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Obedience to the Majority: Perception and the American Flint Glass Workers' Union in Sandwich, Massachusetts, 1866-1888

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OBEDIENCE TO THE MAJORITY: PERCEPTION AND THE AMERICAN FLINT
GLASS WORKERS' UNION IN SANDWICH, MASSACHUSETTS, 1866-1888

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
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Accepted by:
H. Roger Grant, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

The Boston and Sandwich Glass Company closed its factory in 1888 after a bitter labor dispute. This study focuses on the perception of the workers by the press, Sandwich citizens, and themselves. The history of the union was similar to others in the nineteenth century. It began as a local organization and eventually joined the American Flint Glass Workers' Union, a national organization. Press coverage of the labor crisis tended to focus on the well-being of Sandwich as a community, generally blaming the AFWGU and the Manufacturers' Association for meddling in local community affairs. The workers and the company did not tend to be assigned responsibility for the crisis. Later authors tended to write about the incident as it was viewed in the popular memory of Sandwich. They generally portrayed the event as it was covered by the press, sympathizing with workers and blaming Pittsburgh interests for the downfall of the company.

This thesis aims to tell the story of the Sandwich glass workers and their union, and how the union played a crucial role in the collapse of the glass industry in the town. More specifically, it tries to explain how the union viewed itself and its changing status, and how the larger Sandwich community saw the workers, and how they were key factors in the crisis.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Michael and Paula Kelley

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my committee chair, Dr. H. Roger Grant. I would also like to thank Drs. Richard Saunders and Alan Grubb for assisting me through this process. I would like to give special thanks to Drs. Megan Shockley and Joanna Grisinger for their help as well. Without their tireless support, this study would have been so much less than what it is. I would also like to thank several members of the Clemson University faculty for their continued guidance throughout my five years here. Thank you to Steven Marks, Edwin Moise, Thomas Kuehn, Joseph Arbena, and David Nicholas. My experience at Clemson and my pursuit of history here would have suffered greatly without your collective presence. I owe all of my professors a great debt, which I fear I will never be able to repay. Thank you all for your support.

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INTRODUCTION

Perception is an important part of life. How a person or group of people is perceived can affect their actions, and it obviously influences the way others treat them. Many factors help in the formation of our perceptions of other human beings. What someone looks like, where they are from, the work that they do, or how they speak are just a few examples. Perception, however, is not rigid, and under the influence of outside forces, how a group of people is viewed can change over time. In the United States of the nineteenth century, great changes took place. Industrialization, commercialization, and urbanization came over the country like waves – and just as a wave can carry a person safely to shore or smash him on a rock, these transformations took people with them to prosperity or poverty. Skilled workers were viewed as more valued members of society than the unskilled, but often that was the only distinguishing factor. Skilled workers had to protect themselves against falling down the social ladder. Men and women who built comfortable, if not extravagant, lives for themselves and their families saw their jobs move to new regions. Some occupations even disappeared with the advent of new technology.

The focus of this study is on one such group of people. In 1888, Sandwich, Massachusetts, had been a center of glass production for over sixty years. Glassblowing required a great deal of skill and the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company paid the men who performed that task quite handsomely. Throughout the 1880s, though, firms based mostly in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, made inroads into Eastern markets and threatened the economic lives of the citizens of Sandwich, who all relied heavily on the factory for their

well-being. Some workers decided to head west in search of better jobs with higher pay and more security. Others decided to stay in Sandwich and try to weather the storm, hoping that they could continue their lives there somehow.

To that end, many of the skilled workers joined the glassmakers' union. Workers' associations had existed in Sandwich for several decades, but the most important union was the initial organization with a national scope. The American Flint Glass Workers' Union (AFGWU) first formed in 1876, and by 1879 it reached the Cape Cod village. The following ten years were marked by labor strife and the declining importance of Sandwich to the glass industry. The final crisis came early in 1888, when, fearing another strike, the company locked the glassmakers out of the factory. They would never be allowed to make glass for the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company again because the directors voted to close rather than give in to the union's demands.

The perception of the workers is the central theme of this study. That perception differed depending on how one looked at them. The company, union leadership, the press, the local community, and the workers themselves all had different points of view on the labor crisis at hand. The experiences of these groups affected how each viewed the members of Local Union 16 of the AFGWU, and thus influenced the outcome of events. These questions form the basis of each chapter. The first will delve into the history of the glassmakers' union in the Sandwich and the social lives of the workers, seeking to answer the question of why they organized into a union. What kind of life were they trying to preserve? What was their motivation for association? Chapter Two will look at the coverage of the crisis in local newspapers from Sandwich and Boston.

How did the press portray union members and their activities? How did the company and the directors come across? The final chapter will look at books written about the company and the industry in Sandwich and will determine what the lasting impressions of the workers and the union were. Why were these books written? What kinds of sources did they use? How did they portray the last days of the company? What do their works say about how the crisis was seen in the popular memory of Sandwich? The downfall of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company is a tragic story that belongs in the historiography of American labor and industrialization.

The two books that began the tradition of labor history in the United States were John R. Commons, et al., *History of Labour in the United States* and Norman Ware's *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895*. Published in 1918 and 1929, respectively, these two groundbreaking works set the standard for every author who followed them. They presented in detail the economic factors that contributed to the rise of the labor movement generally and the Knights of Labor and trade unions specifically. They discussed workers as voters, wage-earners, and economic actors. However, they did not examine social factors and implications of the changing economic landscape at length. Workers were seen merely as cogs in the larger machine of industrialization, and their status as members of different ethnic communities, or as men, women, whites, blacks, skilled, or unskilled were not viewed as necessarily relevant to their experiences as wage earners and were rarely mentioned. The notable exception is that Commons felt that the immigrant experience and assimilation were important in the creation of American exceptionalism. He did not distinguish between immigrants from different

areas and treated immigration itself as the key factor in their experience as workers. The authors also said nothing about the relationships between labor, capital, and the rest of the community. Only later, beginning in the 1960s, would these social factors come into play for historians.¹

One of the earliest American historians to address such issues was Herbert Gutman. In his various works, such as the essays collected in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America*, he confronted social questions directly. He claimed that his purpose was to examine “the ways in which the behavior of working people affected the development of the larger culture and society in which they lived.”² Of particular interest to him was the attitude of non-affiliated community members towards labor activity. That is, he wanted to investigate how individuals who were not industrial wage earners or owners of large factories reacted when factory workers went out on strike. He found that generally smaller communities were more willing to support striking workers against management than their big-city counterparts. This was due to the close relationship between workers and their community. In large urban areas townspeople were not as connected to most of the industrial workers, and they had other industries to fall back on in the event that one segment of the economy fell into disarray. Even if the other segments of the population in smaller communities – including shopkeepers, farmers, and

¹ John R. Commons, et al., *History of Labour in the United States* (New York, 1918) and Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895: A Study in Democracy* (New York, 1929).

² Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York, 1976) p. xii.

laborers – were not entirely sympathetic with the workers’ plight, they understood that the loss of a factory or shop could devastate a town.³

The relationship between factory workers and the larger community, especially those who could be considered social elites, is of vital importance to the study of any labor struggle. The perception of workers by elites, and how the workers feel they are viewed, shapes both groups’ actions. Many working-class individuals made it their life’s work to attain middle-class status and respectability, despite the common prejudices of people already in that class. Oftentimes those efforts came at the expense of another group, such as unskilled workers, new or different immigrants, or those with darker skin. Gutman pioneered the study of these relationships and found that they had perhaps the greatest influence on labor struggles. He also pointed out how elite perception of those underneath them was distorted by ethnic and class bias. These distortions often showed themselves in the observations of newspaper editors and journal writers. This forces historians of the present to look at accounts of class relationships and events, such as labor crises, with a critical eye. It is imperative to try to see through prejudice and ask why elites viewed workers and the working-class the way they did.⁴

An important addition to the literature came in 1961 in the form of Gerald N. Grob’s *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900*. Grob introduced the conflict in American labor between reform and trade unionists. Like Gutman’s work on the attitude of the local community, these concepts are central to the study of Sandwich. Reformists were those workers who

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

wished to establish a society of small producers and generally did not embrace the wage system. They viewed relying on a paycheck from a boss (or “master”) as denying oneself independence. Self reliance was the benchmark of citizenship in America since the early days of the republic, dating back to the idea of a nation of small, independent farmers. During the era of industrialization that notion fell by the wayside, but the idea of independence did not. The National Labor Union of the late 1860s and early 1870s had a reform agenda. After that movement failed, the Knights of Labor also incorporated much of that ideology into their organization, such as the establishment of cooperative ventures and a resistance to strikes because of their implicit recognition of the wage system. Grob even mentions the disparity between what the AFGWU wanted and what its supposed parent organization, the Knights, fought for as early as 1886.⁵

The Knights of Labor were investigated further in Leon Fink’s *Workingmen’s Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics*. Fink provides four case studies on the Knights, and how the organization mobilized workers politically. He also offers details about the public attitude toward labor at the end of the nineteenth century, saying that as unions became more militant, people began to distrust them. He points to 1877 and the violent events of that year’s Great Strike as the turning point, but indicates that matters only worsened throughout the 1880s and 1890s, peaking with the Haymarket Square incident in which eight policemen were killed by an anarchist’s bomb in Chicago.⁶

⁵ Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement 1865-1900* (Evanston, IL, 1961).

⁶ Leon Fink, *Workingmen’s Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Chicago, 1983).

In 1995 another work appeared that attempts to describe the downfall of the Knights and the switch to trade unionism. In *Industrializing America: the Nineteenth Century*, Walter Licht maintains that Samuel Gompers and his followers – eventually including the glassmakers – left the Knights after he became disenchanted with Terrence Powderly’s leadership. Powderly was much more of an idealist who focused on principles instead of bettering the lives of workers. The focus of Licht’s work was that terms such as urbanization and industrialization are often vague and not nearly as descriptive or accurate as they need to be to portray the dramatic changes that occurred in the nineteenth century. He proposed that the real change in America was a rise in commercialism, and the permeation of that concept across all aspects of life. Gompers and his followers viewed Powderly’s announcements as naïve, the strikes endorsed by the power structure as quixotic, and the movement into politics as foolish. The skilled workers of the United States were being held back by the masses who were allowed to join the Knights, and as a result workers such as Gompers formed their own, more exclusive union. The need for a strong union was critical for these artisans as a matter of economic security. Gompers and his followers were worried that by allowing blacks, women, and perhaps most importantly unskilled workers into the union, they were hurting the cause overall. Skilled workers would never be able to achieve respectability or middle-class status if they were not accepted by social elites and that would never happen if they continued to associate with socially undesirable groups. In essence, to

achieve a more privileged social status, Gompers felt it was necessary to be more elitist when considering potential union members.⁷

During the 1980s and 1990s numerous monographs were produced describing various industries and towns and how they changed over the course of the nineteenth century. Several focused on New England towns. One of the earliest such studies was *Mechanics & Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution* by Paul G. Faler. His description of the shoe industry in Lynn, Massachusetts, and the social implications of industrial and commercial changes is a model for similar micro-historical works. He made several observations that can also describe the situation in Sandwich and other industrial towns. As he traced the history of shoemaking in Lynn from the early republic, Faler noticed that masters and journeymen had once been united by their interests and only separated by ownership and command of capital. The two groups worked side-by-side in small shops until the middle of the century. Shop owners were no longer craftsmen; rather, they were merchants or others not directly involved with production. Manufacturers started making large profits and living more extravagantly. This withdrawal from the workplace and lavish lifestyle were really what drove workers and their bosses apart.⁸

Other notable works include Jonathan Prude's *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860*, and Daniel Vickers', *Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-*

⁷ Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1995).

⁸ Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany, NY, 1981).

1850. These books, published in 1983 and 1994 respectively, provide other examples of the drastic changes that occurred in the lives of workers in the Bay State during the nineteenth century. Instead of glass, these authors focus on textiles, farmers, and fishermen. Prude also examines rural industrialization in south-central Massachusetts, helping refocus the view of historians away from urban areas.⁹

One important study focused not on an industry in a small town, but the rise of industry itself in the nation's largest city. *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class* by Sean Wilentz details the economic and, more importantly, social changes wrought by the development of industrial production during the first part of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most important contribution of this work is Wilentz's concept of the "bastard workshop." The term refers to the rise of what are also called "manufactories" or industrial centers that used little to no labor-saving technology. Instead of investing in expensive and potentially unreliable machines, Wilentz points out, manufacturers broke down the production process into increasingly small units that required ever decreasing amounts of skill to perform. This turned workshops, once the bastion of the proud, skilled artisan, into places where common laborers performed mindless tasks for a pittance. This reduction of necessary skills, along with the creation of larger factories that made use of machines, reduced the level of job security for industrial workers. The abundance of available labor during the period was part of the impetus for the growth of unions. Such an organization provided a

⁹ Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts 1810-1860* (New York, 1983) and Daniel Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994).

modicum of protection, at least for skilled workers such as glassblowers, against the twin terrors of “bastardization” and mechanization, which workers saw as laying siege to their crafts and positions in society. If they were allowed to continue unabated, once-skilled workers would no longer be able to lay claim to a social standing above unskilled laborers. The most relevant issue Wilentz discussed was the reactions of the workers to their lost status. He showed how they viewed themselves, and how they felt they were perceived by manufacturers and factory owners. Workers took action to make sure they remained included in the democratic process by organizing themselves into early versions of unions and even forming a short-lived workers’ political party. They also reacted with violence in some cases, taking to the streets and rioting in protest of their lessened status.¹⁰

David Montgomery continues the examination of this trend in *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, in which he also examines the nature of the relationship between workers and their government. Montgomery is particularly useful because the first twenty-five years of the period he covers are the same as those in the study on Sandwich. A good overview of the labor movement after the Civil War, *The Fall of the House of Labor* looks at several industries across the country, including machinists and iron workers. However, he makes some of his most important contributions in his extension of Wilentz’s concept of “bastardization.” He indicates distinctions among common laborers, operatives, and skilled workers based on the nature of their work and their skill level. Each type was

¹⁰ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1986).

perceived differently by each other and by the non-working classes. Practicing a skilled trade was seen as being a productive member of society, while many common laborers were viewed contemptuously. Laborers worked in construction and mining as well as other physically intensive occupations, while operatives toiled in factories, utilizing the latest industrial technologies. Obviously skilled workers maintained the highest wage levels and had much more leverage in negotiations with capital.¹¹

Montgomery, like many of the other authors discussed above, focuses on how the workers perceived their loss of status as factories mechanized and broke down traditional shop techniques into unskilled tasks. They were threatened by this, viewing their positions as fragile and easily subverted. Workers so feared social diminishment that they organized into strong unions and attempted to slow, if not halt, further technological advancement. Unions were also used to try and prevent jobs from going to new immigrant groups or unskilled laborers. Union members were aware of their position in society and how other social classes, particularly elites and the middle-class, viewed them. Montgomery shows how workers and unions tried to advance their social position in his discussion of the iron workers union of Pittsburgh. The union charter made clear that members were to behave in decidedly middle-class ways, and that respectability was one of the key goals they were to achieve through the organization.

Montgomery provides important context for the Sandwich workers and their union. The factory in Sandwich employed each type of worker described in *The Fall of the House of Labor*; men who stoked the fires of the furnaces to melt the glass were

¹¹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: the Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York, 1987).

laborers, pressmen and some of the girls in the decorating department were operatives; and glass blowers were skilled craftsmen. He also notes that in discussing the labor movement in America, historians must be attuned to many different voices, be they racial, ethnic, gender, or regionally based. This is crucial to the study of Sandwich because of the significance of the workers in and around Pittsburgh, and what their experiences and interests were. They were not necessarily the same as those of the workers in the East. Montgomery also points out that some of the strongest bonds of solidarity, an important working class concept, were those of local neighborhoods. Montgomery's focus on social factors picks up where Herbert Gutman left off, in examining ties between workers and their communities, and at the same time it helps explain the actions of workers who were unwilling to move west in the hopes of better pay.

In his examination of iron puddlers and machinists, Montgomery discusses the workers' code of ethics and conduct, which would eventually become the foundation of the constitution of their union. These rules closely resemble those of the glassmakers, such as the concept of "manly bearing" and the treatment of fellow workers. The constitution of the Sons of Vulcan was written in 1866, at the same time as the first statewide glassmakers' protective association was formed in Massachusetts. Skilled crafts unions also managed to define for themselves what constituted a reasonable days' work and how the craft itself would be governed and passed on to the next generation.

These issues were important to workers, who needed a sense of control over their lives, and indeed, they were the very issues disputed in the conflict in Sandwich in 1888.¹²

Insight into the motivations of the union workers in Sandwich and an understanding of their conflict can be gleaned from the works of the other historians as well. This study will examine some of the press coverage of the crisis in Sandwich to gauge the level of public support received by the workers, the union, and the company. The section of the study dealing with the press will keep Herbert Gutman's work in the background to determine how Sandwich fits in with his thesis about the difference in community support in small and large industrial towns.

The American Flint Glass Workers' Union was affiliated with the Knights of Labor for the first decade and a half of its existence, but left to join the fledgling American Federation of Labor shortly after the events described in this study. Members identified much more closely with Samuel Gompers and his brand of "bread-and-butter" unionism as a way to achieve practical labor reforms. The clash between reformists and trade unionists played out in Sandwich with some workers deciding to start their own cooperative glass factory. Others decided to move on with their lives and search for jobs in the more lucrative western Pennsylvania and Ohio region. The proponents of the cooperative movement were reform minded workers, while those who accepted their lot as wage-earners were trade unionists. Gerald Grob's work helps explain the differences between the Knights and the AFWGU and why the latter organization left for the AFL after the events of 1888. Grob showed that there were at least two general ways workers

¹² Ibid., pp. 14, 17-20 and 204.

saw their situation at the end of the century. The reformists, represented by the Knights and the Sandwich men who founded the co-operative, saw themselves as independent producers who were on a par with management in the production process. Trade unionists, such as those in the AFL and most of the Sandwich glassmakers, had begun to view themselves as wage earners and accepted a subordinate role at the workplace in an attempt to achieve the goals of higher wages, better conditions, and respectability. Reformists did not think that a subordinate man could be a respectable one, and that was the main difference between the two approaches. At the same time, Leon Fink helps explain the change seen in glassmakers' unions in Sandwich between 1866 and 1888. In the immediate post-war period Massachusetts glass workers were intent on being transparent to the public, but by the time of their affiliation with the AFGWU these intentions were gone. The change in public attitude probably accounts for this at least in part.

A parallel can be drawn between Faler's story about Lynn and the one in Sandwich, although that is not the focus of this study. Deming Jarves founded the factory in Sandwich in 1826, and shortly thereafter the company was incorporated. Over the following three decades Jarves lost significant control and eventually left the firm to found the Cape Cod Glass Works. With that the managers of the factory became increasingly distant from the workers and the factory, in much the same way as the shoemakers lost contact with their own masters. That distance helped breed resentment, if not contempt, among workers. A shift occurred during this time as a result of that

distance. The glassmakers saw their position as important partners in the process whittled away, and unionization was an attempt to stop or even reverse that development.

