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THEIR OWN SPHERE: WOMEN'S WORK, THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR
AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CARPET TRADE, 1870-1890

City University of New York

PH.D.

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OF THE CARPET TRADE, 1870-1890

by

SUSAN LEVINE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1979

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THEIR OWN SPHERE: WOMEN'S WORK, THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CARPET TRADE, 1870-1890

by

Susan Levine

Adviser: Professor Herbert Gutman

This is a study of labor and women's history during a critical period of American economic growth and development. The work focuses on the carpet industry, one of the few branches of American textiles to undergo the entire transformation from small hand-craft shops to large factory operations and from a skilled male workforce to unskilled female operatives. The study highlights four important aspects of Gilded Age industrial transformation and the response to it of both men and women. First, the carpet industry's shift from hand loom shops to large-scale power loom production affords a closer look at the motives and actions of Gilded Age management. Pressed by the constantly falling prices of the 1870's, carpet manufacturers sought

lower production costs particularly in the supply of labor. Second, an examination of the carpet weavers' communities reveals characteristic changes in Gilded Age working-class neighborhoods and towns. The largely immigrant carpet workforce became split between an older Philadelphia community and a newer factory workforce located in New York State. Women in the Philadelphia mills were linked by family and neighborhood ties to the older hand-craft traditions of the trade. Women in Amsterdam and Yonkers, on the other hand, drew strength from a common work experience and a surrounding immigrant community. Third, the economic crisis which surfaced in the carpet industry during the late 1870's was part of a general crisis developing in American industry. Carpet weavers in both sections of the industry engaged in militant and prolonged, if unsuccessful, strikes during 1878-1879 and 1884-1885.

Finally, the transformation and conflict in the carpet industry coincided with the rise of the Knights of Labor. Consequently the response of carpet weavers not only reflects the industrial conflict in the period but also reveals the nature and motivation of the contemporary labor movement. The Knights of Labor defined a working-class community and culture that opposed emergent corporate values. During the Gilded Age, wage-earning women as well as housewives joined the Knights' movement and demanded equal rights at work and equality for women in the working-class community. Female power loom carpet weavers consti-

tuted large ladies' assemblies within the Order and like other working-class women found in the Knights an important source of support for their workplace struggles. The Order also offered young women a vision of their own futures as the wives of workingmen. By extending their vision to include women not directly engaged in the labor market, the Knights accepted work in the home as a crucial part of the community toil. The Order's ideal of community combined with its commitment to defend women's rights at the workplace defined a sphere of action and influence for working-class women which went beyond the bounds of traditional nineteenth-century "true womanhood." It was a role which disappeared with the rise of craft unionism and which differed in important respects from middle-class feminism.

The experience of the carpet weavers marks an important juncture in both the American labor movement and the social role of American women. The working-class movement of the 1880's helped shape the changing social order. Indeed, late nineteenth-century American industrial communities and culture can best be understood by studying the contradictory processes by which they were created and redefined.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation has been in process for a number of years. During that time, the enthusiasm and friendship of my advisor, Herbert Gutman, has sustained my work even over a long distance. His comments taught me a tremendous amount about history and his ideas opened important ways of asking questions about what that history means. Eric Foner read the entire manuscript with great care and has been particularly helpful in pointing to the broader implications of the study.

Friends and family are always crucial to the success of a project like this. I feel especially lucky in having experienced an ongoing friendship with Judy Hilkey and Allis Wolfe. Our Women at Work project gave me a sense of confidence and optimism without which my dissertation might never have been completed. Our shared work and ideas provided me with a source of support and intellectual vigor, and our project made the isolating years of dissertation writing an important time of collective work as well. Mary Frederickson read both early and late drafts and has offered invaluable suggestions. Her friendship made my transition to the South much easier than I had imagined, and our discussions propelled me through to the end of the dissertation.

My deepest thanks go to Leon Fink. He not only made family life possible during the trying moments of dissertation writing, but has been my closest reader and sharpest critic as well. He and Anna have anchored my work and have made the project even more meaningful.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of labor and women's history during a critical period of American economic growth and development. Dubbed the "Gilded Age" by one of its more cynical observers, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of unprecedented changes in American society. Mechanization and large scale factory production became the norm in important American industries. Patterns of work altered as skilled craftsmen gave way to semiskilled and unskilled operatives. In many industries young women became wage earners in large numbers. Along with the industrial transformation came deep and lasting changes in family and community life that affected men and women alike. By 1900 large corporations dominated an industrial, urban nation. The workforce was divided between a mass of unskilled and organized immigrant laborers and an elite of skilled craftsmen who constituted the trade union movement. Women as well as men increasingly viewed their families as a refuge from a society whose dominant values were competition, individualism and profit.

The United States of 1900 did not result from predetermined patterns of industrialization or economic development.

Business policies, work patterns, family structure, and community life had been gradually changing since before the last quarter of the century. The Gilded Age, however, witnessed a profound struggle over the direction and meaning of industrial growth. In the 1880's significant numbers of men and women envisioned alternatives to the competitive wage system which was gaining dominance. But by 1900 that vision had narrowed. Nevertheless the nature of American institutions and social life had been significantly affected by that struggle.

The general outlines of America's industrial transformation are familiar. Work, community, political organization, and culture all underwent substantial change. But little is yet known of the specific dynamic which tied the changes together. As a result we tend to judge the changes in segmented form. Political developments, economic changes, family patterns, and cultural trends all appear as the result of separate forces and largely unrelated events. Nowhere is the resulting distortion greater than in conventional treatments of Gilded Age workers and their movements.

Patterns of working-class response to industrialization have generally been characterized as either "backward looking," "reformist," or "utopian." Until recently the major labor movement of the century, the Knights of Labor, has been considered a conservative if not "antimodern" social movement.¹ Such studies, however, have given little attention to how changing work and community relations

during the Gilded Age affected the labor movement or shaped working-class thought and behavior.

This narrow perspective provides only a limited understanding of working-class beliefs and behavior in the Gilded Age. This is especially true regarding the beliefs and behavior of working-class women. Although young women entered the workforce in increasing numbers after 1870, we have but scant records of their worklives. Between 1870 and 1880 the number of women employed in manufacturing doubled. By 1880 and 1890 women had come to dominate industries such as textiles, clothing, and shoes. In many instances, their entry into industry coincided with the introduction of new machinery and the decline of the skilled craftsman.² This historic conjuncture profoundly shaped the relations between working-class men and women inside and outside the "world of work." Portrayed either as low wage competitors in the labor market or as unsuspecting victims of unscrupulous employers, working-class women were generally viewed as pathetic creatures in need of protection if not charity. Indeed, women's wage work was notorious for poor conditions and low pay and was not an appealing prospect for the wives and daughters of workingmen. Nonetheless, wage work often represented a social independence previously denied to most poor women.³

The response by Gilded Age working-class women to these changes reveals a culture and a vision different in important ways from that of their middle- and upper-class

sisters. Most literature on late nineteenth-century women focuses on those who left written records of their lives and thoughts. We are familiar with the picture of the narrowed domestic sphere of women as families became increasingly isolated from earlier productive and community life. How an ideal of "true womanhood" placed severe restrictions on women's actions, expressions, and behavior has been well outlined by social historians. The middle-class feminist and suffrage movements of the late nineteenth century are well studied.⁴ But Gilded Age working-class women remain obscure. Working-class women experienced life in ways that clashed with the cult of "true womanhood." For wage-earning women the very act of entering the public world of work and industry jarred with the view of woman's natural domestic sphere. Any action taken by wage-earning women to demand improved conditions or higher wages contradicted expectations of feminine passivity and submissiveness. For the wives of workingmen as well, the ideal domestic sphere was often smothered beneath layers of tenement soot, the drudgery of housework, and limited incomes.

A close look at the behavior and actions of Gilded Age working-class women reveals more than different life styles, options, and tastes. Many also held different ideals, beliefs, and values from their middle-class sisters. Most studies of working-class women, however, skip the crucial Gilded Age decade. Studies of early nineteenth-century working women, most commonly represented by the

Lowell mill girls, document a growing split between the "lady" and the "mill girl." The New England farm daughters who labored in the textile mills first began to carve an alternative vision of working-class womanhood. Studies of immigrant women or women in trade unions most often focus on the early twentieth century when, through the agency of the Women's Trade Union League and (less enthusiastically) the garment unions, a few women dramatically entered the American Federation of Labor. The entry of these women into the labor movement coincided with the upsurge of interest by Progressive-era reformers in the conditions of women's work. Scores of studies and reports documented the deplorable state of working women and the terrible effect this had on family life and the culture of the immigrants. As important as it was, unionization did not alter women's relatively marginal place in industry and in the labor movement.⁵ Yet working-class women had participated in the labor movement well before the turn of the century. Working-class women played a central role in the process of Gilded Age industrial transformation. Either as wage earners in the newly mechanized factories or as housekeepers, wives, and mothers to the men who worked in changing industries, women's lives and work defined important aspects of the changes in American life. During the Gilded Age, for example, wage-earning women as well as housewives joined the Knights of Labor movement, demanding not only rights and improved conditions in wage work, but equality for women in the working-class

community as well. Through the Knights, women defined a sphere of action and influence considerably wider than that of either middle-class womanhood or that of trade union women in the early twentieth century.

The American carpet industry offers an exemplary case study of industrial transformation and the response to it of both men and women during the Gilded Age. Unlike many American industries, carpet manufacture experienced the entire transformation from skilled hand craft production to large scale factory operations and from a male to a female workforce. The transformation in the carpet industry was relatively fast and thus brought into focus the forces of change and the options open to both workers and their employers. In 1870 the average carpet shop employed fewer than ten hands--all skilled weavers. By 1880 integrated factories employing thousands of young women dominated the industry. The transformation in the industry split not only skilled men and unskilled women but the large and small manufacturers as well.

This study of the carpet industry highlights four important aspects of the Gilded Age industrial transformation. First, the industry's shift from small shops to large scale production affords a closer look at the motives and actions of Gilded Age management. The older paternalistic business practices of the hand loom industry were not viable in the large power mills. Pressed by the depression of the 1870's and constantly falling prices, carpet manufacturers

faced constraints not unlike manufacturers in other highly competitive industries. The search for lower costs, particularly lower labor costs, led to the development of manufacturers' associations during the late 1870's and early 1880's. These associations generally formed directly in response to workers' actions during the period. Unlike other employers' associations, however, carpet manufacturers joined forces against members of their own trade who represented the anachronistic small shop era.

Second, an examination of the carpet weavers' communities reveals characteristic changes in Gilded Age working-class neighborhoods and towns. The shift in carpet manufacture from small shops to large factories altered community and family life for carpet weavers. The largely immigrant workforce became split between an older Philadelphia carpet community and the newer mill towns of New York State and to a lesser degree New England. In artisan Philadelphia, women were linked by family and neighborhood ties to the older craft traditions of the trade. Women in the newer mill towns had little more than their common work experience to draw on. Mill town community life was shaped more by a common but new immigrant experience than by traditional artisan ties.

Third, the carpet weavers' response to industrial change indicates important patterns of behavior and thought among Gilded Age workers. The economic crisis which surfaced in the carpet industry by the late 1870's was part of

a general tension appearing in American industry after the panic of 1873. The internal conflicts within the industry combined with the fast pace of its growth resulted in two major strikes by female power loom weavers. The division within the trade between hand and power manufacturers and the changing nature of the workforce shaped these struggles. Women in both settings engaged in militant and prolonged, if unsuccessful, strikes. These events revealed much about the expectations and behavior of Gilded Age working women who willingly stepped outside the domestic sphere.

Fourth, and finally, the transformation and conflict in the carpet industry coincided with the rise of the Knights of Labor. Consequently, the response of carpet weavers not only reveals much about industrial conflict in the period but also about the nature of the labor movement. In cities and towns throughout the country men and women mobilized around an alternative (if vague) call for education, cooperation, and organization. Identifying a community of producers that would establish a "cooperative commonwealth" and "reclaim the republic," the Knights defined a working-class culture that opposed emergent corporate values. This was particularly important among women carpet weavers. The female power loom weavers constituted large "ladies'" assemblies in the Order and became the focus of a major rupture within the organization. The Knights linked working-class women to a national labor movement for the first time. Carpet weavers, like shoe workers and other unskilled

operatives found in the Knights' movement an important source of support for their workplace struggles. The Order also offered young women a vision of their own futures as the wives of workingmen. In the Knights' community of producers housework was honored with wage work as part of the common toil. Although the Knights accepted a sexual division of labor, they viewed the domestic sphere as an organic element of production. The Order's ideal of community combined with its commitment to defend women's rights at the workplace resulted in an expanded notion of working-class womanhood. The goals of the social movement were never realized. But the alternatives posed by the Knights had a power and an appeal for Gilded Age workers. The Gilded Age working-class movement helped shape the changing social order, including trade unions and their attitudes towards women. Indeed, late nineteenth-century American industrial communities and culture can best be understood by studying the contradictory processes by which they were created and redefined.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Most conventional treatments of the Knights of Labor are based on the interpretation in John R. Commons, et al., History of Labour in the United States, esp. 2:part 6. See also Gerald Grob, Workers and Utopia. Norman Ware is an interesting exception to the conventional interpretations. In The Labor Movement in America he recognized the alternative vision posed by the Knights but he did simplify the politics and ideology of the organization. For more recent reinterpretations of the Knights see the papers from the Knights of Labor Centennial Symposium, Newberry Library, Chicago, 1979, especially Leon Fink, "Uses of Political Power: Towards a Theory of the Labor Movement in the Era of the Knights of Labor"; David Brundage, "The Producing Classes and the Saloon: Denver in the 1880's"; Reinhard M. Schindehütte, "Organized Labor and Class Struggle, the Knights and 'All of Labor,' 1879-1900: A Working Thesis"; Steven J. Ross, "Strikes, Knights, and Political Fights: The May Day Strikes, The Knights of Labor, and the Rise of the United Labor Party in Nineteenth Century Cincinnati"; and Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, "Hamilton and the Home Club."

2. According to the U.S. Census for 1870 and 1880 that decade saw the largest increase in number of women employed in manufacturing. The vast majority of wage earning women continued to work as domestic servants but the number of women in manufacturing occupations rose by over 300,000 or 50 percent. Over half of all women in manufacturing worked in clothing industries. About one-third were employed in textiles. The rest worked in industries such as boots and shoes, tobacco, and smaller light manufacturing occupations. For more on the occupations of late nineteenth-century women, see Edith Abbott, Women in Industry: A Study in American Economic History; Helen L. Sumner, History of Women in Industry in the United States; and Robert Smuts, Women and Work in America.

3. See, for example, Helen Campbell, Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives, and Women Wage-Earners: Their Past, Their Present, and Their Future. Also see Dorothy Richardson, "The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl." One exception to this

view was Virginia Penny, How Women Can Make Money, Married or Single, in All Branches of the Arts and Sciences, Professions, Trades, Agriculture and Mechanical Pursuits.

4. See Ellen Carol DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869; Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States; William O'Neill, Everyone was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America. Also see the very influential article by Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860."

5. For a good discussion of women in trade unions at the turn of the century see Alice Kessler-Harris, "Where Are the Organized Women Workers?" and "Women's Wage Work as Myth and History." For a discussion of working-class women in an earlier era see Thomas Dublin, "Women, Work, and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills: 'The Oppressing Hand of Avarice Would Enslave Us,'" in Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, eds., Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker.

CHAPTER 2
"AMERICAN PROGRESS": THE TRANSFORMATION
OF THE CARPET INDUSTRY, 1860-1880

"The immense growth of the manufacture of carpets in this country during the past ten years and the unbounded enterprise of our manufacturers in anticipating the swift and steadily increasing demand for their goods," boasted the leading carpet manufacturers' journal in 1880, "constitutes an interesting and important chapter in the history of American progress." The editors discussed the vast growth in number of establishments and looms and the enormous expansion of invested capital before arriving at their main point. "The increase in productive power is not only the greatest but the most striking. It includes not only the increase in number of looms . . . but also the increase in their capacity consequent upon ingenious inventions which have made the looms of the present marvels of swiftness . . . and which promise to make the relative productive power of the looms of the future still more wonderfully great."¹

Indeed in 1880 the carpet industry had just begun to enter that "chapter in the history of American progress" characterized by large factories and machine production. Those "marvels of swiftness," by which the editors meant

power carpet looms, transformed the industry within ten years from a minor artisan craft to a major branch of the textile industry. In 1870 skilled hand loom weavers operating out of small weaving sheds produced most of the nation's small output of carpets. Ten years later, large-scale power mills employing hundreds of unskilled young women dominated an industry which already had become international in scope. The change occurred most speedily and dramatically in Philadelphia which had long been the center of hand loom production. In 1870 not one of the city's two hundred or so carpet factories used a power loom. Ten years later mechanical production accounted for half of all Philadelphia-made carpets and about two thirds of the national output. The magnitude of the change was also reflected in the relative importance of the carpet industry in America's booming Gilded Age economy. Until the 1870's carpets accounted for just 12 percent of the woolen industry's product. Most carpets used by Americans until then were imported from the world famous centers of Kidderminster (England), Belgium or Turkey. By 1880 domestic production far outstripped imports, and America's carpet mills became serious contenders in the world market. By 1890 carpets accounted for one quarter of the product of America's woolen industry. Carpet mills also counted among the nation's largest factories.²

Industrialization of the carpet industry--the transition to mechanized production and large-scale factory

operation--transformed both workforce and management, altering old habits of work, labor processes, and patterns of production as well as the older paternalistic relations between weaver and manufacturer. As in so many American industries during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, skilled carpet weavers experienced a decline in their trade and a steady erosion of their craft and their power. Machines and unskilled young women took over the bulk of production. Smaller manufacturers also saw their position in the industry weaken and diminish as a few power mills began to control the market. But the promise of progress and the optimism surrounding the power loom quickly degenerated as a decade of depression and falling prices threatened the industry's precarious profit margin. Both weavers and manufacturers ended the 1870's organized to maintain their interests within the industry. In order to lower production costs and control the cut-throat competition between shops, the major manufacturers united to establish uniform industry-wide wage standards. Reluctant to confront their skilled workforce, the manufacturers initially attempted to reduce the wages of the female power loom weavers. The unskilled women responded in two major strikes, first in 1878-79 and then in 1884-85. In both instances the women surprised their employers as well as their fellow workers with a militant refusal to accept a lower wage. In both strikes, too, the skilled hand loom weavers allied with the women to maintain the general wage level of the industry.

Together, competition between the major manufacturers and their smaller, less mechanized rivals and confrontations between manufacturers and weavers stretching over almost a decade ushered the carpet industry into a new era of mechanized production, modern management, and an organized workforce.³

The major problem facing mid-nineteenth century carpet manufacturers was the slow and expensive nature of production. Until a method could be devised of weaving high quality carpets quickly and at a low unit cost, the industry remained on the margins of the textile trade. Although the power loom had solved many of the cotton industry's problems by the 1830's, it was harder to adapt to woolen and to carpet weaving. A scarcity of fine wool and the difficulty of handling the material by machine delayed widespread application of power to woolens and worsteds until the 1850's.⁴ Even more complicated problems delayed the weaving of carpets by machine. The three types of carpets which dominated the nineteenth century market all required precision and detail in combining several warps, filling and patterns into one fabric. One census reporter noted that the "problem of incorporating two webs into one fabric and still keep colors regularly at the surface and make the figure match was utterly beyond the power of automatic art on any scale that would pay."⁵ Indeed, hand loom carpet weaving produced one of the smallest outputs per unit in

the entire textile industry. Ingrain carpets, the simplest, most inexpensive and popular coverings of the period, had an average hand loom output of eight yards per day.⁶ The more luxurious Brussels and tapestry carpets rarely exceeded five yards per day. Axminsters, the most painstaking of all hand made carpets to work, often were produced at less than three yards per day. With hand loom weavers' rates in the mid-century running as high as twenty-five or thirty cents a yard and most of the wool used being imported, the cost of production in the industry remained remarkably high.⁷

Most of the nation's carpets traditionally were produced in the artisan manufacturing city of Philadelphia. Although challenged by eastern power mills, that city remained the heart of the industry until the turn of the twentieth century. From the early nineteenth century onward, English and Scottish immigrant carpet weavers plied their craft in small sheds located within or adjacent to their own homes. An independent weaver purchased his yarn from a merchant or large manufacturer and delivered the finished goods.⁸ Hand loom weavers of the 1880's still recalled the "old time manufacturer" who owned one, two or three hand looms and "would bundle a role when completed on a wagon or pushcart and take it to Second Street, then the carpet emporium of the city."⁹ More often a weaver worked on orders from a larger proprietor. As late as 1881 when the factory system was already widespread some manu-

facturers in Philadelphia still contracted their work out to hand loom weavers working at home. Samuel Burnett, for example, who ran a mill of 75 hand looms and employed 42 hands, also employed 65 weavers and winders "outside." Another small manufacturer, Joseph Patton, whose Minerva Mills employed 45 hands, reported "the larger part of the looms are out of the buildings."¹⁰ Whether inside or outside the mill, Philadelphia's industry was characterized by its concentration solely on weaving. In 1880 only 8 of the city's 215 mills employed any spinning equipment.¹¹ In 1890 when one quarter of the city's looms were still hand-powered the number of integrated establishments had declined to three.¹² Running tiny operations of ten looms or less, most Philadelphia manufacturers operated on very narrow margins and had few resources with which to experiment or risk innovation. It was thus left to the major textile manufacturers of the East to invest in the as yet unproven carpet power loom.

