup> These early industries included A. Robb foundry (1865); Christie Brothers carriage works (1863); Casey's Tannery (ca. 1860); and Amherst Boot and Shoe (1867).

Scotia Steel and Coal Co). With a population of 2,595 in 1881, New Glasgow grew only to 3,777 by 1891. Moncton's 1881 population of 5,032 expanded to 8,765. The Record Foundry (established 1857) was among the few significant manufacturing plants in Moncton prior to 1879, and the important terminus for the Intercolonial Railway with its attendant repair shops and large labour force were begun there by 1872. Even with this huge operation, rail car manufacture did not begin in Moncton until 1908.<sup>2</sup>

Like other Maritime towns Amherst grew more consistently after 1890, experiencing a spectacular 80% increase in population, with 4,964 in 1901 and 8,973 in 1911. Several new but small manufacturers established in Amherst, probably attracted by tax concessions or "bonuses," an establishing workforce and the sense of economic stability provided by the old, large plants like building contractors and rail car manufacturers Rhodes, Curry and Robb Engineering, makers of stationary steam engines. The Labour Gazette correspondent portrays the energy and activity embodied in Amherst during these boom years:

The leading houses all show an increase in their sales over previous years. The tendency of wages is steadily upward, and many individual increases have been granted. The labour market has been free from any unrest. In ten years the population of Amherst has doubled, and the assessment roll has more than doubled. Nearly 2000 hands are employed in local workshops. Strikes may be said to be unknown here.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Machum, A History of Moncton: Town and City, 1855-1965 (Moncton, N.B.: City of Moncton, 1965) 95, 215.

<sup>3</sup> Labour Gazette 7 (1906-1907): 838-839.

Characteristic of an economic boom were housing and social problems. New neighbourhoods clearly segregated according to economic class and ethnicity, each with its distinctive architecture, grew up to accommodate the influx of workers. The working class lived near the downtown core, close to factories, and, after 1901, in a new neighbourhood called the West Highlands. On the other hand, managers and professionals concentrated in the eastern section of the town, farther away from the factories.<sup>4</sup> These trends will be more closely examined in the next chapter.

Despite the industrialized character of Amherst, it also retained an interconnection with the agricultural economy. In the pre-National Policy era, farmers dominated the economy and the intersection of farm families with those involved in manufacturing was great. An analysis of marriage records for 1870-1875 demonstrates the strong relationship between tradesmen and rural workers, with 48% of a total 81 marriages involving families of rural workers in Amherst. This trend continued in the 1890s but fell off in the early 1900s once the town's manufacturing population had taken root. This mix of farm and factory, however, was not without its tensions. In 1904, for example, "Farmer" indignantly wrote in the Amherst Daily News that while "... the merchants, mechanics and manufacturers" think they own the town, "they forget that there is a large number of ratepayers within the bounds of the town who are farmers."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Diane Tye, "The Housing of A Workforce: Workers' Housing in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1900-1914," Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin 11:3 (1986): 14-16.

<sup>5</sup> Amherst Daily News 29 June 1904.

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Despite the growth of Amherst, after 1901 and before 1914 when this study ends, only two significant new industries developed.<sup>6</sup> The town's expansion was due to the reorganization of the pre-National Policy firms of Robb Engineering, Rhodes, Curry Co., Christie Brothers, and the Amherst Boot and Shoe. These companies grew and reorganized in a way which better suited the new industrial capitalism. For example, in the early 1890s two industries which hinged on the metal trades, Rhodes, Curry and Robb's, not only reformed their business structures by becoming joint stock companies but developed, or more accurately, refined and redefined their respective products.

For Rhodes, Curry these refinements meant a new emphasis on rail car manufacture while maintaining the older and lucrative building construction side of the company. The repair of wooden freight cars had long been part of the firm's work, but the purchase of the defunct J.H. Harris rail car plant in Saint John increased its role of repair shop to manufacturer. With this equipment came many of the skilled workers of the Harris plant. These workers assimilated easily into Amherst society and many assumed leadership roles in church, labour movements and local politics. As with their building business, Rhodes, Curry began to make railway cars from the ground up, supplying most if not all the materials needed. This capacity was increased again when a rolling mill was added to the plant in 1906, and a new group of metal workers entered Amherst's labour force.

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<sup>6</sup> These industries are Hewson's Woollen Co. (1902-ca.1920) and the Amherst Piano Company (1913-ca.1928).

Eventually the rail car business assumed pre-eminence at Rhodes, Curry Co. This occurred after 1909, the year several car builders and foundries amalgamated to form the Canadian Car and Foundry Co. Under the firm's president, Nathaniel Curry, the rail car and building construction sections of the old Rhodes, Curry plant grew steadily apart until in 1911, Rhodes, Curry Limited became a corporate body separate from Canadian Car. Retaining the name of the original company, Rhodes, Curry Ltd. continued in the construction business until winding-up in the 1950s. The Canadian Car and Foundry continued to operate until the early 1920s as a car manufacturer. The plant was revived in World War II to make and assemble components for aircraft, a product which continues to be manufactured on the site today.

The foundry of A. Robb and Sons was built in 1865 by Alexander Robb and began production that year manufacturing stoves. In 1906, at a dinner given for the "selling and operation staff" of Robb Engineering, D.W. Robb reminisced about the old foundry:

The first cast in the new foundry was made in August 1865, the product being principally stoves. At this time, Amherst as you may imagine, was quite a small village, consisting of half a dozen stores, three hotels; five churches, the court house, county jail, and a corresponding number of dwellings. There were no factories except a small tannery which was located in the building just at the left of the present Black printing office, and this tannery boasted the only steam engine in the village. There was no railway, no banks, and only a single line of telegraph, with one operator, Mr. George Keyes, who used the old fashioned recording tape for receiving messages.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Amherst Daily News 4 Jan. 1906.

Agents for Robb were organized around the Maritime provinces and the company continued on a modest scale until 1891. In 1872 ill health forced Alexander Robb to retire from the business, and bonds for the administration of his estate were posted by Gilbert Seaman of Minudie.<sup>8</sup> As Norman Ritchie records, "The responsibility of running the business was taken over by his two eldest sons, David W. Robb, age sixteen in the shops and Frederick B. Robb, age fifteen in the office."<sup>9</sup> How active Gilbert Seaman was in the everyday business is uncertain, but he was in a position to give advice to the young Robb brothers which would help them maintain their business for the next eighteen years. Another brother Aubrey attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, while a fourth brother, Walter played a minimal role in the company.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander Robb died in 1891. Following his death, his sons and daughter formed a new company which discontinued stove and agricultural implement production and vigorously pursued the making of stationary steam engines. Norman Ritchie, the historian of Robb's, describes this redefinition of product as a natural step forward for such a progressive family.<sup>11</sup> In fact it was an astute move which provided the firm with a product which had little competition in the Maritimes if not Canada, and one which they could promote internationally.

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<sup>8</sup> Susan (Christie) Hill, ed., The Diary of Gilbert Seaman (Amherst, N.S.: Amherst Township Historical Society, 1988) 36.

<sup>9</sup> [Norman Ritchie], "The Story of Robbs," unpublished essay, n.d., 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ritchie 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ritchie 3.

To the "stranger beyond our gates" the word Amherst is synonymous with the name of one of the most successful manufacturing enterprises that the town is justly proud of. We refer to the Robb Engineering Co., Ltd., whose business under rapid expansion has become the largest of its kind in the Maritime Provinces, and whose engines have earned a world wide reputation, and are now used in almost every civilized country on the face of the globe... To the Robb Engineering Co., Amherst is largely indebted for its rapid growth. The fame of this company has had a great deal to do towards attracting outside capital to Amherst and the establishment of so many flourishing industries.<sup>12</sup>

The impetus for the change from stoves to engines may have come from Aubrey Robb's association with engineers at MIT and his friendship with Mumford, an American-trained Nova Scotian engineer, and Armstrong, an American engineer. Both these men made important contributions to the effectiveness and capability of steam power.<sup>13</sup> The creation of a manufacturing plant in Amherst which produced the power source for electrical generators was timely. Robb's decision to produce engines coincided with the beginning of a civic interest in electrification. This movement quickly expanded into a productive and lucrative international industry that has been explored elsewhere.<sup>14</sup>

The Robb plant built boilers and stationary steam engines. The engines, which found a variety of uses from small lumber mills to driving ocean going vessels, had their greatest success working in conjunction with electrical generators. Prior

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<sup>12</sup> Amherst Daily News 24 Dec. 1902.

<sup>13</sup> Ritchie 10; 13.

<sup>14</sup> See H.V. Nelles and C. Armstrong, Monopoly's Moment: The organization and regulation of Canadian utilities, 1830-1930 (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986) and Thomas Parke Hughes, Networks of Power Electrification in Western Society 1880-1930 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983).

to the development of private and publicly owned electrical utility companies, generators tended to be site specific. These small units provided electricity for single buildings or institutions, although municipalities were not hesitant to install generators for the civic advantages they could bring. Robb's supplied hospitals, universities, Eaton's department stores and numerous other institutions with engines designed to turn the generators at the necessary speed to maintain a regular current.<sup>15</sup> These large machines were custom built, and like many of the aristocrats of labour in Great Britain, the machinists and metal workers at Robb's found themselves producing for the bespoke trade.

Robb's had made a radical change in 1891 to meet a rising technological demand, but their failure to do so a second time no doubt contributed to the firm's demise and take-over. The highly efficient turbine, using steam or water, began to replace the stationary steam engine as a motive source in electric power plants just prior to World War I. It is improbable, given the complexity of the engines being produced by the Robb plant, that turbines were beyond their technical capability. So far as is known, no effort was made to change products again to meet a growing demand. By 1912 the company had gone into receivership and by 1923 it dissolved itself and was absorbed by Dominion Bridge of Montreal. This company refocused the Robb plant on boiler production and, in 1928, structural steel.<sup>16</sup> Currently, Robb's continue to produce and erect structural steel as part of AMCA

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<sup>15</sup> Ritchie 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Amherst Daily News* 31 Dec. 1947 and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: A Study of Amherst, 1891-1925," Diss., Dalhousie University, 1983, 197.

International.

Who were the people with whom the skilled workers had to deal in their everyday work? The skills of the managing Robb family assisted materially in the creation of a well designed and modern product. Since part of the definition of the labour aristocracy depends upon its relationship with management, it is important to note the emphasis Nolan Reilly places upon the character of David Robb in his interpretation of worker-management relations.<sup>17</sup> Reilly sees the management of David Robb as part of "the company's history of paternalistic management (which) fostered, at the very least, the grudging loyalty of the workforce into the 1920s."<sup>18</sup> This history is a real one which first appeared during evidence given to the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour in April of 1888. When asked if the men in the foundry were "attentive to their work and of steady habits," F.B. Robb replied "Yes; we have no trouble that way. Of course we treat them well and find no trouble and the relations existing between us are everything that could be desired."<sup>19</sup> While the questions put to both a machinist and patternmaker at Robb's were not so revealing, the answers given corroborated the lack of labour trouble.<sup>20</sup> Further evidence of the paternalism of the Robb's lies in management's organization of and, presumably, control over both the apprenticeship programme and a mutual

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<sup>17</sup> Reilly 249-250.

<sup>18</sup> Reilly 249.

<sup>19</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour in Canada. Evidence-Nova Scotia (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1889) 323.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Royal Commission 309, 333.

benefit society, both features more traditionally arranged by labour itself. All the Robb brothers had some, if not extensive training in the actual manufacturing process of the plant, and this factor separates them from later managers more schooled in business than workshop management.<sup>21</sup> Did the skilled mechanics of Robb's and/or the Robb brothers perceive a bond of common origin in the workshop as a reality, or an historical coincidence which could be referred to when convenient?

Eugene Forsey rejects the idea that workers developed a degree of respect for managers simply because of a similar background.<sup>22</sup> Managers, however, pursued with vigour the concept that a common origin presupposed a common interest. Without doubt, most manufacturers in the nineteenth century could legitimately claim some affinity with the workshop. How and in what context this was done however, could betray the reality of their motives. Eugene Forsey quotes an important memorandum in his Trade Unions in Canada. This memorandum struck a note of personal insult allegedly given the manufacturers by the boot and shoe workers on the organization in Amherst of a lodge of the Knights of Labour in 1890. They write:

We would refer to the fact that nearly all the managers of the principal manufactories of Amherst have been wage earners, and can assure their fellow mechanics that they did not get their present position by means of trade unions, and we feel sure that all level-headed workmen who are capable of doing a good day's work and earning a good day's pay will not feel that they need a union to

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<sup>21</sup> David Noble, America by Design (London: Oxford UP, 1979) 36.

<sup>22</sup> Eugene Forsey, Trade Unions in Canada 1812-1902 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 155.

get their rights, and that they are not willing to sacrifice their independence to any society which proposes to regulate their affairs, nor to contribute to keep up loafers or strikers in the United States or elsewhere; and they will decide with the undersigned fellow citizens that Amherst does not want a branch of the 'Knights of Labor' or any other organization which will interfere with the satisfactory relations which now exist between workmen and employers. We feel sure that the majority of workmen are totally indifferent or opposed to the organization referred to, but in order that there may be no doubt in the minds of those few who are agitating for it, we the undersigned manufacturers think it prudent to state that we will not employ any person whom we know to be a member of the 'Knights of Labor' or any other Society which proposes to come between us and our workmen.<sup>23</sup>

"This sublime effusion is a classic..." writes Forsey. Certainly it argued subtly and was carefully calculated to be a persuasive tactic to win the upper hand in a budding class conflict. First, while the managers enjoyed a different standard of living than the workers, and may have moved in more exclusive social circles than the rest, it is improbable that the plant owners/managers could maintain a real isolation from their employees. Living as they all did in a small community of 3,700, attending and supporting the same churches, and working in the same plants, it is reasonable to assume the authors knew their audience. From this position the authors of the memorandum set out to appeal to the unionizing workers in order to divide their ranks and restore the previous order. In setting out the argument for their side, the manufacturers chose not to emphasize questions of wages, hours or shop-floor control. Instead they focused their attention on those issues and beliefs

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<sup>23</sup> Forsey 156.

that they knew were agreeable to their workers and to themselves, thereby identifying themselves with the workers and establishing a common ground for further negotiation. The memorandum appealed to the workers' self-reliance, sense of independence, nationalism and natural order in a patriarchal society. In short, the authors expected "the respectable workman," or as the press reported it, "all right-thinking people" would find it difficult to disagree with these things.<sup>24</sup> All the leading manufacturers of the town signed the document and circulated it in their respective factories. This attempt to organize Amherst's first union ultimately failed because of firings of the Knights, the formation of a lodge of the more acceptable Provincial Workmen's Association, and this memorandum.<sup>25</sup>

Even though the attempts of the Knights of Labour to organize in Amherst were restricted to the boot and shoe makers, evidently Robb's felt some pressure to respond. The Robb Engineering Co.'s Mutual Benefit Society, organized about six weeks after the Knights were defeated, was an instrument of insurance protection organized through the offices of the employer. Ostensibly the society was to provide a form of sick benefit to members, who would receive four-fifths of their wages while ill. The society's charter also allowed for "Any difficulty which may arise between employers and employees which cannot be settled in the ordinary manner by the parties interested, to be settled by arbitration..."<sup>26</sup> Presumably the "ordinary manner" would be through a mutual agreement reached in discussion between two

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<sup>24</sup> (Halifax) Morning Herald 5 May 1890.

<sup>25</sup> Forsey 155-157.

<sup>26</sup> Ritchie 33.

independent, self-respecting parties.<sup>27</sup> The inference that the two parties could discuss differences as equals would not be lost on members. In his study of steel plants in Canada, Craig Heron refers to this form of "welfare capitalism". Heron points out the corporate welfarism of which employers' mutual benefit societies were a part, was an appropriate form to appease skilled labour. He writes:

Worker discontent could take two disruptive forms—informal resistance through work slow-downs, absenteeism, or labour turnover, and collective action through strikes and unionization. Corporate welfare was aimed at both these forms of working class insubordination. Most often, it was also beamed at the more skilled, English-speaking segment of the steelmaking workforce, whose knowledge and experience made them so valuable to the companies and so ripe for organizing. Indeed, most of these programs were announced in precisely those periods when steelworkers' discontent was boiling over.<sup>28</sup>

With their background in the workshops, the Robb brothers evidently understood how to appeal to their workforce of skilled labour. When threatened by a hint of organization, they responded with both rhetoric and action designed to mollify the skilled work force. Even though they would personally identify themselves with the skilled worker, clearly their interest lay not in the workers but

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<sup>27</sup> Reilly 195 notes another example of personal negotiation: "The manager met each machinist individually at three month's intervals to balance the time credit ledger. Depending on the balance in the manager's book, the machinist's wages were adjusted upward for the next three month period when the situation was again reviewed." Ian McKay observes the ideal of "manly self-respect" in matters to be resolved by compulsory arbitration were part of the PWA's organizing language. See McKay, "The Provincial Workmen's Association: A Brief Survey of Several Problems of Interpretation," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working Class History, (St. John's, NF: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1985) 133.

<sup>28</sup> Craig Heron, Working In Steel the Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988) 99-100.

with their maintaining control over them to maintain the perceived advantages of a non-unionized shop. The machinists at Robb's did not organize as a local of the International Association of Machinists until 1913. The patternmakers never organized in Amherst. That the Robb's knew what would appeal to their work force also reveals what their work force perceived as important. What emerges is a picture of the respectable craftsman who is independent of mind and action, and who fends for himself. How successful the skilled metal workers could be at maintaining any kind of control over their trades without a union, will be discussed later in this chapter.

For metal workers, the newly specialized products of Rhodes, Curry and Robb's were important as they created a market for identifiable skills and focused those persons entering the work force more narrowly than did the general labouring or carpentry skills available from the rural population. Previous to 1891 the call for skilled labour, particularly in Amherst, was limited and reliant upon traditional woodcrafts such as carpentry, cabinetmaking and carriagemaking. Rhodes, Curry and Christie Brothers continued a demand for these and associated skills, such as painting, throughout their history. Apart from metal workers, the boot and shoe workers would have made up the other large group of skilled and semi-skilled workers in the town, until the creation of the textile and piano factories.

Moulders, machinists and patternmakers constituted the most highly paid among metal workers. In contrast, coremakers, drill press operators and labourers, worked at jobs where lower pay reflected a lower level of skill and less demand for

the positions.<sup>29</sup> These lower scale jobs included monotonous, repetitive activity, and the formation of cores for hollow moulding made from sand using horse manure as a binder.