Jonathan Prude's work also presents a good parallel when examining Sandwich. The towns of Oxford, Dudley, and Webster are similar to Sandwich in that they were not large urban complexes like New York or Boston. However, it should be noted that they differed from the Cape Cod town due to the existence of multiple manufacturers in each place. There were many textile factories in the area, as opposed to Sandwich, which had only one dominant local company. This is the main difference between Sandwich and other New England towns such as Lynn, Lowell, and Lawrence. Those communities usually had more than one factory of importance to rely on, even if they were all producing for the same industry. That fact did not stop the industries in question from leaving. Just as glass production was no longer viable in Sandwich at the end of the century and therefore the factory closed, so too did the cloth and shoemaking industries leave central Massachusetts due to competition from overseas and the New South. The uniqueness of Sandwich in this regard is the most important lesson to be drawn from this study. Workers had no viable options in Sandwich after the factory closed. If a firm shut down in Oxford or Lynn, there were other companies to which a craftsman could offer his labor. Does the one-factory nature of the town change the dynamic of a labor crisis? Do the theoretical frameworks established by earlier scholars such as Gutman, Montgomery, and Faler stand up under such conditions?

Perception greatly influenced industrialization and how people reacted to it. Workers saw themselves in a number of different ways. Some clung to the old idea of

the independent small producer, while others embraced the status of wage earner in an effort to better their position. Either way, unions represented a chance to protect workers against further subordination, degradation, and diminishment of wages and respect. Unions also developed as a means to maintain social standing and, as such, they instituted stringent rules against what was seen as disrespectful or unmanly behavior. Perception was key to workers, both for how they saw themselves and how they wished to be viewed by other members of the community. The press played a crucial role in shaping the perception of unions and workers, and in turn helped form the way events would be looked at in the future

HOW THE WORKERS SAW THEMSELVES

The way a group views itself is forged over a long period. To see how skilled glass workers in Sandwich perceived themselves and their situation, it is necessary to look at their past. Why did they think they needed to unionize? Why did they seek to join a national union? Were local unions unable to protect them sufficiently? The glassmakers were very proud, and felt that their craft and skills should be protected. Their union was powerful during the 1880s, and the workers became confident that their association could protect them from the intrusion of management. It is also important to examine how they felt they were looked at by other members of the Sandwich community, particularly the social elites. They tried to distance themselves from other workers of Irish stock in seeing themselves as more respectable, less dependent on alcohol, and more productive in society. For decades, glassblowers and their skilled associates in the factory had been trying to form a protective association. Those endeavors seem largely to have failed until the late 1860s, when glassmakers from throughout Massachusetts got together for protection. That group formed the basis of what was to become Local Union 16 of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union (AFWGU) in 1879. By examining the constitutions of the two organizations (the Massachusetts Glassmakers' Protective Association and the AFGWU), the workers' self-perception – and how it changed – becomes clearer. To get an even better picture, it is necessary to look at the lives of the men and the people of Sandwich to determine under

what circumstances the union came to be and why the workers felt it was necessary to unionize.

In 1866 workers in the Massachusetts glass industry formed a union to defend their interests. Delegates from eight different factories in the Bay State had met the previous year to devise a constitution and establish rules for the union. By the end of 1866 the United Glassmakers of Massachusetts became fully operational. The representatives from the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company were William Hobson, William Kern, and Thomas Dean. When these delegates brought the document back to Sandwich, no fewer than twenty-nine men attached their names to it, proving that the principle of union was strong on Cape Cod. The preamble to the constitution described the reasons why previous attempts at association among glassmakers had failed. Foremost among these reasons was “the inequality of those who formed them, through the want of an understanding of each other, in order that they may know how to govern the whole body.”¹ In other words the men had not reasoned as a group, but rather as representatives from individual factories. They had not understood, as the individuals forming this new union claimed to understand, that “Union is Power.” Yet the new union, like its predecessors would also fail to provide the security the workers sought. Part of the reason for this was an internal tension between reformist and trade unionist members. For example, the constitution described its members as free and independent men who had no master, but provided that it would work toward the betterment of both workers and management. Despite its lack of early impact, in Sandwich it would form

¹ Glassworkers’ Union file, *Constitution of the United Glassmakers of Massachusetts*, January 1865

the nucleus around which Local Union 16 of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union would be built twelve years later.²

The people of Sandwich had long understood the benefits of association. For years the glass workers had mingled with other citizens in fraternal organizations that successfully strengthened the ties between different social groups and families of the community. Organizations like the Odd Fellows, Ancient Order of Hibernians, Knights of Columbus, and Freemasons flourished in the tiny Cape Cod town during the years of the factory's existence. These groups had much in common with early labor unions. They performed a social function, allowing the members of the community and their families to get together. They also acted as social safety nets, with members taking care of deceased or incapacitated members' children or widows, just as the Massachusetts Protective Association would have done for injured or dead glass workers. Sometimes pioneer unions were nothing more than "coffin clubs," doing nothing but providing a wooden box for members after they died. According to the opening statement of the Protective Association Constitution, there had been several other attempts to unionize glass workers of New England. All failed, and there is no evidence that they existed other than this brief statement. But while there is little to no information on any of these early glass unions or why they folded, clearly it was not out of disdain for the notion of unionization itself.³

² Ibid., and worker cards from the Archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum

³ "Fraternity in Glass: the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Glass Community in Sandwich, Massachusetts," *The Acorn* Vol. 12, 2002 p. 99

The attitudes of workers in Sandwich changed dramatically between the post-Civil War era and 1888. In a mere twenty-two years the workers' association went from saying it was working for the benefit of themselves *and* management to saying nothing of the sort, and seemed to be concerned only with gaining short term benefits. At least eight individuals who signed the 1866 Preamble were present twenty-two years later and joined the branch of the new national union. Still, the change in outlook was dramatic. The difference between the two periods is revealed in the address to the working men in the earlier constitution. There it indicated that:

An association is itself only an instrument; it requires knowledge to direct its action, and must depend upon the intelligence that guides it, whether it be a benefit or not... [The Union's] aim and purposes are the moral, social, and financial advancement of every man among us, which we believe is the only true means of arousing confidence between us and our employers, and enabling us to meet them upon any question which may arise connected with the business in which we are engaged; and of settling matters upon terms far more agreeable and more calculated to promote the prosperity of each party, than by force of any kind.⁴

The union was only a tool, and without proper guidance it could be misused. Without intelligent leaders, the organization would be ineffective. The purpose of the union was to allow workers to meet on an equal footing with their employers in order to discuss all aspects of the industry, including wages, prices, and production. The union of the late 1880s would fall short in all of these regards largely because of the rapidly changing industrial landscape.

The Massachusetts glassmakers understood the common fears of workers' unions. They made their intentions clear to the public, stating that the workings of the union were

⁴ *Constitution of the United Glassworkers of Massachusetts* and worker cards from the archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum

not to be a secret and that they were “not afraid to declare their intentions to any one.” The glassmakers’ union would not be a hidden affair or a cabal setting out to fleece the public; indeed, the union charter stated that the organization sought to protect members and do no harm. This shows that previous efforts at association were met with this type of criticism and that certain segments of the wider population, such as social elites, viewed unions in such a way. The glassmakers sought to display this perception and set the record, as they saw it, straight. They viewed themselves as honest and hardworking and felt that the public should also look at them that way. The glassmakers tried to make sure the union would not be viewed as a greedy organization, claiming they wanted only justice, and that they recognized “the rights and claims of others,” meaning employers and consumers. The new union also took the offensive, attacking the idea that it would be a destructive or counter-productive member of society, and pointing out a common double standard among people who lament “combinations” of laborers and workers, while applauding the “associations” of others such as the owners of the factories for whom they worked.⁵

If the testimonies of the preamble and opening statements are taken at face value, then it can be said that workers strove to establish a system of equality between themselves and their employers. If the men were elevated to such a position, the entire industry in the region would be better off because each side would be protected. The workers would feel more comfortable dealing with management because they would not have to fear arbitrary wage cuts or other major changes. If the men educated themselves

⁵ Ibid.

in the ways of the entire business, they could understand the economics behind such cuts. As a result, owners would not have to fear strikes or an angry mob of ignorant workers. The individuals who established the protective association were not just trying to protect themselves or their families – they were attempting to protect the manufacturers as well. They understood fully that it took both sides to make the industry work. The men who signed the Preamble in the late 1860s were seeking to protect their craft for future generations of citizens of the Bay State.

The Union was governed by a charter, consisting of fourteen articles, some of which were further separated into sections. Most of the document dealt with bureaucratic details and was similar to other union documents of the period. Article III, for example, listed the duties of the various officers from president and vice-president to secretary and treasurer. Others noted requirements for entry into the Union or dues payments required by each factory's local organization. Dues could be returned to a departing member or the family of a deceased member, less actual expenses incurred for the organization. The articles also catalogued the various ways someone could be expelled.⁶

Following the constitution were the Rules of Order, which detailed the basic framework of each meeting of the Union. Generally the rules explained who could ask a question and when, but one went farther. Rule II stated in part that, “[n]o sectarian or political question shall be entertained at any meeting of the Society.” This reflected the trend in early unions to shy away from politics and to focus only on issues that related to work and workers. At the time, socialism and anarchism were brought to the United

⁶ Ibid.

States by European immigrants and were feared by large segments of the non-working classes. Saying the organization would not become involved in politics might have been a way to prevent such associations for union. This impulse also was seen in the actions of the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange, in the 1870s. Grangers became involved through heavy lobbying and endorsements, but never crossed the line into becoming a political party. Future unions would follow similar avenues, such as the American Federation of Labor and the American Railway Union, endorsing politicians whom they deemed to be friendly to the causes of the workingman. Some labor groups, such as the various socialist organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, involved themselves more directly in politics, either by running their own candidates or through political actions against capitalism.⁷

Glass workers of all types were some of the earliest industrial laborers to organize in the United States. Even though flint glass workers, window-glass makers, bottle glass producers, and other various workers had separate unions, they were bonded by almost identical job descriptions, wages, and working conditions. The development of the unions from each segment of the industry followed parallel lines. In 1877, the window glass workers' union started on the path to national scope when the local gatherers'⁸ association in Pittsburgh joined the fledgling Knights of Labor as Local Assembly 300. Cutters, flatteners, and blowers soon followed the gatherers. The gatherers were some of

⁷ For more on the Grange see Oliver Hudson Kelley, *Origin and progress of the order of the Patrons of Husbandry in the United States: a history from 1866 to 1873* (Westport, CT 1975), James Dabney McCabe, *History of the Grange movement, or the farmer's war against monopolies* (New York, 1969), and Solon Buck, *The Granger movement; a study of agricultural organization and its political, economic and social manifestations, 1870-1880* (Cambridge, MA 1913).

⁸ The gatherer took the molten glass from the pot in the furnace and did the initial blowing.

the first workers in the industry to unite because they tended to be paid lower wages and have less job security. Two years later, blowers and gatherers merged their unions as LA 300; by the following February they had also absorbed the local cutters and flatteners unions. It did not take long before the union claimed that it had successfully organized every window glass worker in America. While this was an exaggeration, there is little doubt that the organization had blossomed and spread its jurisdiction over most of the window-glass making factories. With that kind of reach the union regulated prices and output as well as negotiated for wages and hours. In 1885 the union extended the workers' annual summer vacation from two months to three, and in following years the length would be determined annually by a joint owner-worker committee.⁹

During the late 1870s and early 1880s manufacturers organized to counteract the growing power of the union. The Eastern Flint Glass Manufacturers' Association was formed as part of this counter-movement. Strikes in 1882, 1883, and 1884 helped to consolidate the power of the labor union. Then, in 1885, the union showed the true nature of its reach when, in an effort to curb the influx of new foreign workers into the industry, it organized a meeting of world glass makers. Representatives from Belgium, England, France, Germany, and Italy met with leaders from the United States and organized the Universal Federation of Window Glass Workers. It is unclear if this federation survived for long, but the fact that workers had united globally under one name, even if only briefly, suggests the organizational power of glass workers' unions.¹⁰

⁹ Pearce Davis, *The Development of the American Glass Industry* (Cambridge, MA, 1949) p. 127-130

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132

In 1866, the same year the Massachusetts Glassmakers Protective Association appeared, the first attempt at national organization occurred. Instigated by workers from a factory in Brooklyn, New York, the first-ever national convention of flint-lime glass workers gathered in Philadelphia. This shows that the center of the industry remained the Eastern seaboard, roughly in a north-south axis between Boston and Philadelphia. Local organizations, which were common in most Eastern glassmaking towns, sent representatives to the conference, but the meeting yielded no substantial results. Twelve years later another convention took place in Pittsburgh where several different craft unions unified under the banner of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union (AFGWU). The effort to nationalize the scope of organization and to affiliate with the Knights of Labor shows that glassmakers were beginning to view themselves as part of a larger movement in society. Workers from Sandwich did not join the new union at its founding, but before the end of the following year they became members of the AFGWU and the Knights of Labor. The union organized its branches by craft. This meant that chimney-shade makers, pressers, centerpiece makers, and others each had their own individual unions under the umbrella of the national association. Every branch had its own rules governing hours, wages, the apprentice system, and the length of the summer break, although many were similar.¹¹

In 1879, the AFGWU arrived in Sandwich. Local workers organized in January and by April they had received their union seal and constitution. The seal read: "Obedience to the Majority." The motto of the AFGWU was indicative of how union

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 155-156

leadership viewed individual members. While it was not a socialist or radical organization, the AFGWU believed that what was best for the majority of workers was best for *all* workers. The national leadership, made up entirely of Pittsburgh workers, viewed individual members, especially those working in the East, as expendable. Most of the glass workers in the 1880s lived in Pittsburgh and the surrounding area. The best interests of Sandwich glassmakers were of no concern to the union. Local Union 16 formed from what had been the Sandwich chapter of the Massachusetts Glassmakers' Protective Association (MPGA), which had been formed in the late 1860s. At least eight men who had signed the MGPA Preamble were members of the later union as well; these included Peter Swansey, born about 1843, who was a gaffer, or master glass cutter, at the Sandwich factory. For several decades his family had been associated with the community. His father had come from Ireland and his brothers Patrick and John worked at the factory.¹²

Swansey's experience and that of his family would not have been uncommon in Sandwich, as fathers passed the skills of glassmaking down to their sons. That is part of the reason why unionization was so prevalent in the industry, since fathers felt the need to protect the craft for their sons and other members of the next generation, preventing them from becoming laborers instead of skilled workers. Downward mobility was a real possibility and it threatened the lives that skilled workers had built for themselves and their families. Glassmakers, especially blowers, lived relatively comfortable lives, but

¹² Worker cards from the archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum

their position was tenuous. The skilled workers knew this and feared being grouped with unskilled laborers at the bottom rung of the social ladder.¹³

The new union, like others in glassmaking towns, received a copy of the AFGWU constitution. Representatives to the first national convention had conceived the document in 1877, so the Sandwich glassmakers had no voice regarding rules that would govern them in their lives as working men. Unlike its predecessor in 1866, the new document came with no lengthy statement of purpose or preamble discussing the history of the industry or labor's place within it. Instead, it was simply the "Constitution of the Local Unions of the American Flint Glass Workers Union." Each identical constitution began with a blank line where the number of the new local would be placed, in this case the number sixteen. The first article contained a straightforward declaration of objectives: "the elevation of the position of its members; the maintenance of the best interests of the Order, and all things appertaining to the business in which the members under its jurisdiction may be involved."¹⁴ The union, based in distant Pittsburgh, that new center of the American glass-making universe, now determined what was in the best interest of the workers of Sandwich. Obedience to the majority would be required, and in this case, that meant obedience to the whims and decrees of those in western Pennsylvania.¹⁵

Following the first article were sixteen others, discussed below. Article II designated who was eligible for membership. The document uses the term "workman," which instantly excluded the many women who labored in the factory as decorators.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Glassworkers' Union file, *Constitution of the Local Unions of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union*, Pittsburgh, 1880

¹⁵ Ibid.

However, any “blower, presser, finisher, foot-finisher, mould blower, prescription blower or gatherer” could be nominated for membership as long as he was at least eighteen years old and agreed to abide by the rules of the constitution and affix his signature. The only other requirement for eligibility was that he be “sober and industrious.” After an existing member nominated a man and he was accepted by two-thirds of the local members, he paid an entry fee of at least fifty cents (roughly \$10.10 in 2005 dollars). If, for whatever reason, the union rejected a man’s membership – and this was not out of the question, as it happened to Patrick Linehan and John Martin in Sandwich – all other locals were notified and that man was not allowed to be nominated again for at least three months. The organization was meant for respectable craftsmen with a skill that was useful to the industry and society. Anyone deemed disorderly, effeminate, or intemperate in any aspect of their life or work would not be allowed to join, as they would bring down the social standing of the other men by association.¹⁶

The locals were beholden to the national body. Article III listed the dues of each member as three cents every three months, to be paid to the Secretary of the National Union. Article IV noted the various officers required of each local, of which there were twelve (a significant increase since 1866). Article V outlined the basic duties of each officer. The recording secretary had an especially interesting job within the union hierarchy. He had to be ready at a moment’s notice to deliver his books and records to the national office for inspection and to report all matters to Pittsburgh that may have “interest to the trade.” Essentially he was required to reveal the goings on of his fellow

¹⁶ Ibid. The AFGWU did accept Patrick Linehan two years after his initial denial.

local members and the state of his factory so that the national union could remain informed of the status of the glass industry throughout the country. It would be of interest to leaders of the national union to know, for example, that fuel prices or shipping costs had increased in a glassmaking region. Pittsburghers could take advantage of these types of occurrences by positioning themselves to take over a greater share of the market. Also of note is one of the duties of the inspector. He was to “receive the password” from anyone trying to attend the meeting. This seemed to be a far cry from the Protective Association’s policy of openness and a turn to the secrecy that made laypeople unsure of where to stand on the labor movement. Why would the union change switch positions so diametrically? One possible answer is the influence of the Knights of Labor, which had started as a secret organization. The National union dictated the new policy to Local 16, so it is unclear how the Sandwich workers felt about it. The union leaders feared that information disclosed at public meetings could be used against them by management. Even private meetings could be infiltrated by company spies, so the union had a right to be suspicious.¹⁷

The specifics continued: Article VI laid out the procedure for electing officers every six months, in December and June, with the new officers replacing the old at the first meeting of the following months. Article VII dealt with the installation of new officers. Article VIII briefly described the two types of meetings, stated and special. And article IX dictated to new members that no local could go on strike unless it met the standards of the National Union. There was no hint, however, of what those

¹⁷ Ibid.

standards may have been. Upon the sanctioning of a local strike by the national body the secretary was to write a statement of “the facts” and send it to all member unions so they could know what their industrial brothers faced. Local members thus gave up some of their independence for the perceived extra security provided by the national body.¹⁸