During the 1840's the Lowell company (founded in 1828 as a part of Massachusetts' great textile establishment), decided to explore the possibilities of using power in carpet production.¹³ The company hired Erastus Bigelow, a local inventor, to work on the problem. Bigelow, the son of a New England farmer and wheelwright, had already solved the problem of knotting in a power loom for coach lace.¹⁴ His work progressed well, and in 1854 the Lowell company patented the first ingrain power loom. This first machine

produced three times as much carpet as the old hand looms but cost \$1300 to install, compared to only about \$100 for a hand loom.⁵ Within three years, the inventor refined his machine to the point of averaging twenty-five yards per day. Bigelow's inventions proved so successful that he became a partner in the firm and attached his name to a carpet company which exists in altered form to this day.¹⁶ Largely because the power looms were operated by young women Bigelow's machine reduced the price of weaving dramatically. Two-ply ingrain which had commanded twelve cents a yard could be produced at just two and a half cents. Three-ply carpets, the higher grade, were likewise reduced from twenty-five to just under three cents a yard. The reduced cost combined with a handsome royalty from the loom's patent of two cents per yard assured Bigelow's success in the industry.¹⁶

Bigelow's loom dominated the carpet power loom field until the Civil War. High prices and a low tariff initiated a post-war expansion in the industry and stimulated rival companies to develop their own power loom models. By the 1870's three types of power looms were in widespread use outside Philadelphia. John Chester Duckworth, whose power loom came to rival the Bigelow loom, developed a model which could produce almost forty yards of ingrain carpet in one day and in addition took up half the space of other power looms.¹⁷ Born in Manchester, England, Duckworth had apprenticed in his father's machine shop as a boy. In 1873 he was hired by the Elias S. Higgins carpet company in

New York City to whom he subsequently sold the patent for his loom. Duckworth, who reportedly continued inventing until his untimely death in 1882, left his mark on other machines as well, including the McCormick harvesting machines of the 1880's.¹⁸ William Murkland, a Scottish weaver who later became a supervisor in the Lowell company, invented an ingrain power loom which became the model widely adopted by the Philadelphia power loom industry. His loom averaged about thirty yards a day and also was patented by the Lowell company. In a pattern not uncommon to nineteenth-century inventors, Murkland, whose loom was called "really a triumph of its kind," died seeing "little or nothing" of its yield.¹⁹

The appeal of power looms lay not only in their increased productive capacity but in the fact that they could be run by relatively unskilled and low paid young women. Erastus Bigelow boasted that his loom "eliminated the costly labor of men" and replaced it with women who could produce in a day "as many yards of ingrain as four men by hand."²⁰ The employment of women on power looms at once decreased the cost of labor from the twenty-five or thirty cent hand loom rate to less than six cents a yard. Bigelow estimated that his invention brought the price of carpets down 20 percent.²¹ Bigelow's loom for Brussels carpets was even more effective, producing in a given time "as many yards as ten men and ten boys by hand loom."²² Young women could be trained in less than a month's time compared with the two years apprenticeship for hand loom weavers, and they commanded

much lower wages than their skilled predecessors. According to one estimate, the power carpet loom reduced the cost of production by half while increasing output three times.²³

Within twenty years after Bigelow's ingrain power loom went into use, the carpet industry split into two rival sections (see Table 1). The old Philadelphia hand loom shops continued to produce a substantial portion of the nation's carpet output, but by 1870 a few New York and New England mills seriously rivaled that city's position in the market. By 1870 the eastern mills which were almost exclusively large-scale integrated power factories equalled Philadelphia's production. Thirteen New York State mills alone produced 20 percent of the nation's total carpet yardage. The capital invested in these New York mills exceeded Philadelphia's by over \$1.25 million. New England carpet mills also produced about 20 percent of the national output but were more often combined operations with other textile production. The difference between the mechanized New York mills and the Philadelphia hand industry was further emphasized by the relative size of the factories. In 1870 the average Philadelphia shop employed 27 hands, while the eastern mills averaged over 300 employees.²⁴

The power loom ushered women into the mills. Men still dominated the skilled Philadelphia trade, and women constituted only about a quarter of the workforce there. But as mechanization spread in Philadelphia the percentage of women increased. It was almost 30 percent in 1880.²⁵

Table 1. Carpet Production in the United States,
1860-1880.*

	1860	(%)	1870	(%)	1880	(%)
A. Number of Establishments						
United States	213	(100)	215	(100)	195	(100)
Pennsylvania	137	(64)	184	(86)	172	(88)
New York	29	(14)	13	(6)	10	(6)
New England	14	(7)	9	(4)	7	(4)
B. Yards Produced (all types, in millions)						
United States	13	(100)	22	(100)	39	(100)
Pennsylvania	6	(45)	12	(56)	22	(57)
New York	2	(17)	4	(20)	8	(21)
New England	4	(34)	5	(23)	6	(17)
C. Value of Production (in millions)						
United States	\$8	(100)	\$22	(100)	\$33	(100)
Pennsylvania	3	(34)	10	(45)	14	(45)
New York	2	(21)	5	(23)	8	(26)
New England	3	(40)	6	(30)	9	(28)
D. Capital Invested (in millions)						
United States	\$5	(100)	\$13	(100)	\$21	(100)
Pennsylvania	.9	(18)	3	(24)	7	(34)
New York	1	(20)	4	(34)	6	(30)
New England	3	(60)	5	(40)	8	(36)

*Figures do not total 100% due to a few mills outside the major carpet areas which are not included here.

Source: U.S. Census, Statistics of Manufacturers, 1860, 1870, 1880.

The mechanized eastern mills employed a workforce which was 42 percent female in 1870 and 66 percent female by 1880.²⁶ Because of the skilled history of the industry, the proportion of women traditionally had been much lower in carpets than other textiles, but by 1880 carpets employed the second largest number of women after cotton goods.

Unable to compete with either the output or the cost of the eastern mills, Philadelphia's hand loom industry began its own conversion to mechanical production. Spurred by the increased post-war demand for carpets and constantly falling prices, a few of Philadelphia's staid hand loom establishments by the early 1870's risked the transition.²⁹ While few of the small shops could afford the initial investment in power looms or the cost of expansion, those which did so began to see significant gains. As in the woolen industry as a whole, most of the larger firms financed their investment in power from other commercial and retail interests.³⁰ Beginning with only a few power looms, these firms could then use the profits to expand their holdings.²⁷ Of the twenty-five major power mills in 1880 every one had operated a sizeable hand shop (see Table 2). The firm of Ivins, Dietz and Magee, which added just 4 power looms to their hand loom stock of 62 in 1876, was running 125 power looms in 1880. Although Ivins, Dietz and Magee had decreased its hand looms to 25 in 1880, its annual

Table 2. The Impact of Power Looms on the Growth of Major Philadelphia Carpet Manufacturers, 1876-1880.

Firm	1876			1880		
	Number of hand looms	Number of power looms	Yards produced annually	Number of hand looms	Number of power looms	Yards produced annually
J. and J. Dobson	16	225	2,010,000	20	310	2,388,000
Thomas Leedom	130	23	1,080,000	125	78	1,248,000
Alex Crow	100	26	936,000	100	65	1,116,000
Ivins, Dietz & Magee	62	4	361,440	25	125	1,080,000
Judge Brothers	?	20 (1877)	?	120	50	1,080,000
Bromely Brothers	108	36	504,000	108	56	1,020,000
John Bromely & Sons	100	62	892,500	124	82	924,00
Horner Brothers	35	6	418,400	36	40	780,000
Joseph Gay	85	31	460,720	45	62	720,000
James Hogg & Son	4	36	453,800	56	80	648,000
McCallum, Crease & Sloan	30	56	750,000	25	61	618,000
Dornan Brothers	75	27	552,604	16	76	600,000
James Kitchenman	79	26	431,080	60	34	600,000
James Pollack & Son	35	--	355,160	36	40	528,000
Samuel Beck	35	19	337,955	54	26	480,000
Robert Carson	16	--	78,000	60	20	480,000

Table 2, continued

Firm	1876			1880		
	Number of hand looms	Number of power looms	Yards produced annually	Number of hand looms	Number of power looms	Yards produced annually
James Doak	?	15	82,000	?	18	456,000
Robert Huston	25	--	144,000	53	16	444,000
Samuel Burnett	20	--	143,000	50	15	420,000
Thomas Taylor	27	--	155,360	40	25	408,000
James Taylor	28	--	174,720	25	25	300,000

Source: "Statistics of the Carpet Industry in Philadelphia," The Carpet Trade Review, January 1877 and September 1881, Pennsylvania State Department of Internal Affairs, Industrial Statistics, Annual Report, 1879-1880, pp. 103-108.

output had increased by close to seven hundred thousand yards. Henry Horner who ran only 6 power looms along with his 35 hand looms in 1876 had increased his stock to 40 machines by 1880. He, too, minimized his hand production running only 36 looms in 1880 but his production during those four years doubled.

Once it started the transition to power production in Philadelphia continued with remarkable speed. In 1875 only a single firm, John and James Dobson, employed power looms. Three years later 19 mills were mechanized and by 1880, 45 of the city's 215 firms ran power mills. Masked by the seemingly small number of power firms was the position they held in the city's carpet industry. In 1876 the 19 power-loom firms controlled half of Philadelphia's hand looms and produced 75 percent of the city's output.²⁸ By 1880 carpet production had become the fifth largest industry in Philadelphia. According to a 1876 survey, the average sized mill contained 27 looms. This figure hid the magnitude of the power shops which averaged 133 looms, 31 hand and 102 power-driven. The average hand loom shop in contrast housed only 12 looms. In general the hand loom shop employed one weaver per loom, thus bringing them near the national average of an eight-man shop.²⁹

The investment in power looms quickly raised the fortunes of those manufacturers who used them. Robert Huston, a weaver who worked for the old firm of Horace Soule, began his business with 12 hand looms in 1870. Late in

the decade he bought 16 power looms and increased his annual production almost four times by 1880.³⁰ Another small proprietor, Robert Carson, also saw his fortunes rise.

A weaver for ten years before becoming foreman at Ivins, Dietz and Magee, Carson opened his own shop in the late 1860's. The Irish-born weaver was running only 16 hand looms in 1876 but had increased his stock to 60 hand and 20 power looms by 1880. The investment in power raised his annual output from 78,000 to 480,000 yards.³¹

Philadelphia's carpet men formed a close-knit manufacturers' community. Among the smaller manufacturers, many had begun their careers as weavers and consequently knew the trade intimately from the production side. Of the larger firms, many invested in carpets initially as a commercial venture and went into production afterwards. Concentrated among the varied textile concerns of Philadelphia's industrial district known as Kensington, the carpet manufacturers occupied an important position in the city's commercial affairs. Many invested in real estate including employee housing. A number of carpet men also invested widely in railroads, insurance companies, and municipal stocks. Like their employees, carpet manufacturers were in general foreign-born, usually either Scottish, northern Irish, or British. Many came from families with long histories in the textile or carpet business.³²

John and James Dobson who ran the first Philadelphia power mill had by the 1880's built their business into one

of international stature.³³ Born in Yorkshire in 1827, John Dobson came to the United States at the age of eighteen "after acquiring a knowledge of carpets and the woolen business." He worked for a time for Joseph Schofield, who ran a small Pennsylvania carpet mill in Montgomery County, and then went into the woolen business for himself. In 1854 he married Sarah Schofield, the daughter of his old employer, and began to concentrate on carpet production. Exclusive Army contracts for blankets and jackets enabled Dobson to expand his mill during the Civil War even while leading a hundred-man company of factory operatives, the "Blue Reserves," into battle. At home, his wife "looked after the business and held it together," increasing the plant from one to several buildings which included spinning and dyeing as well as weaving blankets, carpets, silk plush and dress goods.³⁴

After the war James Dobson joined his brother to build Philadelphia's largest carpet mill, and the third largest in the country. By 1880 the Falls of Schuylkill mills annually produced over two million yards of carpets and employed close to two thousand hands. The firm occupied a site just outside the city and was the only major Philadelphia carpet mill outside of the Kensington district. The company provided housing for its workforce in "Dobsontown" and built what in many ways resembled an eastern mill town.³⁵ In spite of the distance from Kensington, John Dobson remained a prominent member of the carpet community and was instrumental in forming a manufacturers' association in 1878.

Dobson also took an active interest in political affairs, becoming an "admirable representative of the manufacturing industries of the country." A staunch high-tariff Republican, he testified for the carpet industry before the government tariff committees.³⁶ One of the largest woolen manufacturers in the nation, Dobson also held extensive interests outside the textile trade. A "great amount of Philadelphia real estate," particularly of valuable center-city properties, complemented holdings throughout Pennsylvania and Ohio.³⁷ All together, his interests in textiles, railroads, gas companies, insurance companies, and banks gave Dobson a net worth of close to \$10 million upon his death in 1911.

Within the Kinsington district a few large family concerns dominated the carpet industry. John Bromley with his sons George, James, and Thomas owned Philadelphia's second largest carpet business.³⁸ Born in 1800 to a British woolen manufacturing family "of many generations," John Bromley began his career in his father's worsted mill. Aged twenty-eight, he went into business for himself and in 1841 moved his operation and his family to Little Falls, New Jersey, a small textile town not far from New York. Spinning yarn for New York's Higgins carpet company "and others looming up in carpet manufacture," Bromley decided to take up the weaving of carpets himself.³⁹ Apparently his yarn business did not prosper, so in 1843 he moved to Philadelphia where he apprenticed himself to hand-loom

master John Cheetham. Two years later he began his own carpet business (reportedly with but one hand loom).⁴⁰ By the eve of the Civil War, Bromley's stock had increased to 37 looms and he moved his works to more extensive quarters. In 1860 his oldest sons, George and James, became John Bromley's partners while his youngest son, Thomas, began work as a bobbin winder. The youngest Bromley soon became a weaver and then a warper. In 1868 the three brothers formed a separate firm known as Bromley Brothers. In 1881 Thomas bought out his brothers and the older two began their own production in an old mill next door to their father's original site.

The firms of John Bromley and Sons, Bromley Brothers, and James and George Bromley together formed a powerful block in the carpet community. In 1880 the family controlled 232 hand and 138 power looms and produced close to two million yards of carpet each year. Together the Bromleys employed over seven hundred weavers, mainly young women working power looms.⁴¹ James Bromley, a prominent member of the Orthodox Friends, took special pride in his family's treatment of the workers. Many of their hand loom weavers had been with the family for years and the brothers followed their father in sponsoring outings and sporting events for the mill employees. The Bromleys were one of the few major manufacturing families to live in the Nineteenth-Ward carpet district, and following the trade's traditional pattern, they frequently boarded weavers or apprentices in their

homes.⁴² One old weaver told the local newspaper, "We think a good bit of Mr. Bromley and his family."⁴³

Another major name in Philadelphia's carpet community was James Judge. Born in the northern Irish county of Derry in 1833, Judge moved to Philadelphia at the age of nineteen to become a carpet weaver. Entering the business "when every man was his own proprietor and there were no strikes to interfere with labor" (a romantic memory at best), Judge began working for himself in 1855.⁴⁴ Eight years later, his brothers William and Robert joined the business, and the firm steadily expanded to become the third largest power mill in the city by 1880. In 1877 the family moved their mill to a large site in Kensington. It had a capacity of 120 hand and 50 power looms. Judge, the "best yarn buyer in the trade," diversified his investments by buying real estate and breeding horses. Described by a contemporary as a man who "had the force of character and natural ability but lacked that veneered polish which so often masquerades as culture," Judge was a "devout but liberal" Episcopalian and held the position as director of several lodges and building associations (including ones holding the houses of his employees). Upon his death in 1887 one fellow carpet manufacturer said of him, "Kensington never held a more typical representative of the staunch North of Ireland colony which has done so much to build up the carpet industry of our city."⁴⁵

In general Philadelphia's carpet manufacturers took

an active role in civic and political affairs. Carpet men, as might be expected, gave their loyalty almost exclusively to the high-tariff Republican Party. John Dobson, a party leader, marched conspicuously in the Blaine campaign parade of 1884.⁴⁶ Alexander Crow, who ran an extensive mill of 100 hand and 65 power looms, represented the city's Fourth Ward at the party's national convention that year.⁴⁷ James Pollack, a manufacturer of lesser stature who ran a mill of 40 power and 36 hand looms, represented the carpet district's Nineteenth Ward in party politics. Other carpet men were also active in Nineteenth Ward affairs. Robert Winchester and Daniel Currie, both small hand loom proprietors, represented the ward on the city's Common Council and both William and Robert Judge served on city commissions including the school board and the fire commission.⁴⁸ The notable exception to staunch Republican politics was carpet man James Kitchenman. Kitchenman, a British-born weaver who worked in a "basement hovel" Brussels factory after arriving in Philadelphia, was, by 1880, a well-to-do manufacturer who produced over six hundred thousand yards of ingrain carpets each year.⁴⁹ Kitchenman was one of the older carpet men in Kensington and was as staunch a Democrat as the others were Republican. Proclaiming himself a "working man's friend," Kitchenman publicly upheld the side of the weavers in many industrial conflicts⁵⁰ and maintained his wage rates during the major strikes of 1878 and 1884, thus enabling his organized weavers to support their fellows

who were out of work.⁵¹ In 1885 after the strike the Democrats nominated Kitchenman for sheriff and the labor interests campaigned for him with banners and cards during a labor parade that year.

In stark contrast to the crowded mill district of Kensington were the huge carpet mills of the East. The major carpet companies of New England generally formed parts of larger textile concerns. The New York mills, on the other hand, initiated operation as large scale carpet factories.⁵² By 1880 three New York firms, the Alexander Smith and Sons Carpet Company in Yonkers, the Stephen Sanford and Sons mill in Amsterdam, and the Elias S. Higgins Company in New York City, provided Kensington's major rivals in the carpet market. Operating on a much larger scale than any Philadelphia mill except that owned by the Dobsons, these three firms could seriously influence the trade by regulating their output and thereby affecting the market price. The New York mills, particularly the Alexander Smith company, stood out as major industrial plants, employing over a thousand hands each in 1880.⁵³

In 1880 the Alexander Smith and Sons carpet company was the nation's largest carpet mill and was second only to Scotland's famous John Crossley in the world trade. Unlike many of the Philadelphia men who came from textile backgrounds, Alexander Smith was the son of a prosperous New Jersey farmer. Like other eastern manufacturers Smith entered the business from the retail side of the trade.

After working a few years in his father's general store and handling carpets there, Smith decided the business was too small and "being bent on pushing his way upward" began to look for a "more promising career."⁵⁴ After an unsuccessful start in the carpet business Smith worked for a short time in Schenectady for a power loom manufacturing plant. As a supervisor there he learned the principles of the loom, and with the aid of the enterprising inventor, Halcyon Skinner, Smith opened a large mill of 100 hand looms in 1851.⁵⁵ Despite two fires (one of which left "only the national flag flying" above his charred mill), Smith continued his business with the model ingrain power loom he and Skinner had developed. Large losses in southern investments during the Civil War caused him "temporary financial embarrassment" but did not deter his energies. In 1863 he patented the first power loom for Axminster carpets.⁵⁶ Skinner, who invented the machine, improved it and finally patented it again in 1874. The power loom exceeded the output of Axminster hand looms by ten times and catapulted Smith's company to the head of the industry. The Axminster power loom gave his company "an advantage amounting to nearly a monopoly" in that branch of the industry. The cost of an Axminster carpet dropped significantly and what had been a luxury carpet came within "the reach of a much larger class of people." With his Axminster loom and a modification called Moquette, Smith's production jumped from three to forty yards per day per loom.⁵⁷

By 1880 the Smith company employed one-tenth of all women carpet workers in the country and employed a third of the working population in Yonkers, New York. Along with the budding Otis elevator company, a hat mill and a small silk mill, Smith's carpet company provided the industrial base for this growing New York suburb. Alexander Smith was highly commended as one of the town's "most widely honored citizens" especially for the "use he is making of his surplus capital in building houses to adorn our city."⁵⁸ As Yonkers' leading industrialist, Smith participated fully in civic affairs funding various local charities including the Episcopal hospital. Originally a Democrat "until he found the American Democracy was controlled by the slave powers," Smith became a Free Soiler and then a staunch Republican. In 1874 the party nominated him for Congress. Although he lost that year he ran again in 1878, this time as a "workingman in every sense of that much abused term."⁵⁹ Smith's untimely death on the eve of his election left Yonkers flags flying at half mast mourning a man "greatly beloved by all who knew him."

After Smith's death in 1878 the business fell to his son Warren B. Smith and his son-in-law, William Cochran. Together, they built the Alexander Smith and Sons carpet company into the world's leading manufacturer of tapestry and Axminster carpets. They steadily increased their stock of power looms and expanded the company's facilities for spinning, dyeing, and finishing. In addition to holding

the Axminster patent, the company expanded its own machine shop, exporting looms to Philadelphia and even to Europe. Employing over two thousand hands by the early 1880's, the Smith company quickly shifted after its founder's death to more impersonal management strategies including a rigid set of work-rules.⁶⁰

The Smith company's closest eastern competitor was the Elias S. Higgins company located on Manhattan's West Side. Born in 1823 to a Maine shipbuilding family, Elias Higgins entered the "mercantile side of the carpet trade" in 1832.⁶¹ Three years later Elias with his brother Alvin began the production of ingrain carpets. Like many nineteenth-century factories, Higgins' first Jersey City mill was a fire hazard and burned down three times in seven years. After trying business in Brooklyn, Paterson (New Jersey), and then in Haverstraw, New York, the Higgins brothers moved their operations to a newly built mill on Forty-third Street and the Hudson River in Manhattan.⁷¹ The brothers bought thirty-four city lots, just half a block of land, for \$16,400 in 1847 for the manufacture of tapestry and ingrain carpets. By 1882 the company owned the entire block plus a number of tenements and flats nearby.⁶²

During the 1860's the Higgins company diversified its line, becoming the country's leading tapestry producer. It employed the inventor John Chester Duckworth and held the patent on his power loom models.⁶³ By the early 1880's

the company employed nearly two thousand hands, many of whom lived near the mill. Most of Higgins' workers were Scottish immigrants. A number of French Canadian workers also appeared in the mill during the late 1870's.⁶⁴ The Higgins brothers maintained considerable interests outside the carpet trade and claimed to be worth over \$35 million by 1878. Their company was one of the "heaviest holders of real estate in the metropolis" and also held a large amount of railroad stock. Elias Higgins served as director of two rail lines as well as a post as trustee of the New York Life Insurance Company. In addition he was a large stock holder in the Consolidated Gas Company and served as director of the Central National Bank, known as the "Carpet Men's bank." Their diversified interests and location in the cosmopolitan center of New York lent the company a relatively liberal air. During the great strikes of the 1880's, for example, they dealt more willingly with the carpet weavers' union than other manufacturers.⁷⁵

New York's third major carpet company, Stephen Sanford and Sons, was located in the Mohawk Valley town of Amsterdam, the heart of the state's vast knit goods district. Founded in 1842 by John Sanford, the company was the country's fourth largest producer of tapestry carpets in 1880. Born in Vermont, John Sanford was known in the trade as a "self-made man." He had worked on the Erie Canal and from there settled in Amsterdam. His first mill, run by looms hauled up the Hudson River on ice in the 1830's, was a small opera-

tion until the 1850's when his son Stephen took over the business.⁶⁶ Stephen Sanford guided the business to steady growth, beginning his own spinning mill as well. During the 1860's the company invested heavily in tapestry and velvet carpet looms, becoming one of the top velvet carpet manufacturers. Sanford's unique tapestry setting machines, which used a tin-painted pattern plate over which the worsted was drawn to match exactly, assured his position in the industry.⁶⁷ With business tripling in ten years, Sanford outlined his philosophy in 1879. "Others may increase the number of their looms all they please, but I prefer to increase my facilities for manufacturing carpet materials."⁶⁸

Although Sanford joined numerous knitgoods manufacturers in Amsterdam, his mill was by far the largest operation in town. When Amsterdam became incorporated into a "full fledged city" in 1885, the "Messers Sanford" were praised for having had a "powerful effect."⁶⁹ In turn, John Sanford, his son, and grandson all served the Amsterdam district in Congress after a youthful stint at Yale.⁷⁰ Stephen Sanford, more than other carpet manufacturers, was known for his opulent life style. From his "royal private residence located in an elegant park" a short distance from the mill, Sanford reigned over his holdings, which included housing for his employees as well as the mill itself.⁷¹ Sanford's reputation among carpet weavers was among the worst in the trade. His employees described their housing as rows

of "wretched tenements from which he draws as rent a large part of the money which he pays his hands as wages." The mill was lined with windows "guarded by a network of thick iron wire" and "King Sanford" eschewed the paternalism of other carpet mill owners.⁷²

After a period of spectacular growth and prosperity, the carpet industry entered a crisis in the mid-1870's which lasted over a decade. "Painfully large" Civil War profits had encouraged the building of new factories and the "inordinate extension of those in operation." A favorable tariff combined with low wool prices aided the industry's expansion. The capital invested in carpet mills tripled between 1860 and 1880 as did the value of production. Annual yardage soared from thirteen million yards in 1860 to almost thirty-nine million in 1880. The dramatic expansion of the industry brought with it a "ruthless competition."⁷³ Particularly by the early 1870's when the initial patents on power looms began to expire, the industry faced a serious internal problem. While production soared and the new machines promised reduced costs, increased production and high profits, prices in the industry began to decline sharply. The price of ingrain carpets fell from an 1864 high of \$2.50 per yard for extra supers to a dismal low of \$0.90 in 1876 and an even worse \$0.72 per yard in 1879.⁷⁴ As early as 1875 the trade journals began to call for regulation of the competition in the industry and an organized cutback in production. Production, they feared, had exceeded the

"national demand." Hit hard by the low prices, individual manufacturers stepped up their search for low production costs.

For power loom manufacturers, labor appeared as the most flexible cost of production and therefore became a target for contraction. The power loom had initially cut manufacturers' expenses dramatically. With mechanized looms, the manufacturer could at once increase his productive capacity and reduce his labor costs. "When you can have a loom weaving fifty yards a day and requiring the attendance of but one girl," Elias Higgins observed, "it is getting the cost of weaving down to about its lowest point."⁷⁵ However, investment in new machinery brought with it high fixed overhead costs in the form of interest and royalty payments which had to be met no matter how low the carpet selling price fell. Since manufacturers estimated the cost of labor at almost a third of their production costs, they increasingly looked to lower wages for relief from the falling prices of the 1870's.