The metal trades practised in Amherst as identified from the 1891 census were centred on the production methods of the iron foundry. In 1891 there were at least two foundries in operation in Amherst, being Robb's and the Amherst Foundry of Aaron Palmer's. It is not certain whether Rhodes, Curry had a foundry furnace, but it seems probable they did. The process of melting and moulding iron required skilled workers but was not necessarily labour-intensive. A very small crew could manage a furnace, set and fill moulds, and clean and assemble castings. The size of the work crew expanded or contracted depending upon the size of the melt and the number of moulds to be filled. Patternmaking, while crucial to the process, was not necessarily done on the site and patterns could be imported.

In 1891, the census indicates, two or three foundries employed about 18 men as moulders. The majority of these workers (ten) identified themselves as iron

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<sup>29</sup> Wages of Metal Trades in Engine Shops, Amherst, N.S.

	Avg. wage/hr	Avg. hrs/week	Avg. weekly wage	overtime hrs
Lathe hands	.18-.26	60	11.50	1.25
planer & shaper	.18-.20	60	11.50	1.25
vise & fitters	.18-.22	60	12.00	1.25
drill hands	.13-.17	60	9.00	1.25
moulders-machinery	.18-.23	60	12.00	---
moulders-greensand	---	---	---	---
coremakers	.10-.20	60	9.00	1.25
patternmakers	.20-.25	60	13.50	1.25
millwrights	.20	60	12.00	---
unskilled labour	.11-.30	60	7.00	1.25

Source: Labour Gazette 1 (1900-1901): 357.

moulders, six specified they were stove moulders, one was a holloware moulder and one a machinery iron moulder.<sup>30</sup> Only one patternmaker appeared (given the practice of buying patterns and licenses for manufacturing farm equipment perhaps this is not surprising).<sup>31</sup> Other metal workers included a group of six boilermakers. Robb's shop was the only place to undertake boilermaking, which is closely related to engine production. Eighteen persons were identified as machinists, and four apprentices. Without a clear identification of the employer, "machinist" is a troublesome category as not only metal shops employed machinists. The Amherst Boot and Shoe and Hewson's Woollen Mill, for examples, employed machinists, probably as repair staff; and machinists served as woodworkers at Rhodes, Curry. Machinists in the metal trades, however, operated machine tools (e.g. lathes, boring mills, planers, thread cutters) which required skills associated with precision measurements, and translated the draughtsman's drawings directly to metal.

The role of the machinist at Robb's was pivotal. By 1891 when Robb's undertook to specialize in engine production, stationary engines had advanced considerably from the ineffective, relatively crude engines of the early nineteenth century. The quest to produce highly efficient engines had begun early on, but the major developments of the nineteenth century saw the designing engineers creating first compound engines, then Corliss and uniflow engines with greater power and

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<sup>30</sup> A machinery iron moulder operates a machine which injects molten iron into a mould, rather than pouring it by hand. These moulders were not included in the Iron Moulders Union of North America up to at least 1902. See Labour Gazette 3 (1902-1903): 101.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon Winder, "Before the Corporation: The licensing Practices of American Reaper and Mower Manufacturers 1830-1890," paper presented to the Eastern Historical Geographers Association, Quebec City, October 1990.

lower operating costs.<sup>32</sup> Further than cost efficiency, the high steam pressure and speed with which the engines operated made critical the need for accurately fitted parts and quality materials. It was the production of these parts and the control of quality that was the job of the machinists.

The 1900-1901 directory for Amherst, which identified the occupation of most male citizens, indicated some changes beginning to occur to the numbers of workers in the metal trades.<sup>33</sup> While boilermakers and machinists remained numerically about the same as 1891 (eight and 17 respectively) the greatest increases were in the foundries. Thirty-four moulders and six patternmakers are identified in this year. While entries in this directory generally name a trade, place of employment is rarely given. This increase, however, may be explained in two ways. First, Rhodes, Curry began the production of cast iron car wheels and car parts in 1893 with the purchase of Harris's equipment. With this purchase came a number of workers from Saint John, many of whom are identifiable as belonging to skilled trades like pipefitting and moulding. The production of castings for rail cars could account for some of the increase in the number of moulders in Amherst. Rhodes, Curry was producing roughly nine freight or coal cars per day at the turn of the century. Shortly after, it increased its output to fourteen cars per day, a level of production which became average.<sup>34</sup> Cars varied between single and double axle

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<sup>32</sup> See Richard Hills, Power From Steam: A History of the Stationary Steam Engine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> Claude deL. Black, Directory of the Town of Amherst, 1900-1901 (Amherst, N.S.: Black's Printing Co., c.1901).

<sup>34</sup> Amherst Daily News 31 Dec. 1901; 15 Oct. 1906; and Labour Gazette Jan. 1905.

trucks, and so nine cars would require between 14 and 22 tons of castings. Larger orders such as the one received by the company in June 1903 for 325 cars, could boost production to thirty-one tons per day.<sup>35</sup> Second, as Robb's began to produce engines, the need for unique patterns would grow. The Amherst Daily News of 24 December 1902 noted that the plant kept five draughtsmen busy producing drawings for engines and engine parts. This was also the period before a large post-fire expansion in 1904. Those parts being cast in iron would need to be accurately translated into wood, allowing for differences in shrinkage of metal. Although there are no current statistics on rates of engine production at Robb's, the nature of the product would not allow a high daily finished volume. It seems probable that a majority of patternmakers in Amherst in 1900 were working at Robb's while moulders were split between Rhodes, Curry, Robb's, and the Amherst Foundry. Amherst witnessed remarkable growth in the next five years so that by 1905 both Rhodes, Curry and Robb's had established their employment limits with 1200 and 400 respectively. Of the 400 at Robb's, the breakdown was 150 "mechanics", 80 moulders, 80 boilermakers and 90 repair and office staff.<sup>36</sup>

By 1914 the effects of nearly a quarter century of specialization were clearly seen in the workforce. According to the McAlpine's directory for the town, Amherst had 15 patternmakers, 135 moulders, 80 boilermakers and 67 metal machinists at

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<sup>35</sup> Amherst Daily News 20 Jan. 1903.

<sup>36</sup> Labour Gazette 6 (1905-1906): 482.

work.<sup>37</sup> The evidence of the precise division between shops is again spotty, but it is a little more clear than for 1891 and 1900. Of 67 machinists, 56 were noted working for Robb's, with ten at Canadian Car and Foundry, the successor to Rhodes, Curry. The majority of patternmakers were likely working at Robb's, the Canadian Car and Foundry apparently having call only for a small number of standardized patterns. By this time as well the Amherst Foundry was producing stoves, furnaces, and kitchen and bathroom fixtures, all standard patterns. The recently created Amherst Malleable Iron Co. employed a number of moulders, casting mainly for the Canadian Car. The majority of boilermakers were employed at Robb's.

Through the years 1891 to 1914, Robb's came to be seen developing a reliance on workers with identifiable skills. Nolan Reilly notes Robb's, like other plants in Amherst, was an open shop, and green hands were not unknown.<sup>38</sup> The nature of the product, however, demanded a real knowledge of the work, and the maintenance of certain skills may have prompted D.W. Robb to institute his apprenticeship programme, which was in place by 1888. Apprentices were boys over 17, or school leaving age, who undertook to work in the factory at low wages while being assigned to a journeyman. No written agreement or indenture was provided, the arrangement apparently being made informally.<sup>39</sup> Norman Ritchie writes of the apprenticeship programme:

By the 1890s, the Robb apprentices were limited to ten

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<sup>37</sup> McAlpine Publishing Company, McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory 1914 (Halifax, N.S.: Royal Print & Litho. Ltd., 1914).

<sup>38</sup> Reilly 193.

<sup>39</sup> Report of the Royal Commission 310, 323.

hours a day for six days a week. They started at five cents per hour pay and this was gradually increased during the course. Sunday was a day of rest and quiet, and this did not leave much time for protest marches and that sort of thing. There was a certain amount of horseplay in the plant during working hours and an occasional accident resulting from it.

When an apprentice had completed one year successfully, he was promoted to 59 hours a week, instead of 60, at the same weekly pay. He was let off at 5 o'clock Saturday afternoon. A graduate machinist worked a ten hour day for \$3.00. These courses were carried on in the boiler shop, the foundry, the machine shop, the pattern shop and the drafting department.<sup>40</sup>

The plant revolved around the functions of the skilled metal worker. In examining any group of skilled workers for characteristics of the labour aristocracy it is important to observe their reactions to challenges of their status, either socially or on the shop floor. In Amherst, the evidence for working class activity of any kind is fragmentary before World War I, but a picture of unorganized workers with aristocratic ideals nonetheless emerges.

The exclusivity of machinists and patternmakers was entwined with ethnic prejudice as it was practised by elite groups in the town. Among the metal workers known, ethnicity can be, in a limited way, identified by surname.<sup>41</sup> In these trades, the overwhelming number of workers are Anglo-Celtic. Indeed, up to 1900, the metal workers were almost exclusively Anglo-Celtic. In both 1891 and 1900 only four Acadian names were identified in the metal trades. Many more Acadians,

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<sup>40</sup> Ritchie 23.

<sup>41</sup> While surnames offer an indication of ethnicity, it should be remembered that determining ethnicity by surname alone does not account for maternal lines of descent nor anglicized names. While neither of these latter elements should be neglected, their investigation falls outside the confines of this study.

however, were to enter the trades so that by 1914 thirty percent of boilermakers and eighteen percent of moulders were Acadians. For all three sample years, no Acadian patternmakers were identified, and only six percent -- or four actual workers -- of the known machinists in 1914 were Acadian.

It is not convincing to explain the absence of Acadians from the skilled metal work force on the basis of a general absence from the town directory. Of the 1500 names of adults in the 1900 directory, 113 have Acadian surnames. Marriage records indicate quite distinctly that Acadians had come to Amherst en masse. Acadian farmers and fishermen lived in several nearby areas, notably between Amherst and Moncton, and along the shore from Shediac to Buctouche. Acadians moving to Amherst came principally from these areas.

The exclusion of the non-Anglo-Celts from particular trades may be more indicative of the protective nature of the tradesmen. The efforts of the skilled worker to appear "respectable", as will be defined later, would be diminished by an open association with people thought to be inferior because of religion or ethnicity.<sup>42</sup> Beyond the shop floor, Acadians were excluded from other organizations. For example the town council, lodges, militia and Amherst Trades and Labour Council, all organizations with significant numbers of skilled workers and/or merchants as members, tended to exclude Acadians from participation.<sup>43</sup>

Up to 1900 it appears Acadians were successfully excluded from pattern-

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<sup>42</sup> Amherst Daily News 3 Feb. 1903. The editor noted the poor showing of James Donalds in the civic elections was likely based on his being Catholic and Irish.

<sup>43</sup> Reilly 224, observes that Acadians did not achieve membership in the leadership of the Amherst 'abour movement until 1914.

making and the machinist trades. By 1914, when we will see the aristocratic tendencies of machinists were breaking down, Acadians were beginning to overcome any hurdles. Their most successful efforts to enter the metal trades were with the boilermakers. In 1914 thirty percent of boilermakers, or 24 of 80 in Amherst were Acadian. Why boilermaking was more open to this group is difficult to say. Without wage information the exact status of boilermakers remains uncertain. Highly paid Anglo-Celtic machinists and patternmakers did, however, solidly maintain their exclusivity, and even with Acadians making up 18.5% of moulders (25 of 135) in 1914 it cannot be said they were embraced by that trade either. Thus, while we see Acadians entered the metal trades, they had not fully enter the known high status, skilled positions occupied by machinists and patternmakers during the years of this study.

These numbers suggest a tension among metal workers. At once we see the acceptance of Acadians to one branch of work, boilermaking, and a foothold or grudging acceptance in another skilled trade, moulding. While this could argue as a demonstration of class solidarity transcending ethnicity, the continuing rejection of Acadians by machinists and patternmakers may suggest the social expectations placed upon or accepted by a trade with labour aristocratic values.

Shop floor protection for the machinists and patternmakers, in the absence of specific craft unions, may be found in the subtle evidence about apprenticeship. Knowledge of a craft was traditionally learned through apprenticeship, and apprenticeship was "the cardinal principle in building up craft union membership."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> McKay, Craft Transformed 14.

Ironically, the maintenance of apprenticeship training at Robb's was of special interest to management. While David Robb may have wanted to ensure an available pool of skilled labour, he would also have perpetuated a system which was sympathetic to the goals of skilled labour itself.<sup>45</sup> Evidence supplied during the 1888 visit of the Royal Commission indicated "quite a few boys" were known as apprentices, and yet only four apprentice machinists are noted in the 1891 census.<sup>46</sup> In the directories, apprentices were not identified, leaving the inconclusive but intriguing evidence of "the Boy Problem."

This peculiar issue surfaced in Amherst early in 1911, at the height of the town's economic development.<sup>47</sup> The matter was that boys who could not be compelled to attend school were either not employed and had become noticeable in their numbers and presence on the streets, or else had begun to work in factories. Middle-class reformers tackled the problem with vigour, organizing town meetings, boys clubs and scout organizations, camps and other groups. Work with the churches was crucial to the cause, and Sunday Schools were also organized.<sup>48</sup> The following year, the problem was still evident, and a resolution was sought by the town council:

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<sup>45</sup> Reilly 250.

<sup>46</sup> Report of the Royal Commission 310.

<sup>47</sup> Census of Canada, 1911, indicates the value of products from Amherst had increased about 200 percent from 1901, to \$4,625,765.

<sup>48</sup> Amherst Daily News 6 Feb. 1911; 22 Aug. 1911. This reform effort directed toward boys paralleled work done under a related programme with women and all children.

Moved by Councillor Moffatt and seconded by Councillor McCully that the Recorder furnish the Council at the next night of meeting with laws in regard to taking children under age out of factories and compelling them to attend school.<sup>49</sup>

In this case, the council decided to instruct the police to enforce curfew laws "and otherwise carry out the provisions of the Act for the Protection of Neglected Children."<sup>50</sup>

In his study of the labour aristocracy, Eric Hobsbawm notes that in industries dominated by labour aristocrats there tends to be an absence of boys and women.<sup>51</sup> While Hobsbawm cautions about the inconclusive nature of this kind of evidence, he nonetheless suggests the absence of lower paid boys and female workers is one indicator of skilled workers maintaining an exclusivity over the workshop. The exclusion of women from metal workshops would not have been difficult to achieve, since the strenuous, physical nature of the work clearly did not coincide with the popular version of acceptable women's work. This exclusion was based on social attitudes towards women, and could not have been based on skill or the ability to acquire skill, or probably even on physical strength. As Jane Lewis and others have argued, female workers were quite as able to attain aristocratic status as males.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Minutes, Amherst Town Council, 9 April, 1912.

<sup>50</sup> Minutes, Amherst Town Council, 22 April, 1912.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain," in John Saville, ed., Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torr, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954) 235.

<sup>52</sup> See Jane Lewis, "Women Lost and Found: The Impact of Feminism on History," in Dale Spender, ed., Men's Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987) 56 and Marjorie Murphy, "The Aristocracy of Women's Labor in America," History Workshop 22 (1986): 56-69.

Similarly, there is evidence of some female foundry workers in low paying positions. The number of boys on the streets in Amherst, especially as the town's manufacturing height had been reached, presents a problem in interpretation. As E.R. Forbes reminds us in his review of Maritime suffragists, sometimes the absence of tangible evidence on one matter can be relieved by the presence of "other issues."<sup>53</sup> While the Boy Problem may indicate apprenticeship or low level jobs in the plants of the town was not a choice for most, it may also suggest the opposite. Since it is unlikely the manufacturers would exclude the opportunity for cheap labour, it is reasonable to suggest that skilled workers throughout the town, including machinists and patternmakers, had been able to limit this option by maintaining solidarity with themselves and either refused entrance or made it difficult for cheaply paid labourers to enter the shop.

Significantly, the occurrence of unoccupied juveniles became noticeable in 1911, and were being brought into factories in numbers large enough to cause concern by 1912. It was also at this time that changes in the town's workforce were well underway. As will be discussed in the following chapters, exclusionary attitudes which prevailed among skilled workers both at work and socially, were beginning to disintegrate just before World War I. The Boy Problem experienced by the town likely reflected the decline of a formerly successful defensive labour aristocracy, now no longer able to shield its position through apprenticeship.

Between 1891 and 1914 Amherst underwent many significant changes.

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<sup>53</sup> E.R. Forbes, "The Ideas of Carol Bacchi and the Suffragists of Halifax: A Review Essay on Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists 1877-1918 in Ernest Forbes, Challenging the Regional Stereotype (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1989) 93.

Among these, restructured industries and an enlarged labour force created new tensions and challenges for the skilled workers. From scattered evidence, particularly of the metal trades, a picture emerges of a group of well paid, self-respecting, independent skilled tradesmen, with a tendency toward ethnic exclusion. These characteristics are among those attributed to a labour aristocracy. The next chapter will widen the search for the respectable workingman through a discussion of marriage, attitudes to property, and membership in organizations outside the workplace.

### III

#### MARRIAGE, PROPERTY, AND THE LODGE

Earlier chapters examined evidence about the stratification and isolation of two groups of skilled workers: the machinists and patternmakers. What evidence of stratification exists for other groups of workers in Amherst? In this chapter, three aspects of working class culture will be explored: marriage patterns, property ownership, and memberships in a fraternal association. An examination of each reflects to a varying degree the social stratification, the interactions of classes, and the opportunities and choices available to the working class in Amherst between 1891 and 1914. As well, by observing and analyzing data pertaining to occupational groups other than machinists and patternmakers, a more complete understanding of Amherst's social and economic context emerges.

While interaction occurs at many levels, including educational, religious and voluntary activity, the broad subjects of family, property and fraternalism reflect many of the themes identified as belonging to a labour aristocracy. Questions of exclusivity, willingness to adopt characteristics of the middle class, and eagerness to associate with managers, professionals and white collar workers are addressed by Robert Gray, Geoffrey Crossick, and Eric Hobsbawm in their analyses of labour aristocracies in Britain. These same issues are developed here to identify any patterns which might suggest a similar group in Amherst.