Article X explained how each member of the union was to act to all others. They were required to be “punctual” and attend all regular and special meetings unless they had a good excuse. The union also forbade vulgarities against fellow members and from bringing general offense to them through personal insult or physical injury. A first offence against this rule brought a warning, but subsequent instances of the “unmanly use of such language” would result in exile from the current union meeting. Drunkenness at meetings was not tolerated. Most offenses against the rules carried with them fines of varying amounts. For being drunk, a member was charged one dollar. The amounts doubled for any further such occurrences. These fines were not small by any means.¹⁹ The workers viewed themselves as respectable members of society, and wanted their union to represent them as such. They did not want to be seen as lowlifes, drunks, or unruly citizens in the eyes of the community. Behavior that would cost them respectability was therefore punished heavily, both with fines and the prospect of expulsion from the brotherhood. If the secretary failed to submit the required reports to the national headquarters, the national union fined him three dollars. This indicated that the AFGWU valued bureaucratic efficiency as well as temperance and virtue. Of course,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ According to <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/compare/result.php>, this figure can be converted in several ways with dramatically different figures. Using a comparative price index, one dollar in 1879 would be roughly equal to \$20.20 in 2005. Using the conversion for relative share of GDP, however, that same 1879 dollar would be worth \$1,330.75 in 2005.

if one assumed the duties of secretary, he would know what was expected, and was rightly responsible for any penalties he incurred for tardiness. But it points to the increasingly bureaucratic nature of the union itself, and how it seemed to care more about running a tight ship than helping individual workers. It is true that a sloppy union would be of almost no use to members, but it is clear that what the union felt was best would take precedence over the well-being of a single member, or even an entire local, such as the one in Sandwich.²⁰

The bureaucratic nature showed itself further in the committees that the locals were to establish upon admittance to the national union, described in Article XI of the constitution. The previously mentioned Factory Committee aimed to guarantee the good relations and conduct between men while at the factory. An Auditing Committee made certain that the reports issued by the secretaries and treasurer were accurate and devoid of fraud. These were the only two standing committees, but the union created temporary bodies as it saw fit. Among these were the committee of men intended to wait for the return of General Manager Spurr at his office while he was away during strikes, such as in 1885 and 1888, and the committee in charge of preparing the annual union ball. Committees were used to show the orderly nature of union and workers; besides having specific functions, they combated the notion that they were unruly or uncontrollable and that they fit in neatly with the rest of the population. The union tried its best to demonstrate that glassmakers were more similar to farmers (who started the Grange) and other respectable occupations than to lower class immigrants with which they had more

²⁰ *Constitution of the Local Unions of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union*

in common in terms of nationality or religion. The constitution required all men to assist the officers and committees in any way they could, ensuring the smooth flow of business at every level of the union hierarchy. This may have been an effort to demonstrate the professional nature of glassmaking, joining it to other occupations that were emerging in the late nineteenth century, such as lawyers, physicians, economists, and historians. Establishing such a hierarchy could have separated glassmakers from laborers without sacrificing any traditional rules; again, in other words, it was a way for the union to recast its image in the public eye without changing much at all.²¹

Article XII explained that each member was expected to pay dues to the union every month. After three consecutive months of failing to pay, a member was suspended without benefits until he wrote a letter of re-application to a special committee whose job it was to investigate the case. Members then took an up-or-down vote to decide their suspended brother's fate after the matter appeared before the whole body of the local. A simple majority and the payment of an unspecified sum of money to the union were all that was required for reinstatement. The democratic nature of union locals demonstrates that glass workers viewed themselves as members of a republic, where each man's opinion mattered as much as that of any of his peers. This showed the rest of the community that if a glassmaker got out of line, the union would deal with him harshly. The organization would not permit such people to stay in the brotherhood, because only respectable men were allowed into the union. Local members could not change the rules and laws of the union at their own leisure. Amendments were only made at meetings of

²¹ Ibid.

the national body, and even then only when two-thirds of present members agreed to any proposed changes. It is unclear what, if anything, was altered in the constitution between its adoption by Local 16 in 1879 and the eventual collapse of the company many years later. The perception the workers had of themselves as citizens and important members of a republic was obviously belied by the fact that they could not decide for themselves what rules were fair for their unique local situation.²²

Fraud against the union was taken seriously, as was illustrated in Article XIV. Any man found to have committed fraud or to have assisted another in so doing could be immediately discharged from the order. If a man who was receiving union benefits while supposedly sick or injured was found to be gambling his compensation away or spending it on alcohol, he could be similarly punished. The same went for an individual who was discovered to be receiving benefits while actually earning a wage. Almost four pages of the eighteen-page constitution were dedicated to describing what constituted fraud and outlining the punishments of those so charged. This indicates perhaps that fraud was widespread among unions in the nineteenth century, at least common enough that large labor associations had to be so explicit about the problem, but also it was a way for the union to portray its rank-and-file as respectable citizens. Fraud fell into the category of “unmanly” behavior, but it also injured fellow members financially, and thus was to be treated harshly. While most men only sought to practice their craft for a reasonable wage and in a safe environment, obviously there were some who took advantage of the cooperative insurance systems that unions provided in the nineteenth century. This harmed

²² Ibid.

other members financially, essentially stealing paid-in dues, but also socially. If glassmakers became known as a group that committed fraud and stole from people who were supposed to be their brothers, their status and stature in the rest of the community would be injured. This was a serious matter, for with their position already rather tenuous, they had much to lose in reputation.²³

That was exactly what the unions tried to do for their members, that is, provide a safety net. Industrial work in nineteenth century American was dangerous, and more often than not companies did not see to it that an injured or deceased worker's family received support when the breadwinner could no longer work. Oftentimes the only way an injured worker could receive compensation was through the legal system, and even that did not work in his favor. Under common law, industrial workers were said to have assumed the risk, and therefore would not be compensated for injuries. Article XV of the AFGWU constitution described the benefits that a family would have upon the death of a loved one who was a glass worker. Strangely, the place where there should be a figure is a blank line, which could mean that each member union determined locally how much it would pay out in benefits, or that it varied from year to year, or even that it depended on the job that the worker in question performed. This was vastly different from the earlier version of death benefits seen in the Massachusetts Protective Association constitution. A family would receive the worker's paid-in money, minus a sum for the costs incurred by the union itself. This change may have been a way for the union to keep more money

²³ Ibid.

in its coffers for strike funds, because walk-outs were becoming more frequent as the century drew to a close.²⁴

The penultimate article, Article XVI, contained four sections but is most important because it called for union members to work stridently to achieve closed shops²⁵ at their factories. Not only did it implore members to “endeavor to establish and make permanent the same, and use all honorable exertions to secure employment for any member of this Order in preference to all others,” but union members were to assist only one another at the workplace. Section One of Article XVI read:

No member in any factory shall render any assistance or loan his tools to any workman who persistently refuses to become a member of this Order; or who refuses to pay up his arrears to the same; or who uses his influence to disorganize his fellow workmen, and make it difficult to carry on the objects of this Order.²⁶

This was not an open plea for intimidation of non-union workers, but it came close.

While members were not to hurt each other at work, either physically or in terms of job security, it seemed that the union wanted them to undermine the standing of all unorganized workmen and root them out of the factory. Solidarity seemed a long way off. Solidarity among the union members was one thing, but it clearly did not extend to other laborers in the factory. Union members thus not only separated themselves from manual laborers, but from non-union glassmakers as well. Independent workers were not hated or excluded, because any skilled worker was welcome to join the organization. But

²⁴ Ibid. and Julian Go III, “Inventing Industrial Accidents and Their Insurance: Discourse and Workers’ Compensation in the United States, 1880s-1910s,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Autumn, 1996) p. 401-402. Also see Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* p. 209-210 for more details on the assumption of risk doctrine.

²⁵ A closed shop was a factory that employed only union workers. Unions sought this reform in several ways including negotiating with management and intimidation of non-union workers.

²⁶ *Constitution of the Local Unions of the American Flint Glass Workers’ Union*

until they joined the ranks of the union, they were discriminated against quite overtly. Unity was important in the struggle against management, and therefore any non-union member was seen as a threat to the well-being of members because their presence could damage strike efforts and the bargaining power of the union. Skilled workers who refused to join the union were seen in fact as traitors and, as such, viewed as more of an enemy than the company itself. These independent workers, ironically, embodied some of the values that the union itself espoused – independence, hard work, and self-reliance. The union, however, saw these men as the ultimate threat, and endeavored to eliminate them from the workforce.²⁷

Article XVII, the final provision, gave powers to the local union chapters. Mainly they were able to create by-laws, but only in so far as they did not conflict with the rules of the national union or constitution. Following the final article was a list of the order of business for each union meeting. Roll call, reading of minutes, new candidates, old and new business, dues and fines, and election of any new officers were the main points that the locals went over every month.²⁸

Although the two constitutions resulted in similar organizations, in some regards they were quite different. Most notably, the AFGWU document stressed the bureaucratic nature of the union. The earlier charter seemed to be based on traditional shop rules and values. These were long-established customs or rules of thumb that glassmakers lived by. While not absent from the subsequent version, these rules formed the basis of the members' working lives for some time, and thus appeared to have a larger impact in the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

late 1860s. Also, the national scope of the AFGWU may have precluded that kind of focus, as conventional rules-of-thumb could differ from one factory to another. The efforts by glassworkers echo those of iron puddlers described by David Montgomery in *The Fall of the House of Labor*. He pointed out that the unions often controlled many aspects of the process of production, such as wages and output levels. The parallels between the two occupations do not end there, as the union structures were quite similar.²⁹

Montgomery makes another important point when discussing the machinists' union. The workers, he notes, were beholden to certain moral imperatives, one of which was that they were to maintain a "manly bearing" toward each other. This meant standing up for fellow employees and making certain other workers were aware how much one was paid so as to avoid unfair discrepancies.³⁰

The idea of manliness was of utmost importance to skilled craftsmen in the nineteenth century, though this concept was drastically changing. Anthony Rotundo explains: "If a man was without 'business,' he was less than man."³¹ What a man did for a living was extremely important to his social status. Wage earners of all types therefore had to fight against the perception that they were less manly because they did not own the means of production and relied on someone else for their well-being. This explains the rules against intemperance, gambling, and vulgarity found in the glassmakers' constitutions, which betrayed their concern of how they were viewed by the town's elites

²⁹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: the Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York, 1987) pp. 17-20

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205

³¹ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993) pp. 168-169

whose respect the desired. If all glassmakers were seen as lazy, dependent drunks, their social standing would fall to the level of common laborers; they themselves wished to be grouped with skilled workers, and eventually rise to a middle-class status. The union was therefore a means not only of maintaining economic security, but of social security as well. The glassmakers were fighting to keep wages high, to retain their standing in the community, and to prevent their being grouped with common laborers, who did much of the work at the factory. If the process of mechanization continued and all skill was taken out of the glassmaking process, blowers and other artisans would fall precipitously down the social ladder. At the bottom were laborers, then the glassmakers, while at the top were farmers, shop keepers, and management. By establishing and enforcing strict rules of behavior, the members of the union tried to separate themselves from lower class men who engaged in physical labor. This was necessary largely because there was no other way to distinguish themselves from the laborers, who, like themselves generally descended from Irish stock.³²

David R. Roediger discussed this concern in his book *The Wages of Whiteness*. He wrote that Irish workers struggled to ascend to the status of white, masculine, and middle-class, and once they were able to do that they also had to fight to make sure they did not backslide to an inferior position in any of those categories. Interestingly, Gail Bederman pointed out in her work on race and gender that during the 1880s middle-class men themselves often adopted certain behaviors and actions commonly associated with a working-class ideal of manhood. This seems as though it would have been paradoxical to

³²Ibid.

workers of the period. At once they would have been glad to have their actions finally seen as masculine after decades of being derided by social elites, but at the same time they would have felt that their individuality and uniqueness was under attack. That said, the overpowering feeling would likely have been relief, because they would no longer need to feel guilty about going to the pub, saloon, or boxing match because they could no longer be called uncivilized or unmanly for it. While their status as skilled workers was being assaulted on one front, their whiteness and manhood was being affirmed on another. It was no simple matter of being one and not the other, because there were many ways by which whiteness, masculinity, class were measured.³³

Between 1866 and the 1880s, the American labor movement changed greatly. Immediately following the Civil War, associations were formed with the intention of reforming society so that the local producer would be the basis of social and economic organization. The National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor both followed this path. They believed that the interests of all people were the same, and they therefore espoused the ideal that employers and workers could work together to create a better society. This type of thinking is seen clearly in the early Massachusetts Protective Association Constitution and Preamble. Glass workers thought that by improving themselves they could also better their industry and everyone involved in it. They also did not completely accept the wage system, and continued to think of themselves as

³³ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1996) and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1999).

independent artisans rather than wage workers. Twenty years later, however, this was no longer the case for most of workers in Sandwich.³⁴

Even though the American Flint Glass Workers' Union joined the Knights of Labor at its inception, it behaved more like a later trade union in that instead of resisting the developing capitalist structure, it fought for the immediate betterment of its members through higher wages and better working conditions; in fact, the AFGWU would soon leave the Knights to join the fledgling American Federation of Labor. AFGWU members largely accepted that they were not independent workers and depended on wages provided by capitalists. In this they differed strongly from the Knights. Terrence Powderly, second head of the Knights, said that the organization meant to "supersede" the wage system, and that it was their goal to make each man his own employer. He did not approve of strikes or collective bargaining, which he thought only entrenched labor deeper into an unjust system. This difference represents the most likely reason for the departure of the AFGWU from the Knights in favor of the American Federation of Labor shortly after the 1888 strike. The AFL held an ideology similar to that of the glass workers.³⁵

On the national level, the glassworkers union participated in both strikes and collective bargaining in an effort to bring about higher wages, price controls, and improved working conditions. This represented a broad shift in American labor toward acceptance of the wage system and subordinate status for workers, as well as of the

³⁴ Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A study of ideological conflict in the American labor movement, 1865-1900* (Evanston, IL 1965) pp. 8-10, 12-13, and 34-59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44

abandonment of the social reform agenda of earlier movements.³⁶ The American Federation of Labor was the key organization involved in this shift, representing unions such as cigar rollers and miners, among many others. On a local level this was not always the case, however. Several of the workers from the Sandwich factory launched a co-operative glass company. The co-operative movement was an important part of the Knights of Labor agenda in the early to mid-1880s, and obviously this spirit had not died out completely. The shift to trade unionism on a national level while some, perhaps many, local workers retained a reform-based outlook helped doom Local Union 16 and the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company.

The history of the union itself is an important part of understanding the strike of 1888, but another piece of that puzzle involves the people who worked in the factory and made up the union. Immigrants made up a large portion of the workers who joined the union. At least nine of the twenty-nine documented signatures on the Protective Association Preamble in the late 1860s were those of foreign-born individuals. Four others were the sons of immigrants. The rest were either at least third generation Americans or the evidence is unclear. What is clear, however, is that even though there was a strong anti-immigrant movement in the United States in the nineteenth century, glass workers of Sandwich were able to get along within their labor organization. To some degree the reason for this that part of the tradition of craft unionism came from Europe, and, in the case of glassmakers, particularly from the British Isles. Most workers

³⁶ See Grob and Walter Licht.

at the factory were either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, and most of those individuals had been recruited in Ireland and England, traditional centers of glassmaking in the Old World. During the early nineteenth century these men and women helped the Boston area become a significant rival to England in the glassmaking industry. These craftsmen not only brought over their expertise in the art of crafting objects out of glass, but also their ideas about craft solidarity, which greatly helped the union movement.³⁷

Immigrants were an excellent source of labor for glass manufacturers. In the early days it was mostly European glassmakers who had the requisite skills for establishing factories in North America. Yet, well into the century, even well-established firms, including the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, recruited foreigners for their skill and their lower wage demands. Europeans could make much more money as glassmakers in America than they could in their home country. Still, American manufacturers were able to pay them less than they would American-born craftsmen because European wages were much lower. This was important because for much of the nineteenth century glass workers in America earned substantially higher wages than their counterparts in other industries. After the Civil War, however, skilled glass workers saw the difference decline as their already high wages were not adjusted for post-war inflation. Wages in the East tended to be lower than those in the West due to the higher costs of fuel once companies began using coal and natural gas that were abundant in the Pittsburgh and Toledo areas. When workers learned about this, they inclined to head

³⁷ Worker cards from the Archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum. For the impact of European traditions on the glass unions of America see Davis, *The Development of the American Glass Industry* p. 271

west in the hopes of making a better life for themselves and their families. Like their cohorts in other industries, particularly railroading, glass workers moved from factory to factory, their movements frequently the result of the regional differences in wage levels and other workplace conditions. This was all much to the chagrin of Eastern employers who had paid most if not all of the expenses for a skilled worker to come to America only to learn that they were unable to keep this new hire from seeking better wages elsewhere. This was not always the case, however. One author indicates that many workers did not learn about the potential for higher wages in the West until it was too late, and because of family ties or general inertia they were unwilling to move again. Whatever the case, some workers left when they found out about better opportunities elsewhere, while some did not. One could put this another way by saying that workers who viewed themselves as glassmakers first often left, while those who stayed thought of themselves as citizens of Sandwich first.³⁸

European immigrants emphasized the importance of maintaining a skill as a worker and not becoming relegated to the status of an unskilled laborer. As a result, the union did not allow press workers to become members, as they were viewed as mere machine operators for a long period in the nineteenth century. The perception was that pressers were different than traditional blowers because of their lack of skills. By the 1880's, however, pressing had become such a dominant part of the glassmaking landscape that there was almost no choice but to admit pressers into the union and to

³⁸ Warren G. Scoville, "Growth of the American Glass Industry to 1880," *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 52, No. 3, (Sept. 1944) pp. 212-214 and Davis, *The Development of the American Glass Industry*, pp. 89-90, 120 and Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built*, p. 250. Regarding the movement of glass workers from region to region, Scoville argues that they were far more likely to do so than other industrial workers, but the issue is by no means settled in his article.

argue for wages equal to those of other workers. According to the worker cards found at the Sandwich Glass Museum at least two pressers, John Swansey and Thomas Dean, belonged to Local Union 16 of the AFGWU during the 1880's. In fact, Dean was one of three representatives from the factory who signed the preamble. No doubt some of the individuals listed as glass blowers, glass makers, or simply workers were press operators.³⁹

What this shows is that, at least in Sandwich, a factory known for its pressed wares, pressers were accepted as bona fide glass makers and artisans as early as 1865, if not before. In Sandwich it is likely that machine operators would have been accepted earlier because it was one of the first glass factories to make pressed items. After years of being shunned by the union, press workers were finally accepted as true glassmakers when it became clear that mechanization would remain a big part of the production of glass. Glassmakers therefore also had to accept the idea that they were similar to other Irish workers in the town who performed menial, unskilled jobs. By allowing pressers to join, the union clearly thus drew a line between glassmakers and everyone else in the factory, but it benefited the union in that greater numbers created a stronger negotiating position against management.⁴⁰

³⁹ Worker cards from the Archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum

⁴⁰Ibid. For the rise and eventual acceptance of press workers see p. 156 and Scoville, "Growth of the American Glass Industry to 1880," pp. 213-214. Pressing had originated in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, contrary to early common belief that it was a purely American innovation. It was not, but the Sidell press was, and that was what most firms were using in the 1880s. Pressing allowed for a vast increase in production, especially of tableware which is what Sandwich made the most of. Instead of blowing molten glass into a mold or shaping it on the end of the blower's rod, it would be placed on a machine and pressed into the desired shape. This allowed for the mass marketing of nice glassware. The pressed pieces were generally not as shiny and pristine as blown ones due to the glass coming into contact with the metal mold, but some of the shine could be recovered during a reheating process.