Wage patterns had had a most uneven impact on the carpet workforce since 1860. The impact of power looms on hand loom weaving rates was especially disastrous. Weavers who had made twenty-five to thirty cents a yard during the 1860's received as little as thirteen cents in 1880. With power loom ingrain glutting the market, the demand for hand loom goods fell off. Mechanically produced carpets appeared to be of much higher quality and more uniform

texture than the hand made goods, and by the late 1870's the skilled hand loom weavers worked almost exclusively on low-grade carpets.⁷⁷ Female power loom weavers, on the other hand, were among the highest paid women in the textile industry. Based on the standards of production of the very hand loom weavers who were now becoming impoverished, wages of power loom weavers in Philadelphia were the highest of all. Earning about six cents a yard for average grade goods, women in Philadelphia probably averaged about \$1.50 a day. Allowing for the seasonal nature of the work and the extended layoffs during the slack times, the women could earn over \$300 per year by 1880.⁷⁸

The optimistic post-war expansion of the carpet industry glutted the market by the mid-1870's. The crisis of 1873 which seriously dampened national appetites hit the carpet industry later but no less hard than many other industries. In May 1876 one of the leading trade journals issued a "note of warning to the trade." Production had to be curtailed, warned its editors, "or we shall have a large accumulation of stock."⁷⁹ Urging manufacturers to "exercise vigilance for the good of the trade," the journal predicted dire consequences if some check were not put on the excessive competition and consequent low prices in the industry. Even though domestic production for the first time surpassed imports, the spring trade that year was very depressed. The winter season was marked by "idle looms" and the next year witnessed a "large number of failures"

in the industry.⁸⁰ Most major mills in both Philadelphia and the east reported large stocks of surplus carpet rolls in their storerooms as each season the prices dropped a few more points. As conditions in the industry worsened, competition between the manufacturers for the shrinking market increased.

During the spring of 1877, several Philadelphia firms reduced hand loom weavers' wages. They claimed that "New York and eastern competition forced the reduction." John Dobson and Thomas Leedom led the way, posting notices of a two-cent per yard cut in the weaving rate, bringing weavers' wages to thirteen cents a yard. Leedom's Philadelphia carpet mill was one of the largest in the city, running 130 hand and 23 power looms and producing over a million yards of carpets each year. The hand loom weavers immediately struck, demanding their original wages and an advance in order to restore the fifteen-cent rate of the previous spring. The strike lasted about four weeks. The final settlement remains obscure but Leedom praised the outcome for establishing "uniform prices in certain grades."⁸¹

Within the year, the major manufacturers organized themselves to reorder the competitive situation in the trade. In early May, 1878, the leading tapestry and Brussels manufacturers--Higgins, Sanford, Smith, Dobson, and the Boston Roxbury company among others--met in New York with a view "to making some arrangement by which overproduction could be stopped."⁸² Threatened by low prices and the intense

competition of the industry, the larger firms attempted to exert a control over the market. Regardless of the action taken by the weavers in response to cutbacks in production, the major manufacturers were determined to control the market and establish uniform rates in the industry. That "marvel of the age," the power loom, which had promised low costs, high productivity, and high profits, had, in the end, reduced not simply the hand craft skill of the weaver, but the economic latitude of small proprietors as well.

The one group whose position remained secure during the industry's growing crisis were the female power loom weavers. Despite increased restrictions on production, the number of power loom weavers in Philadelphia steadily increased. In 1869 the Pennsylvania carpet industry employed only 905 women. By 1879 the number had almost tripled to over 2,300. Elsewhere the female carpet mill workforce experienced a similar growth. In 1869 1,400 women worked in the New York mills. Ten years later over 3,000 female operatives worked the power looms.⁸³ To manufacturers' eyes the women represented a docile, low wage alternative to the hand loom weavers. One manufacturer commented after several years of using women in his mill, "I've been employing girls in my factory for six years and I can emphatically say that I like them much better than men."⁸⁴ Until the late 1870's wages for Philadelphia power loom weavers remained stable at about six cents per yard, or an average of \$7 to \$9 a week. By the fall of 1878, however,

power loom manufacturers felt compelled to cut the women's wages. The low market price combined with increasingly bitter competition between firms led the employers to test their new workforce for the first time. The women met the cut with an organized and forceful resistance. The "Long Strike" of 1878-79 signaled the final stage in the industry's transition to mechanized factory production and expert management. The major power firms, having defeated the older hand loom proprietors in the market, began now to assert a closer control over their workforce. After 1878 carpet manufacturers organized themselves not simply to regulate prices and output in the industry but to counter the initiatives of their employees as well.⁸⁵ The female power loom weavers proved less docile than expected. Throughout the next decade the women firmly resisted their employers' attempts to cut wages, encroach on what had already become customary rights on the shop floor, and outlaw all efforts at organization.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. The Carpet Trade, January 1880.

2. Statistics for the industry have been compiled from the following: U.S. Census, Statistics of Manufacturers, 1860, 1870, 1880 (hereafter referred to as U.S. Census, SM); "Statistics of the Carpet Industry in Philadelphia" (hereafter, "Statistics of the Industry"), The Carpet Trade Review, January 1877 and September 1881; and Pennsylvania State Department of Internal Affairs, Industrial Statistics, Annual Report, 1879-1880, pp. 103-8.

3. The two major histories of the carpet industry are Arthur H. Cole and Harold T. Williamson, The American Carpet Manufacture: A History and an Analysis; and John S. Ewing and Nancy P. Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen: A History of the Bigelow-Sanford Carpet Company.

4. See Arthur H. Cole, The American Wool Manufacture, 1:238-41. For other material on mechanization in the textile industry, see Caroline Ware, The Early New England Cotton Manufacture: A Study in Industrial Beginning; and John L. Hayes, American Textile Machinery: Its Early History. . . .

5. U.S. Census, SM, 1860, p. lvi.

6. Estimates of handloom output are derived from scattered sources. See, for example, The Carpet Trade, January 1880.

7. Joseph D. Weeks, "Report on the Statistics of Wages in Manufacturing Industries," U.S. Census, SM, 1880. Also see Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, p. 173.

8. For accounts of the hand loom carpet industry see Phillip A. Hall, The Rug and Carpet Industry of Philadelphia; J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Wescott, History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884; Victor S. Clark, History of Manufacturers in the United States; William A. Sullivan, The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania; and J. R. Kendrick, "The Carpet Industry of Philadelphia," in Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, Annual Report, 1889, part 3, vol. 17, pp. 7-9; and Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, pp. 24-32.

9. Hall, Rug and Carpet Industry, no page.
10. The Carpet Trade, November 1881.
11. The Carpet Trade Review, September 1881, "Statistics of the Industry."
12. Clark, History of Manufacturers, 2:439.
13. For more on the early industry in Lowell see Ewing and Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen, pp. 1-33; and Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, pp. 15-21. Also see The Carpet Trade Review, December 1879.
14. Information on Bigelow comes from the following: Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, pp. 58-65 and 158-59; The Carpet Trade, February 1878 and May 1880; and The Carpet Trade Review, January 1880.
15. The Carpet Trade Review, December 1879.
16. U.S. Census, SM, 1860, p. xvii; Ewing and Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen, p. 17.
17. The Carpet Trade Review, December 1879.
18. The Carpet Trade Review, April 1882.
19. Ewing and Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen, p. 23; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 12 September 1882.
20. Hayes, American Textile Machinery, p. 153; The Carpet Trade Review, May 1880.
21. U.S. Census, SM, 1860, p. lvii.
22. Hayes, American Textile Machinery, p. 51.
23. See, for example, Philadelphia Public Ledger, 29 November 1884.
24. In general, carpet mills were among the nation's largest factories. The average size carpet mill was 56 hands in 1870, while the average size for all industries was only 8; thus the scale of production for carpets was generally quite large. Daniel Nelson, Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920, p. 4.
25. Because of the skilled nature of the industry, the proportion of women had traditionally been much lower in carpets than in other textiles, but by 1880 carpets employed the second largest number of women after cotton goods.

See Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, p. 264; also, Helen Sumner, History of Women in Industry in the United States, vol. 9, Report on the Condition of Woman and Child Wage Earners in the United States, p. 59.

26. Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, p. 264.

27. Cole, The American Wool Manufacture, 1:229; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 February 1887; and The Carpet Trade Review, January 1880. Also see Bradstreets, 29 March 1884.

28. "Statistics of the Industry," The Carpet Trade Review, January 1877 and September 1881. For a comparison with the transition in the British carpet industry see J. N. Bartlett, "The Mechanization of the Kidderminster Carpet Industry."

29. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1877.

30. See Table 2; also Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 October 1889.

31. The Carpet Trade Review, 1 May 1881.

32. Information on individual manufacturers was gleaned from notes, obituaries, and news accounts in the various trade journals.

33. Material on Dobson may be found in Herman LeRoy Collins and Wilfred Jordon, Philadelphia: A Story of Progress, p. 18; National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 17:120-21; The Carpet Trade Review, June 1880; and Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 June 1884.

34. Collins and Jordon, Philadelphia, p. 18.

35. National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 17:120.

36. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 June 1884.

37. Collins and Jordon, Philadelphia, p. 18.

38. Information on the Bromley family comes from The Carpet Trade, January 1880; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 April 1883 and 1 September 1884; and Philadelphia Carpet Trade, May 1883.

39. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, May 1883.

40. The Carpet Trade, January 1880.

41. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1877. (The survey of the industry also gave the number of hands employed.)

42. U.S. Census, Manuscript Schedules, 1880, Nineteenth Ward, Philadelphia. See Chapter 3.

43. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 10 October 1886.

44. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, March 1887. This was a somewhat romantic memory; see Chapter 4.

45. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, March 1887.

46. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 May 1884.

47. The Carpet Trade Review, September 1881; and Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 May 1884.

48. See, for example, The Carpet Trade Review, January 1882; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 August 1883, 1 March and 1 April 1884; and Philadelphia Inquirer, International Edition, "Historical Review of Philadelphia," 1896.

49. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 October 1885.

50. See Chapters 4 and 5.

51. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 October 1885.

52. Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, pp. 14-23; and Ewing and Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen, p. 5.

53. The Carpet Trade, December 1878.

54. See Biographical material on Smith and information on his business in the Yonkers Statesman, 21 and 28 November 1878; The Carpet Trade, December 1878; Sophie Green, "The History and Development of the Carpet Industry in Yonkers"; Dictionary of American Biography had information on Smith, 9:198 (under Halcyon Skinner). See also the article on Skinner in National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 5:301; J. Thomas Scharf, History of Westchester County, New York . . ., 2:106; and Charles E. Allison, The History of Yonkers from the Earliest Times to the Present . . ., pp. 356-62.

55. Yonkers Statesman, 28 November 1878.

56. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 June 1884.

57. The Carpet Trade Review, August 1878; Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, p. 264.

58. Yonkers Statesman, 28 November 1878.
59. Yonkers Statesman, 21 November 1878; and The Carpet Trade, December 1878.
60. See The Carpet Trade, January 1878; The Carpet Trade Review, August, September, October 1879. For a discussion of second generation management strategies, see Robert Ozanne, A Century of Labor Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester, pp. 10-11.
61. For biographical material on Higgins see The Carpet Trade, February 1882; and The Carpet Trade Review, 1 January 1888 and 1 September 1889.
62. The Carpet Trade, October 1878. Also see Otho G. Cartwright, The Middle West Side: An Historical Sketch, pp. 34-36.
63. The Carpet Trade Review, September 1880.
64. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 January 1888.
65. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 September 1889; and Chapter 5.
66. 1929 Directors' Meeting, Sanford Papers.
67. The Carpet Trade, December 1880.
68. The Carpet Trade, October 1879.
69. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 May 1885.
70. 1929 Directors Meeting, Sanford Papers; also Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 November 1888.
71. The Carpet Trade, December 1880.
72. John Swinton's Paper, 22 February 1885, 3 May 1885.
73. See, for example, The Carpet Trade, July 1877.
74. The Carpet Trade, March 1880.
75. The Carpet Trade, July 1877.
76. Weeks, "Report on the Statistics of Wages," pp. 324-26; also Ewing and Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen, p. 5. For a discussion of the problem of fixed overhead costs in a period of falling prices see Thomas C. Cochran

and William Miller, The Age of Enterprise: A Social History of Industrial America, pp. 59-63.

77. The Carpet Trade, January 1877. Also see Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 March 1888.

78. Wages in the industry are difficult to determine because of the seasonal nature of the industry and frequent lay-offs. A power loom weaver seems to have averaged one roll of about thirty-six yards in a week or ten days. Weavers in Philadelphia were paid five and a half or six cents per yard depending on the grade, while weavers in eastern mills received two cents per yard less. See Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, p. 173. Weeks, "Report on the Statistics of Wages," has a pay schedule for Bromley Brothers. See also S. N. D. North, "Report on Wool Manufacturers," in U.S. Census, SM, 1890. Virginia Penny, How Women Can Make Money . . ., has some wages figures for Higgins' mill, p. 195.

79. The Carpet Trade, May 1876.

80. The Carpet Trade, June and December 1876, March 1877.

81. The Carpet Trade, February, April, May 1877.

82. The Carpet Trade Review, June 1878.

83. Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, p. 264.

84. Boston Labor Leader, 21 May 1887.

85. See Chapter 4. For a discussion of the motivations behind the formation of employers' associations in this period see Clarence E. Bonnett, History of Employers' Associations in the United States, pp. 21-22; and Cochran and Miller, The Age of Enterprise, pp. 238-43.

CHAPTER 3

WEAVERS' DAUGHTERS: WORK AND FAMILY, 1880

Power loom carpet weavers joined an increasing number of young women entering America's Gilded Age factories and mills. As unskilled or, more accurately, semi-skilled operatives, such women often found themselves running the machines which would ultimately displace their skilled forebears in the industry. Among the Philadelphia power loom weavers, the women might actually be replacing their fathers and uncles and older male neighbors. As new recruits to industrial work, the power loom weavers represented an important link between the artisan world of their fathers and the new factory world of the future. At the same time their presence in the mills signaled a break with the industry's older forms of organization and business practices. The young women's experiences at work and in their community life were informed by their relations to the skilled workforce. That was not the case in the eastern carpet towns where the factory women were mostly daughters of unskilled laborers. The Yonkers or Amsterdam women gained solidarity directly from their common experiences at work. While their sisters in Philadelphia sifted work experience through the lens of several generations

of family-related work traditions, women in the eastern mills drew their support from the newer immigrant laboring communities of the Gilded Age.

The carpet industry drew large numbers of women into the workforce during the late 1870's and early 1880's. Like other declining crafts such as shoe and cigar making the carpet industry turned to unskilled female labor during its transition from hand to machine power and from small shop to large scale factory production. The problems facing carpet management and its new workforce centered, as did other industries', around the problems of wages, falling prices, and a search for lower production costs and hence more efficient shop floor policies. The fact that the carpet workforce was predominantly female set it apart in detail but often not in principle from other Gilded Age industries.

The fate of the male hand loom weavers reflected the division between Philadelphia manufacturers and those in the eastern towns. With the introduction of power looms in the eastern mills during the 1850's, hand loom weavers quickly disappeared from those areas and concentrated in the craft center of Philadelphia. The carpet weavers formed a distinct group among Kensington's artisan community. Until the Civil War, the carpet weaver earned relatively high wages and was "as much respected then among [his] neighbors as a high class machinist is now."¹ The skilled

English, Scottish, and Irish weavers numbered over three thousand and one observer in 1888 found them different from "native Americans":

[They] betray their British ancestry in the cast of their features and the shape of their beards and more than all, in the form of their speech. Thirty or forty years residence in this country has not changed their habits or manner of life materially . . . every man of them smokes hard plug tobacco in queer stumpy little pipes.²

Carpet weavers were among the few groups of skilled hand craft workers in the American textile industry. In Europe a class of skilled hand loom weavers had produced textiles before the advent of the factory system, but in the United States industrial production represented the earliest important stage of the industry. Thus most American textile workers were semi- or unskilled operatives from the start. The long tenure of hand loom carpet weaving and the late development of power in the industry gave American carpet weavers a unique status among textile workers and allowed them to exert an industrial leadership similar to that of skilled handcraft workers in European working class movements.³

Philadelphia's hand loom weavers formed an important part of Kensington's textile community. Working in small workshops or weave sheds which were often attached to the master weaver's or manufacturer's own living quarters, the

carpet weaver made the entire carpet. Weavers worked by the piece in shops of ten looms or less, receiving their yarn from a merchant or manufacturer and delivering a finished carpet. The weaver's tool was a large wooden loom with a heavy beam and treadles which "greatly taxed the muscles of the back and arms."⁴ The craftsman was intimately familiar with the workings of his loom, the various carpet designs, and the raw materials he used. A weaver was responsible for the entire process "from receiving the warp, beaming it, tying it in, weaving the carpet and taking it out of the loom, darning and trimming it and assisting in drawing it over and in many cases keeping the loom and its appurtenances in repair."⁵ Except for Brussels weavers who employed draw boys to assist in drawing out the wires, most weavers worked alone on their looms. With this general knowledge of the trade, manufacturers admitted, however reluctantly, the importance of the weaver's craft. Formerly," wrote one reporter, "weavers constituted like the present ironworkers, a class upon whom the manufacturers were much more dependent than they are at the present."⁶

Kensington's hand loom shops crowded among a myriad of manufacturing establishments in the city's southeastern quarter. Clustered in one area of the district, the carpet shops lined Lehigh and Front streets standing like a monument to an earlier manufacturing era. Small and crowded, often musty old wooden structures housed the heavy looms and provided the home for the weavers' tasks. These were

notorious fire hazards. The carpet neighborhood spilled over along the narrow streets of Hancock and Howard, Hope and Amber and Sergeant and Dickinson. One old resident of the district recalled, "The passer by could hear the methodical rapid click of the shuttle as it shot back and forth through the warp and the slower thumping sound of the beam as the weaver kicked it the livelong day."⁷

Few women or children were employed in the carpet industry until the advent of mechanization. Carpet weaving was one of the traditional male artisan crafts. Jealously guarded apprenticeship requirements severely limited entry to the trade well into the 1870's. The arduous nature of the work (both the loom and the carpet were notoriously heavy) and the skill involved made it appear that "women were poorly adapted to the work."⁸ Most women employed in the Philadelphia hand-loom shops worked in preparing the yarns and in minor auxiliary tasks. Often these jobs were performed in separate quarters, and sometimes under entirely different management than the weaving shops. Only in the eastern mills where power looms appeared during the 1850's did women enter the industry in large numbers. The contrast was striking. In 1869 women constituted 50 percent of the eastern carpet mill workforce. In Philadelphia they were only 27 percent (see Table 3).

By the late 1870's the Philadelphia hand loom workforce had declined precipitously. Weavers who were once described as "fine and healthy" with an "absence of servile

Table 3. Percentage of Men, Women, and Children in the American Carpet Industry, 1869-1889.

Year	Pennsylvania	New York	Massachusetts	U.S.
1869				
Men	75	48	38	56
Women	18	42	60	36
Children	7	10	2	8
Total	100	100	100	100
	N = 4,941	N = 3,424	N = 2,200	N = 12,098
1879				
Men	64	30	36	47
Women	27	60	63	44
Children	9	10	1	9
Total	100	100	100	100
	N = 8,682	N = 5,300	N = 3,617	N = 19,439
1889				
Men	53	41	45	48
Women	39	51	52	45
Children	8	8	3	7
Total	100	100	100	100
	N = 12,418	N = 8,879	N = 5,109	N = 28,736

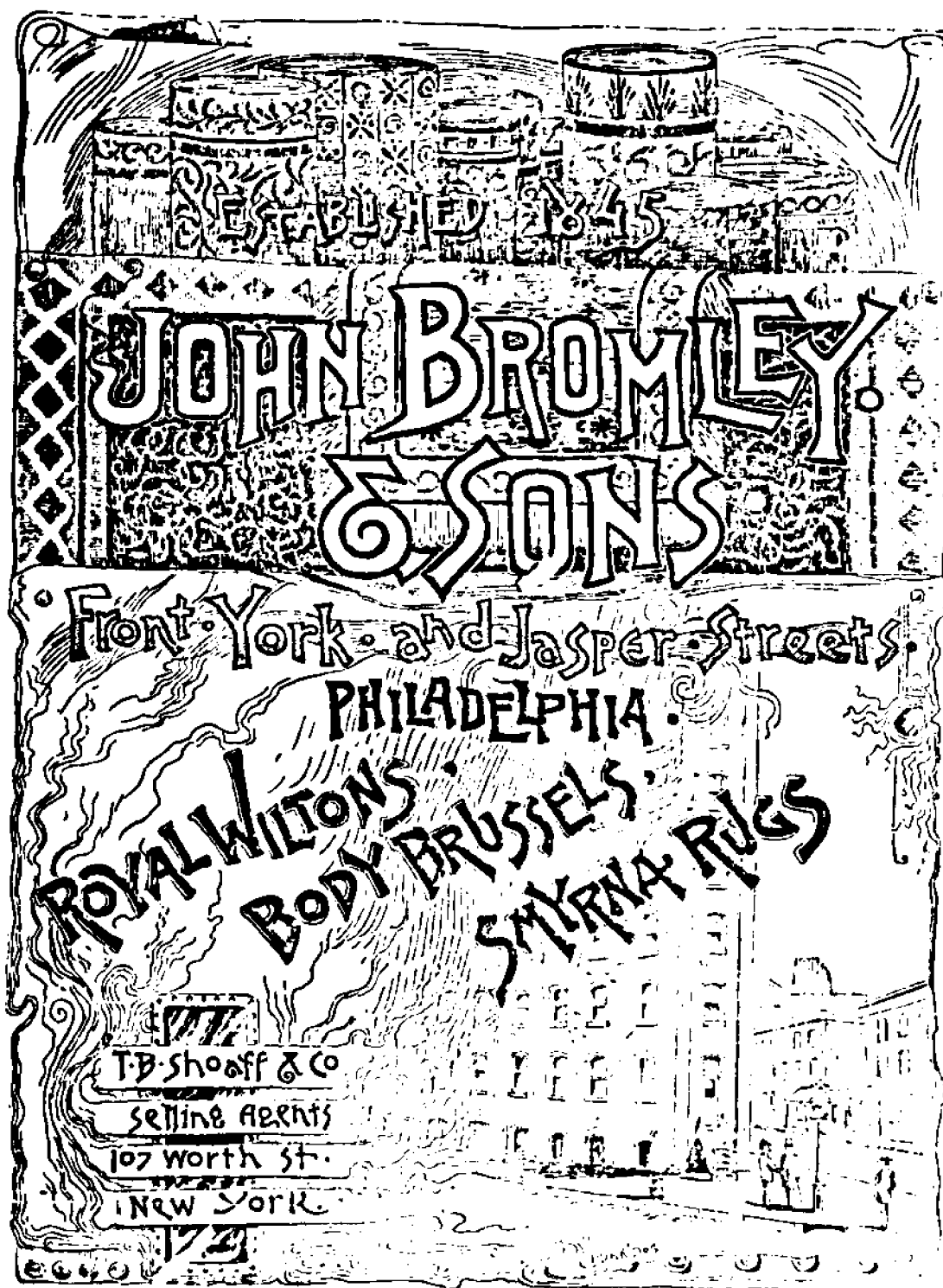
Source: Arthur H. Cole and Harold F. Williamson, The American Carpet Manufacture: A History and An Analysis, p. 264.

demeanor, and a conscious air of manhood," were now frequently referred to as "downtrodden" and "impoverished." Their wages dropped by half within ten years and their numbers dwindled to fewer than twelve hundred in 1878. Fewer than three hundred hand loom weavers were left to "swing the beam" in 1888. One old weaver commented, "Time was when a guid weaver could make a substantial livin with a hand loom, a body cud raise uns family cumfertable, cud send the children to skule, pay his rent regular and live content. But now that's all changed. We that's left are jest peggin away like. We make only three or four dollars a day and the old ones can't learn power loom work."⁹ [sic.]