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## MARRIAGE

Perhaps the best source of material for judging the points of intersection between classes of people is the provincial marriage record. The record of all weddings between 1864 and 1913 in Nova Scotia contains several pieces of information which help develop an understanding of any social stratification. This information consists of the name of each bride and groom, date, place and type of wedding (banns or license), the ages of the two parties, their status as bachelor, spinster, widower or widowed, their own "rank or profession," their residence at the time of the wedding, where they were born, the names of their respective parents and the rank or profession of each parent. The names of the witnesses and minister were also recorded. In the creation of the records a distinct bias was shown for entering the profession of males only. Similarly for one period examined (1870-1875), the birthplace of the bride was routinely left unnoted.<sup>1</sup>

Equally problematic is the description of occupation. Presumably this information would be given by the parties themselves, and in terms of occupation it is probably accurate. Some questions arise however, similar to those discussed earlier concerning the selection of machinists from the town directories. It is difficult to be precise. Terms like clerk, shoemaker, farmer, and lumberman may

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<sup>1</sup> The absence of this information does not greatly hamper analysis for this study, but it does point out that the records cannot support definite conclusions. The absence of job information about the brides also raises many questions about migration and inter-generational social mobility. For example, it is not possible to tell from these records who worked in trades traditionally reserved for female labour. Apart from important work in the home, in Amherst female workers were employed at the Amherst Boot and Shoe and Hewson's Woollen Mill. Without occupational data for the mothers of the bride and groom, an assessment of inter-generational mobility and the ability for parental assistance to young people in the workforce or for education, particularly the professional groups, would also be limited to male wages and salaries.

vary considerably from case to case, especially regarding their placement on the social and financial ladder. Even with these restrictions in mind, however, marriage records remain a useful resource in discovering patterns of interaction among the workforce in Amherst.

For this study 1,496 records were examined for the years 1870-1875 and 1891-1913.<sup>2</sup> The years 1870-1875 were chosen to provide a glimpse of Amherst's social alliances when the town was still relatively undeveloped. The years 1891-1913 were chosen as they are the principal years of this study. The marriage records consulted only exist up to 1913. In making the selection from all marriage records for Cumberland County the criterion was simply to include all records which name either partner as resident in Amherst at the time of the wedding. In very few cases could it be assumed that the couple would leave Amherst following the wedding, such as when the groom was a resident of another place. These weddings were included in the survey, however, because of the information about the bride's parents. For convenience, the marriage records were divided into groups 1870-1875, 1891-1898, 1899-1903, 1904-1908 and 1909-1913. For each group of years the occupation of the groom was cross-referenced to the occupation of the brides' father, similar to the process used by Gray and Crossick in their studies of the labour aristocracy in Edinburgh and London.<sup>3</sup>

This analysis begins before the years of the National Policy and Amherst's

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<sup>2</sup> Cumberland County Marriage Records, RG 32, Series WB, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 111-120; and Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society Kentish London, 1840-1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1978) 121-133.

greatest industrial growth. As might be expected, the majority of weddings are of farmers marrying daughters of other farmers. Of the 101 weddings between 1870 and 1875 for which occupational information is recorded, 44.5% had rural grooms, many citing residence in Amherst itself. Of these, over half married the daughters of other rural workers, and the rest married daughters of labourers, carpenters, masons, shoemakers, clerks and mechanics. The second most numerous occupational group for the period were professionals (doctors, lawyers, teachers, civil engineers), which represent 10.9% of the total. Of these, a little over half married daughters of other professionals, 36% married daughters of farmers, and one wed the daughter of a merchant. Merchants made up 8.9% of the 101 weddings reviewed in this period. One third of male merchants married daughters of farmers, 44% (or four in this small group) married daughters of professionals, one married a mason's daughter, and one married into a "mechanic's" family. Equivalent to the merchants in numbers of marriages were labourers. Of these, 66% married daughters of rural workers, 22% married daughters of other labourers, and one married the daughter of a mason. Small numbers of marriages occur for the other occupations in this period (See Table 1).

For each occupation between 1870-1875, at least half if not all of the grooms married daughters of rural workers, except the single painter who married a daughter of a carpenter. In the metal trades one machinist married the daughter of a farmer while another married the daughter of a mason. Two moulders married farmers' daughters and no patternmakers were noted as either grooms or as fathers of brides.



This group of 101 weddings, while restricted in size, does demonstrate a certain narrowness in Amherst social life before the National Policy. Clearly the influence and the importance of the rural inhabitant is paramount, given the high number of farmers, and the dominance in the workforce of those associated with rural life. What is not known is the pecuniary difference between those farmers whose daughters married professionals, and those farmers whose daughters married skilled workmen and labourers. Closer study of the financial position of farming families whose members married into families with urban occupations could develop this point more fully. Apart from the pervasive influence of the farm, tradesmen are seen to be marrying daughters of other trades. Only one carpenter married into a labourer's family.<sup>4</sup> A similar tendency to exclusiveness in marriage existed among the professionals, and, to a lesser degree, the merchants. The professionals married daughters of other professionals, merchants and of course farmers. Daughters of professionals married a farmer and a clerk, but mostly merchants. Merchants, while largely marrying daughters of farmers and professionals, also associated with the trades, but not widely. Again, with such small numbers it is risky to read too much into these findings, but an exclusionary pattern among the better off sector is evident. Similarly a broader acceptance of other occupations is apparent among the trades.

In the period 1891-1898 a larger group of 214 weddings can be explored. The

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<sup>4</sup> The designation "carpenter" in the evidence consulted for this study is problematic because of its indistinct nature. A cursory observation suggests that some carpenters were probably cabinet makers. The distinctions between carpenters employed at Rhodes, Curry is a case in point. In that firm, men working in building construction are identified the same way as those involved in rail car building (See also Reilly 115). Given this, carpenters are grouped together as a distinct occupation throughout this study, but no further attempt to distinguish among them is made.



number of grooms who were rural workers was lower from the early period, but still represented the largest group, with approximately one-quarter of the grooms in these years pursuing rural occupations. Of these, nearly 80% (or 42 actual persons) married daughters of other farmers. The next largest number of grooms were labourers. This group divided almost equally between daughters of other labourers (44%) and of rural workers (40%). A clear linkage between rural families and those of urban labourers had developed by this period and was maintained to 1913. Also seen is an exclusivity in marriage partners among labourers which was hinted at in the pre-National Policy period. The professional occupations ranked third highest in number of weddings comprising 7.5% of grooms. Similar to the earlier period, daughters of rural people (37.5%) and of other professionals (25%) were statistically favoured as brides. Two new occupational groups entered the population through daughters of government workers (18.8%) and daughters of managers (6.25%). Two professional grooms married daughters of merchants.

Another new occupation, the clerk, emerged as fourth largest group. No attempt has been made to distinguish among members of this white-collar group and all clerks are counted together. A third of this group married daughters of rural workers, but the remainder were spread out widely, marrying daughters of men from other occupations including merchants, carpenters, professional, skilled metal, mason painter, manager and government worker. Daughters of clerks married a merchant, a painter and a tailor.

Shoemakers ranked next in size with 6% of the grooms. Of these just under half married daughters of rural workers, and 23% married daughters of labourers.



The remainder divided among railway and other transportation workers, a carpenter and a shoemaker.

The machinists made up eight, or 3.7% of the weddings in this period. Two married daughters of farmers, two daughters of professionals, and one each married into families of a labourer, a carpenter, a merchant and another machinist. The spread among occupations was wide, but those which may be said to be better paid are favoured. Moulders were also small in number (5, or 2.3% of the whole) and also spread over different occupations, making it difficult to detect any bias. No patternmakers were recorded in this period.

Two hundred and twenty-three weddings were analyzed for the years 1899-1903. Labourers, comprising 20% of the total, now replace the rural grooms as the dominant occupation among weddings. These men continued to find the majority of their partners from rural families (49%) and their own unskilled group (42%). Rural and carpenter grooms were nearly equal with 16.1% and 15.7% of weddings respectively. They, too, had the greatest interaction with rural families, marrying respectively 66.6% and 65.7% of women from rural families. Significantly, 10.3% of weddings were now with machinists as grooms. Similar to other occupations, the machinists found the majority of their brides among rural families. Otherwise, and unlike the labourers, farmers and carpenters, the machinists chose brides from a wider selection of occupations and most of the machinists married daughters belonging to the families of skilled tradesmen, clerks or professionals.

The moulders of this period comprised 5.8% of all grooms. Most married daughters of rural workers or carpenters, and the remainder were divided between



daughters of labourers, a shoemaker and manager. As in the previous period, the small numbers of weddings make it difficult to distinguish any preference for social status among the moulders, but these few examples would suggest no particular insistence for marrying daughters of men from skilled trades or white collar professions. The evidence of weddings of moulders' daughters is very weak. None were brides during this period, and in the remaining ten years of this study, only two daughters of moulders are noted: one of whom married a shoemaker and one married a professional.

Clerks and professionals made up the sixth and seventh largest group of grooms in the 1899-1903 period. The clerks married daughters of rural workers (30%) as well as daughters of other clerks (30%). The remainder were divided between daughters of carpenters and professionals. The professional group was beginning to appear less reserved in its choice of acceptable brides. Here the spread was between daughters of farmers and merchants (25% each) and the remainder between daughters of a carpenter, shoemaker, labourer and another professional.

The final two periods, encompassing ten years from 1904-1913, demonstrate the shift from rural to urban work. Those in rural work claiming Amherst as residence were becoming fewer, and comprised a lower percentage of overall numbers than before, dropping to 9.6% of weddings in 1904-1908, and 8.8% in 1909-1913. Labour, on the other hand, had risen to the predominant place for occupations for grooms, at about 20% of 817 weddings. While the positioning of rural and unskilled workers had reversed itself in terms of total weddings, the two groups retained the close relationship observed pre-1900. Also maintained was a



connection with families of carpenters, shoemakers and masons. A perceptible change developed, however, in the other marriages of labouring grooms. From 1899 to 1908 these grooms appear to have established linkages with families of white collar, railway and other transport workers. In the period 1909-1913, the linkage between families of railway and transport workers was strengthened, and, noticeably, connections with skilled metal workers and merchants appear for the first time. Without data beyond this date, it is impossible to say if this evidence forms a trend or exists merely at the personal level. Later in this chapter it will be proposed that some of these new connections are indicative of a shift in the social stratification of workers in Amherst.

Like rural workers, carpenters also experienced a downward shift in percentage of weddings. Compared to 5.1% of weddings in the pre-1900 period, carpenters rose to a high of 18.2% in 1904-1908, which coincides with the building boom of the early twentieth century. For the period 1909-1913, however, there was a dramatic decrease to 7.5% of all weddings. This does not necessarily mean carpenters were leaving the town, since the records consulted were for people who generally were of a young, marriageable age. Given the great influx of workers born outside the town in these growth years, as discussed in Chapter Two, this material should be read cautiously, as it more probably indicates a stabilization of the town's workforce.

Among the skilled metal workers, the percentage of machinist and moulder grooms were at near equivalent levels for the final two periods. In 1904-1908 machinists comprised 6.9% of the total weddings, compared to 6.4% in 1909-1913.

Moulders had 6.1% and 5.3% respectively. The machinists can be seen to be less exclusive than earlier in their choice of families into which it was suitable to marry. For example, in the 1899-1903 evidence, 13% of machinist's brides came from labouring and carpenter's families. In 1904-1908, this rose to 20%, and to 24.1% for 1909-1913. The remainder of machinists divided themselves between white collar and railway, other transport, miners and shoemakers families. On the other hand, daughters of machinists very much favoured white collar or machinist husbands throughout 1891-1913. So far in this analysis, it is observed that moulders were less restrictive than machinists in their choice of marriage partners. In 1899-1903, over half of moulder grooms married daughters of labourers and carpenters. In 1904-1908, 27.2% married into these families, and 29.1% in 1909-1913. The evidence regarding moulders' daughters is very slim, there being only four weddings between 1891-1913: one each to a painter, a farmer, a shoemaker and a professional.

Particularly noticeable from 1891-1908 is that machinists, when choosing brides, seemed to find more acceptance among other trades and white collar families than do moulders. In the final five year period however, there was a narrowing of any perceptible attitudinal gap between the two trades, at least in marriage choices. As noted above, this is difficult to substantiate without reference to similar records for the next five year period, but it may well indicate a lessening of any aristocratic tendencies developed by the machinists in the growth period of Amherst's industrial history.

Finally, patternmakers were rarely listed in marriage records. In 1899-1903, one patternmaker married a daughter of a labourer. In 1904-1908, one married a

daughter of a professional, and in 1909-1913 two married daughters of rural families and one each married into families of a professional, a clerk and a shoemaker. One daughter of a patternmaker married a merchant. Considering the overall numbers of patternmakers identified in Chapter Two, it is reasonable to expect few records. Once again however, available data indicate preference for white collar associations, and an exclusion of unskilled working class families.

## PROPERTY

This section of the chapter will discuss some issues of home ownership as seen among the working class of Amherst. First among these is to ask where people chose to live. The physical segregation of the working class from other classes in Amherst is noticeable. The town is divided by the CNR mainline connecting Halifax to Montreal. Along this line are located the sites of all major industries and plants, which form a band of industry from the north to south boundaries of the town. This physical barrier represents the workplaces for labourers and industrial craftsmen and also forms a visible barrier between the residential districts of Amherst. In 1914, the end of this study period, the shape of the town as it is today had largely been formed. To the west of the railway and south of West Victoria Street was the West Highlands, an area created for the working class of the town. The streets immediately to the east of the tracks and surrounding Robb's were also mainly working class, although because these are also the older parts of the town, merchants and professionals lived there as well. Further east along Victoria Street were industrialists and members of the wealthy elite. Set apart from these again, in an

area roughly bounded by Prince Arthur, Church and Spring Streets, was a mix of clerks, managers and professionals.

Until 1902 and the development of the West Highlands, the principal available housing was located close to the east side of the railway, and in densely populated streets comprising the downtown. It is here that the larger boarding houses, hotels and tenements were located. The most important event for workers and housing, however, was the development of the West Highlands.

The area of the West Highlands had been used as farmland and as the location of the county agricultural exhibition. In 1902 the Town of Amherst, under Mayor Nathaniel Curry, purchased the exhibition property from the County when the fair acquired new land elsewhere in the town. The Town then sold the property by tender to J.R. Douglas. Douglas was a prominent businessman, who owned a large number of town debentures and whose brother, George Douglas, was manager of the Mayor's firm, Rhodes, Curry Co. Accusations were made that Douglas, through collusion with the Town administration, had been able to adjust his bid after the other tenders had been opened.<sup>5</sup>

In the ensuing controversy, J. R. Douglas maintained his intention was to sell houses so that he could then sell insurance, which was his major business concern.<sup>6</sup> In his creation of the West Highlands, Douglas claimed only to be motivated by a

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<sup>5</sup> Controversy about Douglas's purchase of the exhibition land raged in the Amherst Daily News in June and July of 1902. An editorial in the paper's issue of 6 June 1902 outlined objections that had been voiced concerning the sale of the property to Douglas, including the claim that Douglas's bid was finalized after other tenders were offered.

<sup>6</sup> Amherst Daily News 17 July 1902.

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financial impulse and never professed any desire to create decent housing or to build a comfortable neighbourhood for the working class. Certainly the layout of quickly constructed houses on narrow lots along parallel streets suggests the primary goal shared by Douglas and the other contractors who built the area, was to maximize profits.

In her study of the creation and development of the West Highlands, Diane Tye interprets the area as a reflection of middle class reform efforts to impose an ideal of progressive society upon the workers of the town.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this, the building of the West Highlands created more than merely street upon street of similar looking houses. It also created a neighbourhood which enjoys a closeness and familiarity as a community of its own, separate from the rest of the town. Although Tye examines the functioning and meaning of the "private world" of the West Highlands, she also provides an analysis of the architecture and use of interior space in the buildings there. Among the questions addressed in her work is an important one for this study: "While Amherst's managerial class may have regarded the West Highlands as adequate, how successful was the housing when viewed by the workers who lived in the area? Did the 'cosy' home with ornamental mantelpiece and verandah, designed by a member of another socio-economic class, fit their concept of a suitable dwelling?"<sup>8</sup> Tye's tentative answer is "yes." Her conclusion is that even

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<sup>7</sup> Diane Tye, "The West Highlands, Amherst, Nova Scotia: An Examination of a Workers' Neighbourhood," an unpublished report written for the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation, and Fitness, 1984, 27. See also Diane Tye, "The Housing of a Workforce: Workers' Housing in Amherst, Nova Scotia 1890-1914," Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin 11:3 (1986) 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Tye 74.

though these houses were bought up quickly when first built during a housing shortage, many houses remained in the families of those early owners until at least 1983, indicating a level of satisfaction.<sup>9</sup>

Up to the building boom of 1902-06, the majority of working people lived in the downtown area and east of the railway. The opening the West Highlands did two things to the demographics of the town besides enlarging its physical area. First, it provided a badly needed outlet for the cramped living conditions which existed, and second, it allowed the spatial segregation of the various occupational groups to formalize and become more rigid. How then did the inner boundaries of the town form, and which groups favoured the various parts?

The 1914 directory for the town is the best source for developed patterns of segregation and occupational choices of neighbourhood, as it comes at the end of the study period and after the major construction period. The directory, as explained earlier, gave name, occupation, address, and described the person as an owner or a boarder. These descriptions were largely confirmed by searching the Registry of Deeds. The indexes there do not record any property held by persons designated in the directory as "boarder". Home owners are however, not necessarily found in the indexes consulted (1893-1921).

In order to determine patterns among occupations, directory information was extracted for all people identified as labourers, clerks, managers, machinists at Robb's, moulders, moulders at Robb's, boilermakers, patternmakers, independent

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<sup>9</sup> Tye 75.

business men and professionals.<sup>10</sup> The individual addresses were then associated with the areas of the town described above. Within these boundaries there would inevitably be further boundaries delineating strata and social standing among neighbours. These subtleties, important in other ways, have been overlooked for the purposes of this study.

Of the 328 persons identified in 1914 as labourers, the majority lived in the West Highlands and immediately east of the railway track. Less than ten percent lived in the vicinity of Robb's and the downtown area. Eighteen lived on South Albion Street. Clerks, both retail and office, total 225 in the 1914 directory. Less than ten percent of this white collar group lived in the West Highlands, and similarly, east of the railway. Thirty percent lived in the vicinity of Robb's and only two clerks lived downtown. Nearly half or 45% chose the area bounded by Prince Arthur, Church and Spring Streets. This area will come to be identified as a favoured area for managers and professionals as well. For example, of 54 managers, 60% chose this area. Similar figures exist for the 63 independent businesspersons and professionals. For managers and independents, Victoria Street was the next favoured area, but this was not the case for professionals. Nearly 20% of them, mostly doctors, lived in the area east of the railway, and maintained professional offices there as well.