Glass workers were similar to other early industrial employees in various ways. Perhaps one of the largest unifying themes across the spectrum of labor history is the resistance of workers to technological innovations. During the first eight decades of the nineteenth century glassworkers had benefited from increased workplace stability and a shortening of work hours. These positive changes were built on the backs of labor saving technologies that resulted in the lessening of the skills required to be a glassmaker. For years being a glass blower was a respected position because it required a high degree of skill to be able to manipulate the molten material and handle the special tools of the trade. But after the introduction of industrial pressing, the blowers' skills became increasingly unnecessary. Wages accounted for huge percentages of the glass companies' gross expenditures, in some cases reaching up to sixty percent, so the press was a godsend to manufacturers who could hire unskilled or semi-skilled laborers at much lower wages. At the same time, press molds could be used many more times than could blow molds and the process was much quicker, which resulted in being able to produce thousands of identical pieces for mass consumption.⁴¹

The factory at Sandwich used pressing at an early stage. Deming Jarves, founder of the company, had been the agent for the New England Glass Company where the system was first perfected in America. The use of the press allowed Jarves to set up a large glass house employing around sixty men instead of just a handful of master blowers. At first blowers and other traditional glass workers shunned pressers as unskilled laborers, who did not enjoy the respect of craftsmen and unable to command

⁴¹ Scoville, "Growth of the American Glass Industry to 1880," pp. 200, 204

the same wages. By the 1880s, however, the once-spurned press workers had become welcome, and probably necessary, components of the AFGWU.⁴²

Like all industrial enterprises, glassmaking was undergoing a great deal of change during the post-Civil War period. These changes affected employees of the Boston and Sandwich Company and their union. Traditionally there were about four to six workers involved in making a piece of glass. This group was known as a shop. Positions within shops sometimes went by different names, but generally the jobs were as follows: the gatherer took the gob of molten material from the pots in the furnace on the end of a long blowpipe. The servitor did most of the preliminary work, shaping the piece in a general way. The middle boy reheated the glass. The batboy added small pieces that were difficult to craft such as handles. The head worker or gaffer did intricate shaping work. The taker-in boy received the finished piece on a wooden handle and brought it to thelehr where it moved slowly across a conveyor belt from an area of high temperatures to one of much lower temperatures that resulted in a sturdy piece of glass. Then the item might go to the decorating department, which was broken down into etching, engraving, and cutting sub-departments. Etchers put items in acid baths after placing a wax pattern over them that would subsequently be burned into the surface. Engraving entailed the digging of pictures into the glass with small copper wheels. Cutting, probably the most skilled decorating procedure and the one most often done by men, involved scoring deep geometric designs into the glass using large wheels made of iron.⁴³

⁴²Ibid., pp. 215-216

⁴³George Avila, *The Pairpoint Glass Story* (New Bedford, MA 1978) p. 14 and Frederick Irvin, *The Story of Sandwich Glass and Glassworkers* (Manchester, NH 1926) pp. 66-69

The factory did not just employ people who worked directly on the glass articles to be sold to customers. Other individuals were necessary to keep the company operating on a daily basis. There were obviously clerks who kept track of payroll and orders, coopers to make vessels for shipping, engineers to keep the furnaces working properly, and pot makers to construct the large pots in which materials were melted down in the initial glass-making process. Along with young children, people who held these positions were not considered for union membership, for, again the association tried to differentiate between glassmakers and other workers. Clearly a clerk or a barrel maker did not fall into this category. Decorators were also excluded for a number of reasons. First, many were young women, and one of the purposes of the union was to maintain the manly behavior of its members. Second, although cutters were allowed, since they were skilled craftsmen who worked with a traditional set of tools just like the blowers, other decorating jobs fell more into the category of operator; the union did finally allowing press workers to join, but they would not extend the invitation to other operators who only finished products but did not create them.⁴⁴

Around 1870 many glass houses began experimenting with new ways to organize the traditional shop in order to become more cost effective. The shop system was changed so that multiple blowers would be used on each finished piece of glass, which meant that gaffers lost a good deal of authority over the small groups of workers. Instead of shops being headed by a gaffer or master blower with several people working under him, shops instead were composed of several blowers, each of whom worked on one

⁴⁴ Worker cards from the archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum and Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*.

specific part of each item and reported to the plant manager. The result was an increase in overall worker output.⁴⁵

This is an early example of what would come to be called Scientific Management and, later “Taylorism” after Frederick Winslow Taylor. Each blower would do a specific job on a part, meaning he lost the ability to create a whole piece on his own. Blowing still demanded skill, but the set of skills required of a glassmaker diminished on an individual level. Other important innovations included changes in the design of furnaces and ovens to make better use of certain fuels and the introduction of a cheap and effective formula for lime glass. The Sandwich factory had long made flint glass products. Flint had been used in the formula for the molten glass and resulted in a particularly shiny item. But flint was expensive, so manufacturers had been trying for years to invent a less costly formula that resulted in similar end products. Lime glass resembled flint, but it was made with lesser quality materials that cost less. Lime also hardened much faster than flint which effectively forced the workers to speed up and produce more goods in the same amount of time. The union endeavored to protect the workers against speed-ups and over production, which workers viewed as harmful to the industry because it led to lower prices, they saw their position deteriorating. They feared that they would become obsolete, and that the lives they had built for their families destroyed. All the changes taking place in the factory caused no small degree of anxiety among workers, which understandably provided greater impetus to join the union and keep it strong in the face of potential adversity and transition. When the company tried to institute such changes,

⁴⁵ Scoville, “Growth of the American Glass Industry to 1880,” pp. 206

union members saw these innovations not just as an assault on the traditions of their industry but an assault on how they perceived themselves. For they saw themselves as skilled workers maintaining the institutions their fathers handed down to them, and hence any changes to those institutions, like the make-up of the traditional shop or the way a batch of glass was composed, they viewed as assaults on the manhood and character of the workers themselves.⁴⁶

The glassmakers in Sandwich thus found themselves in a fight against the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, but also against the glass industry itself. The company had to do whatever it could to stay competitive at a time when that was becoming increasingly difficult to do so while paying high wages to skilled workers. The directors desired to take back control of their business, which ruffled the feathers of the union members who, for a long time, had set most of their own rules at the factory. Having founded the union to help them in that fight, they came to feel that not even a mere union could save them – they needed a bigger organization, comprised of multiple factories, and eventually, the entire industry. The union was formed out of fear. The men were afraid their factory would close, forcing them to relocate. Without an organization to protect them they worried that the company would take advantage of them, cut their wages, and possibly even hire replacement workers. Were that to happen, it would mean that they would lose

⁴⁶Ibid. This resembles the situation at many shops in New York City during the mid-nineteenth century described Sean Wilentz as “bastard workshops” in *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984) pp. 108-119. These manufactories (not factories) were characterized by intense division of labor, rigorous work schedules, and an utter lack of labor saving technology. The glass industry was not completely devoid of such machines, the press being just one example, but the attempts to alter traditional shop organization can be accurately described as bastard workshops. For more Taylorism, see Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and uplift; scientific management in the progressive era, 1890-1920* (Chicago, 1964) and Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the rise of scientific management* (Madison, WI, 1980).

their middle-class standing in the community, and with that the respect of their fellow citizens.

HOW THE PRESS PERCEIVED THE WORKERS AND THE UNION

What did the other members of the community think about the glassmakers? The answer may lie in the press coverage of the 1888 strike. Over thirty years ago labor historian Herbert Gutman wrote that industrial workers in small towns were viewed not as agitators as they often were in cities, but as individuals and as valuable members of the community. Gutman generally wrote about mid-western railroad and frontier towns, which contrast sharply to the coastal New England village of Sandwich. It cannot be assumed that the citizens of Sandwich supported the members of Local Union 16 of the AFGWU in their dispute against the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company in 1888, or during other similar conflicts throughout the period. Without diaries or letters of non-glass workers, it is difficult to judge the attitude of the population. However, local newspapers can be used to gauge the feelings of those who relied on the factory indirectly even if they were not glassmakers. Newspapers do not exactly mirror the attitudes of local citizens, but they do reflect and influence those feelings and therefore are valuable in gauging public sentiment.¹

For the purposes of this study, “public,” “community,” and “Sandwich citizens” all refer to people who did not work at the glass factory, were white Protestants, and owned a farm or mercantile business in town. Those were the people whose families had resided in the town since it was founded in the seventeenth century, and thus were its most established, respected citizens. While the glass workers were part of the community

¹ Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working Class and Social History* (New York, 1976) p. 319

and citizens, they were distinct from the upper echelons of the social strata in Sandwich at the time, and those are the people whose perceptions the union members cared about. In view of its consequences – the strike resulted in the permanent closing of the factory and the economic devastation to the town of Sandwich – how was the strike covered by the press? Did the coverage of that strike by local newspapers demonstrate sympathy for the workers and/or vitriol towards the directors and management of the factory? How was the story presented in metropolitan news outlets? What does that say about this attitude toward the strike and those affected?

An examination of several publications from Cape Cod reveals that the stories about Sandwich were nearly identical. The *Sandwich Observer*, *Yarmouth Register*, and *Barnstable Patriot* are interchangeable because the articles were the same. They likely shared reports in an effort to save money. Columns on the crisis also appeared in the major Boston dailies – it was, after all, the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company and the firm’s main offices had always been located in the capital city. General Manager Henry Spurr gave an interview to the *Boston Herald* regarding the incident during the early weeks of the dispute and a few days later that paper featured a rebuttal by the union representatives. The *Boston Globe* also included several items regarding events in Sandwich. Other relevant articles appeared in the *Boston Journal*. These pieces will be explored and compared to the local coverage to see how local and metropolitan perception of the crisis differed.²

² See Louis M. Lyons, *Newspaper Story: One Hundred Years of The Boston Globe* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), specifically pp. 3-17 for information on Boston daily newspapers. Lyons says that there was only one Democratic paper in the city in the before the 1880s, the *Post*. The *Journal* is described as a “die-hard [Republican] party organ,” and all other major papers are fairly solidly in the Republican camp. The *Globe*

Also of value are the numerous unpublished sources available in the Sandwich Glass Museum. Those records include newspaper clippings which lack dates or the name of the publication from which they came. Nevertheless, they remain useful for the purposes of gauging the public's perception of the events at the factory. They are especially vital for the examination for the years prior to the crisis of 1888 when the union and the company struggled for control of the factory.

Several events had significant press coverage. One was the naming of Henry Spurr as factory general manager in 1882. Spurr was employed by the corporation for many years as an agent or salesman; he was a loyal company man who was also well respected by the workers in Sandwich. In 1883, the year after he became general manager, he was given the title of general superintendent, replacing Sewell Fessenden. At this point he had greater control over the factory than anyone since the founder Deming Jarves. Spurr sought to change the way the factory operated. He knew that there had been complaints about working conditions from the men. Glass making was a dangerous job in those days, and so he ushered in new safety measures to ease their minds. He also changed the direction of the plant's output. For several years the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company had been producing products for the mass market using pressing machines. This process enabled the manufacturer to make thousands of identical pieces quickly, but the items produced lacked the attractiveness of the older, handcrafted creations that had made the company famous. Spurr desired to limit output

would become a staunch Democratic paper during the 1880s under the leadership of Colonel Taylor. Taylor attempted to gain readership among Irish immigrants by supporting Democratic politicians and labor causes. The coverage the paper provided of the glass strike in 1888 was not consistent with this editorial viewpoint.

and increase product quality, according to one newspaper clipping, he got rapid results, the price of company stock jumping from \$50 per share on April 5, 1884, to \$63.25 three weeks later. The previous year the people of the town – who were mostly company employees– awarded Spurr a gold-headed cane for being the most popular man in the community. He and his wife had moved to Sandwich to be near the factory, and the men recognized his contributions to the company’s revival and, as a result, their own fortunes. George T. McLaughlin, the same individual who would later spearhead the efforts to keep the factory open after the strike, headed the committee responsible for awarding Spurr his attractive gift. The local press sang his praises and the reports of Spurr’s efforts and early success in reasserting the firm’s place in the glass industry were optimistic, as they were cognizant of how much the fortunes of the town were tied to the company’s success.³

One of the earliest labor issues Henry Spurr faced was the question of the annual summer vacation. Traditionally all workers at glass houses throughout the country had received a break during the hottest months without pay. The length of this off period differed from factory to factory, however. With the establishment of the AFGWU in 1876 came an effort to standardize conditions at all glass houses, and when the workers in Sandwich joined as Local Union 16 in the early months of 1879, they brought the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company into the struggle. The company had some objections.

³ Unpublished documents of the Sandwich Historical Society, Spurr family documents at the Sandwich Glass Museum, Harriot Buxton Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built* (Cambridge, MA 1948) p. 281-282, Raymond Barlow and Joan Kaiser, *The Glass Industry in Sandwich Vol. 3* (Windham, NH 1983) p. 3

In the summers of 1883 and 1884 the fight over the length of the vacation came to a head. Earlier in the year union men had warned that they would be taking six weeks off instead of the usual two. Spurr responded that if the men did not return on schedule, he would go to the board of directors. This seemed a far cry from the “happy and earnest union of capital and labor” that was reported to have existed under Spurr’s leadership in July 1882. According to one report the local men felt that the traditional two weeks were sufficient, but the national union body was forcing them to stay out longer despite good wages and a lack of complaints regarding management. Although glassblowers remained out, other factory departments continued working on previously made pieces.⁴ At the same time any blower who wanted to work was used to paint houses in Jarvesville, the section of town where many of the glassworkers lived in company-owned duplexes. The unknown reporter who reported this detail concluded that this proved that “corporations have souls.” While this was not necessarily the case, it shows that the newspaper was trying to portray the firm in a positive light. The company’s actions here can be variously interpreted – if the townspeople turned against company management, the directors might have voted to close or relocate the factory, which would have spelled doom for Sandwich. The company may have just been trying to avoid more trouble or an exodus of workers. It also does not say that the workers employed as painters were the agitators – they may have been loyal workers whom the company was trying to keep on its side during the dispute. In both years the work resumed after some tense weeks of

⁴ The decorating, etching, and cutting departments were largely made up of young women around the age of twenty. These women were not allowed to join the union.

idleness, and in 1884 the men returned to improved working conditions, as Spurr had used the time to make improvements to the factory.⁵

In 1885 there was yet another incident between the union and factory, occurring in October. The *Cape Cod Item* reported that Manager Spurr blamed the national union for inciting the strike and indicated that there was a conspiracy afoot, saying “It is the general opinion among manufacturers that the strike in the East has been inaugurated in the interest of Western manufacturers.”⁶ This was also the first time when the president of the AFGWU, a Mr. Smith, paid a visit to the tiny Cape Cod town. The *Boston Daily Globe* revealed that strikers claimed that the stoppage was “entirely” in the interests of the Eastern glass houses as well as those in the West. The paper, however, quoted a worker who opposed the strike as saying that the walk-out was brought on at the instigation of the Western glass workers with aid from the Western manufacturers with the expressed intent of harming their Eastern counterparts. If the Eastern firms closed for an extended period, then their customers would have to go elsewhere for glass – namely, the West. In response to this and other reports of a conspiracy, a reader known only as “Glass Blower” wrote to the *Globe*. “What is gained by the Western manufacturer by the great supply of coal in the West is lost in traffic or goods and places him on a level with the Eastern Manufacturer,” he said. The paper may not have given the name of the worker for a number of reasons. Perhaps it was unknown, or the editors were trying to protect him. Or perhaps there was no worker at all, and the *Globe* was trying to steer

⁵ Unpublished documents of the Sandwich Historical Society, Spurr family documents at the Sandwich Glass Museum

⁶ Unpublished documents of the Sandwich Historical Society, reprinting of the *Cape Cod Item*’s story in the *Glass Club Bulletin* found in clippings in the Union file

public opinion toward favoring management to ruin the union. The paper's coverage of the crisis was generally hostile toward labor, so this interpretation would make some sense. If the position of the union was undermined, the strike might not last much longer, setting back the labor movement in the area. If the editors of the *Globe* viewed unions as dangerous or malicious, this move would help damage the credibility of labor.⁷

The *Cape Cod Bee* ran a story at the start of the strike on October 13, 1885, indicating that of the 275 total factory employees only 44 belonged to the AFGWU. The article claimed that if space were available, both union and non-union workers would have their stories told. It then took up about half of a column reprinting a posted response to the strikers' demands by the Eastern Association of Flint Glass Manufacturers. Altogether the article and the response by the manufacturers consumed approximately two thirds of a column in the paper. The decision to provide one side and not the other demonstrates what the editor of the newspaper thought was important for readers to know. The response by the Eastern Association of Flint Glass Manufacturers presents the case for management thusly: the price of glass products had slipped dramatically in recent years without an accompanying drop in workers' wages, in fact those wages had gone up. Workers in other industries such related to glass making such as materials and fuel had seen a drop in wages along with a drop in the price of their products. It was unfair for workers to demand higher wages or lower production output when the companies are making all time low profits. Also, freight rates are low from regions where fuel is abundant and cheap (Western Pennsylvania and Ohio), allowing for

⁷ "Manager Spurr's Statement," *The Glass Club Bulletin*, October 16, 1885 from the Spurr family file at the Sandwich Glass Factory and *The Boston Daily Globe*, Oct 15, 1885

ruinous competition from those parts of the country which, combined with the actions of the workers in the strike, could easily result in the wholesale transference of the entire industry to that part of the country. That being the case the manufacturers felt it necessary to resist the strike and requested that the men return to work at the old wages or else the fires in the furnaces would go out and the crisis would be prolonged. The paper's account was obviously slanted.⁸

On October 20, 1885, an article appeared in the *Observer* citing the gloomy prospects at the factory. The workers were said to be standing firm, willing to return to the old prices "under no circumstances." They were attempting to equalize wages between the East and West glassmaking districts. Western firms were able to pay higher wages because their operating costs for fuel were less than their counterparts in New England and the New York area. At that time, raising the wages of the workers in Sandwich would have hurt the company. There was little the manager or directors could have done short of moving the entire concern to the West because workers themselves were mobile. Newspapers were flush with reports of such-and-such a glass worker, formerly of the local factory, now employed by some other manufacturer. These stories tended to be sentimental, pointing out how long the worker in question had been with the company, and any good things he may have done for the firm or in the community. The reports showed the increasingly sad state of the industry in Sandwich, even without expressly saying so. While most of the workers preferred to remain in Sandwich where they had roots and family ties, many did not. When the New England Glass Company,

⁸ *Cape Cod Bee*, October 13, 1885

owned by Edward Drummond Libbey, relocated to Toledo, Ohio, it took about one hundred of its Cambridge-based artisans with them.⁹