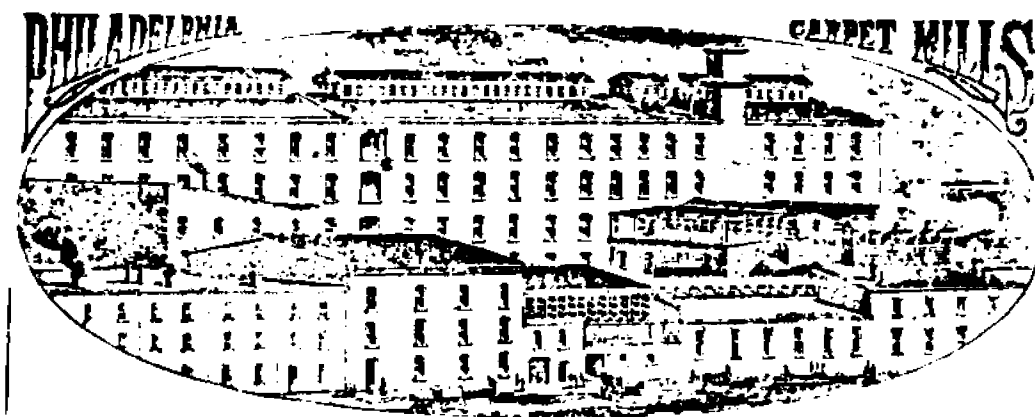
Even power mills in Philadelphia differed from hand loom shops in important ways. By the late 1870's, in order to accommodate the new machinery, manufacturers began replacing their old weave sheds with three or even five story brick and stone buildings. The new mills often housed two or three types of looms in addition to other machinery for spinning or finishing. George Bromley's new 1880 mill, for example, covered an entire city block. His five story brick building stood alongside a dye house, a stable, and an engine shed. Bromley's factory employed 450 operatives, mainly young women.¹⁰ Across the street stood Henry Horner's new mill which housed 85 hand and 40 power looms. Horner's seven mill buildings were carefully arranged so that the operators' entrance was always "in full view of those in the office." The seven buildings included a two-story

office complex with hardwood floors, a six-story weaving mill which boasted fireproof stairs and a large elevator and housed spinning and hand loom weaving as well as in-grain power looms. Other buildings nearby were used for dyeing and drying and to contain the engine. Horner also sported a separate weaving shed for his 79 Brussels hand looms.¹¹ Not far away at Lehigh and Huntington, Ivins, Dietz and Magee's new factory (finally completed in 1883) also covered an entire block. This firm boasted nine buildings including a two-story office connected by basement corridors to the main five-story mill. There 125 hand and 25 power looms ran along with winding, sizing, filling, and storage facilities. The power looms were housed on the second floor while the hand looms occupied the upper floor for extra sunlight. Ivins, Dietz and Magee also built an additional shed for their 24 Brussels looms. The complex was powered by a 250 horsepower steam engine, and also included a boiler room, a dye house, a sizing-house, and a three-story building for card rooms and the women's dressing rooms.¹² Even the Philadelphia power mills which operated on a smaller scale, such as John Hamilton's Montgomery mills and the old hand loom firm of Boggs and White, expanded their structures to accommodate the new machinery. Hamilton and Boggs and White ran only weaving machines and yet each occupied a new four-story building with room to expand (see illustrations).¹³

Work in the power mills reflected a significant



1. John Bromley and Sons Carpet Mill. Advertisement in Philadelphia Carpet Trade, May 1885.



Moresqued Extra-Supers.

Extra-Supers.

Union Extra-Supers.

Ten Pair Worsted and Wool.

Nine Pair Worsted and Wool.

Cotton Chain Fines.

Wool Fillings.

A. Cotton and Wool Figures.

B. Cotton and Wool Figures.

Damask Hall, with Borders to Match.

Twilled and Plain Venetians in all Widths.

MANUFACTURED BY

THOMAS L. LEEDOM & CO.,

2419 HOWARD STREET.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

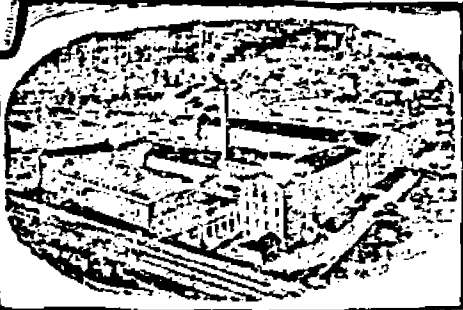
2. Thomas L. Leedom and Company, Philadelphia Carpet Mills.
Advertisement in Philadelphia Carpet Trade, January 1883.

NEW GLEN ECHO MILLS
 WAYNE JUNCTION PHILADELPHIA

**McCALLUM
 CREASE
 & SLOAN.**

Manufacturers of

FINE CARPETS.



WAREHOUSE.
 Nos. 1012 & 1014 Chestnut St.
 PHILADELPHIA.

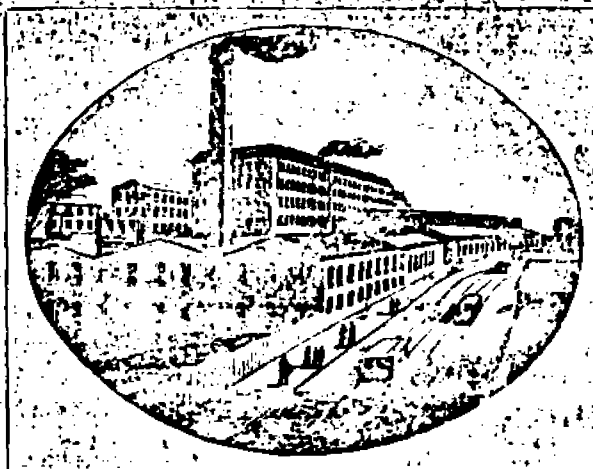
NEW YORK OFFICE.
 108 Worth St.

WILTONS.
 BODY.
 BRUSSELS.
 EXTRA-SUPER.
 INGRAINS.
 ART SQUARES.

© 1885 ©

3. McCallum, Crease and Sloan, Glen Echo Mills. Advertisement in Philadelphia Carpet Trade, May 1885.

FALLS OF SCHUYLKILL CARPET MILLS.



WILTONS,
VELVETS,
BODY-BRUSSELS,
TAPESTRY BRUSSELS,
THREE-PLYS,
EXTRA-SUPER

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON, Proprietor

SALES ROOM,

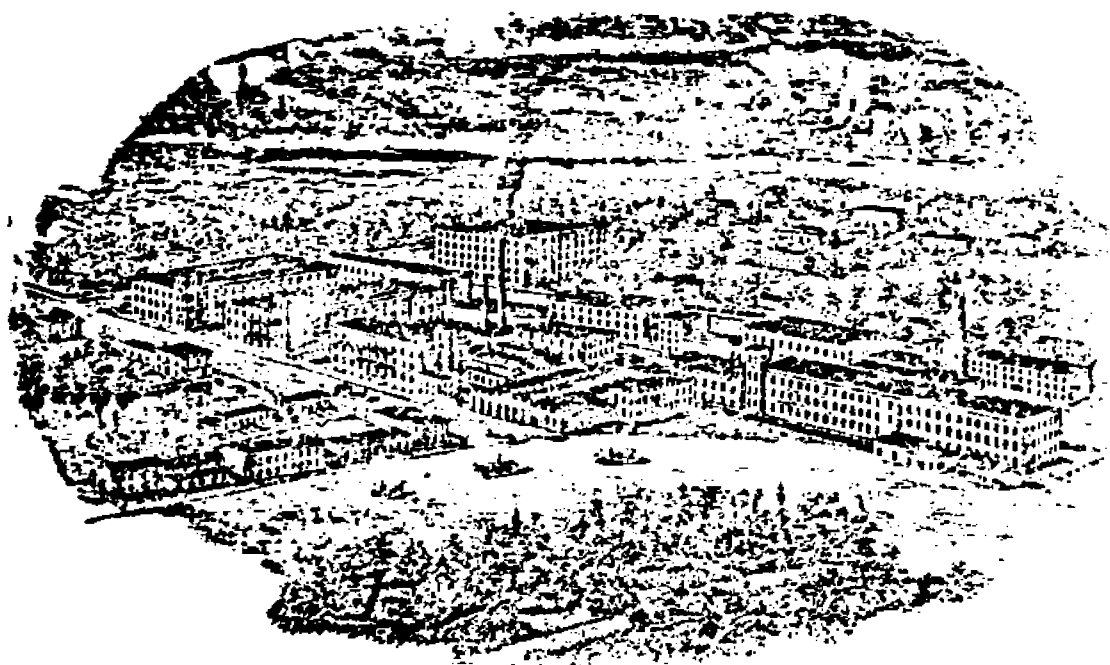
809, 811 & 813 Chestnut St., Philadelphia

BRANCH STORES—40 and 42 West Fourteenth Street, New York, and 525 and 527 Washington Street.

Stephen Sanford & Sons,

Carpet Manufacturers,

 AMSTERDAM, N. Y.



ESTABLISHED 1842.

MANUFACTURERS OF

Tapestry Velvets.	Comet Tapestry Brussels.
Double Ex. Tapestry Brussels.	Tapestry Ingrains, Three-Ply.
Eagle Tapestry Brussels.	Imperial Three-Ply.
and Extra Superfines.	

SALESROOM AND OFFICE,

No. 368 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

5. Stephen Sanford and Sons Carpet Mill. Advertisement in
Philadelphia Carpet Trade, June 1884.

division of labor unknown in the hand loom shops. Although only a few of Philadelphia's new power mills included auxiliary processes such as spinning, the factories often housed both hand and power looms. Thus the new mills became the workplace for women and unskilled men along with the hand loom weavers. Unlike their skilled counterparts, power loom weavers simply watched "the operating of the loom, repairing broken warp threads and supplying it with shuttles."¹⁴ The looms usually stopped automatically if a thread broke so the women frequently did little more than keep "the shuttles filled with yarn."¹⁵ One manufacturer observed that the women lacked the respect awarded to the skilled weavers.¹⁶ Despite the increased specialization in the Philadelphia power mills, the constraints of space and the fact that most of the city's power shops also ran hand looms meant that the unskilled women often worked in close proximity to the skilled hand loom weavers. Daily contact at work thus united the entire Philadelphia carpet community.

In the larger eastern power mills the division of labor was more specialized so that female machine operatives rarely came into contact with skilled workers. Factories such as the Smith company in Yonkers, Sanford's mill in Amsterdam, or even Dobson's Falls of Schuylkill mills were typically spread out over a wide geographic area. Most women in these mills rarely saw workers outside their own departments. With a minimal training women became spinners, spoolers, reelers, twistors, and winders. The

highest paid job in the power mills was, of course, weaving (or loom tending). The warpers, winders, spoolers, reelers, and twisters followed. In general, however, carpet mill employees received higher wages than most other textile operatives.¹⁶

Occupationally, the most significant change in the new power mills was the appearance of a new class of skilled male worker, the loom fixer. Loom fixing, a skilled job created by mechanization, became a crucial part of power mill operations. Generally young men, often recent British immigrants, the loom fixers inherited the overall knowledge of the weaving process formerly controlled by the hand loom weavers. As one superintendent observed, "All patterns are started by men employed expressly for that purpose, they are called loom fixers and are entirely distinct from the weavers."¹⁷ Loom fixers were not skilled mechanics but were often taught by the manufacturers themselves. Needing a year or more of training, the loom fixers oversaw the running of the power looms from setting up the cards, overseeing any problems in the pattern, and keeping the loom in working order. Overseeing eleven or twelve looms at a time, the fixers acted as unofficial supervisors in the mill, training the power loom weavers and assisting with problems. Occasionally loom fixers acted as sub-contractors, actually hiring power loom weavers who worked under their wing. More often, however, manufacturers reserved the hiring authority and assigned weavers to each

fixer's section.¹⁸ The manufacturers were dependent on the loom fixers for the smooth running of their power mills and without these skilled men were hard pressed to continue operations.

Contacts between skilled and unskilled carpet weavers in the mills continued in their family and community life. Most of Philadelphia's carpet workers lived near the Nineteenth Ward mills. Clustered in "long rows of neat two and three story dwelling houses," the weavers lived among Kensington's other textile and manufacturing workers.¹⁹ The percentage of home owners in this neighborhood was considerably less than for the city as a whole, and in 1880 the Nineteenth Ward still housed a variety of classes and occupations.²⁰ In the manner of an older artisan city, skilled workers lived alongside laborers. Even some manufacturers made Kensington their home. It was not uncommon along the streets of Kensington to find a loom boss living next door to a carpet weaver or a shoemaker next to a dyer. On Hope Street one block contained a German shoemaker whose eighteen-year-old daughter was a carpet winder, a German house painter who kept a young woman carpet weaver as a boarder, an Irish tanner whose seventeen-year-old daughter worked in the carpet mills, a morocco finisher whose son was a carpet worker, a dyer, a carpet setter, a vest maker, a loom boss, a rug weaver, a chemical worker, a tailor, a wood turner and at least fifteen carpet weavers. Many of the daughters and sons of these families worked in

the carpet mills.²¹

A few of Kensington's carpet manufacturers joined their employees in the Nineteenth Ward. Most of the manufacturers living in Kensington were small hand loom proprietors operating fewer than twenty looms in 1880. Of the thirty-two carpet manufacturers listed in the Nineteenth Ward manuscript census over half were of Irish descent and only six were under forty years old. They represented by and large an older generation of hand mill owners who were rapidly being replaced by the larger power factories. William McHatton, a sixty-year-old manufacturer who lived on Waterloo Street, ran eighteen hand looms in his small mill on Front Street. Next door to McHatton lived sixty-year-old John Shegog, whose mill on Hope Street housed twenty-four hand looms. Next to Shegog lived two loom fixers and a carpet weavers' family. Thomas Spence, a forty-nine-year-old Irish manufacturer, lived on Hancock Street with his two daughters who were cotton weavers. The proprietor of a small ten-loom shop, Spence kept three boarders, one of whom was a seventeen-year-old girl who worked in a carpet mill. Next door to Spence lived Alex Anderson, a young Irish manufacturer who ran fewer than ten looms.²²

A few more sizeable manufacturers also lived in the Nineteenth Ward, but most of these were large hand as opposed to power manufacturers. Thomas Caves, who ran fifty hand looms, lived next door to Joseph and Thomas Taylor

on Howard Street. Their nearest neighbor was a fifty-eight-year-old carpet weaver whose two sons also worked in the trade. Samuel Burnett, whose mill of fifteen power and fifty hand looms was located on Hope Street, lived a few blocks from his shop also on Hope Street, next door to a laborer and a woolen mill worker. James Judge, whose mill ranked among the city's largest, lived on Front Street next door to his brothers and partners William and Robert. The most prominent carpet family in the neighborhood were the Bromleys. The clan all lived in the Nineteenth Ward; John on Sixth Street next door to an attorney, while Geroge and Thomas lived next to each other on Diamond Street. Like a few other manufacturers in the older tradition of the trade, the Bromleys made it a habit of keeping carpet weavers as boarders in their homes. David Jackson, for example, a proprietor of thirty-five hand looms, kept ten carpet weavers as boarders. He as well as most of his boarders were from Ireland.²³

Many Kensington manufacturers, as was the habit in the earlier days of trade, sent their sons into the carpet business. Few children of manufacturers became weavers. The sons of Joseph Winchester and Robert Dripps were exceptional. More often, proprietors' sons became clerks in their fathers' business. All the Bromleys sent their sons into the business either as salesmen or clerks. So did Thomas Taylor and John Sonneborn. Some manufacturers' sons became professionals, as did Thomas Cave's, who went

into engineering. Others, like John Sonneborn's son who became a paperhanger, went into a skilled trade. Most manufacturers' daughters described themselves as "lady" though a few, like the daughters of Joseph and Thomas Taylor, became teachers. A few smaller proprietors sent their daughters into less professional work. August Binte's daughter tended shop and Thomas Spence's young daughter was a cotton weaver.

Among the weavers close community and family ties accompanied a shared work life. For the women, their position in the industry as unskilled workers was tempered by their family and neighborhood relations with the skilled weavers. Almost three-quarters of the women who entered Philadelphia's carpet mills were the daughters of skilled workers (see Table 4). Over a third were daughters of carpet weavers. If a young carpet weaver's father worked in the mills he did so as a skilled weaver, a loom boss, or a dyer. Only 1 percent of fathers who worked in the carpet mills were unskilled and even some of these who gave their occupation to the census taker as "works in carpet mill" may have been skilled workers. If a girl's father was not a carpet weaver he was likely to be a skilled artisan in some other craft. Shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, coopers, wheelwrights, carpenters, and bricklayers sent their daughters to work in the high-paying carpet mills. The same was

Table 4. Fathers of Philadelphia Carpet Weavers, 1880.

Father's occupation	Carpet weavers (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
Carpet weaver	37	42	40
"Works in carpet mill"	1	--	1
Other skilled textile (includes loom boss)	11	13	13
Other textile mill	--	2	1
Skilled worker-artisan	22	21	21
Laborer	9	8	8
Unskilled industrial	4	3	3
Business or professional	16	11	13
Total	100	100	100
	N = 94	N = 144	N = 238

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, Nineteenth Ward, Philadelphia.

true of the sons of skilled workers, as 41 percent of the men in the mills were sons of carpet weavers, and another 34 percent were sons of skilled artisans. However, just as the status of the hand loom weavers had seriously declined, so too were other trades experiencing contraction and the competition of machinery. In Philadelphia, a close parallel existed between the plight of the weavers and that of shoe workers. Contributing to the family income through their wages, women carpet weavers were a crucial support to a declining craft. By 1880 one observer noted that in the families of iron and steel workers only one member of the family worked, while in textiles the average was two. For the families of carpet weavers, the two or more incomes were essential.²⁴

The major difference between the men and women in the mills, as might be expected in a declining hand craft and a rising factory industry, was in age and position within the family (see Tables 5 and 6). As a new industrial workforce, the women in Philadelphia's carpet mills were very young. Fully 90 percent of the female carpet weavers were under twenty-five years old--half were between sixteen and twenty. On the other hand, the male workforce reflected the older artisan presence in the industry, with half of all men over twenty-five and a third between twenty-six and forth. Again, 95 percent of the

Table 5. Age of Philadelphia Carpet Weavers, 1880.

Age	Workforce (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
10-15	11	4	6
16-20	48	13	19
21-25	24	17	19
26-30	7	19	17
31-40	6	21	18
41-50	1	12	10
Over 50	3	14	11
Total	100	100	100
	N = 193	N = 782	N = 975

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedule, Nineteenth Ward, Philadelphia.

Table 6. Family Status of Philadelphia Carpet Weavers, 1880.

Status	Workforce (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
Single	92	56	63
Live with parent	65	26	34
Live with other relative	8	3	4
Board	19	27	25
Married	7	43	36
With children	3	35	28
Without children	4	8	7
Widowed	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100
	N = 193	N = 782	N = 975

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, Nineteenth Ward, Philadelphia.

women were single, living with their parents, while over a third of the men were married with children of their own. Another link between the skilled and unskilled workers in Kensington existed in the fact that about a quarter of the workers in carpet mills lived as boarders. Even among the women, almost 20 percent boarded with relatives, friends, or strangers. Since almost 40 percent of the women were immigrants to Philadelphia it is likely they came, as thousands of others did, leading the way for other members of their families. In addition, a large industrial city like Philadelphia offered many opportunities to young women, who likely sent a portion of their earnings home to families elsewhere.²⁵

Within the carpet weavers' community the division between hand and power weavers was not great. Not only did they often share family ties, but they shared a common ethnic heritage as well (see Table 7). In 1880 over 90 percent of all carpet weavers, men and women, skilled and unskilled, were foreign born or the children of immigrants. Like the small hand loom proprietors, most of the weavers were from Irish backgrounds. Another 20 percent came from England or Scotland. Most (46 percent) of the second generation women were also from Irish families. Germans made up a sizeable minority within the carpet community. Although only 5 percent of the women were German-born, almost a quarter had German parents.

Work and community life in the eastern carpet mills

Table 7. Nativity of Philadelphia Carpet Weavers, 1880.

Nativity	Workforce (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
Native born / native parents	8	3	4
Native born / foreign parents	53	26	30
Irish	24	14	16
English or Scottish	6	3	3
German	23	9	11
Other	--	--	--
Foreign born	39	71	66
Irish	19	40	36
English or Scottish	15	16	16
German	5	14	13
Other	.01	1	1
Total	100	100	100
	N = 193	N = 782	N = 975

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedule, Nineteenth Ward, Philadelphia.

differed from Philadelphia in significant ways. While the large mills in New York and New England employed hand loom weavers during their early days, the skilled men had all but disappeared from these factories by the eve of the Civil War. The workers in the power loom mills therefore developed a distinct community and workplace culture. Living in small towns dominated by a central employer, the women in Yonkers and Amsterdam did not filter their experience through an artisan past but through the prism of factory work relations and immigrant community ties.

Workplace and community life in Yonkers illustrate the contrast between Philadelphia and the East. Smith's mill differed dramatically from most Kensington factories. Where a large mill in Philadelphia might cover one city block, Smith's mill stretched out over a half-mile radius along the Nepperhan River in Yonkers (see illustration). The British poet laureate, John Masefield, who worked in Smith's mill during the early 1890's, recalled his first impression of the factory.

I saw ahead of me on the right of the road a great red brick building, three storeys [sic] high and of immense length and breadth. Other buildings stretched away behind it, with smoking chimneys. The road was black with crowds going in at the gates. . . . To the left of the road was a hill, partly sunburnt grass, partly built upon. To the right of it, behind the buildings, was the shallow valley of the Nepperhan.²⁶

Smith's operation actually constituted three separate factories, a print mill, a tapestry mill, and a moquette mill.²⁷ Each department included its own facilities for spinning and weaving plus a machine shop for repairs and for constructing his famous Axminster and moquette power looms. The worsted mill on Saw Mill River Road dominated two acres on the east bank of the Nepperhan. The main three-story brick building housed a picker room which itself was two stories high. Adjoining the picker room was a washing and drying building and an engine house. This mill spun only carpet yarn, carding, combing, and spinning almost exclusively imported wool. Smith's print mill lay opposite the worsted mill on the west side of the river. There 48 huge drum cylinders printed the specialized patterns on the yarn before it was sent to the weaving mill. In this department worked 150 skilled yarn dyers. About a half mile away lay the tapestry mill, "the plant around which clusters whatever of sentiment or romance there may be associated with so material a matter as carpet weaving."²⁸ Smith's original building still remained in this complex along with the main office and counting rooms. The weaving mill itself was five stories high and was surrounded by wooden tenements which housed employees through the mid-1880's. Smith's famous moquette mill was four stories high and housed close to two hundred machines. The top floor was occupied by 39 tapestry setting and winding machines, and below were 56 Axminster looms with space

for at least 60 more. On the second floor were 100 tapestry looms plus a few spooling machines and ingrain power looms. On the main floor were finishing and rolling rooms. In all, eight hundred hands worked in that building alone.

Smith's workforce numbered about fifteen hundred in 1880, two-thirds of whom were young women.²⁹ Like their sisters in Philadelphia, the Yonkers carpet weavers were overwhelmingly young single women (see Tables 8 and 9). However, in Yonkers, the men in the mill were also very young. With no older skilled workforce of men in Smith's mill, those men who did work there were either young loom fixers or dyers or very young unskilled laborers. A quarter of all men in Smith's mill were between ten and fifteen years old. Seventy-eight percent were under twenty-five.