The machinists of Robb's, and the patternmakers, exhibited revealing residential choices. Of machinists at Robb's in 1914, 38 have known addresses. The

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<sup>10</sup> For a similar methodological approach applied to Montreal, see Robert Lewis, "The Segregated City: Class Residential Patterns and the Development of Industrial Districts in Montreal, 1861 and 1901," *Journal of Urban History* 17 (1991): 123-152.

majority, 55%, lived in the vicinity of Robb's and only three chose the West Highlands. Thirty percent of patternmakers also chose the vicinity of Robb's and one lived in the West Highlands. While some sense of community no doubt developed in the area nearest Robb's, the convenience of being near work was not the only factor for people choosing a place to live. Significantly, 20% of Robb's machinists and 30% of patternmakers chose the area of Prince Arthur, Church and Spring.

The other major groups of metal workers selected for this study seem to make similar choices, although with certain qualifications. Of the 120 moulders identified in the 1914 directory, only 11 are known for certain to have worked at Robb's. Of these, 68% lived near the factory, one in the West Highlands and two in the Prince Arthur, Church and Spring area. A clearer picture of moulders' preferences comes from looking at all 120 moulders. Twenty-four, or 20% lived near Robb's, and 25% chose the West Highlands. Another 25% chose the Prince Arthur, Church and Spring Streets area. The boilermakers, however, employed almost entirely by the Robb plant, chose the vicinity of the factory as the most favoured residential area. As did the Robb's machinists, they rejected the West Highlands as a place to live, only three of their number choosing that area. Another 18% moved to the Prince Arthur, Church and Spring area, and the remainder were distributed throughout the town with no identifiable clustering.

By 1914 the great growth period of the town was over, the major employers well established, and the physical shape of the town largely defined. The interior boundaries can be understood to have gone through a readjustment in the first

decade of the century. The town's population expanded rapidly and a housing shortage stimulated the creation of a neighbourhood of several hundred new and inexpensive houses which, regardless of the developers' motivations, would house a large part of the new workforce.

Neighbourhoods take on characteristics of their own.<sup>11</sup> That the West Highlands did so is unquestionable. Its character was created by its inhabitants who were for the most part labourers and carpenters, with a sprinkling of skilled workers and small merchants. The characteristics of the West Highlands was also visible in the houses, mainly small, single family units whose uniformity was broken only by the aesthetic choices of the inhabitants.

From an analysis of occupations and addresses in the 1914 directory, the West Highlands clearly was not the residential area of choice for certain skilled metal workers, white collar workers and professionals. Machinists, patternmakers, boilermakers and moulders employed by Robb's tended to chose homes closer to work, but not exclusively so. Among these trades was a significant number who selected residences in the neighbourhood known to be favoured by white collar workers, business people and professionals. This infiltration by metal tradesmen of a higher-class area was not exclusive to the upper strata of trades. The activity did, nonetheless, encompass them.<sup>12</sup> Like so many other determinants of the labour aristocracy, here again the group can be seen being carried along not exclusively but

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of neighborhood identity, see Christopher Winters, "The Social Identity of Evolving Neighborhoods," *Landscape* 23:1 (1979): 8-14.

<sup>12</sup> This confirms Robert Lewis's observation that there "was less segregation from the social class on either side" of a specific group than between classes generally. See Lewis 141.

in concert with other compatible members of society, in this case their fellow tradesmen. A distinction, however, must be noted, particularly among the moulders of the town. While quite a few were part of the gradual movement into the Prince Arthur, Church and Spring Streets area, a higher percentage of moulders than any of the four metal trades, maintained a presence in the West Highlands. The propensity for a labour aristocracy to seek opportunities for intersection with the middle and leading classes has been noted by Robert Gray and Geoffrey Crossick. This tendency was evident in the residential selection of machinists, patternmakers and boilermakers in Amherst. Similar to the moulders' acceptance of Acadian workers, discussed in Chapter Two, there seems to be less of a propensity to exclusion among this trade. In the choice of housing location, there was a willingness to intersect with labourers and carpenters as well as the white collar managerial group.

The ethnic exclusivity of membership among the machinists and patternmakers at work would have been strengthened by their choice of residence. While living in the vicinity of Robb's would have certain advantages for the person who walked to work, that the majority of skilled workers in the plant lived in the same neighbourhood would lend strength to their collective identity. In other words, for many Robb's employees, a solidarity beyond the work place may be expected in much the same way as it developed in the West Highlands.

Unlike the West Highlands, Robb's was located in a neighborhood close to the business and major cultural institutions of the town. In the West Highlands both churches, which were missions or branches of the larger churches downtown, and

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schools, were established for the new population. It is reasonable to suggest that a further point of social intersection between the tradesmen at Robb's and the managerial upper classes occurred through attendance at the same churches and schools.

In the development of the West Highlands, insurance broker/developer J. R. Douglas was building houses for profit, either to rent or to sell, and then to sell again the insurance policy. With a few exceptions, company-owned housing was rare in Amherst.<sup>13</sup> This was not unique to Amherst as a rush to home ownership had developed across North America.<sup>14</sup> In Nova Scotia this was further marked by the growth of building societies, notably the Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, of 181 properties surveyed in the West Highlands in 1983, 40 are noted as having been mainly rental properties owned by some one of a few major property owners, like J. R. Douglas and C. J. Silliker.<sup>16</sup>

How important was home ownership to the working class in Amherst, and does this issue allow us any further understanding of the labour aristocracy? Home ownership has sparked a limited debate among historians and geographers. Richard Harris summarizes one of the dichotomies of the issue for historians this way:

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<sup>13</sup> Tye 38.

<sup>14</sup> Robert G. Barrows, "Beyond the Tenement: Patterns of American Urban Housing, 1830-1930," *Journal of Urban History* 9 (1983): 403 and Richard Harris, "The Unremarked Homeownership Boom in Toronto," *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 18 (1985): 437.

<sup>15</sup> See Charles Bruce Fergusson, *A Century of Service to the Public Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society* (Halifax, N.S.: Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society, 1950).

<sup>16</sup> In 1983 deed searches were completed for all pre-1914 buildings in the West Highlands by the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness as part of a heritage property inventory project. The deed searches are available at the Cumberland County Museum, Amherst.

Certainly homeownership has posed a dilemma for socialists. On the one hand, socialists have welcomed homeownership on the grounds that it has emancipated the working class from the potentially exploitative tyrannies of private landlordism. On the other, however, they have often viewed it with unease, as a sop to working-class discontent.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned above, writers on home ownership identify a number of continental trends. One of these is the rush to private ownership or less cramped rental conditions than may have prevailed.<sup>18</sup> With regard to the labour aristocracy, home ownership suggests two points. First, it indicates if the labour aristocracy viewed home ownership any differently from other occupational groups such as labourers or carpenters. Second, it may demonstrate if the same sources of capital were available to skilled labour as to other buyers. Once again, in examining this evidence the mixture of information will not facilitate the extraction of data specific to any upper strata of workers.<sup>19</sup>

While recognizing home ownership patterns can vary widely from place to place, a clue to how different classes of home owners would view the issue is suggested by Richard Harris and Chris Hamnett. In their comparative study of

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Harris, "Mansion on the Hill?," Labour/Le Travail 16 (1985): 240.

<sup>18</sup> There is some debate on how crowded living conditions actually were. For example, see Barrows 396 and 403.

<sup>19</sup> This is a characteristic of housing data noted by Richard Harris, Gerald Levine, and Brian Osborne, "Housing Tenure and Social Classes in Kingston, Ontario 1881-1901," Journal of Historical Geography 7 (1981):277; Richard Harris and Chris Hamnett, "The Myth of the Promised Land: The Social Diffusion of Homeownership in Britain and North America," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 77 (1987): 181; A. Gordon Darroch, "Occupation Structure, Assessed Wealth and Homeowning during Toronto's Early Industrialization, 1861-1899," Histoire Sociale-Social History 16 (1983): 402 and M. J. Daunton, House and Home in the Victorian City Working-Class Housing 1850-1914 (London: Edward Arnold, 1983) 110-111.

home ownership in Britain and North America, they note a propensity among middle classes to a greater (or at least marginally stronger) interest in maintaining servants and the trappings of a comfortable lifestyle, than to actual ownership of their homes.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, in home ownership the working class sought "security from insecurity" and "the economic elite of owners and managers pulled far ahead of all other groups between 1900 and 1931."<sup>21</sup>

Returning to the 1914 Amherst directory, there was usually an initial for each entry indicating either boarder (b) or owner (h). Referring to three occupational groups -- labourers, managers and machinists and patternmakers -- of 328 labourers, 46.3%, or 152 owned, their homes. Among 54 managers, 66.6%, or 36, owned their own homes, and of 52 machinists (Robb's) and patternmakers, 32.7%, or 17, owned their own homes and 67.3%, or 35, were boarders. By 1914 Amherst had endured two recessions and both Rhodes, Curry and Robb's had undergone changes in ownership. Whether this uncertainty, after the promise of growth and a secure future for Amherst and its citizens, stimulated a rush to home ownership is difficult to say. This seems unlikely however, given the location of labourers in two distinct areas of the town, east of the railway tracks and the West Highlands with its developmental history at the height of the boom. The concentration of labourers in these places would indicate an availability of cheap housing, and a welcoming of unskilled, lower echelon working people. Their search for "security from insecurity" would appear, then to have begun well before the development of the West

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<sup>20</sup> Harris and Hamnett 181.

<sup>21</sup> Harris and Hamnett 181-182.

Highlands, that even facilitating a trend rather than creating one. Their long commitment to the neighborhood, as discussed earlier, was similar to the long term residency which had developed in nearby Springhill. As Ian McKay discusses in his doctoral dissertation, the absence of company-owned house has two general effects. First, it provided an independence from eviction by the company, and, second, there is a "...strong impact of home ownership on the rootedness of the population. In a strange way, company housing gave one the independence to leave the community altogether; home ownership carried with it far less freedom to go."<sup>22</sup>

Harris and Hamnett suggest that the middle class was less concerned with actual ownership than with comfort and maintenance of life style, while industry owners and managers eagerly bought their own houses. In Amherst the middle-class is difficult to define up to 1914 from the evidence consulted for this study. It is usually accepted to be white collar clerks, managers, store owners and small manufacturers, and so the comment that owners and managers "pulled far ahead" in home ownership is somewhat problematical in this context. Certainly, however, the professional class in Amherst had pulled ahead of the others: 29 of 35 owned their own homes, and an overwhelming 58 of 63 independent people or owners of businesses. But if managers of banks, industries, and shops, as distinct from owners of these businesses, were among the middle class of the town, then Harris and Hamnett's remark leads to some useful conclusions.

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<sup>22</sup> Ian McKay "Industry, Work and Community in the Cumberland Coalfields, 1848-1927" Diss., Dalhousie University, 1983, 331-332.

Among those listed in the directory as "manager" almost 25% were boarders in the town. Comparing this percentage with those above and below, the middle class appeared not yet to have fully accepted home ownership as a critical element of class definition, lending support to Harris and Hamnett's contention. They were, however, clearly receptive to property ownership, as the other 75% show. Further comparison with the machinists and patternmakers demonstrates a tension. The percentage of individuals in this latter group owning their own homes was nearly the reverse of managers, that is 28% chose home ownership and the rest boarded. While clearly rejecting the trend toward home ownership that the middle-class has demonstrated, they did show a willingness to live in the same area as the middle class.

What this evidence may suggest is that the machinists and patternmakers were willing, if not eager, to live in the neighbourhoods of the middle-class. They may also have felt that home ownership was either unnecessary to remain respectable, as suggested above, or alternatively, the figures may reflect their confusion over exactly where in the social hierarchy they belonged. Similarly, it may mean they did not feel as vulnerable to economic swings as did the unskilled, and, as McKay suggests, were willing to leave for other parts if economic conditions did not suit them. This, however, seems an unlikely conclusion for skilled workers in Amherst as many of them became rooted in the town. As Harris and Hamnett observe in their study, "Class similarities in ownership rates in the late nineteenth century, then, may not reflect equality of opportunity. Instead, they might be the mixed result of ownership aspirations and limited finances among the working class,

combined with weaker aspirations among their social and economic superiors."<sup>23</sup>

The security and status accompanying home ownership, regardless of its location within the town, could of course only occur after the house had been paid for. To complete the purchase most home owners needed a source of capital beyond their own wages and salaries. As M. J. Daunton observed in his book on working class housing in Britain:

The private mortgage market was before 1914 still a significant channel for funds to finance house purchase. It was a personal, local and informal market which was in the 1920s and 1930s superseded by an impersonal, national and formal market dominated by the building societies. The institutional market of the building societies operated on different principles from the mortgage market. The borrower of money from a building society had a long-term mortgage over a fixed period, during which the principal was repaid in addition to the interest charge. A private mortgage was by contrast short-term, and could be recalled at any time.<sup>24</sup>

This seems to have been the situation in Amherst, although here, as in the rest of Nova Scotia, the building societies made an appearance in the first decade of the twentieth century. Private mortgages were, however, very common, particularly among the unskilled labourers.

In the records of a 1983 survey of properties in the West Highlands completed by the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, and by the Registry of Deeds for Cumberland County, mortgage information provides further evidence about home ownership, and clarifies the position of the skilled

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<sup>23</sup> Harris and Hamnett 181.

<sup>24</sup> Daunton 97.

metal workers. Of 155 transactions in the 1983 survey, those among the unskilled and carpenters were particularly dependent upon mortgages from individuals. Of the 50 transactions belonging to these two groups, 54%, or 27, received mortgages from individuals. The semi-skilled and skilled categories comprised a total of 51 transactions of which only 27.5%, or 14, had mortgages from individuals. As might be anticipated, the white collar, professional and independent groups, which totalled 54 transactions, did not, as a rule, indicate that a mortgage was needed. The 31 transactions of this type were probably paid for from the cash reserves of the buyer. Similarly, of eight farmers, six gave no indication of using a mortgage to purchase land.

The evidence concerning the skilled metal workers of this study, and their mortgage patterns, is otherwise weak. Only 52 had known addresses in 1914, and of these only 17 were noted as property owners. In the absence of full property title searches for their properties outside the West Highlands, little can be said.

What is noticeable in these 1983 survey data is the propensity of the lower echelon workers to turn to individuals rather than mortgage companies. The opposite pattern holds for more skilled workers. A review of the transactions of the Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society, 1905-1911, confirms that, for this company at least, workers with skills and white collars were the more consistent type of client.<sup>25</sup> Between these years 1905-1911, Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society gave out 63 mortgages in Amherst. Carpenters received 15 of these, 18

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<sup>25</sup> Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society Book, 1905-1911. Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, Amherst.

went to semi-skilled and skilled workers, 11 to independent and professional persons, and three to white collar workers. With the exception of one night watchman, the remainder were given to persons with no known occupation.

The first decade of the twentieth century was not only a period of growth in housing stock, but also a period of growth for building and loan societies. As C. Bruce Fergusson indicates, "from 1900 to 1914 the Building Society considerably expanded its business. Assets showed a gain of 55% in 1914 over what they had been in 1900, and a continual rise in every succeeding year, with the exception of 1908, when assets amounted to slightly less than in the preceding year."<sup>26</sup>

Other building and loan societies operated in Amherst, notably Birkbeck and Acadia Loan Corporation. Most important though, was the Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society. From the records available it appears this form of raising capital was most favoured by skilled and semi-skilled workers, as opposed to the older form of individual loans for labourers. In his history of the Nova Scotia Savings, Loan and Building Society, Fergusson emphasizes an important point: not everyone who applied to the loan society was accepted. In fact between 1900 and 1914 only 31% of applications to the building society were approved.<sup>27</sup> Barrows reiterates that there is no clear pattern demonstrating the necessity for building and loan societies to building developments.<sup>28</sup> Their existence however, offered a crucial choice to the home buyer.

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<sup>26</sup> Fergusson 26.

<sup>27</sup> Fergusson 27.

<sup>28</sup> Barrows 417.

This choice was one accepted by the semi-skilled and skilled worker to a convincing degree. As Daunton argues, building society mortgages were preferable because they removed the control of the individual lender to call in the mortgage at any time.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, when the upper strata of the working-class did buy with corporate mortgages they placed a legal distance between themselves and the lender, leaving them free to interact with the employer in the "ordinary manner." It remains a question whether people borrowing from individuals enjoyed freedom of conscience to respond to the workplace pressures as they might wish, knowing their mortgages to be held by friends or family of the employer. While it is impossible to test this supposition, it nonetheless bears consideration.

## THE LODGE

### Imposing Funeral

Peter Nicol, for nine years foreman of Robb & Sons machine department, died on Tuesday. After an illness of eleven weeks. He was a Master Mason, a past Grand of the IOOF and steamer engineer of the Fire Department. The engine-house flag was at half-mast yesterday and the front of the building decorated with evergreen figures and flowers. The body was sent by train to Londonderry. The procession, which was one of the most imposing ever seen here on such an occasion, was headed by the Cornet Band, playing the Dead March in Saul; the Oddfellows, Masons, and Fire Department, all wearing their badges and white gloves, following. Deceased was universally respected. He

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<sup>29</sup> Daunton 97.

leaves a widow and two children.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of the funeral to Victorians is noted by many historians and others as having special significance. In its public form, a respectable funeral avoided the negative connotations associated with the alternative pauper's funeral.<sup>31</sup> To achieve this level of public display, regardless of its many meanings and significance, a pool of capital must again have been available to the family. Similarly, in the event of sickness, injury or unemployment, a safety net was needed to ensure a basic standard of living for one's self and one's family. In the absence of such programmes, mechanics in England turned to a form of organization in the late eighteenth century which could supply this benevolence and relief, mixed with fraternal ideals which served to strengthen societal bonds. The far reaching affect of fraternal societies and their function as another indicator of the activities of an upper strata of working-class people, is the subject of this section.

Friendly, or self-help, societies experienced a huge popularity in England from the mid-eighteenth century. While varying in effectiveness in providing relief, and in stability in membership, collectively they expanded very rapidly in the eighteenth century. Between 1760 and 1803 over 9,000 friendly societies were formed.<sup>32</sup> One of the stronger lodges, the Odd Fellows, was established in the United States early in the nineteenth century by a machinist, and from there it grew

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<sup>30</sup> Amherst Gazette 28 May, 1886, in Dalhousie University Archives, Robb Misc. Papers MS-4.14 file Historical Employees.

<sup>31</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900 (London: Fontana, 1988) 200.