If the striking workers were stubbornly sticking to their demands for higher wages, their opponents were just as stubborn in their refusal to accede to those demands. A reporter noted that the Eastern Association of Flint Glass Manufacturers met in Brooklyn, New York, and voted unanimously to put out the fires in the glass furnaces. This was a serious threat, for the fires took several days to reach the proper temperature for the creation of molten glass, and once they were extinguished, it meant that management was prepared for a long battle. The manufacturers had obviously determined that the strike was not going to end quickly, and it was no longer prudent to continue burning fuel while the workers were idle. All of which was an indication to the community that the town may be in for some rough times. While the article did not necessarily blame workers or directors, but it did present the situation as a kind of last resort for the company.¹⁰

The October 20 article ran a series of rumors after the author's own piece in the newspaper. Included among the rumors were reports that several other glass works,

⁹ For more on Libbey and the move to Toledo see Warren C. Scoville, "Growth of the American Glass Industry to 1880," *The Journal of Political Economy* Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sep. 1944) pp. 212, notes that glass workers tended to move around more often than their counterparts in other industries such as steel making. Also see Kenneth M. Wilson, *New England Glass and Glassmaking* (Corning, NY 1972) p. 233 and Laura Woodside Wathieu, *Cambridge Glass* (Boston, 1930) p. 38 which says that not only did Libbey take 100 men along with him to Ohio, but that one of them was Andrew Long, the president of the union at the New England Glass Company. *Sandwich Observer*, October 20, 1885

¹⁰ *Sandwich Observer*, October 20, 1885. Fuel was one of the highest fixed costs incurred by the production of glass, especially if the company burned coal. Coal had to be imported from a distance, usually Pennsylvania or West Virginia. During the 1880s the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company waffled between coal and wood a few times because of the expense of coal. Wood was generally abundant on Cape Cod, which is why the factory was built there in the first place. Because the fires took so long to reach a high and ideal temperature, putting them out would be foolish during a short labor dispute.

including those in New Bedford, Somerville, and Cambridge, had already drawn the fires. The article also revealed that the company had been operating at a loss and was borrowing money in order to keep workers employed. This pro-management report contrasts greatly with another report, which took a decided pro-labor angle, that many of the workers would rather labor in Sandwich for less money than go somewhere else. This may explain in part the difference between the New England Glass and the Boston and Sandwich companies. One was able to move west with many of its workers while the other could not, due to financial constraints or lack of managerial imagination. Perhaps the difference in the workers' willingness to move was reflected in the fact that Sandwich, a lovely town at the base of Cape Cod, was more alluring than Cambridge, a more urban and expensive setting close to Boston. If so, the small town nature of Sandwich ultimately contributed to the decline of the glass industry there. On the other hand, several lines later in the report it is said that certain workers expected to find new jobs easily in the West, so not everyone was attached to Sandwich to the same degree.¹¹

The reporter also told readers of the good feelings on both sides of the dispute. Spurr is noted to claim that his employees are the best and most hard working he had ever encountered, while the workers themselves seemed to have nothing but respect and admiration for their manager. Further, the article indicated that workers found "no fault" with Spurr's leadership. Spurr is the one they negotiated with regarding their demands and he was the one who represents the company at the meetings of the manufacturers' association. The reporter himself acknowledged that Spurr is the one making the

¹¹ Ibid

decisions by saying that the board of directors praised his actions regarding the strike. The *Observer* reporter played up the nature of labor relations because he did not want word to get out that any trouble existed at the factory. It seems to have been a public relations ploy to keep the public uninformed about the true feelings the parties had for each other.¹²

The *Sandwich Observer* reported dourly that all departments were closed except the decorating room and that the report in the *Boston Journal* that the men had returned to work was, in fact, false. Toward the middle of the crisis, on November 3, the *Observer* made the following commentary:

The Glass Workers: To all outward appearances the situation in regard to the strike at the Boston and Sandwich Glass Works remains practically unchanged. The factory is lying at a stand still. The only department now running is the decorating room. The manufactured glass is being sold rapidly and at the same time more orders are continually being received but under the existing circumstances cannot be filled. Monday, Mr. Spurr had not returned from his Western trip whither he had gone on business for the corporation. We are given to understand that a committee from the local union intends waiting on him as soon as he arrives with the idea of making some compromise. We do not expect the workmen to return to work at the old prices, neither do we believe the company will accept the new list. A Somerville workman says that the men feared that the Union would not support them, but said they would know all about it if they received their money this week; but if they did not receive it, the strike could not exist without their support, and the strike would be at an early termination. Whether the above holds good here, we cannot say.¹³

This article says a lot. First, this piece reveals that General Manager Spurr had gone to the West on business. In an earlier story the public was informed that he intended to stop at Pittsburgh to meet with area owners. This is important because it shows that Spurr was out of town at an important time for the factory. He could not

¹² Ibid

¹³ *Sandwich Observer*, November 3, 1885

negotiate with Local 16 from “the West,” be it Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, or California. He was the principal representative of the company to the workers, and without his presence virtually no progress could be made.

The second important piece of information gleaned from this newspaper report is the catalyst of the strike – prices. When a glass house changed its price, it had to alter the wages of the men as well. Workers, especially blowers, were paid either by the piece or by the move, which was simply a group of pieces of varied size depending on the items made. If the company lowered the price of its goods by increasing production, wages of the workers would inevitably decline. In fall 1885, the union sought to force a new “list” or set of rules and prices on the company. This was going on in every glass factory in the East, but not those elsewhere. The Pittsburgh and Ohio area firms reaped significant benefits resulting from increased orders, as consumers who needed glass products turned to new producers during the strike.

The final piece of information is that the men were willing to compromise. This means one of several things. It could be that the workers were broken and were only at that point willing to concede certain points to the company. Since the strike did not end for another two weeks, it is possible that the men were not broken, but rather just wanted to return to work after almost a month away from their benches. It was unclear exactly why they became willing to compromise, but the following week, however, no progress had been made and employees were asked to remove their tools from the factory until the end of the crisis. The newspaper also reported that there was a meeting of the board of directors about which it speculated that a decision would be made to either close the

factory until the spring or decide to hire non-union employees. On November 24, 1885, the *Cape Cod Bee* announced the end of the strike: “We honestly believe the workmen feel better in than out of the factory. They certainly look happier.” No reason was given for this sudden increase in morale other than the return to work. The paper was trying to portray the workers as happy within the confines of the factory in order to give the impression that they had no more complaints with their conditions or pay, and at the same time to vilify the union for keeping the men from doing what made them happy. Is it a coincidence that a short time after a possible shutdown of the factory appeared in the local paper the men returned to work? Perhaps this is true. They also could have been scared of losing even more time from their jobs with strike funds wearing thin, and finally gave in to the demands of the company. Whatever the reason for the strike’s end, the *Bee* indicated that it was especially difficult on local businessmen and their families who had no strike fund of their own at any period and had no direct part in the labor dispute. The *Bee*’s concern here seems less its support of the company that the fact the continued operation of the factory boded well for the shopkeepers and other citizens of the town not employed by the company. Any partisanship on the people’s part seems to have been put aside in favor of practical solutions, for should the factory stay closed, the entire town would be left without a source of economic wellbeing.¹⁴

On November 17, 1885, the *Cape Cod Bee* and the *Sandwich Observer* printed identical reports detailing the termination of the strike. For several days before the official end Henry Spurr met with a committee of the strikers to try to resolve the crisis.

¹⁴ *Cape Cod Bee*, November 24, 1885 and *Sandwich Observer*, November 10, 1885

The reporter indicated that he was unable to determine exactly what took place at these meetings, but he believed that it was “probable that concessions were made on both sides.” The workers were said to be happy to return on the terms agreed upon, demonstrating that they really only wanted to practice their crafts, and that they were just as worried about the strike as the townspeople must, especially given the difficulty of having to survive on meager strike funds and assistance from their brothers in the western districts. Spurr, the writer of the article concluded of his behavior throughout the strike, “has shown no little patience.”¹⁵

Once again Henry Spurr was presented as an admirable man who had done his best to preserve the company and at the same time look out for his employees. And again, local workers are all but absolved of any responsibility they bore for the situation in Sandwich, quitting “in accordance with orders from the National Glass Workers’ Union and because the Eastern manufacturers had refused to accede to a new list of prices furnished by the union on what are known as Opal Dome Shades.”¹⁶ The newspapers portrayed workers as obedient cogs who had followed the orders of the national union. When the conditions of the two sides were discussed after the strike, journalists said that while the company sustained heavy losses, losing business to operating firms and not being able to manufacture new products or fill new orders, the men who were out-of-work were said to be in a much worse situation. These operators had not been paid for the preceding six weeks. There was obvious sympathy for the men,

¹⁵ *Cape Cod Bee*, November 17, 1885 and *Sandwich Observer*, November 17, 1885

¹⁶ An opal shade dome is an item made at the factory, which made many beautiful lamp shades. The dispute seems to have arisen in part because the men wanted the company to produce fewer of them and charge a greater price.

especially those who were “put out of work” by the incident, pointing to the many employees who were not union members who were nonetheless negatively affected by the actions of Local 16. Non-union workers had the greatest public support. They were seen as individuals just trying to get by with their daily lives without meddling in the affairs of others and causing trouble, as the union and the company could have been seen as doing.¹⁷

All of these reports demonstrate that when trouble began in fall 1887, it was not without precedent. Labor difficulties had existed for all of Henry Spurr’s tenure as general manager and superintendent and in prior years. They also seem to show that the animosity between the men and the company did not extend to Spurr. The union was more than willing to meet with him to discuss a compromise on the pressing issues, and the men obviously respected him for what he had done to improve the factory. The reporting of the earlier strikes was not heavily slanted toward labor or management. They focused more on the well-being of the community, which both parties reportedly valued. Supporting the interests of the town as a whole ensured the continued readership of a wider audience, because it was a cause that everyone could endorse. As the strike wore on, reports grew increasingly desperate, mirroring the mood of the community. Events were particularly hard on local residents who were not employed at the factory. These people depended on the income from glass blowers and would struggle financially when that usually steady influx of cash ceased.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Cape Cod Bee*, November 17, 1885 and *Sandwich Observer*, November 17, 1885

¹⁸ According to Harriot Buxton Barbour the glass blowers, while well paid, were also typically not savers. She characterizes them as big spenders who did not think too much about the future. Readers should take that with a grain of salt because her book was written in the 1940s.

Likely the saddest part of this final report on the strike of 1885 is the assurance given the paper's readers that this walkout, when all was said and done, was a positive thing. The agreement that was reached by Spurr and the union would lead to many years of labor peace and continued economic fortune for Sandwich. A glass worker who was enthusiastic about the future of the company and his and fellow workers' security and well being is quoted as saying, "The strike thus ended is a benefit to both the company and men and will be the means of preventing any further troubles at these works." In fact, as it turned out, three years later the town would be dealt its heaviest blow when the firm ended production, sold the factory building, and evicted workers from the company-owned housing in Jarvesville.¹⁹

The press never explicitly reported negatively about the workers or the company, and especially not about Henry Spurr. Instead, journalists attempted to put the blame for the crisis on the national union. Despite the refutations from the union men themselves, the *Observer* continually contended that there were agitators from the West forcing the Sandwich men to stay out of work even if they were happy. Due to the high instance of labor disputes during the period it is obvious that the Sandwich workers were not happy, and the AFGWU, based in Pittsburgh, could not have done much to prevent the members of Local 16 from returning to work if they had so desired. On the other hand, the paper was correct in saying that the union sent instigators to the town to stir up trouble, one being Michael Owens from Toledo. The paper's focus on the outside agitator, it would seem, came not from a desire to alienate either side in the dispute, because doing so could

¹⁹ Ibid.

damage the town. Eventually Owens himself rose to a managerial and ownership position after helping to invent a mechanized bottle making process, but in the 1880s he was a strong union man and came to New England to incite battles between labor and capital. The strikes he helped to provoke eventually caused the closing of many Eastern firms, including the B&SGCo. Ironically, he also triggered the labor troubles at the New England Glass Company in Cambridge, which in 1888 relocated to Toledo. In 1895 Owens and Edward Drummond Libbey, owner of the NEGCo, formed a partnership as the managers of the Toledo Glass Company that went on to have great success in the early part of the twentieth century and later years.²⁰

There was little news in 1886, save that the pay schedule changed. That year the Massachusetts General Court stipulated that factory workers must be paid on a weekly basis, instead of monthly or biweekly. The Boston and Sandwich Glass Company in September instituted the change “following out the spirit and letter of the law.” This was reported with decided indifference, showing only that the company obeyed the laws of the land, nothing more. 1886 was a slow year for news regarding the glass factory in Sandwich. The following two years, however, would more than make up for it.²¹

The first prominent news to come out of the factory in 1887 was that the decorating department was going to be improved. No word was given as to what exactly this meant, or what was the problem with the department in the first place, only that the changes would “assist greatly to the convenience” of the workers. This meant two things.

²⁰ Warren C. Scoville, *Revolution in Glassmaking; entrepreneurship and technological change in the American industry 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA 1948) p. 276

²¹ *Sandwich Observer*, September 21, 1886

First, the department needed improvement in the eyes of management. Second, the company felt that the cost was worth the investment. That decade was financially difficult for the company, so the fact that they were willing to spend money showed the community that they were still dedicated to it. The people who worked as decorators were mostly young women between the ages of school and marriage, trying to earn a modest living. They labored under the supervision of Edward Swann, an Englishman who was reputed to be an exceedingly caring overseer. According to one account, he managed to keep his decorators well paid for girls, although the exact figures always remained a secret. That they were reportedly “well paid” may be why females in the decorating department were considered to have the most enviable occupations in the factory open to members of their sex. Although women could not be union members, this story is representative of the relationship between management and workers. Swann, like Henry Spurr, cared about the conditions his workers encountered and sought to improve them when possible. The press supported this paternalistic view. The workers’ status as dependent was thus reinforced, even that of the skilled male glass blowers. They relied on the company for their own well-being and livelihoods. This may have been a factor in the change from a reformist agenda to that of a trade union.²²

In April, the decorating department reopened, with an account of the reopening running in the April 5 edition of the *Observer*. The next weeks were tumultuous for the town and the factory. The infamous “Nicholas Black Affair” occurred the following week. Since Black’s move was counted several pieces short, and his pay was docked 87

²² Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built* p. 275-277

cents. In other words, he was accused of not producing his fair share of goods. A move is a certain amount of pieces created during a turn. A turn is a period of time consisting of a half days work, or five to six hours depending on what year one is referencing. A work week consisted of 11 turns, or five and one half days for a union worker during the 1880s. The number of pieces per move depended on the size and complexity of the item. That day Black was working on salt cellars, which were very small and required many individual items to fill a move.²³ Black was a member of Local Union 16, and his union brothers attempted to stand up for him by threatening to strike. Unfortunately, the exact pages of the *Observer* regarding the Black Affair from the week the incident occurred are missing from the microfilm. Therefore, it would be difficult to determine reactions. The next edition of the paper, however, spoke to the resolution of the problem being “amicably settled in Boston” at a meeting between Henry Spurr and the president of the national union, William Smith. The following day all discontented glass makers reported to work. Residual anger, however, would linger in the hearts of the men for the remainder of their tenure at the factory, contributing to the nastiness of the strike the following winter.²⁴

The factory made few headlines through the summer, except for the usual talk about the summer vacation. Then, at the end of November, there were ominous signs that, in retrospect, foreshadowed the labor strife that was to engulf Sandwich in the months to come. Terrence Powderly, the president of the Knights of Labor, resigned in

²³ For more on moves and turns see Dr. James S. Measell, “Turn, Move, and Wages: Key Concepts in the American Glass Tableware Industry,” *The Glass Club Bulletin* Spring/Summer 2005 edition, p. 11-17 found in the archives of the Sandwich Glass Museum

²⁴ *Sandwich Observer*, April 5, 1887 and April 19, 1887

the wake of the backlash against organized labor that followed the Haymarket Square riot in Chicago signaling the downfall of the once great organization. The glass unions had been associated with the Knights, although as strong craft unions they would eventually shift their allegiance to the still young American Federation of Labor. At the end of December the *Boston Journal* reported news out of Pittsburgh, that some of the flint glass workers there were getting ready to open several co-operative glass factories in Ohio. At the same time there was a series of major railroad and coal strikes in Pennsylvania, specifically along the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Then came the most worrisome news for the people of Sandwich that the local union had held a secret meeting to discuss the new rules posted in all glass factories by the National Association of Flint Glass Manufacturers, which represented firms from New England to Ohio. No one knew what had been discussed at the meeting, but the public was reassured that there would probably not be a strike. Manager Spurr, at least, said he did not expect a walkout just as he did not expect the new list and rules to be totally accepted. Spurr was hopeful that the affair could be settled “amicably by a committee from both organizations,” meaning the labor union and manufacturers’ association. The press’s interest indicated that Sandwich hoped so as well.²⁵

On January 2, 1888, the glassmakers took their tools home and went on strike – or were locked out, depending on the source – which showed that the optimism displayed by Henry Spurr and the local press was misplaced. The next day the *Observer* reported that the entire town was in a state of depression. Every flint glass firm in the country was

²⁵ *Boston Globe*, November 26, 1887 and December 30, 1887, *Boston Journal*, December 26, 1887, and *Yarmouth Register*, December 24, 1887

closed. After the last major strike the manufacturers had reached an agreement to lock out non-striking glass houses if any one particular member's workers struck, effectively blurring the line between strike and lock out. In Sandwich, the crisis could probably be more accurately described as a lock out. Workers demanded that the new rules be changed, but instead of giving in to those demands, the directors decided to shut the factory and extinguish the fires. "We have closed our factories rather than alter [the new list]," declared one director. Unlike in 1885, furnace fires were put out immediately in preparation for a drawn-out labor battle. After the first day the *Boston Globe* reported that all glass workers were members of the union, but that definitely was not the case. Regardless of the inaccurate description the newspaper properly attributed a great deal of power in the industry to the union, for prices and production numbers had for years been made in part by union demands.²⁶

The posting of the new list of rules by the manufacturers greatly agitated the union. The first rule was the most burdensome, namely that the manufacturers were asserting the right to hire and fire as they saw fit, thereby denying the union the closed shop that all labor organizations sought. According to the *Globe*, the union also objected to the new list of prices and output numbers and the proposed new wages. When asked to explain what he meant by saying the strike was not just about rules and numbers, a striking glassmaker refused. Conversely, the *Boston Herald* seemed to try to give both sides a voice in the matter. It reported several items that the *Globe* failed to acknowledge. The *Herald*, for example, all but named the crisis as a lock out, which its

²⁶ *Boston Globe*, January 3, 1888 and *Sandwich Observer*, January 3, 1888

rival would not do, indicating, “It has been generally supposed that in the case the Western men went out, the Eastern manufacturers would not close their factories, but today this appears to be a wrong conclusion.” The newspaper noted the planned cooperative glass venture in Sandwich whose start up coincided with the downfall of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company. Finally, the *Herald* reported that workers were expected to give their answer to the new list on January 15, even though the company closed the factory prior to that date. Some of the strikers interviewed were portrayed, if not as victims, then as less than willing participants in the drama. Said one, “We are not the aggressors.” The *Globe*, on the other hand, also misled the public about the background of the labor dispute, when it quoted management as saying that there was “rarely... trouble” with the employees. Even though there had been trouble in 1883, 1884, 1885, and 1887 – four out of the previous five years. The *Globe* generally seemed to lend greater support to management through its reporting, and this case was no exception. In this way the paper effectively laid the blame for the current crisis at the feet of the union, the only “new” addition to the equation.²⁷