The Yonkers weavers formed an even more homogeneous ethnic community than their Philadelphia counterparts. Over 80 percent of the women were Irish, as were 65 percent of the men (see Table 10). Local reports claimed that all of Yonkers' Irish citizens migrated from the northern county of Waterford, settling in Yonkers' sixth ward, known as the "Hog Hill" area. Smith himself was descended from Scots, and local lore had it that before his factory grew in the town, Yonkers was known as "Scots city."³⁰ One historian recalled that "for a long time no Irishman could be elected in certain wards of Yonkers." By 1880, however, the picture had changed considerably as the Irish began to assert themselves in city politics.³¹

Table 8. Age of Yonkers, New York, Carpet Weavers, 1880.

Age	Workforce (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
10-15	14	24	18
16-20	50	37	45
21-25	28	16	23
26-30	6	6	6
31-40	2	9	5
41-50	.5	5	2
Over 50	.5	3	1
Total	100	100	100
	N = 645	N = 380	N = 1,025

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, Yonkers, New York.

Table 9. Family Status of Yonkers, New York, Carpet Weavers, 1880.

Status	Workforce (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
Single	93	77	88
Live with parent	72	66	70
Live with other relative	7	3	6
Board	14	8	12
Married	5	21	11
With children	2	17	8
Without children	3	4	3
Widowed	2	2	1
Total	100	100	100
	N = 645	N = 380	N = 1,025

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, Yonkers, New York.

Table 10. Nativity of Yonkers, New York, Carpet Weavers,
1880.

Nativity	Workforce (percent)		
	Female	Male	Total
Native born / native parents	13	12	13
Native born / foreign parents	63	53	59
Irish	50	41	47
Other	13	12	12
Foreign born	24	35	28
Irish	18	19	18
English	5	13	8
Other	1	3	2
Total	100	100	100
	N = 645	N = 380	N = 1,025

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedule, Yonkers,
New York.

Unlike the Philadelphia weavers the Yonkers women came predominantly from families of unskilled workers (see Table 11). Clustered together in the Sixth Ward, laborers, industrial workers, and a few skilled workers formed Yonkers' industrial community. Joined by young women in the town's small silk mill and hat factory, and the more skilled workers in the small Otis elevator company, the carpet weavers were among the town's first generation of industrial workers. Few of the Yonkers weavers came from families of industrial workers. Three-quarters were the daughters of laborers or unskilled factory workers. Only a quarter were daughters of skilled artisans and most of these were non-industrial trades such as bricklayers, carpenters, and masons. Smith's factory thus provided the town's population with its major industrial experience and afforded an opportunity to the daughters of many families new to the industrial world.

Although the women in Smith's mill worked as loom tenders, winders, or setters as did their sisters in Philadelphia, they rarely if ever came into contact with skilled weavers. Not only was their family background that of unskilled laborers, but most of the male workers they saw in the mill were unskilled youths. The weavers undoubtedly also saw loom fixers, but in the vast mill complex their major contact was with other women like themselves.

Despite a strikingly different family and community background, power loom weavers in both Philadelphia and

Table 11. Fathers of Yonkers, New York, Carpet Weavers, 1880
(includes only single women living with parents).*

Father's occupation	Number	Percent
"Works in carpet mill"	8	3
Skilled industrial	11	5
Unskilled industrial	12	5
Skilled-artisan	61	25
Laborer	134	56
Business or professional	11	5
Farmer	3	1
Total	240	100

*Total number of fathers is less than total number of single women living with parents due to the large number of siblings working in the Smith mill.

Source: U.S. Census, 1880, Manuscript Schedules, Yonkers, New York.

the East shared certain common work experiences. By 1880 the larger power mills in Kensington were not unlike the eastern mills. A sizeable workforce divided into separate departments each with its own machinery and supervision characterized the operation of Leedom's mill as well as Smith's. While the Philadelphia women filtered their experience through the artisan past of their family and neighborhood, the women of the eastern mills faced their industrial experience with newly formed but untested workplace ties. The different influences on the women--one combining skill with their work experience, the other community with work--was to have important impact on their success or failure in organization. Although both groups of power loom weavers allied with the Knights of Labor during the 1880's and combined their efforts in a national confrontation with the power loom manufacturers, the outcome in the two communities would reflect the different forces at work in each setting.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 March 1888.
2. Ibid.
3. For a discussion of the relation between skilled and unskilled workers in an American industry see David Brody, Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era. For European comparisons see, for example, Joan Wallach Scott, The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth Century City; also Edward Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class; and Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour.
4. The "heavy 4" square of pine" is described in J. R. Kendrick, "The Carpet Industry of Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, Annual Report, 1889, part 3, vol. 17, p. 5d. Also see Arthur H. Cole and Harold F. Williamson, The American Carpet Manufacture: A History and an Analysis, pp. 24-25.
5. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 September 1883.
6. W. P. Trowbridge, "Report on Power and Machinery Employed in Manufacture," U.S. Census, Statistics of Manufacturers (hereafter, SM), 1880, p. 1.
7. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 March 1888.
8. Kendrick, "Carpet Industry of Philadelphia," p. 11.
9. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 March 1888. For accounts of the hand loom weaving process see Kendrick, "Carpet Industry of Philadelphia," pp. 4-11; and Cole and Williamson, American Carpet Manufacture, pp. 24-32.
10. The Carpet Trade, December 1881.
11. The Carpet Trade, July 1880.
12. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 September 1883.

13. The Carpet Trade, December 1877; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 June 1883; The Carpet Trade, October 1880; and The Carpet Trade Review, February 1879 and July 1880. See illustrations of mills from advertisements in Philadelphia Carpet Trade; the sketches of the mills reveal the differences between Amsterdam on the one hand and Bromley or Leedom (Kensington) on the other.

14. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 September 1883.

15. Philadelphia Public Ledger, 29 November 1884.

16. See Chapter 2. Also see Joseph D. Weeks, "Report on the Statistics of Wages in Manufacturing Industries," U.S. Census, SM, 1880. Weeks lists jobs and pay scales for Bromley Brothers, another Pennsylvania mill, and an establishment in Massachusetts, pp. 324-26.

17. Public Ledger, 29 November 1884.

18. Philadelphia Inquirer, 31 January 1885.

19. Philadelphia and Its Environs: A Guide to the City and Surroundings, p. 143.

20. Lorin Blodget, The Social Condition of the Industrial Classes of Philadelphia, p. 7.

21. The following information is based on the manuscript schedules of the 1880 Census of Population, Philadelphia, Nineteenth Ward. All persons listing an occupation in the carpet industry (i.e., Carpet Weaver, works in carpet mill, etc.) were listed.

22. The census information here is combined with information from the Pennsylvania State Department of Internal Affairs, Industrial Statistics, Annual Report, 1879-1880, pp. 102-8.

23. The following is all based on manuscript census material.

24. Also see Blodget, Social Condition, pp. 10-14. For a discussion of the role of women's work in industrialization see Joah Wallach Scott and Louise Tilly, Women, Work and Family; also Carol Groneman, "'She Earns as a Child, She Pays as a Man': Women Workers in a Mid-Nineteenth Century New York City Community," in Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, eds., Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker.

25. For a discussion of the role of immigrant women's work in the family see Virginia Yans McLaughlin, "Patterns

of Work and Family Organization: Buffalo's Italians." Also see Robert E. Kennedy, Jr., The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility.

26. John Masefield, In the Mill, p. 14.

27. The description of Smith's mill is based on The Carpet Trade, January 1879 and April 1880; Charles E. Allison, The History of Yonkers from the Earliest Times to the Present . . ., pp. 356-61; and J. Thomas Scharf, History of Westchester County, New York . . ., pp. 106-7.

28. Allison, History of Yonkers, p. 361.

29. The following is based on the manuscript schedules for Yonkers, 1880 census. All wards in the town were covered and every carpet worker recorded, totaling 645 women and 380 men. Yonkers was chosen as an example of eastern mills because carpet workers were specified in the census schedules. In Amsterdam, carpet workers were not consistently differentiated from other mill workers and New York City was too diverse to locate the relatively small number of carpet weavers.

30. Yonkers Statesman, 20 November 1973, historical series entitled "Who Are Yonkers?"

31. Henry Collins Brown, Old Yonkers, 1642-1922: A Page of History, p. 190. Also see Allison, History of Yonkers, p. 267.

CHAPTER 4

COUNTERPOINT OF UNREST: TWO CLASSES OF WEAVERS AND THE SEARCH FOR INDUSTRIAL ORDER

The 1878 spring season was an unmitigated disaster for Philadelphia carpet manufacturers. The depression of the 1870's resulted in a decreased demand for carpets and an enormous surplus stock in industry warehouses. As early as 1875 the manufacturers' market price began to fall. By 1878 even the large power firms claimed they could no longer maintain their profit margins. The intense competition within the industry made most efforts at control of the market difficult if not impossible. Scores of small (and increasingly outdated) hand loom shops, normally hard pressed to meet their costs, were forced to compete in price-cutting with larger mechanized firms. The power loom manufacturers, while faced with a high overhead, could more easily weather the storm.

Although every Philadelphia manufacturer needed to reduce labor costs, the employers' ranks were seriously divided. Since a wage cut would very likely mean a weavers' strike, many of the smaller manufacturers balked at this option. Despite the fact that they were operating at a loss, any halt in production might mean total failure for the old hand

loom proprietors. The city's manufacturers therefore initially compromised and cut only power loom weavers' rates. The reduction, announced in November, 1878, affected a power loom workforce of about four hundred young women, small in number, yet accounting for 75 percent of the city's carpet output.¹ The manufacturers hoped that a cut in this sector would ease conditions for the entire trade.

The owners, however, had not yet reckoned with the resources of their employees. The power loom weavers met the wage cut with a three-month strike backed by full support from the skilled weavers. Although the women were ultimately forced back to work, their "long strike" shook the manufacturers' confidence in a docile female workforce. Within six weeks after the women's defeat, the newly formed trade association declared a city-wide wage cut for all skilled hand loom weavers. The manufacturers hoped to gain control of both the market and the workforce by the end of the year. The hand loom weavers' union retaliated with a sophisticated strategy which pressured the smaller firms at precisely their weakest point. Striking only one or two firms at a time, the men threatened to close the small shops out of the market. Placing the highest priority on an industry-wide agreement and uniform conditions within the trade, the manufacturers' association withdrew the reduction in late May and agreed to a compromise industry-wide scale. The manufacturers' association then agreed to support strikes against those firms not complying with

the uniform scale. But the workers' triumph proved a Pyrrhic victory. The weavers' strike resulted in a more stable market and enabled the power firms to increase their hold on the industry. By 1880 the hand loom weavers as well as the smaller manufacturers became increasingly obsolete. This depression-era consolidation of the trade set the stage for a renewed confrontation with the female power loom weavers in the 1880's.

In early 1879 Philadelphia's major power manufacturers formed an association with the eastern firms. They hoped to end the suicidal competition within the industry. Philadelphia firms like Dobson, Leedom, and Bromley had much more in common with the eastern power mills than with the remaining Philadelphia hand loom firms. In June, 1878, the nation's leading tapestry manufacturers led by Smith, Higgins, Sanford, and Dobson met in New York to halt "over production" in the industry. Hoping to "give the manufacturers the needed control of the market," and bring prices back up to "a profitable level," the men agreed to cut their stocks by a total of thirty thousand rolls within the year. In their first practical cooperative move, each manufacturer promised to run his looms four days a week until the industry-wide surplus had diminished.²

Despite their general enthusiasm, the manufacturers realized that their actions implied serious consequences for the weavers. "The greatest hardship connected with

the plan," they admitted, "will doubtless fall on the work-people and we anticipate some trouble from that source." The Carpet Trade Association (formed the previous month) therefore set up an arbitration committee to deal with the anticipated confrontation with the weavers. Higgins headed the committee, and it included some of the smaller manufacturers. Promised protection in an adjusted market, small proprietors George Hyatt, James T. Hope, Joel Goldthwait, and E. E. Sampson joined the arbitration committee.³

Carpet prices continued to decline. Fall season prices reached the lowest levels ever with ingrains selling for only 77 1/2 cents a yard.⁴ In November as the slow winter season approached, the manufacturers decided to cut power loom weaving rates. Reluctant to confront the skilled men or threaten the smaller firms, the manufacturers' association hoped to ease industry conditions by reducing only the women's wages. On November 11, Philadelphia power loom weavers received notice that their wages would be cut from six to five cents a yard for average grade ingrain weaving.⁵ Expecting at most a short (one or two week) strike, the manufacturers looked forward to stopping their machines and reducing some of their surplus stocks. John Bromley announced that he had more goods on hand than he could sell "at the present price," and his firm was "content to stop manufacturing altogether for a time." Later he added that a strike would "afford an opportunity to make necessary improvements and alterations."⁷ A general halt in production

fully promised to reduce the supply of carpets on hand and raise the prices for the spring season.

The power loom weavers quickly responded to the manufacturers' actions. Within days of the announced reduction, Philadelphia's entire power loom carpet workforce of four hundred women struck. The young women, most of whom had been in the industry only a brief time, responded in a remarkably disciplined and organized manner.⁸ John Bromley's power loom force of fifty women and twelve men left their looms and gathered outside the mill.⁹ Although the manufacturers immediately called for police protection, the crowd of over fifteen hundred relatives, friends, and fellow carpet workers remained calm. No disturbances were reported as over one hundred weavers from Dobson's mill joined the Bromley weavers.¹⁰ Weavers from every power mill in the city, large shops as well as small, left their looms, and by the end of the week fewer than ten of the city's power looms were in operation.

The power loom weavers' strike gave manufacturers a reason to shut down the industry. Within a week, most mills followed John Bromley in announcing that "if the operators do not consent to the reduction the mill owners deem it advisable to cease work."¹¹ Bromley closed his entire mill down, stopping the spinning machinery and locking out all the employees. Alexander Beck closed his mill and also shut out the hand loom weavers. By November 20, almost three thousand people in Kensington were affected

by the power loom weavers' strike.¹²

Like the skilled hand loom weavers the power loom operatives organized around a core of shop committees. The shop committee organization had its roots in the early years of the hand loom industry when Kensington weavers periodically negotiated wage rates with their employers.¹³ Shop committees formed the heart of weavers' organization in the newer eastern mills as well. In 1846 hand loom weavers from New England and Yonkers met in New York for the first time to form a national association. Representatives from thirty-one factories attended the meeting and adopted a set of rules governing the trade. Each shop elected officers to communicate local needs and to enforce the rules of the association.¹⁴

The main concerns of the shop committees and this early hand loom national organization were wage rates, protection of weavers' shop floor prerogatives, and control of entry to the trade. New workers seeking to become carpet operatives had to pay a fee of ten dollars, but weavers' sons only paid five. The weavers' organization fixed fines for violation of the trade rules such as working under the set rate or taking an unauthorized loom. Each loom was to be taxed equally to defray the association's expenses and the rules were to be posted in every carpet factory. The national body would support local strikes only on a two-thirds vote, but once approved, "stringent measures" could be taken and aid sent to the striking weavers.

During a strike married men were assured of receiving three and single men two dollars per week. Members of the trade were strictly cautioned against "taking looms at the time of a contest with the capitalist." Such action led to expulsion from the trade.¹⁵

The fate of this national association is unclear but sporadic strikes and attempts to negotiate wage rates throughout the 1850's and 1860's suggest that some form of shop committee structure survived. During the early 1870's Kensington carpet weavers took their organization into the fledgling Knights of Labor. Forming Local Assembly (L.A.) 4 in 1872, the hand loom weavers became charter members of the Noble and Holy Order and early converts to the Knights' vision of the cooperative commonwealth. In 1873 another group of carpet weavers formed L.A. 6. That year a serious strike broke out in Kensington over the declining hand loom wage rates.¹⁶ The weavers' shop committees, now aided by the Knights' national organization, began their long struggle to stem the decline of their trade.

The skilled weavers saw the wages of female power loom operatives as a crucial lever in the industry. The skilled men did not attempt to exclude women from the industry. Indeed, since the women worked in the new departments and factories, exclusion was never the option it seemed in trades like cigarmaking, where women appeared to be replacing men directly. Instead, the carpet weavers cooperated with the unskilled women and encouraged general

organization throughout the trade. Work and family ties in Kensington's small carpet community probably aided in the development of strong shop floor organizations in both hand and power mills.¹⁷ By the time the power loom weavers struck in 1879, shop committees appear to have been well established among the women.

The day after the new November 1878 rate was announced in Kensington, committees functioned in each mill to shape the workers' responses. In shop meetings at Bromley and Sons, Leedom, Dornan, Ivins, Dietz and Magee, and James Gay, the weavers announced their intent to strike. The mill committees unanimously agreed to strike and appointed committees to help recruit weavers still at work. A committee of eight approached the reluctant weavers at John Bromley's mill and "endeavored to persuade them to strike." Weavers in other mills followed suit and the personal contacts made by shop committees proved successful. The strikers reported their ranks increasing as women were "recruited by twos and threes."¹⁸

According to the weavers' calculations, the wage cut demanded by the industry amounted to about 20 percent of their present rate. "Even if the employers have to compete with the east," they announced, "we do not consider the cases parallel."¹⁹ At the six-cent rate a full time female worker earned about seven dollars a week. But Philadelphia weavers also claimed that they "do more work on inferior looms and hence lose considerable time waiting for warps

or fillings," which brought down their wages.²⁰ Slack time and seasonal lay-offs, moreover, meant that few weavers ever earned the optimal amount quoted by manufacturers. The Philadelphia cost of living was also considerably higher than in the eastern mill towns, justifying a higher wage rate. According to the weavers' reports, women in Lowell paid only two dollars and ten cents a week for board while the lowest female Philadelphia boarding house charged three dollars.²¹ The wage cut, the weavers argued, would bring down their weekly earnings to five and a half dollars "when fully employed and much less when time lost was counted."²² The wage cut was therefore "unfair and unfounded." The weavers further countered their employers' claims of necessary cuts by arguing that "the depression of business is caused principally by the low state of wages. People must receive sufficient to keep body and soul together in order to buy carpets."²³

The shop committees provided the focal point of the weavers' strike organization. Meeting almost daily, the committees provided moral support, aid, and a means of communication to other labor organizations. The shop committees sent regular reports to general strike meetings where the weavers could assess their strength and could find out what was going on in other mills. Both women and men were elected as delegates to the strikers' general meetings, where the weavers' determination was reinforced by visits from other trade unions, including representatives from

the eastern carpet mills.²⁴ The weekly shop reports always included an estimate of the number of weavers on strike, a report on the financial condition of the weavers, and a record of weavers who refused to join the action. The weavers' general meeting appointed various committees, including one for relief work and one to "visit" scabs. One committee resolved to "use all means in our power to prevent any of the strikers from accepting the reduction."²⁵ By December, according to the Irish World, the weavers had organized a permanent union "to protect themselves against a further reduction of their wages." The union was to be "conducted on a beneficiary principle which will supply the wants of many members."²⁶

The power loom weavers' strike gained considerable popular support in Kensington's textile community. Hand loom weavers in particular, contributed strongly to the women's effort. They provided financial assistance as well as moral support and tactical advice. According to one report, the hand loom weavers "supplied most of the money to support the strike."²⁷ Having seen the gradual encroachment of power looms into their trade and the precipitous decline of their own wages during the past five years, the hand loom weavers knew as well as the manufacturers the ultimate direction of the industry. A lower level of wages for power loom operatives clearly spelled an additional decrease for the skilled weavers as well. The only way to maintain their own wages was to keep the general industry

rates as high as possible. "If the strike should prove unsuccessful," said one reporter, "all their hopes would be blighted."²⁸ The hand loom weavers who worked in shops also employing power looms had already been thrown out of work with the strike. Their fellows working in the old exclusively hand-run mills generously contributed to the strikers' fund and supported those men who were out of work. The hand loom weavers' contributions combined with other sources enabled the women's relief committee to report after two months of strike that "all who reported a need were taken care of."²⁹

By mid-December, carpet supplies were down and the start of the spring season approached. The manufacturers' association announced it would end its lock-out and planned to reopen on the day after Christmas. Although one manufacturer said he did not expect any trouble "so long as the men do not join the strike," the manufacturers' association requested that the mayor send police guards to the neighborhood.³⁰ It warned the strikers that "any persons found interfering" with the running of the mills would be "prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."³¹ The Association promised "ample protection" to the hands who wished to resume their places and prepared to begin operations.³² Bromley Brothers opened their doors with a guard of sixty police officers charged with patrolling the neighborhood of the mill.³³

The manufacturers assured the strikers that they would

take back any who wished to return to their jobs. James Kitchenman told his weavers he had received "applications from those anxious to learn the business but prefers his former employees for whom the doors will be kept open only a few days longer." John Dornan promised the same, saying he had had applications "from those desirous of learning power loom weaving but . . . there is no necessity of considering them as yet." Another employer assured a local newspaper, "it will not be long before all the old hands will want to come back."³⁴ The employers assumed that personal loyalty combined with female passivity would bring the weavers back to work.

The manufacturers' expectations proved ill-founded. There was no sign that their old hands would willingly return to their looms. On December 26 Bromley and Sons opened with only twelve of their sixty-two looms in operation. James Kitchenman reported "a few" looms running and Judge Brothers started just four of their thirty-five machines. Some mills, including that of John Gay, could not reopen at all.³⁵

When it became clear that few if any of the old hands would accept the reduced rate, the manufacturers' paternalistic solicitation became a grim determination to resume operations even if it meant training new hands. The turn to new hands marked a major transition in relations between management and labor in power mills. John Dornan, who claimed to be the first Kensington employer to introduce

power looms, announced that as he had "instructed many of the strikers in the knowledge of the business," he was convinced that "what was done before can be done again." Another manufacturer claimed that he would even seek workers in England to keep his looms running. By January 18, after almost a month of stand-off, the manufacturers' association announced formally that if the strikers would not yield within the week they would "all be discharged and new hands taken on to run their looms."³⁶

The weavers realized that successful importation of new learners would signal a death blow to their strike. When the mills reopened after Christmas, strikers appeared in force to publicly denounce their sisters who had broken ranks. Each evening, according to one report, "strong influences were brought to bear upon those who returned to work to induce them to stop."³⁷ Although no violence was reported, a detail of sixty to seventy extra police officers patrolled the neighborhood "to prevent disturbance and disperse all unusual assemblages of people." On December 30 the women paraded through the streets of Kensington. Five hundred women carrying banners which called for "six cents or nothing" and "no surrender" marched from mill to mill. At least two hundred men, probably hand loom weavers, who followed behind the parade were dispersed by the police.³⁹ The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin chided the men for "sending women to the front to do the fighting." Referring to the Kensington riots thirty years earlier,

the paper described the parade as "a historic mode of warfare in Kensington" and warned the women, "Captain Heine is no respecter of persons and he scatters Amazons with impartial vigor with which he charges any other mob that happens to come his way."⁴⁰

The women's militance slowed production in the mills, but they could not entirely close down the looms. By mid-January the manufacturers successfully brought in close to one hundred new recruits and nearly a quarter of the strikers faced the loss of their jobs.⁴¹ Once the manufacturers actively and directly bypassed their old hands and sought workers from outside the carpet community, the weavers were forced to admit defeat. On January 22, after three months, the weavers reluctantly agreed to accept their employers' terms. Weavers at Dornan's mill returned first, followed by those at Bromley Brothers, Leedom, Judge, and others.⁴²

After the January 22 agreement was reached the women returned to their old employers expecting to reclaim their positions. The manufacturers, however, refused to "discharge the few old hands who remained or turn out the girls whom they took in to learn the business and who have become expert weavers."⁴³ One manufacturer told the strikers he hoped this action would "have a tendency to the repression of future strikes."⁴⁴ Having trained new hands whose loyalty they had cause to trust, the manufacturers no longer felt any obligation to their old workers. The manufacturers'

association announced that "most of the new hands are good weavers and we desire to let them continue working rather than give the strikers preference."⁴⁵

Despite their defeat in the strike many of the women remained tied to their newly formed union. In late February the power loom weavers' union held a public meeting "to ascertain the number of weavers whose place had been filled during the strike and were still out of work." The union declared that "a considerable amount" of money was still in the treasurer's hands when the strike ended. As some of the women reported themselves in "very needy circumstances," the union decided that the money should be distributed equally among those in need.⁴⁵

The "long strike" ended with a victory for the manufacturers. Although the strike had lasted far beyond the expected two weeks, employers successfully weathered the power loom confrontation. The strike not only confirmed the manufacturers' commitment to controlling their power workforce, but effectively reduced the surplus carpet stock on hand. Over five thousand rolls of carpet had been eliminated from Philadelphia warehouses, and the trade expected a prosperous spring season.⁴⁶ The Philadelphia firms entered the 1879 season in a vastly improved position and with a renewed sense of confidence in their new trade association. "We are more than ever impressed with the importance the enforced stoppage of machinery should have upon the demand for goods of the class affected by the

strike . . . , " the leading trade journal noted; "It is confidently expected that when the spring trade demand sets in such goods will be in very short supply."⁴⁷

The defeat of the power loom weavers had potentially disastrous consequences for the hand loom weavers as well. Despite a strong organization and a monopoly over the skill of hand loom carpet weaving, the men had been unable to stem the tide of mechanization in their industry. The skilled weavers' position had steadily declined as the market (and hence the price) for hand-loomed ingrain carpets contracted. By the late 1870's the wages of hand loom weavers averaged only about thirteen cents a yard or less than half the rate paid just ten years earlier.⁴⁸ At the time of the power loom weavers' strike, the skilled weavers numbered among the most impoverished of craftsmen. The defeat of the women and a general decline in wages in the industry were therefore doubly disastrous to the position of the skilled men.