<sup>32</sup> See P.H.J.H. Gosden, Self-Help (London: Batsford, 1973).

to rival the Masonic order for overall membership.<sup>33</sup>

The Odd Fellows opened a short-lived lodge in Halifax in 1851, and again in 1855. From this beginning the order eventually grew to encompass the region. By 1874 there were 14 Maritime lodges, 70 in 1899 with a membership of 5,244, and 123 lodges in 1914 with 12,396 members. A further 72 lodges of the women's branch had 6,121 members in 1919.<sup>34</sup> This steady and impressive growth was concurrent with the industrial development of the Maritime provinces. Other orders also developed in Nova Scotia such as the Elks, Orangemen, Knights of Columbus and Knights of Pythias, Knights of the Maccabees, Catholic Mutual Benevolent Association and the Independent Order of Foresters. The Masonic order, while the prototype for the ritual and operation of many of these self-help associations, was not itself explicitly a self-help group in the same sense as the other lodges. Otherwise, the fraternal and benevolent societies which flourished at the turn of the century shared many characteristics with the Masons and Odd Fellows -- they were male dominated, tended to be exclusive of some group, and practised a ritual "based upon the social metaphor of brotherhood."<sup>35</sup> Apart from the Masons, only the Odd Fellows were able to maintain a high level of support. This support faltered after World War I and has since been declining steadily to pre-1900 levels.

Apart from a modified Masonic ritual and fraternal conviviality, the Odd

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender and Fraternalism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989) 7. See also H. Stillson, The Official History of Oddfellowship (Boston: Fraternity Pub., 1905).

<sup>34</sup> Statistics are taken from the Journals and Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1874-1919.

<sup>35</sup> Clawson 4.

Fellows lodge offered a very solid and reliable system of relief for members who became sick or injured, as well as funeral benefits. The weekly or monthly dues collected were divided according to actuarial tables. This management of members funds no doubt gave the IOOF a reputation for responsibility, which in turn may have added to its appeal.

In her study of Utica, New York, Mary Ryan writes that the developing community:

... felt a dearth of formal institutions to meet their everyday needs. Neither the public sector nor the church was equipped to serve a population that more than doubled in the 1820s and grew by more than 50% in the next decade... Much of the local population also felt the lack of the basic emotional sustenance usually found in families. The city was inundated with young men and women, mostly recent arrivals who had travelled to Utica without an entourage of relatives. In the 1830s more than one in four Uticans was between the ages of twenty and thirty and one in three adult males was listed in the directory as a boarder rather than as head of a household...<sup>36</sup>

Without the benefit of established kinship or institutional support, voluntary and fraternal associations were relied upon to "...provide psychological services and supportive everyday human contacts to this deracinated population."<sup>37</sup> The image that Ryan creates of Utica, of transplanted youth seeking emotional support that Ryan creates of Utica, appears not far removed from that of Amherst sixty years later.

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, NY, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) 107.

<sup>37</sup> Ryan 107.

Building on Ryan's assertion that associations met a social need, Mary Ann Clawson sees fraternal societies as an "identifiable social and cultural form" which have an impact far wider and significant than mere friendship groups.<sup>38</sup> Clawson develops an argument based on the idea of "resource mobilization." She writes:

Here the concept of resource is key - the idea... that the types and levels of resources available to a constituency group are crucial in explaining its ability to mobilize. Similarity in people's life experiences or structural location is one necessary basis for a social movement, but cannot by itself explain either emergence or success. If a group lacks appropriate means and opportunities, it will be unable to engage in effective collective action no matter how compelling the grievances it experiences. Successful social movements typically draw upon a variety of resources, but of these, resource mobilization theorists identify the character and extent of pre-existing social networks as one of the key variables affecting emergence of movements and shaping their actions.<sup>39</sup>

Clawson is quick to recognize that groups are not "pre-ordained," waiting to be mobilized. While individual members share, as a group, any number of characteristics, they nonetheless choose to become members of a group, and in so doing exclude certain others. Groups that share a common interest and location in the social structure may act in quite different ways: some may never engage in visible collective action while others are energetic in its pursuit.<sup>40</sup>

It is this process of construction that interests Clawson and one of her main points is that while lodges and orders promoted equality and mutuality they were

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<sup>38</sup> Clawson 4.

<sup>39</sup> Clawson 7.

<sup>40</sup> Clawson 90.

nonetheless based on exclusion. She writes that the exclusionary nature of the orders "highlights the fact that the fraternal order cannot be understood as simply a random assemblage of people."<sup>41</sup> The working class support of fraternal orders, noted by Greg S.Kealey, David Montgomery and others, did not necessarily "lead to the consolidation of lodges as organs of working-class solidarity. The reasons for this lie in the complex symbolic and institutional realities" of fraternal structures.<sup>42</sup>

The membership of the Odd Fellows lodge in Amherst reflects what Robert Q. Gray refers to as the "complex link" of skilled artisans with the upper strata of society.<sup>43</sup> Ivy Lodge No. 35 was formed in 1879 when four members of Crystal Wave Lodge in Pugwash, and Peter Nicol, formerly of Mizpah Lodge, Acadia Mines, met as the five Odd Fellows required to open a lodge and induct new members. The four brothers from Pugwash had come specifically to provide the quorum of initiated Odd Fellows, and returned immediately after opening the lodge.<sup>44</sup> By the 31 December, 1879, Ivy Lodge had 26 members under the guidance of their first Noble Grand Master F.B. Robb, Peter Nicol's employer.<sup>45</sup>

Clawson's resource mobilization theory suggests that "the resource mobilization perspective identifies the resource of already existing social ties as a

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<sup>41</sup> Clawson 11.

<sup>42</sup> Clawson 89.

<sup>43</sup> Gray, Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh 115.

<sup>44</sup> Semi-Annual Report of Ivy Lodge No. 35, Grand Lodge of the Atlantic Provinces, IOOF for term ending June 30, 1879. Grand Lodge, IOOF, Dartmouth, N.S., microfilm no. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Annual report of Ivy Lodge No. 35, Grand Lodge of the Atlantic Provinces, IOOF for the term ending December 31, 1879. Grand Lodge, IOOF, Dartmouth, N.S., microfilm no. 5.

key variable." The most vivid evidence we have of this is the membership of Ivy Lodge in its first year. Peter Nicol, foreman of the machine shop at Robb's and motivating force for the lodge, obviously drew on his own pool of resources to develop the lodge. Of the 26 charter members, five were employees of the Robb foundry. The master of the lodge was Fred Robb, son of the foundry owner. The linkages created by such a collection of people, none of whom would have joined accidentally, could well have been highly influential for its members.

Analysis of members of Ivy Lodge reveals a strong reliance on skilled labour and white collar occupational groups. The average age of these men was 29 years. Of those members for whom occupations are known, the majority, 19.2%, can be categorized as skilled labour, and merchants and independent businessmen comprised 15.4%. Professionals contributed about 11% to the group. The occupational spread of membership was established and remained largely the same to the end of the study period. In 1901 the lodge had grown to 123 members, 17.9% of which were skilled or semi-skilled workers. Merchants comprised 10.5%, and managers 3.3%. Clerks and professionals rated 6.5% and 5.7% respectively. By 1910, clerks had risen to form 13.9% of the total 108 membership, while professionals remained at 5.5%. Tradesmen, however, rose to 25% of the total, and the merchant class dropped to 6.5%. Labourers comprised 4.6% of the membership of 108. By 1914, little had changed, except the total membership had risen dramatically to 255. The skilled and semi-skilled made up the largest percentage of known occupations among the members with 21.9%. Clerks amounted to 12.2%, and merchants 9.4%. Labourers were equal in numbers to managers with 5.9% of

the total, leaving professionals with the smallest occupational group of 2.3%<sup>46</sup>

No Acadian names occurred in the lists, but this is to be expected given the ban placed by the Roman Catholic Church on membership in organizations with the tinge of Masonry.<sup>47</sup> Farmers, on the other hand, accounted for only one member and he was listed in the 1900 directory as a "farmer/agent." This, however, is likely reflective of the specific situation in Amherst, and should not be considered usual for the IOOF generally as several lodges throughout the Maritimes were located in farming and fishing areas.

Clawson suggests the lodge was a way to "facilitate communication and action to serve the organizational basis for more explicitly political acts of mobilization, resistance and struggle."<sup>48</sup> But she is careful to point out that it is important to notice who is being mobilized, who excluded, who included, and "on what basis do they understand themselves to be a group?"<sup>49</sup> In Clawson's analysis of fraternal organizations, the concept of "group" is critical to understanding how members of fraternal organizations respond to organizations themselves:

In explaining class formation, (the concept of group) posits the development of class-based institutions that create social networks and overcome divisions within the structurally defined class while at the same time reducing social ties to members of other class groups. This is a model in which working-class development

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<sup>46</sup> Annual report of Ivy Lodge No. 35, Grand Lodge of the Atlantic Provinces, IOOF for terms ending December 31, 1879, 1901, 1910, and 1914. Grand Lodge, IOOF, Dartmouth, N.S., microfilm no. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Clawson 126.

<sup>48</sup> Clawson 90.

<sup>49</sup> Clawson 8-9.

depends not only on common economic position but also on the formation of dense and extensive networks....<sup>50</sup>

Given the "common economic position" of the majority of Ivy Lodge members, combined with the reinforcing language of social equality within the lodge, members can be seen as belonging to a group. Clawson goes on to suggest that a group so formed may then undertake to organize and act in its own behalf.

In corporate terms, lodge membership from a variety of social positions would facilitate inter-class loyalties. She argues that solidarity within the group, or lodge, forms across classes horizontally rather than vertically, as in ordinary society. Similarly, lodges helped the individual, but not the class. In consequence, she writes: "To the extent that the fraternal order incorporated working-class men into networks that undercut class as a category, the potential for working-class organization was diminished."<sup>51</sup>

In her analysis of fraternal societies, Clawson breaks membership down to broad groups. This has the unfortunate effect of overlooking the nuances within membership, particularly the blue-collar group. In the case of the Odd Fellows, actual lodge activity remains unrecorded or secret, making it difficult if not impossible to develop links between lodge or group consensus and any overt political or economic activity. The critical point in terms of the existence of a labour aristocracy is the lodge as a vehicle to develop and support relationships between skilled workers and the upper classes of the town. Clawson concludes

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<sup>50</sup> Clawson 92.

<sup>51</sup> Clawson 107.

these relationships must naturally develop in the lodge structure which emphasizes individual and horizontal relationships of authority as opposed to vertical relationships. For members of this exclusionary brotherhood, this did not necessarily mean a rejection of trade unionist ideals or social responsibilities outside the lodge, but it did provide two very important opportunities. First, it gave skilled workers, among others in the lodge, the opportunity to personally "get ahead" by socializing and developing personal relationships with members of classes above them. Second, it provided a vehicle to develop stronger personal relationships among themselves. While this would not necessarily lead to collective action outside the lodge, it nonetheless could provide a basis for useful communication. This contradictory position in which members of the upper strata of the working class found themselves is well illustrated by the function of the fraternal lodge.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter the evidence of skilled workers found in marriage records, property ownership and lodge membership allows some insight into the complex and uncertain world in which they lived, and some of the ways in which they responded to it. In marriage patterns, the skilled workers were, like all others, dominated in the early days by the rural nature of the population. As the town developed however, skilled workers began to look toward a more narrow field in the choice of families from which to take brides. Machinists and patternmakers were noticeably restricted, generally choosing daughters of better off families as partners, and similar families into which they allowed daughters to marry. This tendency to

establish familial ties with persons at their own level or above would undoubtedly have bestowed some prestige on a skilled worker, but more importantly, it would have also provided at least the prospect of advancement for his children, if not himself. Toward the end of the study period, it appears this restrictive attitude was diminishing as machinists began to accept brides from labouring and carpenter families in greater numbers than before.<sup>52</sup>

In choice of housing, skilled labour responded more decisively as a labour aristocracy. The opportunity to purchase good houses relieved the town's working class when a local insurance man became a property developer in 1902. The rush to buy houses was particularly strong among labourers and carpenters who could practically build their own homes. In this rush a new community, heavily populated with the unskilled and carpenters, was created in the town's West Highlands. The remainder of the workforce was spread throughout the town but choose distinctive areas in which to live. Skilled workers, particularly at Robb's, found convenient neighbourhoods near the plant itself, but a significant number also chose to live among the section of town favoured by clerks and middle class managers and businesspersons. Machinists in particular were found to reject the opportunities to live in the new working class district of the West Highlands, and would rather rent a home in a more middle class area. When they did buy homes, skilled workers tended to take mortgages from a mortgage company rather than accept a personal arrangement from an individual. This latter option was one chosen by a majority of

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<sup>52</sup> This is similar to Crossick's observation of the marriage patterns of the Labour Aristocracy in London, An Artisan Elite 127.

unskilled and carpenters building in the West Highlands. Whether or not they felt any debt to the mortgage holders beyond the purely monetary is difficult to say. Clearly, though, the mortgages of the skilled workers came without question of early recall or interference for other reasons, thus removing any possibility of threats at this level. By seeking neighbourhoods other than those occupied mainly by labourers, and by seeking to maintain their homes through institutional mortgages less subject to individual influences, skilled labour in Amherst achieved a slightly higher, if not necessarily more stable, living standard than otherwise available. In achieving their goals, they excluded themselves from opportunities to interact with lower echelon members of the working class.

Apart from marriage, workers had opportunities to develop ties with members of other classes through the fraternal lodge. These highly popular and numerous institutions dotted the landscape of the province at the turn of the century, and were intended to provide mutual assistance to the sick or the bereaved families of members. Among the most popular and effective of these was the Odd Fellows. Membership in Amherst's Ivy Lodge, IOOF, was heavily weighted toward skilled workers and clerks, with managers and professionals in significant minorities. Indeed, the exclusive nature of the fraternal lodges was one of their principal characteristics. As a group, members could develop close personal relationships in a variety of ways. For the skilled workers, this presented opportunities for interaction both upwards and across the social scale. This opportunity to communicate with selected persons in the community, as well as the insurance aspect of the brotherhood, worked to members' advantage in terms of their own

social security. The exclusion of labourers and non-Anglo-Celts, however, raises the question if lodges were indeed a vehicle for solidarity while promoting class segregation. At another level, the lodges true position regarding the individual, as opposed to the group, requires further exploration.

An examination of lodge, marriage and housing patterns reveals the exclusionary attitudes of the skilled labourers in Amherst, including machinists and patternmakers, and leads to the view of a group who identified very closely with several of the characteristics and attitudes of a labour aristocracy identified by Eric Hobsbawm. These characteristics or tendencies of seeking social advancement for themselves or their children, seeking a better living condition than that available to lower echelon labourers, and generally attempting to acquire a position of security in society were framed in the relations of skilled labour with those above and below them in the social strata. "The life style of the 'respectable' artisan tended to project a sense of social superiority, a self-conscious cultural exclusion of less-favoured working-class groups."<sup>53</sup> Their ideals and attitudes were, for the most part as Hobsbawm and Gray have concluded about the British labour aristocracy, closer to the people above them than below. Yet as members of the working class, how did labour aristocrats in Amherst respond to the challenges of capital when it threatened to interfere in the governing of the town and all its citizens?

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<sup>53</sup> Gray 95.

## IV

### SKILLED LABOUR AND CIVIC GOVERNMENT

In Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, Henry Pelling introduces a characteristic of labour aristocrats beyond those identified by Hobsbawm: that is, a propensity to take a leadership role in matters affecting the working class. Pelling's contention is supported with reference to leadership in trade unions where, he notes, key leaders tended to belong to the upper-levels of a craft group.<sup>1</sup> In Amherst the slow process of unionization prior to 1914 removed this avenue for a labour aristocracy to develop as leaders. This chapter will explore the alternative route of civic politics and the role of the skilled workers in bridging the period of economic boom and bust.

A survey of the Labour Gazette for the years prior to World War I demonstrates in a clear way the paucity of unionized activity in Amherst. Most of the reports referred to the condition of available work in the town's industries, and these fluctuated along the well known path of growth and decline in the quarter century of this study.<sup>2</sup> Few craft unions were reported by the Labour Gazette as developing. Only the moulders, carpenters and stove fitters were organized outside

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain: Essays by Henry Pelling (London: Macmillan, 1968) 56-61.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the boom and bust cycle, see Nolan Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919," Acadiensis 11 (1980): 56-77 and T.W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910," Acadiensis 1 (1971): 3-28.

the Provincial Workmen's Association by 1905.<sup>3</sup> Others among the more skilled trades, like the machinists and patternmakers remained unorganized. A loosely organized Trades and Labour Council developed in 1904 which sponsored public lectures and stimulated interest. As Nolan Reilly describes it, it provided a home for the unorganized skilled workers like machinists, cabinet makers and masons. He writes, "The structure of the labour council represented the attempt of the nascent labour movement to cope with its continued isolation and small numbers in Amherst."<sup>4</sup> The Trades and Labour Council, was however, short lived. Indeed, by 1907 unions were apparently not yet considered by most workers as serious players in the town, as reported in the Labour Gazette:

Unskilled labour is in demand, good men easily commanding \$1.50 per day and upwards. Carpenters, bricklayers, and indeed the majority of mechanics employed in Amherst are dealt with as individuals, and not as members of a union. The wages generally are high, owing to the demand, but rent and board are above the average. Harmony prevailed between employers and employees.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of this weak organizational base for workers, the manufacturers managed to retain a tight grip on the workforce. A variety of methods were employed ranging from the benevolent patriarchy of the Robb plant to the heavy handed manipulation exercised at Rhodes, Curry. In consequence, only two small

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<sup>3</sup> Labour Gazette 1 (1900-1901): 103; 2 (1901-1902): 248; 3 (1902-1903): 154; and 5 (1904-1905):878-879.

<sup>4</sup> Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: A Study of Amherst, 1891-1925," Diss., Dalhousie University, 1983, 148.

<sup>5</sup> Labour Gazette 7 (1907): 1339.

incidents of traditional working class action were reported by the Labour Gazette. Both of these took place at the Canada Car and Foundry plant and lasted only a few days.<sup>6</sup> The perceived "happy relation" between labour and capital in the town was so consistent that the image of contented workmen and understanding masters became part of the public image of Amherst.<sup>7</sup> For example in 1919, on the eve of a town wide general strike, A.S. Curry wrote "This is the first labour trouble Rhodes, Curry has had in its 42 years of Business Activity. If the men had been sensible there was no need for a strike at the present time."<sup>8</sup> At one level this image of the town is correct, strikes or overt labour unrest appear not to be noticeable.<sup>9</sup> In such an atmosphere of weak unions and apparent class co-operation, what opportunity did the working class have to voice any discontent?

Most studies of working class politics emphasize labour's attempts to enter the provincial and federal levels of government.<sup>10</sup> With the partial exception of the inter-war period, the experience of Nova Scotian working class politics has been one of limited successes. In Amherst, only one serious effort was made between 1890 and 1914 to enter these levels of politics, and this occurred when the Cumberland

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<sup>6</sup> Labour Gazette 11 (1910): 604, 679.

<sup>7</sup> Amherst Daily News 5 Feb. 1908.

<sup>8</sup> Rhodes Papers, PANS MG 2 Vol. 411.