The following day the *Herald* continued to report from a more labor-oriented perspective. The newspaper ran a story that attempted to show that glass manufacturers were not as united as previously thought and it indicated that there was a disagreement among owners and managers regarding what to do about the union’s angry initial response to the new list of rules. Some felt that shutting down so soon was a bad idea, as a shutdown would alienate workers and harden the union’s resolve. The *Herald* likely

²⁷ *Boston Globe*, January 3, 1888 and *Boston Herald*, January 3, 1888

ran this story to show support to the union and reach a wider audience, including the large numbers of working class immigrants living in the city. The paper quoted the national secretary of the AFGWU as saying that the strike would not last long because dissension among the ranks of the owners would prevent them from standing up to the union for very long. At the time, a report from the Mt. Washington glass factory in New Bedford, Massachusetts, made this seem a plausible outcome. Workers there viewed the strike as a scheme by the western manufacturers to “compel the factories of the East to pay the same wages as in the West” in an effort to drive them out of business by forcing down their profits. It is possible, and perhaps even likely, that a portion of the workers in Sandwich believed this story and started to prepare themselves for the inevitable permanent closing of their factory. This would explain the rumors that suddenly circulated about the co-operative factory opening on Cape Cod as well as more glass blowers leaving Sandwich for other glass houses. Although, as previously stated, the latter had been happening for some time due to higher wage rates in the West.²⁸

On the same day that the above stories appeared in the *Herald*, yet another Boston daily, the *Journal*, ran the response by General Manager Spurr to the arguments being made by workers. He denied that the new numbers lists were unreasonable. At the last meeting of glass managers, prices and numbers-per-move had been compared, with the new list being the average of all of them. As a result, some occupations would receive a pay increase while others would experience cuts. Spurr argued that if Western and Eastern workers were paid identical wages, then Eastern firms would inevitably lose out

²⁸ *Boston Herald*, January 4, 1888

and be forced to close or relocate, for companies like the Boston and Sandwich had to pay high freight rates for raw and finished products. Thus, despite their proximity to major markets, eastern companies faced greater transportation costs due to long haul versus short haul differences. Their Western counterparts being close to abundant, cheap materials such as coal and gas consequently paid less in total cost. This, in turn, led to higher profits, higher wages, and lower prices in showrooms, and that meant more customers.²⁹

At the end of the first week of the strike the *Globe*, *Journal*, and *Herald* had all run competing – and different – stories. At that time the *Yarmouth Register*, being a weekly publication, also published its first article about this event. These four accounts differ in their content and approach, revealing opposing concerns between the competing Boston papers as well as an entirely different point-of-view from the local Cape Cod weekly. The *Globe* and *Journal* indicated that work continued in every department other than glassmaking. This would include the cutting, decorating, and shipping rooms. The glassmakers had created enough in previous weeks to fill a warehouse and those pieces were currently being worked on to fill old and new orders that were still arriving. The company employed non-union men to perform the tasks and there was enough still to be done that they would reportedly be busy for “some time,” as the *Journal* put it.³⁰

The *Herald* continued to insist on referring to the crisis as a lockout, which the other papers were reluctant to do, probably because they did not want to alienate financial support from the business community. Instead, they would not call it a strike, just “the

²⁹ *Boston Journal*, January 4, 1888

³⁰ *Boston Globe*, January 8, 1888 and *Boston Journal*, April 9, 1888

troubles,” or “the affairs.” The *Herald* seemed to be more realistic in its reporting as well, noting that the factory employed roughly seventy-five percent of the working people of Sandwich and that obviously the town relied almost solely on the firm for its prosperity. That being said, the paper expressed a belief that no resolution of the crises seemed forthcoming. The *Globe* also reported on the chances for an end to the crisis but went about it from a different angle. In its view there would be no forward movement regarding the walk out unless it came from “the committee chosen from both the manufacturers and glassmakers now in session at Pittsburgh and not by any individual concern.” Thus, as it saw things, that the strike had begun, there was nothing Local 16 or Henry Spurr or the board of directors could do but wait and see if the big players in the West could reach an agreement. With this the *Herald* seemed to disagree, in that it, reported that while there would likely be no meeting between Spurr and the local union, there might be one between the manager and leaders of the American Flint Glass Workers’ Union.³¹

On January 8 the *Globe* carried two important items about the glass strike that were not picked up immediately by its rivals. First, it reported a rumor circulating that the union workers would return to their posts if the company hired non-union men to do their jobs. Then it printed the following report from Brooklyn, New York, the traditional meeting place of the Eastern Association of Flint Glass Manufacturers that “an Eastern manufacturer outside of Brooklyn had decided to withdraw from the association [the EAFGM]. This will break the combination and the men can return to work under the old

³¹ *Boston Globe*, January 8, 1888 and *Boston Herald*, January 7, 1888

rules.” These reports seemed to indicate ways for work to resume at the factory, but these predictions did not come true. Although some firms did leave the manufacturers’ union and make individual agreements with their labor forces, this did not result in the resumption of glass making at Sandwich or any other associated glass house. And the B&SGCo had hired non-union men to do some jobs, although they did not make any glass, and this had not resulted in the breaking of the union or a return to work of any kind.³²

The *Herald* consistently displayed better reporting. The newspaper was not a labor organ, but its approach was fairer to both sides. During the first few weeks of the strike it showed an ability to get better stories that spoke to the nature of and reasons for the work stoppage, something the *Globe* and *Journal* failed to do. The *Herald* ran interviews with Henry Spurr and union representatives, allowing both sides to make their arguments to gain public support. The workers claimed that Spurr historically favored non-union men and that he and the manufacturers’ association were attempting to destroy the union once and for all. This story conflicts with all the previous coverage of the relationship between Spurr and the workers that indicated that it had been a positive, mutually respectfully one for some time. It is not clear if the previous reports were in error or if subtle, subsurface tensions only sprang to life in 1888.³³

The union probably harbored resentment toward Spurr for some time, but due to his popularity with other workers and within the community, could not speak up

³² *Boston Globe*, January 8-9, 1888. The Mt. Washington and Meridan factories left the association that day or the next, giving in to the workers’ demands. This did not change the status of the strike at Sandwich except to give false hope to the employees.

³³ *Boston Herald*, January 7, 1888

regarding his tendency to favor non-union labor. Whatever the case, the union men were unhappy with how Spurr handled the strike. They also accused him of hiding facts from the public and from B&S GCo stockholders. The paper does not say what those facts were, but this was a clear effort by the union to try to turn the shareholders against management to gain an advantage in negotiations. The *Herald* reported that the strike was an attempt by Western manufacturers to use the union and the Eastern manufacturers as patsies, ruining the glass making business in its traditional center of New England, New York, and eastern Pennsylvania. It even went so far as to accuse the president of the Eastern Association, James Gillinder of Philadelphia, of being complicit in the plot, with the hope of moving his own concern to the Pittsburgh-Ohio district.³⁴

Henry Spurr responded in the same paper a few days after the accusations against him and the EAFGM were printed. He refused to speak to any of the statements made by the workers other to say that the employees referred to events that had occurred under previous managers, before he had taken over the plant in 1882-1883. He flatly denied any wrongdoing and claimed that he showed no preference of non-union workers over union members. Spurr rejected the Gillinder story, indicating that the president had always worked in the best interests of glass firms in the East. The *Herald* did not editorialize on the statement, leaving the reader to decide what to think. Of course, there is no telling what was left out of either report.³⁵

Over the next weeks and months the Boston newspapers discontinued their coverage of events in Sandwich, save when it was voted to close the plant for good in

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Boston Herald*, January 10, 1888

August 1888. The Cape Cod newspapers, particularly the *Observer*, ran almost weekly pieces regarding the strike, noting generally that no progress had been made on a resolution. In early February President John Parker died, which was seen as a bad omen for the factory. Events in Pittsburgh were followed closely with the hopes that something would be done; namely that one side would give in to the other's demands or that a compromise could be reached. Through the early spring the paper reported nothing of substance in that regard. Work on the co-operative glass factory, owned by some of the union workers, was duly noted when it occurred. This included coverage of the building of the factory road or the arrival of new pots or furnaces. In retrospect, reporting seemed overly optimistic, as co-operative ventures were usually failed. Several weeks before the company bell rang for what seemed like and what would ultimately be the final time. The *Observer* noted that businesses dependent on public patronage had already taken a substantial loss when the company closed and the workers in the cutting and decorating departments ceased receiving checks. Property values were expected to drop precipitously over the next half decade. In May Western glass companies came to terms with the union and returned to work with higher wages that were impossible to match in the East. The outlook was bleak, and in this there is no doubt that the local press reflected exactly how the public felt.³⁶

When the directors voted in August 1888 to close the factory, the town was depressed. Over the next two months, citizens desperately tried to change the directors' minds, but to no avail. On October 1, after hearing appeals from the people of Sandwich,

³⁶ *Yarmouth Register*, February 18-March 31, 1888 and *Sandwich Observer*, February 21 and March 6, 1888

the directors unanimously voted not to reopen the factory with the old rules intact, as they said this would “tend to bring about a repetition of the difficulties that have been experienced in years past.” Despite several more efforts to establish glassmaking in Sandwich, the community would never be the same. The *Boston Journal* ran the following story and several local papers, including the *Register*, reprinted it:

Another of the New England Glass companies has yielded to the inevitable and decided to discontinue operations. Labor troubles in the East and natural gas in the West, both combining to place New England at a disadvantage, have induced the directors of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company to quit the business in which they have been engaged the last sixty years. This is the third of the local companies to succumb, the Suffolk and the New England having already removed to the West on account of superior facilities afforded in that section. The directors voted Wednesday noon to wind up the affairs of the corporation, to cease work, and to sell off the stock and materials now on hand. President Bradlee said: ‘The Manufacturers’ Association has entered into an agreement which it is impossible for us to live up to and make glass at a profit.’ When asked if the real estate in Sandwich was for sale, he replied that if anyone wanted it at a fair price he guessed there would no hesitation in selling. The fact seems to be that the recent action of the Western Manufacturers, most of whom have no coal bills to pay, in agreeing to the demands of the Flint Glass Workers’ Union for higher pay is resulting in the loss to New England of one of its oldest and most honored industries.³⁷

This quotation represents how residents of Sandwich most likely felt about the closing of the factory. They believed that the Manufacturers’ Association helped put the company out of business by making an agreement with the union. The Boston and Sandwich Glass Company and other Eastern firms were unable to pay the wages that this new agreement demanded and therefore had to close. The report exemplifies the notion that neither the company nor the workers were to blame for the catastrophe. Rather it was the AFGWU and the Western Manufacturers who were responsible. This does not

³⁷ Quoted from the *Boston Journal* in the *Yarmouth Registers*, August 18, 1888

mean that there was a conspiracy, but it does begin to point in that direction. The sullen tone of the article revealed how the depressed attitude of local communities affected by the geographical shift of the glass industry. Even though it was first written for a Boston newspaper, this article demonstrates what many citizens of Sandwich likely felt regarding the crisis and the shutdown of the factory.

Newspaper coverage of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Factory strike of 1888 indicated how workers and their union were viewed by the community. The local newspapers were indeed sympathetic to the employees, but mostly to non-union men and women. These individuals were viewed as unwilling participants in the event; they were forced out of their jobs by an organization as oppressive as the company was accused of being. People distrusted the union due to its national scope and because it was centered in distant Pittsburgh where workers had different concerns than in Sandwich. It was believed that national union leaders thought of themselves first, and local conditions like those in Sandwich second, if at all. This is probably for similar reasons to the public distrust of business monopolies such as Standard Oil, Carnegie Steel, and other giant trusts. The aftermath of the strike was covered in an oddly optimistic way, almost as if the press was attempting to boost the morale of the public, but ultimately it was only misleading as the glass industry never returned to its place of prominence in the community.

The attitude of the local press during the strike shows that despite pre-existing political affiliations or beliefs about labor organizations, the community wanted the strike to end. Regardless of how citizens felt about the workers themselves, the crisis was bad

for the whole population. If the factory shut down, most of the glass workers would likely leave town to find employment elsewhere, leaving Sandwich without a large segment of its economic base. That would cripple any shopkeeper or other small businessman who relied on the patronage of Irish glassmakers for his own financial survival. Even if someone thumbed his nose at them, and many townspeople probably did due to ethnic and religious differences, they would have recognized that their continued presence was necessary for the survival of everyone else.

The *Globe* and *Journal* took distinctly pro-management angles to their stories, not printing any extensive interviews with strikers and not dissecting the real causes or nature of the labor conflict. The *Herald* was much fairer in its approach, although it could hardly be called a labor organ. It gave a voice to both sides in order for the people to be able to process the information themselves. It is impossible to know for sure why the reporting was slanted in the direction it was for every press outlet, but each newspaper contributes to the understanding of the crisis today.

While the press coverage of the incident no doubt reflected the feelings of much of the community, they also influenced those feelings. The press can be looked at as a curved lens that refracts light and results in a distorted image. That image then becomes fixed in popular memory. Future generations would then explain the crisis in the way it was told by the newspapers, rather than how people saw it as it happened. The next chapter will examine how future generations remembered and wrote about the fall of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, the people who worked there, and the glassmakers' union

HOW LATER AUTHORS INTERPRETED THE CRISIS

The closing of the glass factory affected Sandwich citizens for years. The very identity of their town was ripped away. Local writers Frederick Irvin and Frank Chipman, both of whom penned short histories of the factory that detailed the 1888 incident, expressed the feelings of the next generation toward the company, the workers, and the union. Their versions of the story influenced Ruth Webb Lee and Harriot Buxton Barbour, later writers who tried to retell the story of the factory in a more academic way. Lee was a well-known glass collector who wrote several books on the glass pieces made at Sandwich. The last book written on the company was also authored by collectors. These books demonstrate the long term affects of the reports surrounding the 1888 strike and how they influence the perception of the company and union in the popular memory of the town. The authors in question helped to form the perceptions of later generations of Sandwich residents and observers. Their writings are, therefore, crucial to understanding how the glass workers and the union were viewed in the century after the closing of the factory.

During the 1980s, Raymond Barlow and Joan Kaiser wrote an immense, multi-volume work detailing the history of the company and the pieces the factory workers produced over the years. Barlow and Kaiser tended to view the company as benign for most of its history, and certainly it is portrayed as good for the town. The directors who voted to close the factory rather than compromise with the union are not given the benefit of the doubt, however, and they were usually portrayed as bad businessmen. They also

depicted the workers sympathetically. Some of the other authors showed them as depressed from years of industrial change, seemingly they were just waiting for the end to come. Thus workers' supposed indifference or shortsightedness can be viewed as a major reason for the decline of the company and the town. The union took much of the blame from twentieth century authors, especially the national leadership. Some authors suggest that Western glass manufacturers and union leaders plotted against their Eastern counterparts. None of the works in question present concrete economic data regarding the company's last years, making any analysis of the definitive causes of the closing difficult.

One of the earliest accounts of the closing of the Boston and Sandwich Glass factory comes from a local inhabitant named Frederick T. Irvin and appeared in 1926. *The Story of Sandwich Glass and Glass Workers* is a short, sentimental retrospective on the factory. This book is important for reasons other than historical accuracy regarding the strike. Writing a little more than a generation after factory's the closing, Irvin represents a local voice. His may not have been the consensus view, but certainly a great portion of the public had similar feelings. Irvin cites no sources other than himself and was not a trained historian. Nonetheless, Irvin claimed to be "thoroughly competent" to write the book due to his family's long standing in the glass industry in Cape Cod. His frame of reference in the book is the general mood of the town forty years after the crisis

and how the people of his day thought and felt about the past, including the history of the company, glassmaking, and the union.¹

Irvin seems to have had several purposes with this project. First, he claimed to be interested in the sociological value of such a work, comparing the old days to more modern times. The chief difference he saw was that prior to the advent of mass mechanization, glass workers viewed themselves as producing great art, but toward the end of the factory's life and in the industry generally at the end of the nineteenth century, workers became merely automatons – living machines. These changes occurred out of necessity, he believed, and if the directors had not increased mechanization and used press molds, then the factory would have been forced to close. The workers resisted these changes, which was one reason Irvin points to for the increase in strikes in the 1880s, and that resistance ultimately what led to the factory's closing.²

His book was not anti-business, though, and for the most part he is not overly critical of workers or directors, especially given the situation, preferring to think back to what he considered as the town's "good times." He concludes by recalling the better times of the factory and the people who worked there:

¹ As with all the authors discussed here, the period during which Irvin wrote must also be taken into consideration. The 1920s were a period marked by the dominance of business in public life. It was also, however, a time when attitudes toward labor unions were changing. The injunction, long a tool used by government to suppress union activity, was no longer used by the later years of the decade, and unions gained more legitimacy

² Frederick T. Irvin, *The Story of Sandwich Glass and Glass Workers* (Manchester, NH 1926), p. 6. For more on labor's resistance to mechanization see Sean Wilentz's work on the working class in New York City in during the nineteenth century in *Chants Democratic*. Sandwich and the rest of the glass industry mechanized early on with the invention of the press, but it did not become a major for labor until the latter part of the century. The lessons taken from New York may not be applicable to a great degree in this case, because of the differences between metropolitan and small-town life detailed by Herbert Gutman in the mid-twentieth century.

The Company never allowed a payday to be passed over in the hardest times... No employee ever had reason to complain that he was not paid in full for his labor, and if in case of sickness or trouble in his family he wanted a barrel of flour, or ton of coal, of which the company always kept a stock to be sold to its employees at reasonable prices, or money to help him out, it was always advanced.³

Frederick Irvin characterizes the local attitude in the historiography of Sandwich and the glass factory that made it famous. Almost forty years after the factory doors closed permanently, he managed to articulate what was probably the sentiment of most local residents on what the factory and its ultimate demise meant for the community. His voice echoes what was seen in the press at the time of crisis, essentially refusing to blame the workers or the company for the incident. In the years following the closing of the factory this explanation of the event seems to have become ensconced in Sandwich.