Soon after the successful power loom reduction, the manufacturers attempted to complete their retrenchment strategy with a reduction of hand loom wages. In spite of their depressed condition the skilled men countered the reduction with a forceful response. Six weeks after the women returned to their looms the hand loom weavers embarked on an offensive strike, demanding not only restoration of their original wage but a one-cent advance as well. Coordinated by a "secret organization" (which all evidence

points to as the Knights of Labor), the hand loom weavers developed a strategy of selective strikes.⁴⁹ By targeting "only those firms we know to have outstanding orders," the strikers received continual support from their fellows still at work and were thus able to press their demands.⁵⁰ The tactic showed a sophisticated knowledge of the trade, since small hand loom manufacturers were particularly vulnerable to any halt in production. Within three months the strategy proved successful. In May, 1879, the major manufacturers, seeking industry-wide standards and stability within the trade, allied with the hand loom weavers' union to force every Philadelphia mill into a compromise uniform wage scale.

In early March, 1879, the manufacturers announced a general reduction of one cent per yard for hand loom weaving. The skilled weavers knew that a general strike would be difficult to sustain and impossible to finance. Instead they singled out manufacturers they knew to be vulnerable and struck only one or two shops at a time. The men demanded not only their old rate but an advance which would bring them to the fifteen-cent level of the previous spring.⁵¹

Beginning with eighty weavers at John Hamilton's mill and one hundred employees at the city's largest hand loom firm, Boggs and White, the weavers carried out their plan.⁵² Within a few days, Boggs and White and Hamilton agreed to the weavers' demands, which put the weaving rate at one half cent higher than the original price of thirteen or

fourteen cents. The Carpet Trade marveled that "no more successful strike was ever inaugurated in our city."⁵³

The weavers soon forced most of the city's hand loom shops to adopt their rate of fourteen to fifteen cents per yard. By May the weavers held agreements with 120 of the city's hand loom firms and one manufacturer commented, "Oddly enough, while the power loom weavers after a stubborn resistance of three months against a reduction had to finally submit, the hand loom weavers have in most instances been able to carry their points against the employers notwithstanding that hand loom work was thought to be doomed to early extinction."⁵⁴

Sensing the advantages of a stable uniform wage scale in the industry, the major manufacturers in late May agreed to meet with the weavers to discuss plans to bring every hand loom shop in compliance with the fifteen-cent scale. Representatives of 120 firms and over three thousand weavers met together and appointed a committee of ten weavers and ten manufacturers who would set the scale and "see that the plan is carried out."⁵⁵ Within a few days the committee announced a wage rate which was to go into effect June 9. The scale would be renegotiated by a committee of weavers and manufacturers every six months. The compromise rates ranged from seven to fifteen cents per yard depending on the grade of goods and represented a slight overall increase for the weavers. Both operators and manufacturers welcomed the scale. The manufacturers would now have a "definite

base upon which to treat with customers," and the weavers would be assured of their wage rates for at least six months.⁵⁶

The Carpet Trade Review found this new alliance between manufacturers and the weavers' union a "very important action." "When we advised the organizing of a cooperative league between weavers and manufacturers," the editors wrote, "we had no idea that our theory would be practically illustrated so soon."⁵⁷ Justifying the league with the ironic adage "in union there is strength," the journal noted, "the evils resulting from a mis-understanding or lack of sympathy between employers and employed are obviously detrimental to both."⁵⁸ Admitting that the manufacturers as well as the weavers might be at fault in the case of certain strikes, the editors blamed the smaller companies for their present difficulties. "A smaller dealer would start a few looms, pay a trifle lower wages than others pay and thus be able to sell his goods a trifle lower than his neighbors. The fact would become known and another manufacturer would reduce and so it would spread from shop to shop, and by the action of a few the whole world would suffer."⁵⁹

Having committed themselves to the principle of regulation and a uniform scale, the manufacturers' association began to pressure the few firms remaining outside the combination into compliance. The associated manufacturers were even prepared to support and encourage the weavers' strikes against non-compliers. One of the leaders of the

combination movement, James Judge, for example, contributed five hundred dollars to the weavers' strike fund, saying he would give as much as needed "to force this thing through."⁶⁰ John Shegog, who ran twenty-four looms and spearheaded the proposition in the manufacturers' meeting, called for every employer to "pay his hands the same as his neighbor. Men should strike against those not cooperating."⁶¹ Some of the same manufacturers who had recently and bitterly opposed the organization of power loom weavers welcomed the hand loom union as an essential ally in bringing order to the industry.

Although most firms opposing the combination were small shops, some larger firms balked at the unprecedented alliance with the weavers' union. Boggs and White, the city's largest hand loom firm, commented that "the cent a yard is really about all the profit we have been making lately." Robert Huston, a sizeable employer of forty hand looms, opposed the combination because he favored separate organizations of weavers and manufacturers. Thomas Leedom, known for "wanting to run the business his own way," simply refused to recognize any organization among the weavers. The smaller firms who resisted the combination feared they could not maintain their place in the market at the higher rates. Thomas Buckley, who ran ten looms, said he would have to "shut up rather than give the price," and Jacob Shoemaker, who ran twelve looms, simply said he was "not up to the bill of prices" and could not afford to run

at the scale.⁶²

After announcing the uniform wage scale the weavers' and manufacturers' combination took over the practical details of running the strike. For their part of the agreement, the weavers promised not to strike without the consent of the combination's standing committee. Those shops striking without consent would not receive benefit funds. In addition to money supplied by the larger manufacturers, each employed weaver contributed one dollar a week towards the strike fund. The weavers sorely needed the uniform scale for the slight increase it represented as well as for the promise of a stable rate in future months. It was a final stab at offsetting the obsolescence their trade faced.⁶³

By July a uniform wage scale existed throughout the trade. The weavers had achieved a modest wage gain, and the manufacturers had recovered a degree of control over a chaotic market. The large manufacturers who also ran power machines benefited most from the uniform scale and a more stable market. Philadelphia's larger firms gained strength in the national trade. The uniform scale provided the major firms with the stability they needed to consolidate their power investments and eliminate the more inefficient hand loom operations. After 1879 the number of power looms in the city rose dramatically and as one manufacturer explained, "If there had been no strikes there would have been no power looms in Kensington."⁶⁴ At the

end of the weavers' strike John Dornan announced that, despite the agreement, he intended to sell all his hand looms and replace them with power.⁶⁵ Indeed, within five years Dornan became one of the principal power manufacturers in Kensington. John Bromley also declared that he would employ no more men on his looms and the Carpet Trade commented that "hand looms are for sale throughout Kensington."⁶⁶ The hand loom weavers' strike had provided a convenient mechanism by which the larger companies consolidated their interests in the trade. Both the smaller manufacturers and the hand loom weavers themselves were the unwitting partners to their own accelerated obsolescence.

The reverberations of the Kensington strikes and the ultimate settlement were soon felt in the eastern power mills. Sporadic strikes occurred in several leading factories in the summer and fall of 1879. In June 1879 about two hundred power loom weavers, mainly young women, struck at Higgins' New York City factory. They demanded an increase in their wages. The strike lasted only two days, but the women gained their point and received a compromise settlement.⁶⁷ Two months later, the power loom weavers at Smith's Yonkers mill also struck against a 10 percent reduction instituted shortly after Alexander Smith died. The weavers expressed "ill feeling" against the new management, and the Carpet Trade noted, "There was never a time in the history of the Smith carpet company when they have

been in a more unsettled condition." The strike lasted about a month and also resulted in a compromise. The company apparently rescinded its agreement two weeks later, and the hands once again went out, noting "there is great dissatisfaction again at the factory."⁶⁸ Smith, Higgins, and the Boston Roxbury company all raised their prices for the fall 1879 season. Sporadic strikes continued into the early 1880's. The Kensington power loom weavers at Judge, Dornan, and Bromley and Sons struck again in the fall of 1879, demanding higher wages. Other manufacturers, apparently anticipating the spread of the strike, immediately advanced their weavers a half cent per yard. The strike spread to Gay, Leedom, and even to James Kitchenman's mill as about 350 women again went on strike. Since many women from the previous strike had not been rehired, many of the 1879 strikers must have been new workers. The issues which sparked the first confrontation had clearly not been resolved. After four weeks the women returned to work with a promise of a general advance. As a result of their strike the women sent delegates to the biannual hand loom wage negotiations. The two classes of weavers now jointly dealt with their employers.⁶⁹

The close of the 1870's coincided with the end of an era in the carpet industry. By 1879, the transition to mechanized production was clearly a permanent change. The old hand loom weavers were dying out (although their skill and solidarity had provided them with a final Indian

summer of power and influence). The newer female workforce, aided and supported by the skilled men, had forged new links and begun the process of organization that would take them through a major confrontation just four years later. For the manufacturers, the decade had brought tremendous changes in physical plant and management strategies. No longer hampered by the anachronistic small shop system, the power mill owners now moved decisively to control production and costs in the entire industry.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Philadelphia North American, 13 November 1878; Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 13 November 1878.

2. The Carpet Trade, June 1878.

3. Ibid.

4. The Carpet Trade, November 1880.

5. The Carpet Trade, December 1878.

6. Philadelphia Public Ledger, 13 November 1878.

7. Philadelphia Inquirer, 20 November 1878.

8. The Carpet Trade, January 1879.

9. Inquirer, 14 November 1878.

10. See accounts in The Carpet Trade Review, January 1878; Inquirer, 13 and 14 November 1878; and Evening Bulletin, 13 November 1878.

11. Inquirer, 14 November 1878.

12. North American, 16 November 1878. Also see accounts in Inquirer, 14 and 16 November 1878.

13. For accounts of earlier labor organization see John S. Ewing and Nancy P. Norton, Broadlooms and Businessmen: A History of the Bigelow-Sanford Carpet Company, pp. 46-51.

14. John R. Commons, et al., eds., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, 6:237-41.

15. Ibid.

16. Arthur H. Cole and Harld F. Williamson, The American Carpet Manufacture: A History and an Analysis, p. 181. Also see Terence V. Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, 1859-1899, pp. 97-98.

17. For a comparison with other trades see Augusta E. Galster, The Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry: With Special Reference to Philadelphia, p. 41. Also see Clarence E. Bonnett, History of Employers' Associations in the United States, p. 489.

18. Public Ledger, 13 November 1878; Inquirer, 13 November 1878.

19. Inquirer, 16 November 1878.

20. Public Ledger, 16 November 1878.

21. Ibid.

22. Public Ledger, 16 November 1878. For a comparison of weaving rates see The Carpet Trade, December 1878. The editors estimate that power loom weavers in Lowell received four cents per yard while weavers at Higgins received three and a half to four and a half cents and Philadelphia weavers received five and a half to six cents.

23. Public Ledger, 21 December 1878.

24. See reports in Inquirer, 16, 20, and 27 November 1878, and in Public Ledger, 4 December 1878.

25. Inquirer, 20 November 1878; Public Ledger, 4 December 1878.

26. Irish World (New York), 7 December 1878.

27. Evening Bulletin, 22 January 1879.

28. Ibid.

29. Public Ledger, 4 December 1878 and 1 January 1879.

30. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1879. Also see Inquirer, 13 November 1878; and North American, 26 December 1878.

31. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1879.

32. Ibid.

33. Public Ledger, 30 December 1878. Also see Inquirer, 25 November 1884.

34. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1879.

35. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1879; North American, 26 December 1878.

36. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1879.
37. North American, 26 December 1878.
38. Public Ledger, 30 December 1878.
39. The Carpet Trade, February 1879; The Carpet Trade Review, January 1879.
40. Evening Bulletin, 1 January 1879.
41. Evening Bulletin, 22 January 1879.
42. North American, 23 January 1879.
43. Ibid.
44. Evening Bulletin, 22 January 1879.
45. Irish World, 22 February 1879.
46. Public Ledger, 23 January 1879.
47. The Carpet Trade Review, February 1879.
48. See Chapter 2.
49. The Carpet Trade, April 1879.
50. Public Ledger, 5 March 1879. Also see Inquirer, 5 March 1879.
51. The Carpet Trade, April 1879.
52. The Carpet Trade Review, March 1879.
53. The Carpet Trade Review, April 1879.
54. The Carpet Trade Review, April 1879; The Carpet Trade, June 1879.
55. Inquirer, 9 June 1879.
56. Inquirer, 6 June 1879; North American, 24 May 1879. The scale of wages was published in The Carpet Trade Review, June 1879.
57. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1880.
58. The Carpet Trade, June 1879.
59. Inquirer, 17 June 1879.

60. The Carpet Trade, June 1879.
61. Ibid.
62. Inquirer, 5 March 1879.
63. Inquirer, 9 June 1879. For by-laws of the combination see The Carpet Trade Review, January 1880.
64. Inquirer, 5 March 1879.
65. The Carpet Trade Review, July 1879.
66. The Carpet Trade Review, January 1880; The Carpet Trade, July 1879; Inquirer, 5 March 1879.
67. The Carpet Trade, June 1879.
68. The Carpet Trade Review, August, September, October 1879.
69. The Carpet Trade, April 1880 and June 1882.

CHAPTER 5

THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR AND THE CARPET WEAVERS'

GENERAL STRIKE, 1884-1885

Beginning in the fall of 1884 workplace, class, and community came together as large numbers of carpet weavers joined the Knights of Labor. The Knights provided a rallying point for the power loom weavers during what became the industry's major late nineteenth-century confrontation. Starting in November 1884 and lasting through July 1885, weavers in every major power mill setting struck against wage cuts and for recognition of their right to belong to the Knights of Labor. The power loom weavers became symbols for the entire laboring community of the organized potential of "factory girls" and spurred the organization of women into the Knights of Labor. Perhaps the most notable feature of the carpet weavers' strikes was the support which unskilled and female operatives received from the skilled male workers, particularly the loom fixers. Such an alliance became possible only through the agency of an organization which combined a moral commitment to "lady knights" with a political vision of industrial cooperation. Even while deeply engrossed in their own industrial struggles, these women found themselves plunged into the Order's internal strife. That

happened because the Knights' leading role in the carpet weavers' strikes intensified the conflict within the Order between a strife-weary General Executive Board and more militant trade union members. The weavers' insistence on their right to belong to the union and to be represented through their shop committees thus not only became a critical issue for the future of the industry but also contributed to the major fissures within the labor movement.¹

After the "long strike" of 1878-1879, the carpet industry enjoyed a short period of relatively high prices and fairly amicable relations between weavers and employers. The strike had convinced even the most reluctant manufacturers of the profitability of power looms. In the next five years the number of power looms doubled in the industry and tripled in Philadelphia. Carpet output increased by over seventeen million yards per year and the value of the product soared to almost \$32 million. Much of this growth took place in Philadelphia as smaller firms increasingly turned to power machinery. As a result, the carpet workforce in that city became predominantly female in less than five years, a dramatic change. Always overwhelmingly female, the New York mills expanded in size after 1879 into some of the nation's largest factories. Alexander Smith's Yonkers mills employed over three thousand hands in 1885, twenty-five hundred of whom were young women. E. S. Higgins' New York City mill employed over two thousand that year and Stephen Sanford's Amsterdam mill employed about two thousand

hands., making it one of the largest Mohawk Valley factories.²

The vast expansion of the carpet industry intensified its already competitive nature. With Philadelphia firms growing, even the giant Alexander Smith management began to worry about market pressures. Warnings of oversupply once again filled the trade journals with predictions of disaster if some mutual restriction plans were not agreed upon. Within two years of the 1879 strike, prices in the industry began to fall. Manufacturers had emerged from the strike to record high prices of \$1.05 per yard for ingrain carpets in 1880. By 1884 the price was sixty cents.³ With increased investments in power machinery, low prices threatened another crisis in overhead costs. Cutting labor costs appeared to be the only way of reducing expenses. Competition in the industry reinforced this view as Philadelphia weavers continued to demand wages of two or three cents per yard higher than their fellows in the East. In 1884 ingrain weavers in Philadelphia received six cents a yard while Smith, Higgins, and Sanford paid between four and a half and five cents.⁴

By 1884 the situation in the industry seemed very similar to the period before the 1878 strike. The major difference, of course, was the predominance of power loom weavers and the fact of their organization in the Knights of Labor. For the Philadelphia weavers, the legacy of the long strike included immediate ties to the growing national labor movement. Henry Skeffington, a veteran Philadelphia

Knight, had organized women carpet weavers as early as 1880. As part of the Knights' earliest forays in the recruitment of women, Kensington carpet weavers joined shoe workers in the Order's first "ladies" assemblies. The weavers attached their shop organizations to the Order as early as 1881.⁵ In July 1884 the Kensington ingrain weavers requested an organizer "to arrange turning the union over to the Knights of Labor," and by the end of the year, their local numbered over six hundred members.⁶ Other carpet workers in Kensington followed suit as the setters, the winders, and, most importantly, the loom fixers, organized their own locals.

The organization of New York carpet weavers into the Knights was fraught with controversy from the start. In 1883 E. S. Higgins' weavers struck against a ten percent wage reduction and formed Local Assembly (L.A.) 2985. Under the leadership of John Morrison, a carpet weaver who was to become a central figure in the Order's internal conflict, the Higgins local won a wage increase and established Higgins as the largest union shop in the industry and the "most thoroughly Knights of Labor factory" in New York.⁷ The Knights' victory attracted a large New York membership and encouraged the weavers to expand their efforts to the three thousand workers at Smith's Yonkers mill. Late in 1883 a delegation of Higgins' weavers headed by Morrison visited Yonkers and secretly met with the weavers. Soon Yonkers weavers' L.A.2985 claimed over seven hundred members. Morrison continued in the forefront of the New York weavers'

organization, attracting the ire of the Smith company, who accused him of being a Higgins agent sent to undermine their market position.⁸

The weavers' mode of organization in the carpet mills reflected older trade patterns as well as the spontaneity of a newer industrial workforce. As in many other industries, the workers organized first and then linked their organization with the Knights' growing national movement. The heart of the weavers' industrial organization was their network of shop committees which operated semiautonomously in each mill. Shop committees set and enforced rules governing the behavior of weavers and to a certain extent employers as well. In the carpet shops, as in shoe factories and other industries, the committees determined the number of new "learners" who could be taken on, acted as arbitrators between the individual workers and the employers and insured unity among the workers by fining and even ostracizing workers who violated the rules by working below the rate or by teaching unauthorized learners and "scabs." In the smaller Philadelphia mills one committee served the entire shop. Committee members there knew all their workmates personally and often had ready access to their employer. In the larger mills, on the other hand, each department organized a distinct shop committee. In Smith's mill, for example, the setters, winders, weavers, and dyers each had a committee. In these large mills shop committee representatives were often the only link between weavers in

the different departments. Women as well as men served on the shop committees, and in departments where women constituted a majority of the workforce women often provided the leadership. In Smith's mills, for example, the setter Maggie McCade was president of her department shop committee.⁹

The shop committees formed the center of the weavers' community at work and provided the key link to the Knights of Labor local assembly structure. The committees generally acted independently, only calling on the Order's officers to clarify rules. During strikes, the shop committees turned into the major vehicle for communication and organization and functioned much as the weavers' traditional shop committees. Each shop committee sent delegates to represent it in the local Knights of Labor assembly, a body which brought the entire industry together in Philadelphia, or the entire mill workforce in the larger plants. That body had the power to call strikes and settle them. The Philadelphia local assembly consisted of representatives from throughout Kensington and included weavers from scores of separate mills. As early as 1882 the local assembly coordinated the biannual wage negotiations and upheld the 1879 strike agreement. The New York locals, on the other hand, generally represented only one mill with every member working for the same employer. This difference had important consequences for the Order's ability to function in a trade union capacity and affected its success in sustaining strikes.¹⁰

Bolstered by the growing national presence of the Knights, the carpet weavers met their employers' offensives of the early 1880's in a stronger position than they had held in 1878. Between 1880 and 1883, carpet weavers at Higgins, Roxbury, and other mills won scattered victories including wage increases and, more important, agreement to employ only union hands. As carpet prices began to fall in early 1883, weavers in the various mills began accumulating defense funds. They anticipated "trouble." In Yonkers, the union secretly "set aside a small portion of each week's wages so as to have it when needed." Higgins' weavers did the same and Philadelphia Knights' weavers' dues filled a city-wide defense fund.¹¹ Claiming "we know as much about the business as the manufacturers," the weavers also watched the market carefully.¹² When the employers began to reduce wages in late 1884, the weavers were not surprised.

In November 1884 with carpet prices at record low levels and the fall trade completed, the Philadelphia manufacturers' association announced a reduction in wages. When the hand loom weavers refused to sign the wage agreement the manufacturers announced, "The weavers' action . . . breaks up the mutual arrangement which existed for several years . . . the manufacturers now consider themselves free to employ whom they please without any reference to a scale of wages."¹³ The association, which included most of the city's power loom manufacturers, told the weavers, "Owing

to the continued dullness in business and the extreme low price at which goods are selling, we find it necessary to reduce the cost."¹⁴ Weavers receiving six or six and a half cents a yard would now receive four and a half or five cents. Thomas Taylor appealed to a paternalistic spirit of industry cooperation and asked his weavers to bear a "share in the losses." Other manufacturers pointed to the number of young women in the industry and insisted they could easily afford a cut as they were "often times only one in a large family working."¹⁵ Most employers admitted, as John Gay did, that they needed the reduction "to abate competition" with the East. Said one firm, "We were brought into competition with the eastern manufacturers and it is impossible to make the power looms pay at the old wages."¹⁶ On November 19, weavers in twenty-three of the city's twenty-six power mills found reduction notices posted in their shops.