<sup>9</sup> See Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1900-1914," Acadiensis 13 (1983): 1-18.

<sup>10</sup> David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes 1899-1916," in Robert Brym and R. James Sacouman, eds., Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada, (Toronto: New Hogtown P, 1977) 81-106; Bryan Palmer, Working-Class Experience (Toronto: Butterworth, 1983).

Labour Party nominated two candidates for the provincial election in 1909.<sup>11</sup> Civic politics remained subservient to the provincial and federal houses. The greater power of Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament had been early recognized by the established capitalists, and candidates, funding and organization of election campaigns formed the elements of well run party machines. Given the lack of cohesiveness of the working class, their inability to fight against such established power may have been a recognition of reality. Civic politics, while developing into identifiable interest groups, was, however, less a matter for established parties. In Amherst, at least, the arena of civic politics was open and used to express the tensions between worker and capitalist. Participation in civic government, particularly by skilled workers, went beyond candidacy itself. Their willingness to support particular candidates allows us to observe an aristocracy of labour at work, and to judge how successful it was in providing leadership to the rest of the working class.

Town government tended to be much more immediate than provincial or federal politics in its issues. With regard to such major questions as sanitation and taxation and even the franchise, there was a blurring between factions, and few ideological beliefs seemed to influence decision making. This was perhaps a characteristic of civic politics, as discussed by David Frank in his essay "Company Town/Labour Town."<sup>12</sup> The greatest differences in council arose over issues of

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<sup>11</sup> Reilly, "The Emergence of Class-Consciousness" 165.

<sup>12</sup> David Frank, "Company Town/Labour Town: Local Government in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917-1926," Histoire Sociale : Social History 14 (1981): 185.

payment for services and issuance of contracts to perceived friends.<sup>13</sup>

The history of the control of the town and council underwent three stages between 1889 and 1914. These stages reflect the phases of labourist politics outlined by Craig Heron.<sup>14</sup> In the first period, 1889 to approximately 1900, control of the council rested with business as labour began to find its causes based on experience. In the second period, roughly 1900 to 1911, labour attempted to assert itself under the leadership of skilled workers who were willing to share power with the capitalist and business class, but not at any price. Finally, from 1911 to 1914, control of the nominating committees for labour candidates began to shift away from the predominant skilled workers to a more widely representative group which included unskilled workers and socialists.

#### FIRST PERIOD, 1889-1900

In the years immediately following incorporation in 1889, the merchants and manufacturers of the new Town of Amherst took control of the embryonic machinery of civic government. Initially, this control was unbreakable, and, in 1892, no election was held at all after it was suggested to candidate J.N. Fage, a local carpenter/contractor and sometime "friend of the working class," that he retire from the field. One of the earliest examples of efforts to break down the class barriers of society is a nomination list for the controversial election of 1892. In this election contractor J.N. Fage had been nominated to stand for election along with two

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<sup>13</sup> Bloomfield 98.

<sup>14</sup> Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (1984): 45-75.

merchants who, in later years, would each become identified with opposing sides of civic politics. Fage was replaced, apparently against his will, when another nomination arose for James Donalds.<sup>15</sup> Donalds was to have a checkered career in Amherst, but could best be described as a manager for various manufacturers. In later elections Donalds was associated with the side of capital, and Fage returned as the favourite of labour. Among the list of 73 supporters on the nomination list for James Donalds, the merchants, professionals and managers of industrial plants outnumbered all other groups with 23 signatures. Eight employees of the Amherst Boot and Shoe, including Ora Lamy, Master Workman of the PWA, and another eight skilled workers from around the town signed the nomination papers. Of the remaining identified signatories, two were farmers, two clerks, and the rest unskilled. Twenty-five persons who signed the nomination papers were unidentified. In this list can be seen several themes with regard to the position of skilled labour in civic elections in the 1890s. First is the willingness of both managers and workers to speak for the same person to represent them. This perceived mutuality of needs and apparent willingness to diminish any differences did not last. Second, the involvement of staff from the Amherst Boot and Shoe, where the PWA was first organized in Amherst and which presumably acted as an anchor industry for the association, is telling.

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<sup>15</sup> (Amherst) Evening Press 22 Jan. 1892.

Attempts to describe the PWA as a conservative union have been dispelled by Ian McKay,<sup>16</sup> and in Amherst their position was to pioneer the attempts of the working class to control or influence civic policy. The role of the PWA in civic elections has remained largely unexplored, but can find its roots in the actions of the Lodge which supported a member for county council in Cape Breton in 1890.<sup>17</sup> In Amherst, the effectiveness of the PWA in civic contests ebbed and flowed with the fortunes of the lodge itself. Organized as a multi-craft lodge in 1890 by Grand Secretary Robert Drummond, Concord Lodge was one of the few lodges to break the exclusivity of membership by coal miners. The Grand Secretary revealed that there was some scepticism about the ability of a lodge of mixed trades to flourish, but he reminded delegates to the annual meeting in 1890 that at incorporation in 1882 "it was agreed that workmen in all trades be included."<sup>18</sup> Concord Lodge was reported to be flourishing a year after its opening, and by 1894 it had 80 members.<sup>19</sup> Concord Lodge fell into disarray after the turn of the century, but was reorganized in 1904.<sup>20</sup> The lodge continued to be reported occasionally, and their last effort at civic politics seemed to have occurred in 1905. After this, the arena of council elections was given over to a succession of loosely organized groups of workers.

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<sup>16</sup> Ian McKay, "By Wisdom, Wile or War": The PWA and the Struggle for Working-Class Independence in N.S., 1879-1897," Labour/Le Travailleur 8/9 (1981/82): 13-62.

<sup>17</sup> "Provincial Workmen's Association, Minutes of proceedings and other documents 1879-1891," PANS MG 20 Vol. 939 #2, 215.

<sup>18</sup> (Amherst) Evening News 16 Feb. 1894.

<sup>19</sup> (Amherst) Evening Press 23 Jan. 1891 and (Amherst) Evening News 5 Jan. 1894.

<sup>20</sup> Amherst Daily News 18 Nov. 1904.

The extent of the PWA's radical activity however, was evidently influenced by their traditional dependence on the skilled worker as members. As late as 1899, Ora Lamy seconded industrialist Nathaniel Curry's nomination of civil engineer James Dickey for Mayor.<sup>21</sup> While on the one hand willing to support working class candidates, the PWA was also willing to step back from the fray and allow control to pass on to unabashedly non-working class councillors and mayors in a hope that some advancement of their cause may occur.

The PWA in these early elections set the pace and the tone for working class involvement in civic politics, and as such played a crucial part in the development of working class consciousness in Amherst prior to World War I. There is little indication that the PWA merely desired to educate the working class in the issues and language of class conflict, as did the political efforts of workers in Cape Breton in the inter-war years.<sup>22</sup> The PWA was, however, undergoing structural changes itself, and after the turn of the century adopted more aggressive attitudes toward its negotiations with capital.<sup>23</sup>

The year 1893 provided the first genuine challenge to the established order when three industrial workers presented themselves for election. These men were A. Watt of Robb's, Henry Davis, a pipefitter and prominent members of the working class, and one Mr Dowlin who operated a blacksmith shop and livery. The

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<sup>21</sup> Amherst Daily News 12 Jan. 1899.

<sup>22</sup> David Frank, "Working Class Politics: The Election of J.B. McLachlan, 1916-1935," in K. Donovan, ed., The Island New Perspectives on Cape Breton's History, (Fredericton, N.B. & Sydney, N.S.: Acadiensis Press and University College of Cape Breton Press, 1990) 191.

<sup>23</sup> See McKay, "By Wisdom, Wile or War" for a discussion of this restructuring.

available details of this election are sketchy, but the craftsmen were defeated. Elected in their stead, however, were a merchant sympathetic to labour and John Bryenton, the editor of the Evening News. Even so, the electorate's non-support of avowedly working class candidates was not support for the capitalist cause. As editor, Bryenton often addressed working class issues, so much so that he was accused by John McKeen, bank manager and would be reformer, of being "under the thumb of the PWA". In an editorial, Bryenton replied this would be:

...exceedingly funny did it not betray a very low estimate of the manliness, ability and independence of the members of that society.

Mr. McKeen will yet learn that the PWA is not composed of men who can be controlled by so very insignificant a person as Mr. Bryenton, or by any other person. They are men who think for themselves and will always be found ready to strike out hard in true manly fashion when their rights or privileges are assailed.<sup>24</sup>

The Provincial Workmen's Association in turn disavowed the connection:

The undersigned were instructed on behalf of the Lodge, to (p)resent in the public press the (i)nsult tendered this lodge by Mr. John McKeen in intimating we were incapable of transacting our own business as an institution and were merely the mouth piece of Mr. John Bryenton. The resolution referred to, was passed in open lodge, after full discussion and consideration and expresses the sentiment of the Lodge and not those of any private individual.<sup>25</sup>

In his review of civic politics to 1894, the anonymous letter writer "Max" did not hesitate to inform the "leading citizens" of Amherst they had to bear a large part

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<sup>24</sup> (Amherst Evening News 11 Jan 1894

<sup>25</sup> (Amherst Evening News 12 Jan. 1894.

of the responsibility for the growing financial indebtedness of the town as well as the developing political rancour. Max touched on all the salient issues: the push of "reformists" to govern the town with as little democratic interference as possible, the cost over-runs of large civic projects and the awarding of lucrative contracts to friends or even themselves, and the neglect of the Scott Act, the temperance enforcement law. These would remain the principal civic election issues until at least 1914 when a collapsed economy dramatically focused everyone's attention on the relief of the workforce. In 1894 however, Max laid out the battle lines:

That we have elected two candidates it is most true, true we have defeated you.

The very head and front of our offending hath extent no more.

When you 'holler nuff' gentlemen and are willing to admit that you neither own the earth or Amherst corner, and realize that there are other interests in this town besides that of political parties, and 'balancing acts,' and when you are willing to come over to us, and consult these interests, you will [find that we are neither] agitators, creatures, thugs, anarchists, but quite peaceful citizens like yourselves. If not gentlemen, allow me to assure you that 'we will fight it out on this line' until you see your mistakes and acknowledge your defeat.

The accurate placement of Max in either the working class or the middle class is difficult. One thing is certain, he clearly was not impressed by the governance of the managerial class of the town, and would have found it easy to support those which had been labelled thugs and anarchists.

One month previous to Max's letter two opposing teams had been nominated. At Greenfield's Hall on Boxing Day, 1893 Dr C. A. Black, a temperance advocate, was nominated for mayor, with merchant A. W. Moffat, contractor Fage and shoemaker Rufus Hicks nominated for councillors. On the 29th of December, a

"private meeting" was reported to have been held in councillor William Read's store. The twenty people present nominated manufacturer Nathaniel Curry for mayor, and for council William Read, Dr C.W. Bliss and manufacturer Edward Curran. While the Curry team offered a sound business-like practice in town affairs, it also reminded voters of the large amount of labour hired by the firm.<sup>26</sup> The Black team, on the other hand, promised to work for "the careful protection of the interests of the working man".<sup>27</sup>

The persons who nominated the two sides are not known, but Concord Lodge, No. 24 of the PWA unanimously endorsed the candidacy of Dr Black, Moffat, Fage and Hicks. The issue which prompted the PWA to support the candidacy of a professional, merchant, contractor and shoemaker, was that of the franchise and the ideas of Henry George. The fight to protect the established franchise was among the interests of the PWA in the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

Civic government in Canada in the late nineteenth century had been largely appropriated by professionals, industrialists and merchants.<sup>29</sup> As John Weaver observes in his study of the civic reform movement in Canada, corruption and patronage had become so widely known that "Council as an institution reached a

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<sup>26</sup> (Amherst Evening News 5 Jan. 1894.

<sup>27</sup> (Amherst Evening News 27 Dec. 1893.

<sup>28</sup> Ian McKay, "The Provincial Workmen's Association: A Brief Survey of Several problems of Interpretation," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History, (St. John's, NF: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1985) 132.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Bloomfield, "Community Leadership and Decision-Making: Entrepreneurial Elites in Two Ontario Towns, 1870-1930," in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, eds., Power and Place: Canadian Urban Development in the North American Context, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1986) 82-104.

low ebb."<sup>30</sup> The alternative system of government was a form of commission government which, being appointed by elected officials for an appropriately lengthy term, would in fact run the town or city. In this, "the well paid expert emerged as the ideal for proper city government" and, as Weaver points out it was the business proponents of reform who expected to do the appointing.<sup>31</sup>

The situation in Amherst was no different from that identified by Weaver in other parts of the country. Electoral issues commonly arose over unauthorized payment of town expenses to the perceived friends of the council and allegedly unnecessary expenses incurred by the town. The mouthpiece for reform and the right of the property owners to govern was the manager of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Amherst, John McKeen, who wrote a series of letters to the Halifax Morning Chronicle outlining his vision of civic reform.<sup>32</sup> He argued for municipal reform, that towns ought to be run on business principles, that politics had no place in civic elections, and that the franchise had erroneously been extended to persons who should not be voting, namely rent payers and non-property owners. In one letter, McKeen attacked the Towns Incorporation Act as a:

species of cross between the political and corporate machine in which each interest seems to contend for the mastery greatly to the weakening of the measure. If civic government is ever to become an established success it is clear that it must be directed by competent, experienced men, who not only represent but own

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<sup>30</sup> John Weaver, Shaping the Canadian City: Essays on Urban Politics and Policy, 1890-1920 (Toronto: The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1977) 44.

<sup>31</sup> Weaver 45, 50.

<sup>32</sup> (Halifax Morning Chronicle 29 Nov. 1893; 30 Dec. 1893; and (Amherst Evening News 5 Jan. 1894.

substantial property interest in the body corporate...

The inferred insult was not ignored and letter writers to the Evening News bristled at the suggestion that they somehow were less capable at municipal affairs than the large property holders. McKeen went on to say that the same voters lists used to elect members of the legislative assembly were also used for civic elections. The result of this confusion, he wrote:

is an elector may be voting at a civic election without any property within the corporate limits, and such is the anomaly of the provision that it is a question if he may not under certain circumstance vote on property owned outside. In any case it is absurd on the face of it to introduce into civic government, when direct control and direct taxation are involved, the broadened franchise of the provincial government. Surely they who have to bear the financial burdens and are principally affected by the large spending powers of the council should have some say as to the qualifications of those who are to make rulers (and of) what of the qualifications of the rulers themselves.<sup>33</sup>

The obvious need for some kind of reform was not in dispute, and had it not been for its linkage with the franchise issue, McKeen's suggestions may have found more support.

John McKeen pursued his theories of reform by suggesting that taxation could be changed as well, and invoked the spirit of Henry George and the Single Tax. The poll tax was not enough on which to base a vote, rather, McKeen felt, a tax on rent would be more equitable. In this part of the debate we only have one side, that of John Bryenton, editor and elected councillor. McKeen evidently published other letters in the rival to Bryenton's paper, the Amherst Press, which is

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<sup>33</sup> (Halifax Morning Chronicle 29 Nov. 1893.

now lost. Bryenton, however, stated enough of McKeen's argument to remind the reader of the debate. In his rebuttal in the Evening News of 29 Jan. 1894, Bryenton demonstrated that McKeen had confused George's system of a single tax on land with a tax on rents. In response, McKeen suggested that Henry George himself should mediate between them and wagered a pair of silk hats George would find in his favour.<sup>34</sup>

That there was confusion over the real meaning of the Single Tax is not surprising. In his discussion of Henry George, Ramsay Cook observes that the ambiguity of George's theory was part of its attraction:

And George, at least in the early years of his campaign, was apparently willing to take supporters where he found them - single taxers, land nationalizers, Labour Reformers, Christian Socialists, fabians and others. Consequently, the Georgite movement was composed of a motley crew, attracting both support and criticism from many quarters in Canada as elsewhere."<sup>35</sup>

The 1894 attempt to disenfranchise a large number of persons accustomed to voting, particularly workers who in this period were largely renters, was the principal issue met by the PWA.<sup>36</sup> In the initial stages of the battle, the town council debated the possibility of removing non-property owners from the voting rolls. This was set

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<sup>34</sup> (Amherst Evening News 7 Feb. 1894. Bryenton noted in his editorial that "In this he shows as little knowledge concerning the person of Henry George as he does concerning his theories. For the past two years Mr George has been suffering a mental disease...let it be submitted to the leading Canadian exponent of the Single Tax Mr J.W. Bengough."

<sup>35</sup> Ramsay Cook, "Henry George and the Poverty of Canadian Progress," Historical Papers Communications Historique, Canadian Historical Association, 1977: 146.

<sup>36</sup> The fight for representation would surface again in later years. For example, see the election of 1909 when it was argued that workingmen did not have the time to leave their work to be councillors, nor was it fair to ask them to do so (Amherst Daily News 30 Jan. 1909.)

afoot by Councillor Christie, a manufacturer, and Councillor Chapman, a merchant, who proposed "that all assessments shall be levied upon owners and not upon tenants." Councillors Bryenton and Read, a merchant, moved an amendment that the clause that removed tenants from the assessment roll be stricken. "Considerable discussion followed in which it was shown that the removal of tenants from the assessment roll would make it very difficult for them to get votes as they would have to make affidavits twice each year at the revision of the lists, or they would have their names left off. This being thoroughly explained the amendment was carried unanimously."<sup>37</sup> As Nelles and Armstrong observe, the process of civic government was negotiated, where no one element could afford to exclude the other:

Urban reformers in Canada could not ignore the fact that it was impossible for them to monopolize political power, however much they might wish to do so. Property qualifications and franchise restrictions might exclude many labourers from participation, but a skilled tradesman could own his own home and qualify to vote in most municipalities. And since the latter was most likely to belong to a trade union the preferences of organized labour had to be taken seriously.<sup>38</sup>

Council's action, although removing the immediate threat, did not diminish the effort to defeat the movement to disenfranchise workers. This debate and the positions taken demonstrate the blurred lines between councillors. Read and Christie, during election campaigns, usually sounded more like the arch rivals of labour, and yet when the opportunity arose to decimate their electoral opponents, it was declined.

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<sup>37</sup> (Amherst) *Evening News* 16 Jan. 1894.

<sup>38</sup> Nelles and Armstrong 52.

In the meantime, Robert Drummond of the PWA himself carried the case forward by stating the inconsistencies of the argument that there are levels of importance among citizens based on property. His conclusion was that "there must be no curtailment rather an enlargement of the franchise. It must be the right of not only every honest man, but woman as well."<sup>39</sup>

The remainder of the election proceeded on the usual themes of the need for careful expenditure and temperance enforcement. In the end, Nathaniel Curry, unwilling to risk that the campaign had truly turned away from the issues of control, brought home for the vote his work crews from Saint John, Halifax, Oxford, Yarmouth "and other parts".<sup>40</sup> The results were predictable. Curry won handily over the temperance doctor, and his running mates swept into council. Two years after this clash of labour and capital, the election for mayor and council would go uncontested.