In 1938 a man who claimed to be the son and grandson of Sandwich glass makers, Frank W. Chipman, published a book about the factory called *The Romance of Old Sandwich Glass*.⁴ Written by an author who like Frederick Irvin was not trained as a historian, this publication contains a good deal of mis-information.⁵ Despite his many

³ Ibid., pp. 92-93

⁴ Chipman's book came at a time when union support reached a high point. During the Depression, unions were a valued member of the New Deal Coalition that helped bring Franklin Roosevelt to power. Roosevelt's agenda involved bolstering union power, as evidenced by the Wagner Act and other attempts by the administration to increase the legitimacy of labor organizations. See William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

⁵ For example, the author says that the union formed "just previous to 1888," which is patently false – there were workers' protective associations in Sandwich since at least 1866, with Local 16 of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union (AFGWU) being formed and chartered by the national body in 1879. He also indicated that the crisis first began when the company docked a worker an amount less than one dollar. Chipman does not explore in any other detail than that about this supposedly catalytic event, failing to name the worker involved or why he was docked. He does, however, mention that Nathaniel Bradlee, one of the directors, set out to settle the dispute but could not. Bradlee died before he was able to affect any meaningful change. Again, Chipman fumbles over his history, as Bradlee did not die until December 1888. The information for Nathaniel Bradlee's death is found in the board of directors' report from March 1889, quoted in full in Ruth Webb Lee, *Sandwich Glass: the History of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company* (Wellesley Hills, MA 1966), pp. 561-563.

errors, Chipman's work is meaningful because he raises several important questions. He resembles his predecessor Irvin in this regard. Stating that there was a great deal of confusion surrounding the circumstances of the factory closing, he noted that it was only after "much influence was exerted from outside" that the union formed at all. Why Chipman would insist that outsiders were responsible for the formation of the union and the end of the company is an important question. In a way this was a way of shifting responsibility for events from Sandwich citizens and glassmakers, to others, which doubtless reflected the local view of events; but it also reflected, as we have seen, a great deal of the contemporary media's coverage of the event, which often included some accusation of conspiracy or agitation emanating from Pittsburgh.⁶

Frank Chipman came from a very important Sandwich family. The Chipmans had been on Cape Cod since the very early years of the Massachusetts Bay colony. Major Charles Chipman was one of the town's greatest heroes. An officer during the Civil War, he died fighting the Confederate Army at Petersburg, Virginia in 1864. He was given a hero's burial in Sandwich. Frank had many relatives who worked in the glass factory, which gave a personal link to those bygone days.⁷

Chipman himself was a purveyor of collectible glass during the 1920s. This is significant because it suggests a second reason for the writing of his book, beyond exploring his family history. For if he could make the glass industry seem romantic, and make tourists or townspeople nostalgic for those days, he would make a tidy profit from it; this was likely his greatest motive. Moreover, According to Russell Lovell, a

⁶ Frank W. Chipman, *The Romance of Old Sandwich Glass* (Sandwich, MA 1938), pp. 143-145.

⁷ Russell A. Lovell, *Sandwich, A Cape Cod Town* (Taunton, MA, 1984) pp. 121-122, 346-348, 406

Sandwich historian, Chipman stole a great deal of information from authors of magazine and newspaper articles without giving them any credit. Even with these faults and self-serving motives, Chipman's book did give his readers an evocative – if overly romanticized and error-prone – picture of nineteenth century glassblowing and Sandwich in particular.⁸

In his book Chipman also discusses what happened after the factory closed permanently. According to Chipman the moulds used to form the glass in the pressing machines were destroyed, though he is unclear why. This is surprising, since glass moulds such as these could have been sold off to other manufacturers to reduce the company's debts or, better yet, purchased by some entrepreneurial-minded director, worker, or salesman to start a new factory in the glass producing regions of the West. Certainly some companies in the region chose this latter option and became successful, such as the New England Glass Company of Cambridge, which moved to Toledo, Ohio, and became the Libbey Glass Company. The Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, however, chose to fold rather than relocate. Chipman does not address why because his book was not analytical to any great degree, and, like Irvin, he chose to focus on the positive legacy of the company, and, as his title indicates, the "romance" of the glass industry.⁹

In 1939 Ruth Webb Lee penned *Sandwich Glass: the History of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company* (Webb's book was republished several times; the edition used for this study having been published 1966.) Webb's is a highly comprehensive volume,

⁸ Ibid. p. 456-457

⁹ Chipman, *The Romance of Old Sandwich Glass*, pp. 143-145

although she presents no formal list of sources. While the main focus is on different types of glass items produced at the factory over the years, she also gives details about the founding and closing of the company. Her account is perhaps most important for its description of what happened to the town and the factory building after 1888 and the fact that she includes the 1889 directors' report in full. Part of that document states that the leadership of the national union in Pittsburgh refused to allow the workers in Sandwich to sign an independent agreement with management, which of course destroyed any hope of a revival of the factory late in 1888.¹⁰

Lee was herself also a collector of old glass. She wrote several books on the subject, which were designed for fellow collectors, chronicling what items were made over the years and how the process of glassmaking changed. This book is much like the others, and its interest less the history of the company than providing some historical context to the collectible glass items her readers sought. Still, Lee made some strong advances in the story of the 1888 strike as it relates to the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company. She notes that the price of glassware had dropped since the Civil War, probably due to the advent and preponderance of the pressing method that allowed for more identical items to be made at a faster pace than the traditional blowing method.¹¹

She also said that in 1885 the company left its decades-old office in Boston for a smaller,

¹⁰ Lee, *Sandwich Glass*, p. 563. Like Chipman, Lee wrote during a period of high union support among the American people.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 554. Pressing permitted the manufacturers to sell more products to a wider range of customers, but it also resulted in the flooding of the market, causing prices to decline. As a result the National Flint and Lime Glass Association, the manufacturers' association to which the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company belonged, desired an extension of the traditional summer shutdown of all glass works. In theory this would counteract the prevalent market trend and raise prices. The glassworkers' union also desired an extended break. That there should be a longer vacation during July and August was not an issue. When one side proposed it, however, the other took it as an attempt to subvert the power of the other, resulting in friction between labor and management

cheaper place elsewhere in the city. She refers to this event as “the beginning of the end.” During the 1880s the company had begun to borrow money to pay expenses, a sure sign of terminal decline. The Pittsburgh dealers had opened showrooms in Boston and other Eastern cities, their men controlled the national unions, and for some years now the West had clearly been the dominant center of the industry.¹²

Lee confirms this by reference to annual reports to the stockholders for the years 1888 and 1889. No documents, let alone ones as important as these, had been used by previous writers on the subject, not to mention that Lee brought a degree of scholarship to her work that her predecessors lacked. Since these reports were released annually in March, the first appeared during the worst part of the strike and before the final decision to close had been made. That decision was made in August 1888. In the stockholders report from 1888 the directors complained that workers had been running the factory for the past few years, and that this was obviously unacceptable due to the economic situation in which the company currently found itself. The directors claimed that the very act of association or unionization by the workers was the root of the problem, and if only they would give up their union everything would be fine. To persuade them to abandon the union they went so far as to offer a form of cooperative venture where the workingmen would have a financial stake in the company. The document does not indicate how the union responded to this proposal, but we know that nothing ever came

¹² Ibid., p. 555. While today we know it as the Midwest, most of the sources examined for this study refer to the western Pennsylvania and Ohio area as “the West,” so that is what we will use as well.

of it. All in all these documents give us a clearer picture of the how the directors viewed the union and their efforts to offset its power.¹³

Lee's account also provides us with a clearer picture of what happened in Sandwich after the directors decided to close the shop.¹⁴ While Frank Chipman had discussed what became of the company's molds and other property, he never went into detail about attempts to restart the glass industry in Sandwich. Lee, however, notes that on October 17, 1889, the factory building itself was sold to the Electrical Glass Corporation for \$20,000 cash. The new company is not described in any great detail, nor the type of glass it manufactured, except that it was gone within a short time. Lee indicates that several attempts were made to re-open the works after this, but none met with success. Curiously she does not mention the co-operative venture attempted by ten former employees that began even before the directors made the final decision to close the factory, even though she discusses a similar endeavor. One last attempt, Lee

¹³ Ibid., pp. 555-561.

¹⁴ Some of the valuable information about this period provided by Lee includes the following: in fall 1888, after the directors voted to close the factory, a committee of concerned Sandwich citizens, fearing that the town would perish if the company followed through with its plan to shutdown, petitioned the directors to reconsider. If the factory closed, the town would be ruined. Nearly everyone in Sandwich depended on the glass industry either directly or indirectly because it was the only large local economic activity. One committee member was Edward J. Swann, formerly head of the factory's decorating department, who blames the directors for what happened in the conflict, accusing them of being unable to manage the men and the business effectively. He also felt that they were giving up far too easily, saying "Glassmaking is not an experiment in Sandwich. It can still be successful down here." Swann's assessment of the directors is in line with most of what other authors have suggested. Yet his notion that glassmaking could survive and thrive in Sandwich at the level it had in its glory days is probably far from the truth. The cost of coal was becoming prohibitive, wood did not produce as fine a product, and the price of labor was also becoming more than the business could manage. Many of the best skilled workers were going elsewhere, something that Harriot Buxton Barbour, author of *Sandwich: the Town that Glass Built* in the 1940s, would later note as well.

indicates, was made in May 1907, when a Philadelphia man re-opened the factory. But after only a few weeks it closed for good, never again to make glass products.¹⁵

In 1948, Harriot Buxton Barbour produced *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built*; her book focused attention on the actions of the national union. Writing in the late 1940s, Barbour presented a consensus version of the events she described, resulting in a book that is more biased than some of the others, especially considering the more academic approach she took. A slant may be acceptable from a local writer, but historians are generally expected to at least maintain an air of objectivity. The flaws in Barbour's book in this regard may just be remnants from her sources. Barbour is suspicious of the AFGWU, the national organizing body that served as the umbrella group over the local workers' collective. According to Barbour employees formed or joined the union for their own personal protection and not because they cared deeply for their counterparts in glass houses across the nation, but with the advent of the national union they became embroiled in efforts to do what was best for the most workers, not themselves. The irony she points out is that it was the national union's broad scope that ultimately doomed the local glass industry in Sandwich. Barbour laments what she considers the lazy habits of the glass workers toward the end, commenting that Deming Jarves, the man who created the Sandwich works, would have been rolling in his grave if he saw the "joking, smoking glass blowers lolling around the factory door in the middle of a good glass day," and who "seemed to work only when they pleased and have plenty of time to turn out marvelous

¹⁵ Lee, *Sandwich Glass* pp. 563-568

pieces of individual work on private order.”¹⁶ She does not present any evidence to justify this claim other than her own word. Hers is a stark contrast to the portrait Frederick Irvin painted of the proud, hard-working glass man that twenty-two years before.¹⁷

Barbour lauded Superintendent Henry F. Spurr. Specifically, she praised efforts to reestablish the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company as one of the preeminent glassmakers in the nation after he became superintendent in 1882. In this view Barbour seems to take her cue from Frederick Irvin, whom she lists as a source. Both cited his leadership or business skills, and lamented that Spurr’s efforts came too late to ultimately save the company. According to Barbour, workers had no complaints whatsoever and no new benefits could be gained even if they did; rather, she says the men joined the union for security, arguing that during the industrial era the union provided the type of protection that in earlier times came from the ownership of land.¹⁸ This is a rather

¹⁶ Harriot Buxton Barbour Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built* (Boston, 1948 p. 281

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 283, 287. Industrialization demoralized workers, resulting in their alienation from their labor. They were no longer the proud artisans discussed by Irvin; rather, they had become closer to laborers whose skill was not as important as their ability to do the same task repeatedly every day. At the time Deming Jarves led the business, he enjoyed a close relationship with all workers – he knew each by name and was intimately aware of their lives and family situations. Each man felt like he was an associate of Jarves. However, in the 1880s directors became more distant, visiting the factory grounds infrequently. This most likely occurred because the new directors only had a financial stake in the company, while Jarves had a personal one as well, having built the firm from the ground up. Workers no longer felt secure and safe in their positions in life. According to Barbour, they felt that “their lives were ordered by remote control and were impelled to huddle together for defense against forces they could not see or comprehend – a tendency that could lead to mass living, mass thinking, and mass dying.” The men still managed to retain a modicum of pride in their labor, which was evident in the pieces they did for private orders or for family and friends. Their industrial production, though, showed a “sloppy indifference” as it became more monotonous and less individualistic.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-282. The town gave Spurr a gold-headed walking cane for being the most popular man in the community. He was well liked by workers and directors alike. Barbour says this is a result of his unique ability to relate to whatever company he is currently with, be it the board of directors in Boston or the glasscutters in Sandwich. Spurr allowed the men to do as they wished in regards to output at the factory and their behavior.

contradictory argument, for she blames the workers for being lazy, but seems to give Spurr a pass for allowing them to do as they wished regarding output. In fact, if Spurr had been the fantastic manager many accounts say he was, he should have been able to motivate the men adequately to work as hard on their industrial pieces as they did on private work. Likewise, for much of the mid-to-late 1880s there was a labor crisis in Sandwich, which Barbour pays little attention to. She is, indeed, much too willing to accuse the workers and the union for the local troubles without considering the possibility that management's actions, or lack thereof, also contributed to the company's problems. Instead while she understands the workers' plight, she still tends to blame them for the downfall of the company. While she accuses the directors of an inadequate level of communication with the workers, she does not seem to hold them responsible for the closing. The union workers, she suggests, were lazy and ignorant, and therefore responsibility for the shut down fell largely on their shoulders.

One important contribution of Barbour's book is her description of the 1882 Window Glass Workers' Strike in Pittsburgh and glass workers' unions' association with the Knights of Labor. The AFGWU's followed a similar historical path to that of the window workers, and the Knights of Labor not only shaped the contemporary labor movement, but the AGFWU had been affiliated with the Knights since the late 1870s. These connections, she indicates, are vital to understanding the development of the union and the perception the workers had of themselves, as well as how they were viewed by others in light of the union's relationships with other organizations.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a tumultuous time for labor, marked by numerous high profile strikes including the Great Strike of 1877, the 1885 and 1886 Knights of Labor strikes against Jay Gould and his railroads in the Southwest, the steel strike of 1888, and the Pullman strike and boycott of 1894. These events, and many like them, occurred for numerous reasons. Chief among them were the workers' desire to increase wages, fight wage cuts, protest poor working conditions, and gain union recognition. These efforts reflected serious economic depressions in the 1870s and 1890s. Workers had little to no protection for their families if they were injured or killed on the job, and companies across the country were expanding at ever-increasing rates, putting skilled craftsmen out of work. The glass industry was no different.¹⁹

The 1882 Window Glass Workers' strike was inspirational to the flint glass workers in Sandwich and their cohorts at other firms. Like the AFGWU, the Window Glass Workers had rapidly nationalized their union over the previous few years. In 1882, they struck in glass houses across the country to protest the vast wage difference between workers in the West (Pittsburgh-Ohio region) and the East (eastern Pennsylvania north to New England). Amazingly, they won all of their demands, including a reduction in wage differences between the two regions, control over output, and the closed shop.²⁰ These were mostly the same concerns that existed in the flint glass industry and would be issues for which the AFGWU would strike in 1888. The glass workers gave credit to the

¹⁹ Barbour, *Sandwich the Town that Glass Built* p. 283

²⁰ The closed shop refers to the idea that a factory would only hire workers who were members of the recognized union. Workers' organizations sought this reform through a number of avenues, including bargaining with management and outright intimidation of non-union workers.

organizational and supporting powers of the Knights of Labor that most prominent national labor organization in the United States during the 1870s and 1880s.²¹

The Knights of Labor was the leading labor organization in the United States during the Gilded Age. While it began as a secret fraternal organization in Philadelphia shortly after the Civil War, it soon served more as a union. The agenda of the Knights harkened back to an earlier form of unionism that focused on social reform as the cure to the ills of labor and society. The main thing they fought was vast accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few. Some of the remedies proposed were the formation of co-operatives and abandonment of the wage system, under which the employer was the master of his employees. The Knights, specifically its second Grand Master, Terrence Powderly, felt that society would be better served as a republic of small producers in which each man was his own employer. Glassmakers had no interest in overthrowing the wage system, although several Boston and Sandwich workers did found a short-lived co-operative glass house. Barbour helps link the story of the Sandwich glass workers and the AFGWU directly to the Knights.²²

Management had attempted to increase production. Workers viewed this as lowering prices by flooding the market and resisted these attempts and retained control

²¹ Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built*, p. 284-285. Barbour addresses the question of who organized first in the glass industry, labor or management. She concludes that most manufacturers' associations were not established until after the workers started collectives on a large scale. The window glass workers of Pittsburgh first joined the Knights of Labor in 1877, but the American Window Glass Manufacturers' Association failed to "take stable form" until two years later. She points to a similar time lapse in the flint glass industry, with the first strong national flint glass workers' union, the AFGWU, forming in 1878 and their opposition, the National Flint and Lime Association, not appearing for another two years. When the workers go out in 1885 and again three years later, these groups will be the main protagonists.

²² For more on the Knights of Labor see Gerald Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A study of ideological conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Evanston, Ill 1965), pp. 3-59 and Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Chicago, 1983).

over output for much of the 1880s. Required production consisted of only two “moves” every day, meaning they only sent batches to the finishing ovens two times. Barbour reports that sometimes this could be completed in fewer than two hours or as many as twelve depending on the size of the objects being created. The union required each member to be present for no fewer than four hours on any given day. Barbour sees these rules or practices as indications that the glass workers at Sandwich were lazy and lacked a sense of reality, for according to Barbour, the company was suffering real economic hardships, a fact the men failed to accept in part because the directors did not properly inform them and in part because the historic success of the business kept them from realizing how dire the straits were. In fall 1887 company leaders across the nation attempted to force new rules and output regulations on the men, an action which virtually compelled the unions to resist.²³

In this conflict Barbour takes the side of the directors, but she nonetheless remains understanding of the workers’ point-of-view. Like Irvin, she views the final acts of the directors as self-serving, morally questionable, and silly from a business standpoint. For

²³ Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built*, p. 288. One of the more intriguing possible reasons for the agitation of workers in Sandwich is what Barbour refers to as the Nicholas Black Affair. It began in April 1887, a full eight months before the workers walked out of the factory for the final time, over a reported 87-cent argument. When one of Mr. Black’s moves, or the number of individual items made for a particular type of glassware over the course of half a day, was counted several pieces short of his quota, the company docked his pay. The men who counted each move were known as sloarmen, and to blowers like Black they represented the interests of the company rather than those of workingmen. Black’s fellow blowers backed him up when he stated that his move had been completed. Black did not have to count his own pieces. As Barbour reports, he was making saltcellars on that particular day and the quota for that item was around two hundred individual pieces. A young boy called a taker-in took the pieces from the blower’s workstation to the Lehr (finishing oven). Barbour speculates that it is likely that the disagreement was the fault of one of these boys who was eager to get out of work and have some adolescent fun that day and had either jumped his count by accident out of excitement or deviously done so on purpose hoping that he would not be caught. The blowers threatened to walk out if Black was not paid the money he felt he deserved. At the time, Henry Spurr was away from the factory, but when he got back, he managed to get the blowers to continue working by paying Nicholas Black his 87 cents. The conflict was over, but the incident only stoked the fires of distrust that had been growing over the previous years.

while asserting their right to control their business may have been a good idea, the uncompromising way they went about it was not; indeed at one point, she refers to management's lack of communication with the union as "irritatingly arrogant." But, both sides, she indicates, were foolish in their actions, at least in Sandwich. The directors failed to communicate adequately with their employees and the workers failed to consider that a once strong company could actually be having real financial difficulties. This balanced view of the crisis is strength of her work, in that she points out that the company was in dire straits at the time, and acceding to the union would have led to ruin.²⁴

The definitive work on the subject is Joan Kaiser and Raymond Barlow's five-volume *The Glass Industry in Sandwich*, which first began appearing in the early 1980s. Written by prominent glass collectors, theirs is the most comprehensive work on the subject. While much of it is devoted to the unique and beautiful patterns created at the factory, they also provide an account of the interesting history of the company and the people who worked there. Volumes three and four are the most pertinent to this study as they deal directly with the union and the 1888 strike.