Carpet workers from all departments united against the wage cuts. The shop committees immediately called the weavers out of the mills. Many women spontaneously left their looms as soon as they saw the notice, while in other shops formal meetings were held to ratify such action. In John Gay's mill eighty-six women left their looms, announcing they would hold a meeting and as a group "proceed to the mill and protest."¹⁷ Twenty-five women in Thomas Doerr's mill followed suit, and women throughout Kensington poured into the streets. Committees from the first mills

on strike visited other shops throughout the day, inviting all weavers to a general meeting that evening. The feeling for a general strike ran high as weavers crowded into the evening meeting at Fourth and Lehigh streets. "I have been forty years a weaver," one woman announced to a reporter. "[I] held out through the strike seven years ago and can do so again." Coming directly from their looms "in their working clothes with dinner kettles and baskets," women weavers were reportedly "even more clamorous for a strike than the men." Other carpet workers whose employment depended on the working of the looms joined the weavers' meeting. Many spoolers, burlers, reelers, and winders, as well as loom fixers and hand loom weavers, supported the strike sentiment, joining the agreement to suspend all work the next day in mills that had posted notices. Representatives of the entire industry, both skilled and unskilled, were from the start united in their action as hundreds of carpet workers joined the strike.¹⁸

By the next afternoon the strikers consolidated their ranks. Over a thousand weavers crowded into Liberty Hall for the official strike vote. The meeting appointed a "temporary organization," electing a president, a secretary, and a relief committee. Reports from thirty shops assessed the situation in each mill and indicated overwhelming strike support. "No weaver," the meeting declared, "is to go back to work at the reduced rate." Women as well as men greeted the decision with enthusiasm, rising from their seats,

waving handkerchiefs, and shouting, "Strike, strike, let us strike."¹⁹

The weavers forged an independent strike organization which, while closely tied to the Order and heavily influenced by the Knights' policies, was not directly affiliated. According to Henry Skeffington, "As far as the weavers' strike is concerned, the Knights of Labor will not interfere in any way. We are organizing all the hands who are desirous of joining and they come in to the number of about seventy or eighty a day."²⁰ The Order used the opportunity of the strike to recruit members and actively win their support. James Wright, Master Workman of District Assembly (D.A.) Number One, and Skeffington were prominent speakers at the early strike meetings, urging support for the Order and encouraging all weavers to join. As an added incentive to the strikers Skeffington announced suspension of the usual initiation fees and explained the principles of support and unity. The Order freely offered financial as well as moral aid and one woman predicted, "It is more than likely that all the weavers male and female will become members of the Knights of Labor."²¹ Robert Farrell, a weaver from Dornan's mill and Master Workman of the Kensington assembly, explained the "benefits of organization" to the strikers and urged them to join the Order. Skeffington warned the weavers to "avoid intoxication" and "disturbance" and instead to depend on the "justice of your cause."²² Skeffington's was no idle plea for respectability. Fully two-

thirds of the strikers were young women and any raucous action would, he feared, raise questions about the efficacy of organizing women in general.

Led by James Wright, Knight's D.A. 1 cautioned the weavers to exhaust every possible channel of settlement before striking. Although most of the weavers reportedly opposed arbitration because "no compromise is possible," they respected the Knights' leadership enough to appoint three men and two women to represent their cause to the employers. The weavers insisted, however, that their general meeting reserve all final decision-making power and stipulated that the committee could agree to no action without the "personal consent of the majority of those present." The weavers further insisted that "the action of the meeting should be considered binding on the committee."²³ Predictably, most manufacturers refused to meet with the committee since the five representatives had no power to reach an agreement. The three employers, including Dornan, who did see the weavers' committee "treated them with contempt and even ridiculed their position," reinforcing the weavers' determination to strike. One of the women representatives "expressed indignation at the remarks made about her bonnet by an employer with whom they desired to discuss the situation."²⁴ The following day the weavers discharged the arbitration committee and decided, "We will now cease all efforts at a settlement . . . any further steps looking to the termination of the strike must come

from the 'bosses' and we will simply wait their actions."²⁵

Two issues were central to the weavers' strike.

First, they demanded their original wage rate. Second, but no less important, they insisted that only union weavers be employed in the mills. The manufacturers had threatened to take in learners and promised to keep all who became competent weavers. The employers warned the strikers that "any employee joining the Knights of Labor would not be re-hired" and began a search for "girls as apprentices."²⁶

"We have instructed two thousand weavers in this city to run murkland looms and can teach that many more if we want to," the manufacturers warned the strikers. "We can tomorrow get five hundred hands to go to work at once if we want to go to Lowell."²⁷ Led by John Dornan, the Philadelphia manufacturers bought newspaper advertisements in Yonkers, Thompsonville, Connecticut, and Lowell and offered slightly higher wages than the eastern companies. Ivins, Dietz and Magee led the way by hiring twelve "inexperienced girls" to run their looms.²⁸

The Knights responded immediately and telegraphed local assemblies in Yonkers and elsewhere to "beware" of Philadelphia advertisements.²⁹ The Order assured the Kensington strikers that "any statement that the manufacturers can get hands or learners is false. They cannot do it under any circumstance as almost every weaver in this country is a Knight and of course we control them."³⁰ The Knights' wide network within working class communities

proved effective and the employers found it difficult to import workers.

The issue of scab labor mobilized the Knights' local network as well. Within a week after the first scab weavers were hired, the loom fixers' local assembly voted to join the strike. With almost every Philadelphia loom fixer a Knights member, the assembly vowed that "none of us will run a single loom." Knowing that the fixers were expected to teach learners, the loom fixers promised no fixer or member of the assembly would be "allowed to fix looms for learners."³¹ With no independent demands for themselves, the skilled men struck out of solidarity with their unskilled sisters. One factor in the loom fixers' action may have been the fact that the skilled men were in no way threatened by the status or wages of the unskilled women. As a result the men could easily uphold the Knights' call for the protection and veneration of lady Knights. With the two major groups in the industry solidly on strike, other carpet workers joined the move. Beamers, winders, warpers, spoolers, and even skilled dyers joined the Order. Alliance of all workers, skilled and unskilled, male and female, by early December 1884, created an unprecedented situation in the industry.³²

The Knights of Labor gave full support to the striking women. In addition to enforcing the industry shut-down, the Knights offered substantial financial aid. Single women and men could receive five and married men eight dollars

a week in relief funds.³³ Six Philadelphia assemblies donated money and the call went out in local labor newspapers, "Brothers, Help Your Sisters."³⁴ With the initiation fee suspended, the weavers' assembly held daily meetings to induct new members. Reporting fifty or more new recruits a day, the Order claimed over two thousand new members in Kensington by the end of the strike's second week.³⁵ The daily meetings provided a social center for the strikers as well as a visible center of support. The weavers held frequent "sociables," balls, and entertainments, which in addition to giving the strikers a daily focus, raised considerable funds for their cause. One woman who recently joined the assembly declared, "We have assurances that the Knights will back us up in this fight and are not afraid of the result."³⁶

Given the Knights' visibility and effectiveness in the weavers' strike, the manufacturers' association not surprisingly declared "war" on the Knights of Labor. The association publicly announced that "the Knights of Labor have no business in this fight" and warned the weavers to stay away from the Order. Speaking for the employers, Robert Dornan told the strikers, "We are willing to settle our mutual difficulties among ourselves, but we are not willing for an outside organization knowing nothing of the details of our business to dictate to us."³⁷ The Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review railed against what they called the "improper" side of trade unions, that is, their "attempt to regulate wage."

Unions were justified in providing "such benefits or reading rooms" which would help make the worker "more intelligent," they said, but had no business interfering with the running of the manufacturers' affairs.³⁸ John Dobson threatened to "shut up our mills for a year if necessary" and promised that "no Knights of Labor will ever be employed in the trade again."³⁹

Throughout December and early January Philadelphia's power carpet mills remained idle. Weavers' shop committees reported weekly on the few scabs working in the mills and estimated as few as twelve looms operating in the entire city.⁴⁰ Committees of Kensington weavers visited local businesses, offices, and stores. Some shop keepers agreed to "subscribe weekly" and at least seven local unions pledged financial assistance. The strikers also made home visits to reinforce strike discipline. One or two manufacturers, notably J. Kitchenman, continued to provide work at the old rate, thus allowing a few working weavers to contribute to the support fund. Yonkers and New York power loom weavers also pledged aid and assessed their members each one dollar a week for the Kensington strike. The strikers' door-to-door efforts proved successful and they reported that they were able to meet all requests for aid and still maintain a full treasury. Through the labor press the weavers' strike received substantial national publicity, and in January members of Knights' locals as far away as Cleveland reportedly raised three thousand dollars for the Philadelphia

cause, and Chicago Knights contributed seven thousand dollars to the weavers "for their pluck in holding out."⁴²

The weavers' closest allies in Philadelphia were their industrial cousins, the shoe workers. Recently introduced in large numbers to run power machines, the young women shoe stitchers occupied a place in their industry similar to that of the power loom weavers. The two groups seemed to look to each other for support and strategy, together forming the largest and most militant block of women in the Knights of Labor. Shortly after the weavers' strike began, the stitchers struck against a similar wage cut. The lady shoe workers received support from the skilled male shoe workers as the weavers had from the loom fixers.⁴³ In December, when the two groups began to meet together for mutual aid and encouragement, the Press noted, "The weavers' strike with the boot and shoe trade lock-out comprise the notable labor troubles of the year."⁴⁴ John Swinton agreed. "Both trades are controlled on one side by a manufacturers' association and on the other by the Knights of Labor. In the shoemakers it is a question of authority and reduction of wages; in the weavers it is a question of reduction of wages and authority. In both, it will have to be decided whether the employees can belong to a union or whether they shall be wholly at the mercy of the bosses."⁴⁵

Solidarity among the two groups of strikers was extensive. The weavers and stitchers sent delegations to each other's weekly meetings to report on the progress of

their strikes and to lend moral support to each other's struggles. The women also held a series of joint "social gatherings" at the Knights of Labor hall. At one point in mid-January, their combined daily sessions attracted over five hundred people.⁴⁶ Together, the weavers and shoe stitchers infused their strikes with broader issues and concerns. The shoe workers began a cooperative grocery store and invited weavers and other workers in the city to participate. With two wagons financed from the strike fund, the store delivered wood, coal and groceries to striking Philadelphia Knights.⁴⁷

The weavers and shoe workers mutually adopted a new strike demand which specifically addressed their concerns as women workers. In late December the two groups demanded a ten-hour day. Both industries averaged at least twelve hours per day, particularly during the busy seasons. The Knights of Labor, like other contemporary industrial reform groups, advocated shorter hours to alleviate conditions for working women. The Philadelphia women declared that when they returned to work ten hours would constitute a day's work and no overtime would be allowed. In an effort to ease the seasonal layoffs which plagued both the carpet and the shoe industry, the women proposed that instead of keeping the mills open late during the busy season and then "shut down when the hands are most in need of funds," the manufacturers should adopt a more regular work schedule.⁴⁸

Although the weavers did not pursue the ten-hour demand

(they apparently dropped it when the central issue of their strike became their right to belong to the union), it is clear that some discussion of the women's concerns had taken place within the local lady Knights' organization.

The Kensington weavers received an added boost when two thousand weavers at Stephen Sanford's Amsterdam mill struck on December 22. Following the Philadelphia lead, Sanford reduced the low wages of his employees by 10 percent. The women in his mill, who had recently left the town's mixed female local to form their own Knights of Labor assembly, immediately walked out.⁴⁹ As their demands made clear, the wage cut was merely the precipitating factor in the strike. Underlying their action was a deep resentment of Sanford's rigid system of fines and factory discipline. Calling the fines "outrageous," the women demanded that the bosses of several departments, whom they described as "mean men with shrunken souls," be fired before any weaver return to work.⁵⁰ The weavers most hated weave room boss John Howgate. The women accused him of levying fines indiscriminately and on account of "imperfections in work which cannot be avoided." The weavers, who earned less than five dollars a week, charged that Howgate and other superintendents personally enriched themselves through the fines.⁵¹ The Knights' District Recording Secretary, John McDonald, explained the reasons for the strike to Powderly: "The ladies and children are made a special mark [for the bosses]. They are addressed by these Gentlemen (I suppose

that is what they call themselves) as 'animals,' 'cattle,' 'crawlers' and 'beggars' and epithets too vulgar to be recounted here. . . . If a girl is so unfortunate enough to attract the attention of her employer or any of his friends," continued McDonald, "[the boss] will endeavor to arrange a meeting between the parties in one of the adjacent cities for a purpose easily surmized and if the young lady refuses to accept the proposition she is told there is no more work . . . for her."⁵² John Swinton expressed the feeling of the labor press towards the Amsterdam strike, saying "these girls did not strike for wages--tho God knows their wages were small--but for the rights and principles of womanhood."⁵³

In several respects the Sanford strike followed the Philadelphia pattern. The strikers appointed a committee of nine men and nine women and requested an organizer from the Order to come out and help. "The local assembly," they told Powderly, "is increasing rapidly and with good material, God hasten the time when the working men and women of this and all other countries shall be enabled to get a just share of the fruits of their labor."⁵⁴ As in Philadelphia, the Amsterdam committee received considerable sums of money from local merchants. In addition, representatives traveled to Albany, Troy, and Yonkers to gain the support of other unions.⁵⁵ At the end of December, Sanford declared he would comply with the weaver's demands if Smith in Yonkers would pay the same. So encouraged were the strikers that many

of them returned to work expecting adjustment within a few days. The Amsterdam strike ended with no clear settlement. The local Knights' assembly continued to grow and Sanford frequently complained about the weavers' grievance committee. Sanford was, however, the last major employer to negotiate with the weavers' union.⁵⁶

By mid-January the Knights of Labor presence became the central issue in the weavers' strike. The manufacturers claimed they would gladly talk with their weavers individually but would "not give up the control of our business to members of a secret organization." The employers announced, "We will take back no worker who does not renounce the Knights of Labor."⁵⁷ Although the larger firms claimed enough supply on hand to remain closed "for a year," the smaller employers faced catastrophe if they lost the spring trade. Robert Steward admitted, "We . . . must start up if we are to hold the trade it has taken us so many years to secure."⁵⁸ To consolidate the weakening firms, the manufacturers' association voted to open their mills on January 18. The condition of employment would be an "iron clad" oath from each weaver vowing that he or she "is not a member of any society or organization of any kind, name, or nature."⁵⁹

The iron clad oath and the threat of scab labor threatened the existence of the weavers' organization and their right to belong to the Knights of Labor. One weaver commented, "The employers have their association, why can

we not have ours?"⁶⁰ The Knights mobilized its forces to oppose the iron clad and a week after the mills reopened fewer than one quarter of the city's looms were operating. John Dornan admitted that he had only 40 of his 108 looms working and others complained of not being able to find even ten weavers.⁶¹

Threats of scab weavers and the iron clad prompted a show of community solidarity with the weavers. The Order mobilized Kensington to ostracize scab workers and boycott the families of weavers who deserted ranks. At each mill members of the Order went to work "marking scabs" and keeping a careful list of all who entered the mills, vowing to refuse to work with them after the strike. In some cases women followed the scabs home hurling insults and trying to persuade them to quit work. Large crowds gathered around the mills at closing time each day as the air of tension grew in the mill district. The presence of "blacklegs" from their own neighborhood drew angry crowds into the streets. A few male weavers were arrested by police who had been called in at the request of the manufacturers. The officers guarded scabs on their way to and from work, and at Alex Crow's mill three squads of guards were required to escort thirty-six girls home each evening. To avoid the police threat against crowds in Kensington, some weavers began daily "promenades" in which men and women walked in pairs down the street watching the mills two by two.⁶²

The sudden desertion of two loom fixers at Thomas

Leedom's mill focused the strikers' anger. As long as the number of scabs remained small and only weavers returned, the strikers felt confident that the manufacturers could not build up any substantial supply of carpets and were merely running their looms for show. Knowing that the loom fixers held the "key" to mill production, the weavers reacted quickly and violently to the desertion of even two fixers. Until Morgan Stevens and John Cameron returned to work, not one carpet loom fixer had been working in Kensington; consequently the manufacturers and supervisors themselves had been training the new learners.

The accumulated frustrations of the strike emerged as the neighborhood reacted to the two loom fixers. The crowd at Leedom's mill grew to over five hundred as Stevens left work at closing time. The hooting and shouting followed him home, lasting over two hours. As the crowd grew "to serious proportions" Leedom telephoned for police protection and received twenty officers to protect the loom fixer.⁶³ That evening the Knights of Labor posted a circular throughout Kensington. Addressed to "the people of Kensington" and signed by the weavers, the circular was a strong call for solidarity:

We beg leave to call to your attention the action of Morgan Stevens, a loom fixer, who resides at 2307 Amber St. and who has gone to work for Thomas Leedom and Sons. In going to work he forfeits all claims to truth and honor as a man, as he is biting the hand that fed

him, and, notwithstanding his natural lack of brain, they have made him what he is. Feeling that such a man is unworthy of your esteem, not considering that he is acting to the detriment of the weavers, which is itself something which a man would scorn to do, we therefore beg you to treat him with the contempt he so richly deserves.⁶⁴

Stevens did not return to work the next day (although he did appear two days later guarded by three police officers) but the incident had inflamed the neighborhood and crowds began to appear at other mills as well. Some reporters estimated that as many as a thousand people stood outside the various mill gates.⁶⁵

The Knights kept a tenuous hold on the crowds by trying to organize the street demonstrations. Some weavers gathered at their own mills first, and, led by their shop committees, marched through the neighborhood aiding their fellow strikers. Some actually gathered first at the Knights of Labor hall and marched in a body to their mills to protest the scab weavers. Most of the strikers, however, took a more direct approach to the events, throwing rocks, breaking windows, and generally intimidating the scabs in the mills. One manufacturer described the crowd as "for the most part composed of young people." He added, "The strikers appear to have become desperate." John Hamilton reported over five hundred men and women outside his mill and Robert Dornan, who counted three hundred, commented, "the women were very loudly hooting at the police." Henry

Holmes said, "the women make the most trouble," and promptly had three young girls arrested in front of his mill for "refusing to move when told to so."⁶⁶

As the twelfth and thirteenth weeks of the strike passed, Philadelphia police regularly escorted the few scab weavers home each evening and the entire reserve force of the city plus officers from three districts patrolled the carpet neighborhood. Both manufacturers and weavers appealed to the mayor for protection, each claiming their just rights as citizens. The employers wanted to have a special force of officers sworn in to guard their property, while the weavers asked for immunity from arrest "so long as no personal violence was committed." The weavers also asked for a permit to allow them to gather at the mills and follow the scabs home.⁶⁷ Mayor William B. Smith, a protectionist Republican of Scottish descent who had not been the workingman's candidate, granted neither request. He claimed, "I have no interest in the strike except to maintain order and I shall do that at any cost." The magnitude of events in Kensington was so great, however, that Smith visited the strike district personally. He warned some of the manufacturers to be more guarded in their speeches as "the expressions of some of them were not calculated to mend matters." After the mayor's visit the Knights of Labor restored some order to the neighborhood by attracting weavers back to daily meetings and sociables. One report claimed that over one thousand people attended the Knights' events each day.⁶⁸

Even the larger firms began to feel the pressure of the market by the end of January. The spring season had almost been lost and a number of firms had been forced to shut down their hand loom operations as well. Thomas Taylor, Ivins, Dietz and Magee, and John Gay closed their doors as one manufacturer commented, "If this [strike] continues much longer it will be shut down for six months because trade is being diverted to other channels. The buyers can get the goods in New England and soon we shall lose the whole spring trade."⁶⁹ The manufacturers' fears grew when the secretary of their association, John Henderson of Henderson and Keefer, broke ranks and offered the old rate to any weaver wishing to return. Despite this concession the weavers turned the offer down when it became clear that withdrawal from the Knights of Labor was to be a condition of employment.⁷⁰

Henderson's actions precipitated a major departure in employer policy. The manufacturers' association quickly invited the weavers to a meeting to "arrange if possible, terms that would bring about an early settlement of the strike."⁷¹ The meeting aborted when the manufacturers realized that the weavers' committee had no decision-making power on its own, and the employers quickly retreated until the weavers agreed to send a more substantial delegation. At this point, the Knights of Labor District Executive Board intervened and invited the manufacturers to meet with them. Asserting its constitutional authority over the local

assembly, the Executive Board officially took over the negotiations. C. L. Dodd, secretary of the Executive Board, told the employers, "We believe that if you were conversant with our laws, rules and customs, the way to an early settlement would be made much easier."⁷² The weakened position of the manufacturers was evident when they accepted the offer from the organization they had vowed never to recognize and the two groups sat down with each other for the first time. After several days of intense meetings during which the manufacturers reportedly revealed production and cost figures to justify their wage cut, the Executive Board presented the case to the weavers' assembly. The assembly vehemently denied the validity of their employers' claims and charged that the production figures were based on false assumptions about productivity. The manufacturers and weavers once again reached a stalemate.⁷³

Both sides seemed locked into their positions until late February, when the weavers at the industry's largest factory, Alexander Smith's Yonkers mills, joined the strike. Smith had announced a wage cut in December but the weavers, well organized by then, believed the move purely provocative and knew that a strike at that time only would benefit the company. November was the end of the season and new contracts were not begun until March or April. Production costs at that time of year were highest due to increased need for light and heat, and the Smith company admitted it had a large surplus stock. With prices at record low levels,

a shut-down of production would benefit the company. The weavers thus continued working while secretly building their union organization. At the same time they regularly sent contributions to the striking Philadelphia weavers.⁷⁴ In mid-February, however, Smith identified the union leaders in his shop and fired about twenty women. "We don't want you any more," they were told. On February 20, the first pay day after the firings, all the women in the tapestry weaving rooms left their looms and "paraded" in the street. The company immediately informed the workers in the moquette mill that the doors would be locked at the end of the day, and within an hour every moquette weaver had joined the others in the street. By the end of the day the entire factory of over three thousand people was locked out and the looms shut down.⁷⁵

The weavers' demands in Yonkers most clearly articulated the concerns of the new industrial workforce in the carpet mills. Wages were only part of a larger set of demands which focused on shop rules and industrial discipline. The weavers demanded "Reinstatement of all employees unjustly discharged, Readjustment of the arbitrary and unjust system of docking and NO MORE BOSS OR SUPERINTENDENT TYRANNY."⁷⁶ As in Amsterdam, the women demanded the dismissal of two bosses, William Holder (who later became a partner in the firm) and Francis Coyne, charging them with arbitrary and "obnoxious" treatment.⁷⁷

The women's demands came in the context of a recent

change in shop rules at the Smith company. After the death of the company's founder, Alexander Smith, in 1878, an older set of labor relations gave way to a new code of behavior. The firm's second generation leadership, Smith's son, Warren B. Smith, and son-in-law, John Cochran, immediately began to expand production and increase the size and efficiency of their plant. By 1884 they managed one of the largest industrial establishments in the country and had begun to alter their shop rules accordingly, noting, "where there are over three thousand operatives employed, rigid rules must be laid down and strictly adhered to, else confusion, damage to stock and loss of time would be too great to be borne."⁷⁸ The company instituted a new system of fines not unlike that begun at Stephen Sanford's mill, which regulated both production work and the general behavior of workers in the mill. Where previously if a woman made a mistake in production she was required to buy the damaged piece, which she could sell on her own; now, a certain amount was to be taken from her pay. As the women often tended each other's looms if they were late or absent, the women felt this new system often fined them for the mistakes of others. Further, they were now penalized if one of their looms was out of order by being required to move to another department and thus lose both time and yardage. Finally, Smith had recently begun to pay his workers once a month instead of every week. This along with the recent pay cuts harshly affected families already forced to send several members

to work to meet their expenses.⁷⁹

Smith's new rules attempted to regulate both the behavior and the productivity of his workers. "Problem" behavior was fined the same as mistakes in production, and often actually took more from a woman's pay check. The weavers at Smith charged that the company fined and even discharged women for "laughing too loud at dinner," for sitting with one another during noon lunch, or just for talking. One girl reported she had been fined for looking out the window. Another woman was reportedly fired for missing work on the morning of her mother's funeral. The company made clear that work time was to be rigidly respected. "It makes no difference," said one of the superintendents, "whether they are employed by the day or work by the piece and are willing to lose time to perform some domestic duty or attend to some social requirement." The women charged that Smith automatically took twenty-five cents from their wages each month as a contribution to the local Episcopal hospital. Most of the weavers were Irish Catholic, and twenty-five cents not insignificant. Finally, once Smith discovered the union, the women found themselves spied upon in the mills and followed home in the evening. The women complained that the spies would not allow them to talk together and that the company monitored their activities after work. One woman said, "What [we] desire is, in addition to a fair wage, to be able when at work to not be subjected to a surveillance that is not even exercised over

the occupants of Sing Sing." The result of the spying, the women said, was a blacklist which was shared by all carpet manufacturers in New York and Philadelphia as well.⁸⁰

The Philadelphia manufacturers looked on the Yonkers strike as a long-awaited opportunity to wrest some of the market back from Smith's control. One Philadelphia employer noted that "jobbers are changing their lines from Smith to Higgins, Dobson and Sanford and it will therefore evidently be to the advantage of the entire trade to place early orders."⁸¹ Another observed, "The fact that Smith weavers are on strike has made demand for ingrains much greater than supply and this must have its effect on the Philadelphia strike and necessitate the starting up of the mills."⁸² Yet no matter how strongly the Philadelphia manufacturers wanted to resume production, they refused to employ any weaver affiliated with the Knights of Labor. The wage reduction became a side issue as the entire conflict narrowed down to a question of principle.