Despite the defeat, several points emerged from this election which made it important, and which were consistent with the PWA's political activities of the nineteenth century. Among these were the ability to accept the candidacy of non-working class men as appropriate representatives of the working class, the focus on the franchise as an issue, temperance, and, in this case, the ideas of Henry George. The leadership of the PWA was consistent with their activities in other spheres, where they fought for an extension of the vote and greater democratic functions

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<sup>39</sup> (Amherst) Evening News 25 Jan. 1894.

<sup>40</sup> (Amherst) Evening News 5 Feb. 1894.

among all levels of society.<sup>41</sup> More important, this election outlined the issues which would remain predominant for the next twenty years, even after the PWA itself as a motive force receded from the scene.

After the initial experiments with civic democracy which culminated in the contest of 1894, workers' committees in Amherst developed two approaches to civic elections. The first of these was to seek a compromise or negotiated settlement. Of the twenty elections from 1895 to 1914, at least seven contests included some effort to strike a compromise with the opposing team, or to arrange a slate of candidates which included members from labour and social reform groups.<sup>42</sup> Between 1891 and 1914, mayors were acclaimed four times and councillors three times. There were also at least two compromise arrangements in the selection of candidates. In other words, some effort was made on the part of members of the working class to achieve a negotiated settlement of civic representation, and avoid the acrimonious debates, accusations and class conflict to which elections often resorted. The compromise settlements, however, were not always stimulated by the working class. An ill-fated settlement in 1897, for example, originated with the clergy of the town in an apparent effort to achieve social peace between the classes.<sup>43</sup> The social origins of members on a working class ticket was not at issue for those who nominated candidates until at least 1900, and for a few years beyond. Their

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<sup>41</sup> Ian McKay, "By Wisdom, Wile or War": The Provincial Workmen's Association and the Struggle for Working-Class Independence in Nova Scotia, 1879-97," *Labour/Le Travail* 18 (1986): 13-62.

<sup>42</sup> See: *Amherst Daily News* 23 Jan. 1897; 22 Jan. 1900; 5 Jan. 1905; 26 Jan. 1907; 23 Jan. 1908; 16 Jan. 1909; and 24 Jan. 1911.

<sup>43</sup> *Amherst Daily News* 27 Jan. 1897.

willingness to embrace candidates from other classes, or at least not to oppose them in their bid for council membership, was a noticeable characteristic of these early years. In some cases, this revolved around the issue of temperance, always important to the working class but critical to others as well. Also in this period, the efforts of workers to articulate their position through political expression was linked with other groups, mainly reformers and the middle class. It is this fact, combined with their political inexperience, which creates what Heron refers to as the "ideological woolliness" of early labourist politics.<sup>44</sup>

## SECOND PERIOD, 1900-1911

After a compromise, the second approach of the workers to civic politics was to fight a straight election campaign. A more accurate reflection of the efforts of the skilled labourers to influence civic politics may be seen in those elections where candidates were nominated and fought the contest without any attempt to compromise. The Amherst Daily News occasionally published the names of the persons who had signed the nominating papers for the various candidates. Among these were a mixture of occupations, but over the time span of this study a pattern developed which mirrored some of the activity and attitudes outlined in earlier chapters.

After Concord Lodge drifted from the scene, other working class associations rose to continue the work of nominating persons to represent them, or in arranging for negotiated conclusions to elections. In 1902, the Workingmen's Reform

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<sup>44</sup> Heron 50.

Association, which may possibly have been a detachment of the PWA, nominated its candidates to contest the team of arch capitalist Nathaniel Curry for mayor, and three candidates for council, namely a manager of the Amherst Boot and Shoe, a clerk, and a grocer.<sup>45</sup> The Workingmen's Reform Association nominated merchant A.W. Moffat for mayor, and three non-labouring men for council: manufacturer C. J. Silliker, barber George Weeks and lumberman R. B. Atkinson. What is important here, though, is the participation of skilled workers who were much more active in nominating the candidates than in the ten years previous. In the lists of signatories of the nominating papers was the former Master Workman Ora Lamy, and five other skilled workers, two professionals, the father and son owners of a carriage factory, and two staff from the boot and shoe factory. Although far fewer in number from the 1892 example, the emphasis on skilled labour rather than managerial level persons was marked.

The dominance of labour on the nominating papers for labour candidates is also important, just as it was that those nominated were not labourers. Silliker, for example, often tried, with success, to represent himself as a working man. Indeed, the implied definition of "working man" as exclusive of managers and industrialists was galling to a number of those who felt they worked as hard as those on the shop floor. As the decade advanced and as it became less and less appropriate for merchants and managers to represent the cause of labour, debates over who was and who was not a worker became more common. In his article on labourist

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<sup>45</sup> Amherst Daily News 5 Feb. 1902; these were for council C. S. Sutherland, R. M. Embrce and F. A. Cates.

politics in Canada, Craig Heron identifies this trend as a distinct phase in labourist development. Associated with it was a decline of support by workers for the Liberal party.<sup>46</sup> The Liberal editor of the Amherst Daily News was perhaps responding to this process of declining support when he bluntly exclaimed:

In a town like Amherst there are not fifty men that cannot be described as working men. All of us should be 'workers' if we are not. Why then the distinction? The good of Amherst without class lines being drawn should be the motto of all.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, it was becoming increasingly clear to workers who were their allies. The control of Amherst's mayoralty remained with industrialists and professionals until 1905. Up until then, merchants and business men seemed to fill the position of the mayoralty candidate of labour. Even afterwards, men like C.J. Silliker would attempt to portray themselves as labour's candidate, even though they could be notoriously anti-labour.<sup>48</sup> Between 1905 and 1911 the distinction of class lines was changing. As part of this process, the mayoralty shifted almost annually between the workers' candidate and the interests of capital. In 1905, auctioneer and liniment manufacturer Thomas P. Lowther, with the support of the "Workingmen's Club," began his long career in civic politics. Lowther, who is described by Reilly as having an ambivalent relationship with labour, was elected mayor four times in alternating years, and contested all seven elections. In three of these he ran with the support of a workers nominating committee, and otherwise seemed generally to

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<sup>46</sup> Heron 53.

<sup>47</sup> Amherst Daily News 22 Jan. 1908.

<sup>48</sup> Ian McKay, The Craft Transformed (Halifax, N.S.: Holdfast Press, 1985) 34.

have received their backing.<sup>49</sup> This period of sharpening class consciousness was further reflected in the fact that neither business nor labour received unequivocal control of the council until 1911. In that year, labour was able to claim a majority of sympathetic councillors and the mayoralty.

The activity of the skilled labourers of the town working as an effective political body was heightened in the years 1907 and 1908. In the 1907 civic election, the largest number of votes was polled to date. The contest was between T. P. Lowther and George W. Cole, the Secretary-Treasurer of Robb's for Mayor, and for council between a manufacturer, lawyer and lumberman on one side, and a doctor and two workers for labour. The nominating papers for Lowther reflected his broad appeal with several levels of the town's male occupations represented through skilled and unskilled labour, merchants and petty shop owners. Cole, on the other hand was nominated by a powerful group of men who commanded respect across the social spectrum. These were mainly managers in industry, including the Currys, Christies, H. L. Hewson and A. G. Robb. Additionally, several skilled men from Robb's machine shop who had become well established and ranked among the respectable of the town, made up the traditional mix of skilled labour and business class supporters. The council candidates were however, much more homogeneous in their nominating supporters. The three representatives of labour were nominated by labourers, and the three representatives of capital nominated by managers of industry.

It was activity like this which has lead to the conclusion that skilled labour

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<sup>49</sup> Amherst Daily News 15 Jan. 1906; 24 Jan. 1910; 1 Feb. 1911.

worked to preserve its exclusivity by dividing the working class at the polls, and, presumably, in the work place. Reilly writes:

**In Amherst, the record of the skilled working men is ambiguous because some of these men provided considerable leadership for other workers in the search for new work place structures and in the articulation of the need for an independent working class political action. On the other hand, before 1910 a sizeable number, likely a majority, of the skilled workers clung to the exclusionary institutions and ideas of their craft traditions.<sup>50</sup>**

The record of events is not clear enough to safely decide the real position of the skilled workers. What cannot be overlooked is their evident strength at election time, and that over the term of the pre-World War I decade, their choices maintained a balance of power between capital and labour in Amherst's civic government.

The results of the 1907 election saw Lowther defeat Cole, but only by 13 votes, and the business representatives swept into power in the council. The mayoralty of 1907 reflected the division and position of influence of skilled workers in Amherst. The town's economy in 1907 was still relatively strong and growing, and the dependence on skilled labour a factor in manufacturing.

Among the last displays of influence in civic politics mustered by skilled workers came the following year. Again T. P. Lowther announced his candidacy, this time to be challenged by Aubrey G. Robb, former councillor and mechanical superintendent of Robb Engineering. The nominating persons are not known for

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<sup>50</sup> Reilly, "The Emergence of Class-Consciousness" 154.

this election, but it may be assumed they would be similar in make-up to those of the previous year. The Amherst Daily News lent some indication of the weakness of organized labour and of the split in its ranks on this mayoralty.

Does the 'Workingmen's Club' represent the workingmen of Amherst, we think not. At the meeting that endorsed Mayor Lowther there were thirteen present, seven of whom voted for Mr Lowther and six who voted in favour of Mr. Robb.

The seven majority also favoured the bringing out of three Labour candidates. What we want to know is simply this, are those seven men qualified to speak for all the intelligent workingmen of the town, or are they a number of soreheads that desire to have an election for the purpose of putting up a fight for a fight's sake.<sup>51</sup>

Mr Lowther was not long in disputing the claim of the small number at the nominating meeting, but the reality of the strength of the Robb nomination would soon be told.<sup>52</sup> The election cards for the labour candidates were devoid of any significant promise or declaration, stating only they would serve the best interest of the town, a common stance for labourist candidates.<sup>53</sup> Their opposing candidates revived the implied class difference of ability to govern and declared themselves to be men with time to spend on civic business.<sup>54</sup> A few days before the election an anonymous letter, signed by "Perigrinus," a "frequent visitor" to Amherst, made the following observations on the campaign:

The first thing that strikes the spectator in this, as in your other municipal contests, is the entire absence of

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<sup>51</sup> Amherst Daily News 27 Jan. 1908.

<sup>52</sup> Amherst Daily News 28 Jan. 1908.

<sup>53</sup> Heron 50.

<sup>54</sup> Amherst Daily News 25 Jan. 1908.

party politics. The only real issue on which an elector can reasonably vote is simply the personal fitness of the different candidates for the position. To be sure there does seem to be some sort of a party division - some are called labour candidates, and we find that the present Mayor Lowther is said to be the candidate of the labour party. The division, however, so far as I can learn, is merely one of name. I am informed that Mr Robb was elected to the council as a labour candidate and still has to a very large extent, the confidence and support of the labour interests. The workmen of Amherst do not strike me as being the kind who can be made to respond to any mere party cry. They will not vote for a man merely because he is ticketed with the name 'labour,' but each of them will use his own independent judgement as to the candidates before them, and their fitness for the position.<sup>55</sup>

Whereas the previous year's election was a near run thing, this year's would leave no room for doubts. A. G. Robb defeated Lowther 654 to 431. Similarly, the non-labour councillors scored the largest majority to date. The editorial remarks, tinged with the bias of the editor, nonetheless made a telling observation.

To show the happy relation that prevails between Labour and Capital in our town, it is only necessary to state that all through the campaign Mr Robb secured the hearty support and co-operation of the employees of the Robb Engineering Company. They stood by him almost to a man and worked like trojans to secure his election. Never in the history of Amherst has a candidate had such a loyal band of supporters behind him as Mr Robb, and it speaks well for him that his strongest support came from the men with whom he is in daily contact.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Amherst Daily News 1 Feb 1908.

<sup>56</sup> Amherst Daily News 5 Feb. 1908.

The editor went on to say the support for John Curry as councillor was largely due to the Car Works, but given the electoral track record of Rhodes, Curry, it might be supposed the suggestion for whom to vote came from the top down rather than from the shop floor. Nathaniel Curry, who did not hesitate to bring in work crews for an earlier election, several times refused candidates from opposing tickets access to the Rhodes, Curry plant for canvassing. It is quite conceivable, given John Curry's election, that he brought his persuasive efforts to bear in this election as well.

The workmen of other industries also rallied heartily to his standard and joined with other fellow craftsmen at Robb's to give the Mayor-elect a bumper majority.<sup>57</sup>

The following year T.P. Lowther recovered, only to lose in 1910 to J.M. Curry. Lowther ran, and won, for the last time in 1911, then moved to the west of Canada to pursue his career as a livestock auctioneer.

### THIRD PERIOD, 1911-1914

After the Robb-Lowther contest of 1908, the line-up of visible supporters for mayoralty and council candidates changed as labour activists in Amherst began to command the arena. Up to 1913 the role of the skilled industrial worker did not disappear entirely, but it did diminish. Instead, unskilled labourers and men from a greater variety of trades came to share power and positions of influence with the skilled workers. The rise of openly socialist organizations, such as the Amherst Socialist Debating Club, and the Social Democratic Party, attracted people who,

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<sup>57</sup> Amherst Daily News 5 Feb. 1908.

after the war, took a leading role in organizing and leading the general strike of 1919.

The development of socialism in Amherst dates from just after the turn of the century and the creation of the trades and labour council. This organization provided an outlet for some of the politically informed workers as well as a structure within which they could function. Although it was short lived, the membership of the early organization included names of activists, like tailors Dan McDonald and George McLeod, who remained prominent in the labour movement for many years after. The members of this loosely organized group were among those Reilly refers to as being among the better informed workers in the region, aware of the need for collective activity.<sup>58</sup> While remaining small in numbers, socialists in Amherst organized in 1909 as part of the broad Socialist Party of Canada. Until at least 1914, there remained a core of committed activists who functioned as the Amherst Socialist Debating Club and the Social Democrats.<sup>59</sup>

By 1914 the organization of labour in Amherst had spawned a socialist element which was prepared to contest the civic election. Candidates that year were nominated by the Social Democrats, the Citizens ticket and, briefly, the Labour Party. The major theme of the 1914 election, which took place in the context of a business depression, was not directly economics, but rather the matter of temperance. Again the churches became involved, and seem to have made the issue

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<sup>58</sup> Reilly, "The Emergence of Class-Consciousness" 191.

<sup>59</sup> David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in The Maritimes, 1899-1916" Labour Le Travailleur 4 (1979): 99-101.

predominant.<sup>60</sup> By supporting only certain of the candidates, however, the clergy opened themselves to serious questioning, as "A Reader" described:

Now I note the Temperance Federation -- whatever that is -- have endorsed Dr McCully, A.W. Moffat and Howard Ripley as their candidates. May I ask in all seriousness if this is to be considered as a joke?...may I ask if the President of the Marshlands Club is entitled to the endorsement of the Temperance federation?

I have not the cash nor social standing to join this club. I know nothing of it but have gained the impression it was not exactly the headquarters for the blue ribbon army. I have always understood it was one of those places condemned by the Temperance advocates where the rich could bask in the sunshine of plenty while the poor went thirsty. It will no doubt be of great satisfaction to the members of the Marshlands Club to know they are now endorsed by the Temperance Federation.<sup>61</sup>

"Reader" made more than pointed references to the apparent contradiction of principle and action of the Temperance Federation. The temperance issue demonstrated an element of class politics and also the layers of support which emerged for class issues. The Temperance Committee of the Town Council, composed of a machinist, merchant and insurance broker, publicly attacked the Temperance Federation for not nominating a straightforward ticket of temperance candidates:

Men who would come out flat-footed, who would state in no uncertain terms exactly where they stand, and just what they would do if elected to the Council, (not continue the farce and talk of running a ticket composed of men whose previous records are little different to that of the previous committee) the issue would then be

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<sup>60</sup> Amherst Daily News 21 Jan. 1914.

<sup>61</sup> Amherst Daily News 20 Jan. 1914.

fairly before the ratepayers, where it properly belongs."<sup>62</sup>

Rev. Perry Stackhouse, a strong and widely respected preacher of the social gospel, responded immediately by saying that for too long there had been one law for individual offenders of small means, which included fines, jail and suppression, and another for "influential offenders," namely the hotels.<sup>63</sup> Stackhouse felt the issue was not sufficiently clarified to run single issue candidates "but would enjoy an election on this basis" and felt temperance would win.<sup>64</sup>

Stackhouse identified some inequalities in the administration of the temperance laws, which had been discussed from time to time in previous reports of town business. His inference however, that the exercise of the law was based more on social position than fairness, was not welcomed by one worker who suggested the objection to class discrimination was not an entirely sincere motive. Signing himself "Laborer," this anonymous writer spoke for both an independent candidate, and in defence of the Social Democrats:

Were they approached by the Temperance Federation, or were they overlooked because perchance they were working men? Do the Federation think that in this way they can get the support of the "working classes" as many are pleased to term them - or because they thought their chances of being elected too slim?

Like Reader, I must sign anonymously. I am a total abstainer; I believe in temperance principles; I also believe in honesty and a square deal to all; my foreman and employers hold different views from myself, so I

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<sup>62</sup> Amherst Daily News 17 Jan. 1914.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of Rev. Perry Stackhouse's career and influence, see Michael S. Boudreau, "The Emergence of the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia: The Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist Churches and the Working Class 1880-1914," M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1991.

<sup>64</sup> Amherst Daily News 19 Jan. 1914.

must do as does Reader - otherwise it might mean my bread and butter.

Perhaps the greatest letters ever appearing in the press of N.S. were signed Agricola by Young, and while I can't claim greatness, I reserve the right to express my views, as a laboring man who sees the evils of intemperance, also the evils of fanaticism.<sup>65</sup>

Which "fanatics" Laborer was referring to in his last sentence is not entirely clear. While he seemed to condemn the temperance federation in favour of the Social Democrats, he also wrote in support of independent candidate, cabinet maker Howard Ripley.