²⁴ Ibid p. 290-292. In late fall 1887 the directors decided to put new rules into effect along with every other flint glass house in the country that would begin on January 2, 1888. Among the rules was a wage scale for blowers, the highest paid workers in the factory. In essence, the new scale amounted to a speed up by forcing the men to produce more items in the same amount of time they were required to work before the changes were to be instituted. This was a slap in the face to the blowers, who once had been the most respected men in the industry because of the substantial amount of skill required to perform their jobs. Over the previous decades, however, they had seen their relative wages decline. Barbour cites a statistic stating that wages increased 33% from 1840 until 1880, while general wages increased 62% during the same period. The speed up was viewed by the men as something of a slippery slope – if they allowed this to go without protest, directors then would have precedence in the future for further reductions in pay or other affronts to the dignity of the workers. In their minds, they could not afford to give an inch of ground to management, who they viewed as greedy, aloof proprietors governing from far off Boston. The men viewed the company as making money hand over fist. Barbour says that this assessment could not have been further from the truth – but none of the directors bothered to explain this to the workers, let alone show them the figures regarding how, for several years the company had been losing money. With the fixed costs of transportation, materials, and fuel the only way to cut costs and attempt to remain competitive with the Pittsburgh dealers was to reduce labor costs.

Barlow and Kaiser provide a detailed account of the struggles of the 1880s, including the workers' efforts at unionization after the 1860s. In 1866 the first protective association for New England glass workers was formed. The men were ready to join the national glass workers' union when it was founded in the 1870s. The glass workers of Sandwich received their AFGWU seal in April, 1879. The seal is an interesting artifact. Emblazoned on it is the union motto, "Obedience to the Majority." The union was to protect the most men, which meant Western men, and everyone else be damned. The best interests of certain workers were not the same as the best interests of others and they would not be treated as such – the seal points that out from the beginning.

In 1873, the B&SGCo began to feel significant pressure from Pittsburgh manufacturers, which had the benefit of proximity to cheap natural gas that burned much hotter than either wood or coal and resulted in a more brilliant final product. That year also saw the beginnings of what would become the American Flint Glass Workers' Union in Pittsburgh. This small event would swell into an incredibly powerful force over the next fifteen years. Following the beginning of the plan to put the US on the gold standard in 1973, the 1870s became a rough time economically, and the glass industry was not immune to the downturn in prosperity. Demand decreased and glass houses had to adapt. Employees in Sandwich started being let go in 1874, which eventually cost George Fessenden, the factory general manager, his job. Prior to that, he attempted to improve employee efficiency, thus marking a notable period in the transformation of the workers from skilled artisans to laborers. One of his changes was an improved method for cutting away excess glass while it was being shaped on a blower's tube. This increased

refinement gave an edge to Sandwich over competition, which partially negated the inherent inferiorities in the glass resulting from using a lesser fuel source. Fessenden also enhanced line production, asking workers to become more skilled at one specific task instead of being able to do everything. This lowered labor costs and allowed more money to be spent on fuel.²⁵

The union gained power as business slowly improved in the 1880s. But the union's success proved both a blessing and a curse for workers. The benefits unionization brought included a type of sick pay that the members would give each other so that they could have time to recuperate; moreover if a loved one or fellow worker died, they also received time off for funerals. However, the increase in AFWGU power had negative consequences as well, for the union exercised its might to intimidate non-union men into falling into line and used itemized lists to affect money paid and factory productivity. In fact the union controlled the factory to a remarkable degree, though not without some strife. Barlow and Kaiser, however, blamed the board of directors for the sad state of affairs the Sandwich firm had come to by 1888, accusing them of being reactive when what the company needed was bold, proactive leadership in the face of the increasingly powerful union. The workers too contributed to the downfall of the company, through their shortsightedness and naivety. With stronger leadership or a more

²⁵ Raymond Barlow and Joan Kaiser, *The Glass Industry in Sandwich Vol. 3* (Windham, NH, 1987), pp. 33-36

understanding, independent workers' association they indicate, the B&SGCo might have had a better chance at survival.²⁶

Beginning with Spurr's ascendance as General Superintendent in 1882, there was a brief revival of the factory's former greatness, but the period was rife with labor troubles. Spurr decreased total output but increased the quality of the products made to try to carve out a niche in the business. By 1883 there were three hundred workers, although many of those were not employed full-time. Around this time, workers went out on strike, taking advantage of the sudden upswing in the fortunes of the company. They struck again in 1885, proving that events three years later had been brewing for a long time.²⁷

On August 15, 1888, after another long and arduous labor struggle, the directors decided to close the factory for good and sell the works, spelling doom for the town of Sandwich. As in Ruth Webb Lee's book, Barlow and Kaiser describe how the concerned citizens committee desperately tried to persuade the directors reconsider. Their version of these events is different however because these authors do not mention Edward Swann, but instead indicate that it was George T. McLaughlin who led it. They also mention the results of those desperate pleas for on October 9 the board decided not to reopen and to get what they could for the stockholders. Then, on November 27, 1888, the company evicted the workers from company housing, putting them out on the street. A

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 41-43. One of the first things Local Union 16 did as a member of the AFGWU was send money to striking workers in the West. That strike resulted in more business for the Sandwich factory. The workers should have recognized this correlation.

²⁷ Raymond Barlow and Joan Kaiser, *The Glass Industry in Sandwich Vol. 4* (Windham, NH, 1983), pp. 3-8

year later, the factory was sold to the Electrical Glass Corporation, and in 1894, the corporation was officially dissolved in state court.²⁸

Some authors have indicated that the strike in the late 1880s was instigated by labor leaders from the West, which had by then far surpassed the Northeast as the center of the American glass industry. If this is true, and the evidence indicates that it is, then we can draw a conclusion about how the Sandwich glassmakers were viewed by their peers in the glass industry and the leaders of the AFGWU. In the interests of the union and the industry as a whole, Local Union 16 was unnecessary. If those workers who comprised the local moved to Pittsburgh to work in the big factories there, more glass could be produced, creating greater profits for the industry and higher wages for workers.

Some historians have pushed these conclusions ever further and suggested – giving these events a nefarious, conspiratorial character – that the strike was agreed upon ahead of time by the Western labor leaders and the Western factory managers and owners in order to drive the Eastern glass houses out of business. This was certainly suggested by the press in 1888, who did not want to blame the company or the workers. Referring to the Window Glass Workers’ Strike of 1882, Barbour quotes the striking workers as saying, “Pittsburgh is the center of the glass trade. . . and Pittsburgh price rules the market throughout the land. Therefore Pittsburgh brothers must have control of all the glass workers of America.”²⁹ This comment applied equally to the situation in Sandwich and the flint glass trade. By the time of crisis in 1888, the Pittsburgh glass houses had been able to open showrooms in Eastern cities such as Boston and compete effectively

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 16-20

²⁹ Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built*, p. 285

with local manufacturers, and they understood the benefits they would receive if an entire set of competing firms went out of business. They had learned this during the 1885 strike in the East.

Ruth Webb Lee also provides information supporting the idea of a conspiracy, although she does not comment on it. The evidence in question appears in the 1889 stockholders report reprinted in her book. Her purpose in including the report in her book was to show the state of affairs for the company during the strike, and why the directors believed the company folded in the face of the latest labor dispute. The report indicated that a “high official of the Glass Makers’ Union” objected to the Sandwich workers signing off on rules submitted by the directors, which the men themselves were willing to do. While the report’s claim cannot be accepted without question, given the source, it does fit into a pattern of instigation from the West. Whatever the details and motives, there was definitely interaction between the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company directors and the high-level officials of the AFGWU. Ruth Webb Lee herself does not discuss whether it was nefarious or benign.³⁰

The pressure from Western union leaders is not the only possible explanation for the strike of 1888, nor for any of its predecessors. There were obviously other issues in play during the period, including wage levels, working conditions, control of output, the apprentice system, and the closed-shop movement. Numerous workers in the Sandwich glass house felt that the only way to realize these goals and achieve a general state of security for themselves and for the community was through collective action. According

³⁰ Lee, *Sandwich Glass*, pp. 559-563 and Barbour, *Sandwich, the Town that Glass Built*, p. 300

to Barbour, some workers disagreed and looked upon the union with great mistrust. These men prized liberty over safety and viewed the union, especially after it associated with the AFGWU nationally, as too big and demanding – potentially as dangerous and oppressively controlling as the owners. Men who thought this way and refused to join the union were considered by labor leaders to be threats to the movement and the union endeavored through intimidation to compel every eligible worker to join and toe the line.³¹

The national union assessed fees to assist striking workers across the country. Barlow and Kaiser point out, however, that the union was seen by some workers as another oppressive force. But the two men in charge of business, George Fessenden and his brother Sewall, refused to stand up to either the union or the board of directors; perhaps if they had, the fate of the company could have been different. For Kaiser and Barlow point out that only those Eastern houses with unique and original ideas survived, such as the Mt. Washington Glass Company, Union Glass Company, and New England Glass Works. The B&SGCo had no such plans, and no men to implement them and while generally, Superintendent Henry Spurr is credited with being such a person, he came into power only in 1882, too late to avert disaster as by that time, the company was

³¹ Barbour, p. 287-288. Barbour points to a German immigrant, Fred Wodt, who refused to join the organization and expressed a fear for his very life and wellbeing. Another anti-union advocate was Billy Kern, who had left the Sandwich works for New Bedford, Massachusetts. He felt that the glass houses of the East were losing ground to the West due to poor union management. He believed that the AFGWU was too rigid on a national scale, and failed to consider local conditions. Keeping such men from even working in the factory would prevent any propaganda from infiltrating the shop floor, thus weakening the strength of the workers' movement. It would also prevent the union members themselves from having to resort to intimidation tactics.

only employing 75 full-time workers working at full capacity, a far cry from the several hundred in previous years.³²

The 1888 strike was not the first time the union was accused of forcing workers to strike against their will. In 1883, glass workers went out on strike. Barlow and Kaiser put responsibility for that crisis at the feet of the union, saying that the workers were “forced out of work by the union’s directive.”³³ The company, empathizing with its employees, hired some of the out-of-work men to repaint some buildings, including company-owned employee housing. In the fall of 1885, the workers again went out on strike in the first glass strike that touched workers in many different states. Forty-three men had walked out of the factory on October 12, and the following evening there was a meeting to discuss conditions at the works. Three days later all Eastern glass workers were on strike. Union men broke up work teams and forced non-union workers to join the strike. Although it represented only one-third of the total workforce, the union compelled most of the laborers to abandon work.

The issues in the strike in 1885 were typical: wages, productivity, and working conditions. Management refused to accede to the union’s demands, and the glass furnaces were closed on October 19. The board of directors was made up of “Boston based men” and therefore had a difficult time understanding the complaints of the workers; or they also did not fully understand how the strike was affecting not just the workers, but their families and the other townspeople as well.³⁴ On November 11, 1885,

³² Barlow and Kaiser, *Vol. 3*, p. 41-43

³³ Barlow and Kaiser, *Vol. 4*, p. 4

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8

Henry Spurr announced that the strike had been broken, but Barlow and Kaiser indicate it was really more of a settlement. The strikers were hurt more than the company and forced to compromise on their demands. During this strike, the Western glass houses first felt what it would be like if their Eastern counterparts all stopped making glass, and it felt good.³⁵

Following the strike Spurr attended the National Convention of Glass Manufacturers. At this gathering, it was decided to pass a resolution stating that if any one factory's workers went on strike, every other factory would lock out theirs, hoping to wreak havoc on the union by preventing extra money from being sent from working workers to idle ones. This greatly disturbed Spurr, who had risen to his place of power after years as an employee; after all, he had been one of the best salesmen the company ever had. This resolution could also be seen as evidence – certainly it fuels the theory – that workers and owners alike from Pittsburgh effectively collaborated on the strike in 1888 to force the glass houses of the East out of business for good.³⁶ In their account of the years prior to the strike, Barlow and Kaiser detail how the mutual admiration that had previously characterized workforce and management turned to ill will; they also stated that for some time representatives from the union offices in Pittsburgh had been coming to Sandwich to “agitate Sandwich glass workers over the poor working conditions in Pittsburgh glass houses,” and thus, by taking advantage of a natural empathy with their fellow workers, turned the Sandwich workers against their own best interests.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 3-8

³⁶ Ibid., p. 10

³⁷ Ibid., p. 11

On November 27, 1887 glassworkers in Pittsburgh decided to go out on strike. If this occurred, every glass house was resolved to lock out its own workers per the agreement made two years earlier. As it turned out, that date passed without a strike, but the owners were still on notice. In response, the manufacturers' association issued new rules to be posted at the beginning of the year. The AFGWU found the list objectionable and threatened to strike in 1888 unless the offending rules were changed. Barlow and Kaiser conclude that Pittsburgh workers and owners did in fact collude in this incident to ruin Eastern factories and bring the West to complete domination. They would have known that the new list of rules would not pass muster with the union men in many cities and towns and that the result would be a nationwide strike/lockout. Furthermore, they knew that the Pittsburgh glass houses could survive longer than those in the East, and that when all was said and done they would come out triumphant – all of them, Pittsburgh workers and owners alike.³⁸

There were some local reasons to get behind union action, however. There was some labor trouble in the cutting department early in 1887 (The Nicholas Black Affair discussed by Barbour), forcing a meeting between Henry Spurr and William J. Smith, President of the AFGWU in April. At the same time, there had been a fire on Cape Cod that destroyed 25,000 acres of timber, which put an unexpected burden on the company since wood was the fuel that the factory used to make glass and without it coal or some

³⁸ Barlow and Kaiser, *Vol. 4*, pp. 11-14

other energy source would have to be imported at high expense to Sandwich, having an adverse affect on the wages of the men.³⁹

These facts are known. But without a smoking gun, it is impossible to say definitively whether there was a Western “conspiracy” to put Eastern glass manufacturers out of business. Certainly, some workers and management believed this to be the case. Union leaders from the West did go to Sandwich and other firms to agitate for the union, but agitation is not necessarily a sign of a nefarious plot. As it stands, the issue is not decided. However, Sandwich is not the only factory where it has been speculated fell prey to such a conspiracy. Lura Woodside Watkins, writing in 1930 about the New England Glass Company in Cambridge, said the strikes there were “instigated by the western members of the Glassmaker’s Union, tacitly supported by the western manufacturers.”⁴⁰ She says they supported the action because the interests of the western companies were furthered by the strike. Such evidence is mostly circumstantial and anecdotal – reports from local workers and the directors – but it does appear that the AFWGU instigated the nationwide strike with implicit support from Western manufacturers who hoped the crisis would result in the abandonment New England and New York as centers of glass production. Whatever the motive, this is what in fact happened, and the shift that had begun after the Civil War was now complete. After 1888 the center of the American glass industry was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and later Toledo, Ohio and Corning, New York.

³⁹ During the last few years of the factory, the company vacillated between using wood and coal as its main energy source, and the fire forced it back to the more expensive option.

⁴⁰ Lura Woodside Watkins, *Cambridge Glass* (Boston, 1930) p. 37

CONCLUSION

The Sandwich glassmakers formed their union for protection against the forces of industrialization in the late nineteenth century. That is why they joined regional and national organizations. In the end no association could save them as the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company could not survive in the contemporary world of glass manufacturing. The company did not have access to cheap fuel, nor did it have a capable board of directors willing to move the company elsewhere. The workers themselves could not fathom that the once proud and powerful firm was struggling to stay in business, and the American Flint Glass Workers' Union that was supposed to protect them did nothing to alleviate their problems. When the company and the workers were willing to compromise in fall 1888, the national union leadership did not give its approval, and the deal died, and so did the company.

Some of the workers, still viewing themselves as individual craftsmen, and hoping to create a better situation for themselves, attempted to keep the glass industry in Sandwich alive by forming a co-operative factory. The Co-operative Glass Company (CGC) survived for three years before all references to it disappeared and its founders went their separate ways, relegated to the status of wage earners in Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. The CGC fell victim to the ills of many other co-operative ventures, but mostly the problem was a lack of available capital. Prominent community members

donated cash, and the ten founders of the company put everything they had into it, but in the end they lost their life savings.⁴¹

The CGC was not the final attempt to revive the glass industry in Sandwich. On several occasions, others would try, sometimes under the old Boston and Sandwich name. The co-operative, however, was the last gasp of reformist unionism, the ideology that drove the Knights of Labor and Terrence Powderly. Thinking the nation would be better off as a republic of small producers, the founders of the company insisted that all workers own stock, and that all stockholders work. That agenda did not represent all of the former employees of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, as others moved South and West to find new jobs in other factories that had survived the labor crisis.

Despite their distrust of the AFGWU, townspeople supported the ten union members in their enterprise. After all, they were longstanding members of the community, and they needed support if they were to revitalize the glass industry. The press covered the CGC optimistically, hoping that somehow the industry and town could make a joint recovery. But this was not to be, and by 1891 all references to the company had vanished from newspapers.

Looking back on what Sandwich used to be later authors wrote of the glass workers as hard working, valuable members of the community and argued that. It was only when the AFGWU arrived that things started turning sour. This was not the truth,

⁴¹ Jon and Jacqueline Wetz, *The Co-operative Glass Company, Sandwich, Massachusetts: 1888-1891* (Sandwich, MA, 1976) and Joseph G. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise, 1620-1920* (Danville, IL, 1969), particularly the first section, "Probings." Also see the classic work on co-operative exchange system in Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Revolt: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York, 1978). Goodwyn sees the co-operative movement as the essential element of true populism, and speaks on the topic a great deal.

but how Sandwich remembered the incident. It was how the press had reported the incident when it happened, though whether that was how most people felt at the time cannot be said. Nonetheless that version of events became lodged in the memory of the town, and future generations accepted the story as factual. They could not bring themselves to blame the company that brought the town to prominence or the local workers had caused the factory's demise, so the notion that "outside forces" bore most of the responsibility for the company's downfall and the exodus of workers took hold.

The history of Sandwich represents an addition to the story of industrialization in nineteenth century America. The town thrived during that period because of the glass industry, much as other New England towns were strengthened by the shoe or textile industries. But Lynn, Lowell, Oxford, and other such places tended to be supported by multiple factories. This enabled them to withstand changes slightly better than Sandwich could. It remains for a comparative study to be done, showing the similarities and differences between Sandwich and one of these other areas after the dominant industry left for greener pastures. Today the site of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company's factory in Sandwich is occupied by the Sandwich Glass Museum. The people of Sandwich have embraced their history as a center of glass production, even though it existed there for fewer than seventy years. The industry is remembered affectionately, the community focusing on the positive aspects of the industry rather than on the wrenching economic pain the loss of the company created. This romanticized view of Sandwich's past is due in part, maybe in large part, to the collectable quality of glass the town produced, which inspired many of those who have written about Sandwich as it is

today the source of tourism. By playing down the tumultuous nature of the end of the company, the town thus maintains a mystique that attracts collectors and tourists, but is not the town's true history.

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