While the leading candidates were all non-committal in their election advertisements, either with regard to temperance or other issues, the Social Democrats position in this election was decidedly clear. Three weeks before Laborer spoke out, the SDP revealed their electoral position:

To the wage earners of the Town of Amherst, and sympathizers of same. Fellow Workers,

We the undersigned citizens and ratepayers of the town of Amherst have been duly nominated to enter the civic contest as councillors on the Social Democratic platform, viz:

We, the Social Democratic party of Canada in convention assembled affirm our allegiance to support of the International Socialist movement. By virtue of the ownership of the means of production and distribution all wealth the workers produce accrues into the hands of the capitalist class. This property the capitalist class defends by means of the state (the army, the navy, the judiciary). The object of the Social Democratic Party is to educate the workers of Canada to a consciousness of their class position in society, their economic servitude to owners of capital and to organize them into a political party to seize the reins of government and transform all capitalist property into collective property of the working class. This social

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<sup>65</sup> Amherst Daily News 22 Jan. 1914.

transformation means not only of the working class but of the whole human race. Only the working class can bring it about. All other classes maintain their existence by supporting the present social order.

If elected we will support the following measures and any other measure (no matter by whom introduced) pertaining to the interest of the working class.

No contracts of public services, as permanent roads, sidewalks, sewers and utilities.

Itemized accounts of expenditures and income in civic affairs. Public services, lavatories and increased lighting of outskirts of town. Taxation of land values. No property or improvements tax. Free text books and scholastic requisites.<sup>66</sup>

The SDP was not a strong or particularly well organized group in Amherst, but it did cause people to take notice.<sup>67</sup> Its supporters named in the nominating papers were limited to little more than a dozen, and were dominated by labourers and men described in the 1914 directory simply as "employees of Canada Car and Foundry."<sup>68</sup> In contrast, the supporters of the "Citizens Ticket" were reminiscent of the mixture of trades and professions seen on the post-1900 nominating lists. The nominee for mayor, Dr. C. McQ. Avar, however, was undoubtedly popular with the working class.

The SDP received less than a third of the votes of the Citizens Ticket. The editor of the Amherst Daily News put the defeat in perspective:

The vote polled by our Socialistic friends was, perhaps, as large as they expected. It serves as a protest against existing economic conditions, and every student of current events realizes that there are just causes for

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<sup>66</sup> Amherst Daily News 2 Jan. 1914.

<sup>67</sup> Amherst Daily News 27 Jan. 1914.

<sup>68</sup> Amherst Daily News 28 Jan. 1914 and McAlpine Publishing Co., McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory 1914 (Halifax, N.S.: Royal Printer & Litho. Ltd., 1914).

protests. What the remedy is we do not know, but civic contests will not solve the problem for the simple reason that the town's incorporation act confers but very limited authority to the Mayor and Councillors.<sup>69</sup>

The editor foretold more than he knew. How the forces of social change responded to the economic situation during the coming war is beyond the boundary of this study. Certainly once the war was over and greater opportunities for organization arose among the working class, they did not hesitate to move into the sphere of provincial politics.<sup>70</sup> Craig Heron suggests that one reason why socialist candidates were able to succeed after the war in attracting skilled labour to their ranks, was the fact that socialist politics was more defined in its rhetoric and goals than the "fuzziness" of the labourist.<sup>71</sup>

The editor also noted the "limited authority" of the civic government to deal with economic problems. Over the next year, and until the town's industries began to receive contracts for war work, Amherst suffered the same severe depression as the rest of the country. All the major industries laid off the majority of their workforce, and the serious nature of the situation became evident to all by the summer. The editorial of the Amherst Daily News put it plainly:

Amherst cries out to you for aid. Want, our worst enemy, imperils a large part of our population, hitherto prosperous, yet no longer self-supporting. Industrial depression has hit hardest of all this centre of

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<sup>69</sup> Amherst Daily News 4 Feb. 1914.

<sup>70</sup> See David Frank, "Company Town/Labour Town: Local Government in the Cape Breton Town 1917-1926," Histoire Sociale-Social History 14 (1981): 177-196 and "Working-Class Politics: the Election of J. B. McLachlan, 1916-1935," in Kenneth Donovan, ed., The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton's History, (Fredericton, N.B. & Sydney, N.S.: Acadiensis & University College of Cape Breton P, 1990, 187-219.

<sup>71</sup> Heron 74.

industry. Trade has slackened, factories have closed, work there is no longer for those that want it. Hundreds here are idle...Never before has Amherst seen such circumstances. It all came from beyond her control and I fear will remain beyond her control unless those who have prospered heed our pleas... while rightly our pity points to poor Belgium, the cause of humanity can first and best be served among our own.<sup>72</sup>

In August, the Mayor claimed to be asked daily for work by 25 to 30 men.<sup>73</sup>

On September first, the Amherst Daily News reported the creation of a "Patriotic Movement for the Poor", which, under the guidance of E.N. Rhodes, MP, and Mayor Avard, undertook to exercise the kind of immediate power available to the civic government. This was in the form of relief food and clothing distribution to unemployed workers throughout the town, and the establishment of an employment bureau.<sup>74</sup> By Christmas the Amherst United Relief Society organized all the charitable societies of the town into one. "The word charity was eliminated, cooperation in a public duty, was uttered instead," wrote the editor of the Amherst Daily News.<sup>75</sup> The churches and editor of the Amherst Daily News, however, did not hesitate to moralize about "the shiftless", and the need for a permanent clerk who is "not too soft hearted to discourage those who will not work when they know they need not" <sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, some effort was made to ensure that the dignity of

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<sup>72</sup> Amherst Daily News 24 Sept. 1914.

<sup>73</sup> Amherst Daily News 11 Aug. 1914.

<sup>74</sup> Amherst Daily News 23 Sept. 1914.

<sup>75</sup> Amherst Daily News 23 Sept. 1914.

<sup>76</sup> Amherst Daily News 1 Sept. 1914 and Amherst Daily News 3 Sept. 1914.

the recipients was preserved through a form of self-imposed secrecy. The committees of the society included the clergy, merchants, professionals, manufacturers, skilled workers and bank managers of the town.<sup>77</sup> The clients of this society were the workers of all levels. The town was divided into 14 districts, each with visiting committees who would assess each case. In this, the visiting committee members were cautioned they "...must not be actuated in their judgement by any religious connection but are guided solely by an effort to take care of the worthy and let the worthy take care of themselves."<sup>78</sup> The appointment of several skilled workers to this evaluating committee was, while a small role, indicative of their position in relation to the upper echelons of Amherst's society, and their perceived relationship with those below them.

## CONCLUSION

The observation of Nolan Reilly that skilled workers in Amherst provided class leadership is confirmed over the twenty-five years of this study.<sup>79</sup> In the earlier civic elections, up to about 1900, skilled labour appeared most confused as it supported the nomination of both merchants and industrialists as labour representatives. Arguably, through their support of candidates from these two groups, skilled labourers hoped to protect their own interests by winning continued

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<sup>77</sup> Amherst Daily News 23 Sept. 1914.

<sup>78</sup> Amherst Daily News 24 Sept. 1914.

<sup>79</sup> Reilly, "The Emergence of Class-Consciousness" 154.

loyalty from members of the industrial and mercantile elite. They may have traded their political support of merchants and industrialists for an increased acceptance into the higher social worlds to which they aspired. Their support for non-working class candidates, however, may more accurately be a function of the emerging labourist politics of the skilled workers.

In the civic elections to about 1900, several themes emerge that governed municipal politics in Amherst for the entire period of this study. For example, the civic election of 1894 was fought with the involvement of the PWA and in the course of the campaign the right of the working class to the franchise, fiscal responsibility, the single tax and the reform of civic politics were debated.

In the approximately ten years following 1900, skilled workers became more involved in the electoral process, and it is in this period that labour's candidates became more consistently working class people rather than merchants or managers. The development of more distinct labourist attitudes toward civic politics was a characteristic of this decade as skilled workers readily participated in the electoral process. Even with their sharpening perception of class, workers did not always respond to working class candidates as a matter of course. The disunified voting of the working class led the Eastern Labour News to remark:

The one and only reason why organized labour doesn't have an equal chance in running the affairs of government is because they won't pull together. They won't stick. Rather than stand by one of their own members and elect him to office, union men will vote for their bitterest enemy. It may sound unreasonable, but petty jealousy is the cause of all dissention in the ranks of organized labour. And until union men have enough horse-sense to stand together, they can expect

just what they are getting-nothing more.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, there was, during the first decade of the century, a clearer articulation of labour's representatives, and this was supported, if not led, by the skilled workers. Accompanying these developments were changes among the lives of skilled workers, outlined in the previous chapter -- more openness in the choice of marriage partners, residential segregation according to economic and social status, and membership in associations such as lodges that brought about increased social interactions with members of upper levels of society. Throughout this period, labour always harboured an element which would prefer to negotiate a solution to civic representation outside the polling booth, but this element was diminishing in effectiveness as time went on.

As socialist issues in civic politics, with its clearer vision of society, replaced the less distinct labourist politics, and the participation of less skilled workers increased just before the First World War, the influence of the labour aristocracy in Amherst diminished. At the same time its various forms of exclusivity began to break down. It continued, however, to function in maintaining labour's presence in town government and to prevent capital from taking total control of Amherst. The arrival of the machinists union in 1913, and their support of a short-lived Amherst Trades and Labour Council, was indicative of the decline of skilled labour's position and its inability to sustain its preeminence through traditional means of negotiations with the employer in the "ordinary manner."

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<sup>80</sup> Eastern Labour News 6 Feb. 1909.

Reilly indicates that by 1914 the labour movement in Amherst was in shambles.<sup>81</sup> It was during this period, however, that great distress occurred among the working class of Amherst. The only relief available was that provided by the middle and upper classes. The lack of labour militancy during this pre-war period may indeed indicate the death of a movement. Or, as Henry Pelling suggests of the craftsmen during the economically difficult Chartist period, a complex situation may only serve to conceal labour's real feelings. Rather than giving up on labour's cause, the situation demanded a moderate, and possibly misleading, response to the crises.<sup>82</sup> The election of 1914 provided labourers with clear choices between radical socialist and more conservative candidates. There is little to suggest that skilled labour, as a group, supported the socialist movement at this point, and the response of the middle and upper classes to the plight of the unemployed may have temporarily reinforced their decision.

Throughout the period of this study, despite the very active role labour took in civic politics, the issues rarely reflected issues critical to the working class. As David Frank notes of civic politics in Cape Breton and Elizabeth Bloomfield of politics in Ontario towns, the issues tended to be mundane, housekeeping matters, tinged with arguments over fair play. When labour did tackle the legislative issues of hours of work and safety, their petitions were dealt with by the provincial and federal parliament. This lack of direct legislative activity, however, does not diminish the importance of the civic political arena for the purposes of this thesis.

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<sup>81</sup> Reilly, "Class Consciousness" 233.

<sup>82</sup> Pelling 56

Clearly, the leaders of skilled labour succeeded in keeping the government of the town out of the hands of capital and maintained working class participation in community affairs.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of an upper stratum of the working class has been intensely explored by British historians, particularly since 1954 when Eric Hobsbawm began to develop the idea of a labour aristocracy. Initially, Hobsbawm's principal determinant in identifying an aristocracy of labour was economic. Since then he has softened somewhat on this element and has widened his definition to consider more strongly prospects of social security, condition and treatment at work, relation above and below his social scale, living conditions, and the possibility of advancement. These elements, as well as Henry Pelling's suggestion that the labour aristocracy were working class leaders, have been further explored and developed by Robert Q. Gray and Geoffrey Crossick.

In Canada, historians have discussed issues regarding skilled labour which explore many of the themes identified with the labour aristocracy in Britain. Curiously, though, only a few Canadian historians have been inclined to use the term at all. Why this is so is difficult to explain. The application of the term to workers in Amherst has, however, helped to clarify several points. It has allowed a method of exploration of a group of skilled workers who, because of their slowness to unionize, have sometimes been portrayed as docile or ineffective in their own struggle for unity.

The town of Amherst between 1891 and 1914 provides the theatre for this study. Established early as an industrial centre, manufacturers produced a variety of products. Principal among these were the rail car manufacturers and building contractors, Rhodes, Curry, and the stationary engine builder, Robb Engineering.

While this study focuses on Robb Engineering because of its large number of highly paid employees, many details of employment, apprenticeship and wages for the workers of Robb's are missing. Some revealing evidence about the composition of the workforce, however, does come through the town directories. For example, the machinists and patternmakers seem to be much more ethnically exclusive in their choice of workmates. While Acadians entered the metal trades in increasing numbers during these years, they seem only to have gained acceptance among the boilermakers and moulders. Machinists and patternmakers maintained an exclusiveness against Acadians until at least 1914. Membership in other organizations also indicate that Acadians were not always welcome in association with Anglo-Celts. This raises a variety of questions about ethnic biases in early twentieth century Nova Scotia, but that it occurred in such an extreme way among two groups of skilled workers suggests an effort at maintaining some social respectability through workplace exclusivity.

The inconclusive issue of the "Boy Problem" remains potentially useful in demonstrating the existence of a defensive type of aristocracy in Amherst. By the time the issue of large numbers of juveniles on the streets and in the factories arose in 1912, changes had occurred to suggest a decline in the strength of the labour aristocracy. These changes, such as the growing willingness of skilled labour to form linkages by marriage to families economically or socially below them, and the loss of influence in civic politics, suggest a decline in the overall status of an upper level skilled worker. If the problem of juveniles, particularly in factories, had not been an issue previously, it may then indicate that skilled labour had been reasonably

successful in restricting the number of juveniles in the workplace. It must be kept in mind, however, as Hobsbawm cautions, that this type of evidence can lead to other conclusions as well.

Among skilled workers clearer patterns emerge in the evidence of choice of marriage partner, property, and associational life. Based on all marriage records for the town in the years of the study, skilled workers, particularly machinists, displayed careful choices in their selection of families with whom to associate. From 1891 to 1908 the tendency was clearly toward making a "proper marriage" with a family that would have at its head a person with a good income and reasonable expectation of security. After this time, more unskilled and semi-skilled families are seen to unite with those of machinists.

An examination of residential development and choices regarding home ownership reveals evidence of the exclusivity of skilled workers in Amherst. From 1902 onwards, the West Highlands developed as a working class neighbourhood, but largely for unskilled labour and carpenters of varying skills. Skilled metal workers rejected this area as a place to live, choosing instead areas near the principal metal working factories, or among the clerks and middle class. This rejection of opportunity for association with workers generally less well off than themselves was most apparent, among the machinists and patternmakers. Also, in the evidence of actual ownership as opposed to renting, the machinists preferred a pattern of renting which has been identified by Richard Harris and Christopher Hamnett as being more usual among the middle class.

The association of skilled workers with clerks, managers and professionals was strengthened through their participation in fraternal lodges. Based on the membership lists of Ivy Lodge, No. 35, IOOF, membership is seen to rely heavily on skilled workers and middle class occupations. The benefits accruing to members were significant in the days prior to the availability of workers' compensation. Sick and death benefits were important to Victorians in their efforts to retain a respectable appearance in times of distress, and the lodge could guarantee these to its faithful members. Beyond this, lodge membership served through its language and organizational structure to strengthen fraternal bonds between its members. While these bonds were created within the lodge, there can be little doubt that they were exercised outside. The wide influences of these bonds among a membership such as that of Ivy Lodge, would further develop the relations of skilled workers with those above them. There would be little effect on their relationships with those below as unskilled labour was excluded from the lodge. The evidence of marriage, property and the lodge suggests the conclusion that a strata of workers with exclusive aristocratic tendencies existed in Amherst.

The scattered records of civic election campaigns reveals the effectiveness of skilled workers as leaders of the working class. In the absence of trade unions, this was one of the few available ways for workers to exercise any leadership tendencies. The evidence divides into three approximate periods. During the first period, from incorporation to 1900, skilled labour supported the fight for the right to vote through the leadership of the PWA. It was also willing to support candidates for labour who were themselves not workers. The developing political awareness of

the working class emerged in the form of labourist politics, which tended toward an undefined mixture of ideas.

In the second period, skilled workers led efforts to maintain a consistent opposition to the attempts of business to commandeer the civic government. The pattern which emerged during these years, particularly after 1905, was one of continuing negotiation for control of the town council between labour and capital. The participation of the skilled workers in this process was most evident in the elections when senior staff of Robb Engineering entered the contest. While not always successful in achieving electoral solidarity, skilled workers were successful in the sense that they kept labour's representatives on the council, and allowed labour's voice to be heard. In many ways, this was perhaps the greatest achievement of the labourist political effort, before they were replaced by the more focused socialist parties.<sup>1</sup> While issues dealt with by the council itself were generally mundane, they nonetheless were spoken to by labour's chosen representatives.

Just before the outbreak of the world war and as the exclusivist tendencies of skilled workers were declining, less skilled and socialist workers began to predominate in civic politics. Although they achieved little in the way of electoral success, they nonetheless appeared as a sign of things to come. The advent of a severe depression brought the working class literally to its knees. The question remains, however, if at this point labour acquiesced, or merely retired in the face of overwhelming odds, leaving the participation of the skilled workers to suggest a retrenchment to more conservative values.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," 75.

Indeed, during the general strike of 1919, the machinists at Robb Engineering demonstrated similar behaviour. While the majority of industrial workers in Amherst went on strike, the workers at Robb's, led by the machinists, returned to work the day after the general strike began. In his work on Amherst, Reilly attributes this breaking of ranks with the larger work force to the paternalistic policies of David Robb, and the weak economic position of the company.<sup>2</sup>

Given their aristocratic background which prevailed up to at least 1914, it is worth asking if some of their behaviour in 1919 could be explained in terms of independence and exclusivism.

While many of these conclusions must be tested and discussed in other contexts, the idea that a labour aristocracy existed in Amherst is helpful for understanding some of the nuances of the history of labour there. It may, in an expanded context, also allow some insight into other questions regarding the upper levels of labour. For example, was there possibly an aristocracy of labour in existence before 1891, when this study begins? Did a management controlled apprenticeship programme still allow skilled workers to develop a sense of their own solidarity as a craft? Did the skilled workers respond in a unified way to any process of deskilling? What was the relationship between labour's upper strata and those who entered independent business, such as small shopkeepers? Was there any distinction which historians may draw, between skilled labourers and foremen? It was during the first decade of the century when many of Amherst's skilled labourers

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<sup>2</sup> Nolan Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919" *Acadiensis* 11 (1980): 64 and "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: A Study of Amherst, 1891-1925," Diss., Dalhousie University, 1983: 249-250.

demonstrated several of the classic characteristics of a labour aristocracy. With few unions to rely upon, they kept alive a formal opposition to the forces of capital and business, while maintaining their own position in society through residential choices, and their associations in fraternal lodges. Marriage choices, however, indicate that after 1908, some loosening of the traditional exclusivist attitude toward the unskilled was beginning. While remaining difficult to identify at an individual level, some skilled workers nonetheless formed a group with identifiable characteristics which resemble those of labour aristocracies elsewhere.

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