Refusing to employ any of the striking weavers who firmly declared their loyalty to the Knights of Labor, the employers had few options but to seek labor from outside Philadelphia. The manufacturers' association hired Lowell agent W. E. Potter, "well known in the business of furnishing hands in case of strikes."⁸³ The association reportedly contracted with Potter to bring in five hundred weavers. At the same time individual manufacturers took out advertisements in New York and New England papers promising

employment to "good, loyal hands." Robert Dornan hired his own agent, who apparently promised Providence weavers a "new firm in Philadelphia which would pay nine dollars a week for weavers and sixteen for loom fixers," and guaranteed expenses to Kensington. According to one report, sixty people answered the advertisement. When the Knights of Labor representative met the recruits at the train station and explained the situation, not one of the sixty boarded the train. Similar events were reported throughout New England as the Knights mobilized their vast network of assemblies to counter the employers' offensive. When one hundred New England weavers managed to travel as far as New Jersey thinking they would find work in Philadelphia, the Knights of Labor met them in Jersey City and turned them all back.⁸⁴

The Order's extensive publicity warning weavers to "keep away from Philadelphia" plus the added cause of the Yonkers strike effectively prevented the manufacturers from resuming operations. Throughout the ensuing weeks about 350 weavers worked in the mills, which normally employed close to eight thousand hands.⁸⁵ On February 25 the agent Potter brought in ten of his promised five hundred weavers, assuring the employers of the rest later. The ten (eight men and two women) were closely guarded from the train to their hotel and later complained that they had been treated like "criminals." The weavers were quickly ushered to Thomas Leedom's mill, where the two scab loom fixers were to teach

them their work. At quitting time they found a large crowd outside the mill, as word of their presence had spread throughout Kensington. Despite a police guard, a committee of strikers managed to meet with the New England weavers and inform them of the situation in the Philadelphia mills.⁸⁶ After meeting with the committee one of the recruits said, "They induced us to come here by deception . . . we were told the strike was over and we were to get work in a new mill." He added, "I have a wife and seven children at home but I'm not going to take the bread out of the mouth of others as bad off as myself. We struck for higher wages and are not coming here to take the places of others who demand their rights."⁸⁷ The eight men agreed to return to Lowell that evening with the Knights paying for their tickets. The women, however, remained until payday, when they discovered the wage promises to be false.⁸⁸

The two women in Leedom's mill added to the two scab loom fixers provided a threatening symbol to the striking weavers. On February 25 a crowd of over two thousand strikers "completely surrounded" Leedom's mill, spilling into the neighboring streets and blocking several major intersections.⁸⁹ When the two loom fixers emerged under heavy police guard the crowd could barely contain itself and began hooting and shouting. Anticipating trouble, Leedom had called for a massive guard at his mill. As the crowd of angry strikers faced over five hundred police, a brutal riot ensued. The officers "charged the mob with

drawn clubs and using them, beat back the gathering." The weavers scattered into the neighborhood, taking refuge in homes and stores along the way. At the end women and children had been beaten and chased for blocks in the mill district. Hundreds of strikers and bystanders were reported injured as doors and windows were broken and smashed. The crowd followed the scab loom fixers home, remaining in the streets for over two hours. Many observers attributed the violence to the "extraordinary zeal of the police force" and John Swinton described it as an affair which "may stand as the rival of that which made Tompkins Square infamous." He added, "Had such an outrage been perpetrated in Paris, St. Petersburg or Berlin, the police would have paid with their lives."⁹⁰

The Knights of Labor quickly condemned the violence and blamed the police and manufacturers for creating the disturbance, but they cautioned the strikers to "stay away from the mills" and not to "encourage mob law or violence." The striking Knights posted a circular in Kensington the following day disavowing the riot and promising to "do all in our power to discourage any acts of violence." Asking the support of the people of Kensington, the circular said, "We sincerely hope all business men and citizens will boycott them [the scabs]. We are on strike and intend to stay out until we receive a fair compensation for our labor."⁹¹

After the riot it became increasingly clear that "fair compensation" was not the central issue of the strike.

During March and early April the market price of carpets rose for the first time in months. With the Smith company out of the spring season, Philadelphia manufacturers looked forward to a profitable business.⁹² Several employers began to offer the old rate, including George Bromley, who surprised the industry by starting his looms at six cents in early April, with the provision that his employees sign the iron clad oath.⁹³ Speaking for the manufacturers' association on April 17, John Dobson told the weavers, "We accept the proposition . . . so far as the price is concerned." The sticking point remained the Knights of Labor as Dobson concluded his statement, "but [we] insist on their signing the paper heretofore presented to them." The oath declared: "We pledge our word of honor that we will not be influenced in our actions by any assembly of the Knights of Labor or any other labor organization . . . and that we will work in harmony with whomever the firm may employ." The iron clad forced the weavers not just to forfeit the protection of the Order but compelled them to agree to work alongside those who had taken their jobs or the jobs of their shopmates.⁹⁴ As one woman put it, the manufacturers "wish to control the weavers in their social affiliations and dictate any terms they choose."⁹⁵ The strikers clearly saw the iron clad as the ultimate defeat in the strike, which would force them to give up their right to associate and organize in their shops and would essentially eliminate what few prerogatives they now exercised over wages and arbitrary

treatment.

After almost three months of strike, however, even the iron clad did not discourage talk of returning to work. Some strike leaders began to talk of compromise, but the issue was complicated by a growing split in the Knights' leadership over industrial strategy. C. L. Dodd, secretary of the district assembly and an ardent trade unionist, urged the weavers not to give up their loyalty to the Order and to accept no compromises. Signing the iron clad, he insisted, would effectively kill the power of the Order to affect conditions in the shop and would mean that the weavers would revert to the vulnerable unorganized state in which individuals separately negotiated terms with their employers. "We cannot renounce the Knights of Labor," he said, "without disgrace. We may give in to a wage cut but cannot, without running the risk of losing everything, surrender the great and fundamental right of organizing into unions or assemblies." He added, "Only through organization is there hope of bettering the condition of the working class. Organized capital will ever be the master of unorganized labor."⁹⁶ On the other hand, James A. Wright, Master Workman of the district assembly, urged the weavers to accept their employers' terms and to compromise on the issue of the oath. Signing the iron clad, he claimed, would not force the weavers to renounce the Order, but would merely focus their organization on the local assembly rather than on the shop committee. The weavers would "lose nothing," he told them, "by going

individually and asking for work."⁹⁷ While Dodd counseled no compromise, Wright urged agreement so that the weavers might be able to return to work.

Ultimately James Wright's plea for compromise gained acceptance among the strike-weary weavers, who agreed "that the rules of association shall not apply to the working of the carpet mills or the employing of hands."⁹⁸ On April 18 Wright signed an agreement with the employers' association which did not absolutely renounce the Order, but promised to keep it from being active in the mills. The employers agreed to an "arbitration board" with five members from each side. The board would have the power to bring in outside arbitrators in case of disagreements. The industry's trade journals praised the agreement, saying, "The manufacturers have gained the chief thing for which they have been contending, the right to manage their own affairs without interference from labor unions or other outside influences."⁹⁹ Yet in spite of the settlement many manufacturers refused to take any strikers back to work "save on the terms which [we] have insisted upon from the beginning," namely that they clearly renounce the Knights of Labor.¹⁰⁰

Many weavers also balked at the agreement when the full implications of the settlement became clear. When he signed the compromise with the manufacturers' association, Wright had assumed that the strikers would be taken back to work and the scabs would be dismissed. The manufacturers had a different idea. Ivins, Dietz and Magee announced

that "[We] will not discharge anybody and will employ whatever persons [we are] inclined to employ."¹⁰¹ Shaw, Swire and Scott declared they would not take back union loom fixers although "the girls could get work," and another firm declared, "we will employ no more men as weavers."¹⁰² At several mills the women went as a group to demand their old places only to find their looms filled by the scabs. When spokesmen for the shop committees told the scabs to "get out," the employers forced the strikers out instead. One trade journal commented, "The strikers gained the wrong impression," and noted that the manufacturers were "firmly resolved to retain all competent new hands."¹⁰³ In most mills the weavers finally declared that "none would go in unless all were taken back," but it soon became clear that many strikers would not be rehired. The backbone of the strike broke as the weavers who tried to return to work learned the true nature of the settlement. The mill proprietors clearly intended to "stop for all time the agitation of the Knights of Labor" and refused to employ anyone they knew to be affiliated.¹⁰⁴ The strikers' organization was slowly forced to disband, weakened by the prolonged strike and the uncertainty of the agreement. Although the weavers' assembly continued active, the special strike committee ceased to function. Mistakenly blaming the strike on the men in the mills, many employers also vowed to put more women in their shops to avoid renewed confrontations.¹⁰⁵

With the strike all but broken in Philadelphia, the

Smith company decided to reopen its doors at the reduced rate. Having diminished their surplus through the spring season, the company was now ready to resume operations for the fall, the busiest carpet season. Fall orders were generally delivered during the summer, and Smith's strikers knew this to be an element in their favor.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the Philadelphia manufacturers' experience encouraged the Yonkers firm. Smith fully expected to break the union and assumed that the weavers would ultimately come to terms. The situation in Yonkers, however, differed from Kensington in two important respects. As the major employer in a small industrial town, the company would find it much more difficult to use local scab labor; the pool of anonymous local laborers in Yonkers was much smaller than in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia riot also made Smith more reluctant to import scabs. The second difference lay in the structure of the union in Smith's shop and the relation of the shop committees to the Knights of Labor. In Philadelphia the local assembly united weavers from scores of different shops. Philadelphia weavers could therefore accept a strike agreement which kept the Order out of individual shops but still allowed them to attend the assembly and function as members of the Order. In Yonkers, the local assembly was the central organization inside the mill. Although weavers belonged to committees in each department, any agreement which kept the Knights of Labor from operating in the mill would effectively eliminate the union structure. Because of these

local differences the strike in Yonkers did not repeat the Kensington experience.

In many respects the strike in Yonkers followed a pattern similar to the events in Kensington. During the three-month shut-down the company sold its surplus stock and spent the time "cleaning and repairing machinery and straightening accounts."¹⁰⁷ Smith refused to meet with any of the strikers. He made the firm's views known through the pages of the Yonkers Statesman, the local Republican newspapers. The Statesman attributed the strike to outside influences and condemned the Knights of Labor as a "secret and illegal combination meant to coerce both capital and labor . . . and interfere with freedom of contact between employers and employees." The paper announced its view of the strikers' demands:

The carpet company must pay not what the market will justify, but what the hands demand. There must be an end to all wholesome discipline found absolutely necessary to the success of every large business, and the proprietors must surrender the privilege of deciding who they will employ and who they will not. In other words, the management of this large capital and these immense works is to be passed over by the proprietors to the control of the union.¹⁰⁸

The Statesman's attacks did not affect the public sympathy for the strike and even the editor admitted that the weavers had considerable local support. Although local business came to a halt when the weavers "stopped spending

except for necessities," many tradesmen extended credit or gave contributions to the strike fund.¹⁰⁹ Several "Yonkers Gentlemen" even reported contributions to the fund. One doctor offered his services free and the Montgomery Club, the local branch of the Irish nationalist Clan Na Gael, contributed generous sums. The owner of the local skating rink, the town's most popular social center, donated his premises without charge for a benefit ball. Held shortly before Smith reopened the mill, the benefit proved to be a success. Over five thousand tickets were sold, at twenty-five cents each, to Yonkers and New York Knights of Labor weavers.¹¹⁰

The New York Knights of Labor were especially active in supporting the Yonkers strikers. Since Smith's was the largest carpet factory in the country, the New York weavers knew that "the rate of wages paid in Yonkers and the other abuses were a constant menace to the carpet factories in other places."¹¹¹ As part of New York's District Assembly 49, Smith's weavers received regular benefits from the Order. The New York Central Labor Union and several individual unions including a number of sewing women's locals sent weekly contributions and sponsored benefit balls and concerts.¹¹² Yonkers women appeared regularly at meetings of New York unions to publicize their cause and ask for aid. John Swinton described these visits from a delegation of "well dressed, good looking, intelligent and bright American girls, attended by a male escort" as "very odd . . . but

impressive." He told his readers: "How many men [are] in the ranks of labor organizations who would do as these girls were doing, who had to be at work at seven o'clock in the morning? How many [men are] possessed of the earnestness and enthusiasm to induce them to go around night after night. . . ? These girls knew the meaning of the great industrial movement, saying that it was for the abolition of poverty. They possessed the spirit of the early Christians and were willing to be martyrs for their faith. With the education of women in the great social problems and their organization into unions, the end must soon come and poverty be abolished around the world."¹¹³ By the time Smith reopened his doors in early May, the Yonkers weavers had received over eight thousand dollars in aid of their strike. After the events in Philadelphia, the strikers had become a cause célèbre in the labor press.

When the mill reopened on May 5, the strikers staged a public display of strength designed to intimidate any women who returned to work. Only a few women crossed the strike picket lines. The weavers followed the scabs home and pressured them to stay out. For several days "scores of Knights of Labor from New York" strengthened the strikers' ranks. Yonkers Police Chief Captain Magin and fifteen of his thirty-five-member force patrolled the mill. One officer indicated some ambivalence at being required to patrol his neighbors and friends, saying, "I know every one of them [the "lady picketers"] for years, and know them

to be respectable . . . I think it would be a creditable act for Mr. Smith to come out and talk to the strikers."¹¹⁴

Despite the Statesman's jubilant reports of the "music of machines," even the highest estimates counted only a few looms working during the two weeks after the mill opened. One woman reported seeing men at "women's work," running the looms, and another saw "petty bosses and other help" operating the machines. With "not one striker" returning to the mill, Smith, like his Philadelphia colleagues, was forced to look elsewhere for workers.¹¹⁵ However, the problem of importing scab labor proved more difficult in Yonkers' small community than it had in Philadelphia. Smith reportedly brought a group of "Slavs" in to run the looms, but even the scabs apparently refused to work with them and the effort proved a failure. Smith lost most of his remaining scab workforce when they discovered their pay checks to be much less than promised and walked out of the mill.¹¹⁶ By the end of May fewer than fifty women were at work and the lines in the community had been firmly drawn.

The strikers' picket lines deterred scabs, and the company knew that the pickets had to be stopped in order to resume operations. In Philadelphia the tension in the streets had mounted as the scab loom fixers and weavers successfully entered the mills. In Yonkers the strikers' pickets proved much more successful and gave the police little cause for complaint. Nonetheless, one striker observed, "The mill owners are doing their level best to get

a break in our ranks," and on May 16 two strikers were arrested and charged with "walking to and fro in front of the drum room of the mill and refusing to disperse when ordered to do so."¹¹⁷ The women continued to picket in their "Sunday best" and small groups gathered quietly on the street corners around the mill. The next day another weaver was arrested, and by the third day the police took serious action, arresting three women. The three, Mary Carey, a "recognized leader," Ellen Tracy, and Lizzie Wilson, were taken to the courthouse and warned by the judge to "go home and never do this again." The judge's paternalism ended there. He refused to dismiss their case and set bail at fifty dollars each. During the hearing a huge crowd gathered outside the courthouse and the three women were loudly cheered and given a special escort home.¹¹⁸

If the company hoped to intimidate the strikers by arresting weavers, especially women, its strategy backfired as the pickets grew more determined. Two days later Mary Carey was again arrested for "walking to and fro," this time with her sister Bridget and Maggie Flynn, also a weaver. The women were all described as "well known in Yonkers." They received cheers and support from the striking weavers as they left the police station.¹¹⁹ The arrests in general and especially those of women outraged Yonkers public sentiment. Thousands of people gathered in Getty Square, the town's central plaza, to protest the police action. Speakers from New York joined two Yonkers aldermen

in addressing the meeting. Even the Statesman reported that the Smith company did not "meet with favor among those on the platform." The speakers denounced the police action as "despotic and prejudicial to the best interests of the law abiding citizens of our city," and gave the strikers the support of the town. "We, the people of Yonkers," resolved the meeting, "heartily commend the course of the carpet employees who have conducted the strike with calmness, moderation and ability, and do heartily pledge our moral support until the strike is ended."¹²⁰

The arrests of the Yonkers women catapulted the carpet weavers' strike to the attention of the national labor movement. Two weeks after their arrests, New York Knights and the Central Labor Union held an "indignation meeting" attended by over two thousand people. "Women of every craft and men of every trade" poured into the auditorium, which held "every grade of labor, male and female, white and black, native and alien." Speeches in English and German praised the women's actions, commending them for their courage and dedication. The Yonkers women had come to represent all women in the labor movement and their actions became justifications for organizing women in other trades. One speaker told the crowd, "It was hard to move women but when they began, their pluck, devotion and perseverance made them unconquerable."¹²¹ John Swinton announced a "new Order of Nobility, the Women's Legion of Honor," and presented the three women with special medals. Swinton, who had given

major attention to the Yonkers women's strike in his widely circulated newspaper, told the women: "You ladies are worthy of honor because you have resisted the tyranny of the would be master . . . because you have stood up for your right to join a labor organization and because you have defended woman's virtue and dignity." Mary Carey, Ellen Tracey, and Lizzie Wilson were honored among the hundreds of women in the strike. John Swinton published a poem dedicated to them all:

The Yonkers Women's Strike

"Strike for your rights!" she said,
Wildly her shuttle waved,
While round about the maid,
 Machinery thundered.
"Down with your tools!" she cried,
Then they marched side by side,
Eyes flashing honest pride,
 Gallant few hundred.

Oh! What a strike they made,
Was there a girl afraid?
E'en though the varlets said,
 "Someone has blundered."
Weavers with shuttles deft,
Of every right bereft,
Nothing but strike was left,
 So struck the few hundred.

Dailies to the right of them,
Weeklies to the left of them,
Slander in front of them,
 Volleyed and thundered.

Charged at with shot and shell,
 (But not a striker fell),
 Boldly they stood and well,
 Noble few hundred.

Oh! How they struck that day,
 Striking to get fair play,
 Striking for honest pay,
 Their wrongs are unnumbered.
 When can their glory fade?
 Honor the strike they made,
 Honor each noble maid.
 Gallant few hundred.¹²²

The Yonkers women provided a focus for growing numbers of lady Knights. During the early 1880's thousands of women in textiles, shoes, tobacco, and other industries had begun to organize. By 1884 strikes in each industry expressed women's demands for protection at the workplace and the right to participate in the Knights' movement. The wide publicity given to Mary Carey, Ellen Tracey, and Lizzie Wilson was a signal to other women to push their demands and assert their role in the organization. The following months saw increased activity among lady Knights. During 1884-85 over a hundred new ladies' assemblies were chartered. By 1885 a special women's committee formed at the Knights' annual General Assembly and within a year women pushed the Assembly to appoint the first woman to the General Executive Board.¹²³

The Yonkers strike continued through June and into early July 1885. Few women deserted ranks and not many scabs entered the mill. In mid-June the company uncovered

an attempt to "blow up" the drum room of the mill and charged the strikers with the deed. The Knights quickly denied the action and appointed their own investigation committee to look into the matter.¹²⁴ The women continued to parade in the streets and held their pickets, despite a few additional arrests and reports of pressure from local priests on their families. The Statesman taunted the "brazen faced females," warning them to "play amazon no longer . . . go to Sunday school, show their medals to admiring friends and be good girls, then they may yet get good husbands and become honored members of society."¹²⁵ But the women had become honored members of the labor community and ignored the Statesman's threats.

By mid-July Smith indicated a willingness to end the strike. He had sold his surplus stock and was already late in entering the fall market.¹²⁶ The strikers remained firm in their position and showed no signs of weakness. Even Superintendent Holder admitted that no more than fifteen strikers had returned to work. Smith was forced to capitulate if he wanted to run his looms. On July 16 the carpet weavers announced a settlement. The union called it a "victory." The company rescinded the 10 percent wage cut and granted an additional 10 percent advance. In order to forestall the Philadelphia experience, the weavers insisted on and won a provision assuring that all union members, including those initially fired in February, would be rehired. To further ensure the existence of their union in

the mill, the weavers received a guarantee that no one was to be dismissed "without cause or for belonging to the union." Finally, Smith agreed to "adjust the docking system" and to recognize a union grievance committee. For their part, the weavers and the Knights of Labor agreed not to strike without notice and to "try to settle by arbitration first."¹²⁷ The Yonkers settlement was indeed startling in light of the union's defeat in Philadelphia only three months earlier.

The victory of the Yonkers union affected the other New York weavers as well. Sanford and Higgins immediately granted their employees a 10 percent wage increase. Prices for the fall season were comfortably high, and the industry seemed to be back in a prosperous swing.¹²⁸ The Statesman admitted that the issue had never been "a question of wages, but an attempt to dictate to the proprietors of the mills with regard to management of their business," and while the editors insisted that "no degrading concessions have been made," the outcome of the strike, at least for a time, altered the balance of power in Smith's mill.¹²⁹

The carpet weavers' victory in Yonkers also propelled them into the center of ongoing disputes within the Knights of Labor. The women joined the Order during an intense industrial struggle. The outcome of the Yonkers and Philadelphia strikes reinforced the weavers' commitment both to their shop committees and to the Order as an all-encompassing and militant movement. By early 1885, however, trade unionists in the Knights were increasingly at odds with the

Order's more reformist elements. Although the details of the internal strife remain somewhat obscured by the personal invective of the contestants, the growing hostility between Terence Powderly's cooperationist faction and the trade unionists led by Tom Barry, John Morrison, and others shaped the course of the Knights' affairs throughout the mid-1880's.¹³⁰

Soon after the Yonkers strike, the carpet weavers found themselves embroiled in the Knights' factionalism. At first commitment to defend their shop committees and trade autonomy appeared to lend strength to the weavers' union. Ultimately, however, the internal squabbles, coupled with employer anti-union initiatives, weakened the weavers' national organization and led to the decline of the union in every carpet mill.

Weavers at Higgins' New York mill emerged at the center of the Knights' factional controversy. In September 1885 the Executive Board of D.A. 49 suspended the New York carpet weavers L.A. 2985. Higgins, like Smith, had agreed to employ only Knights of Labor weavers. The local assembly branch at Higgins issued a strike order against three women it claimed were working "illegally." D.A. 49 refused to approve the strike. When the weavers refused to return to work and insisted on their right to strike, the district assembly suspended their charter.

The carpet weavers' demand for shop autonomy in decision making soon became the focus of demands from the Order's trade union faction nationwide. L.A. 2985 issued

a call for a special meeting of the General Assembly to consider their case and the question of trade autonomy. The local apparently received the required number of seconding votes, but the General Executive Board, led by Powderly and leading members of D.A. 49, refused to call the assembly together. Instead, in a belated counter-initiative to the growing trade union criticism, Powderly issued a special national trade charter to the carpet weavers. The charter allowed the local to leave D.A. 49 and to form the first of several controversial district trade assemblies in the Order.¹³²

With the protection of their D.A. 126, the carpet weavers strengthened their shop organizations. By the summer of 1886 most of the nation's organized carpet workers had joined the district. Led by John Morrison, D.A. 126 held its first national meeting in Philadelphia in July 1886. The district assembly functioned much like a trade union. It enforced shop rules and handled the weavers' relations with their employers. With the aid of the trade assembly, the Philadelphia shop committees became a strong influence in the city's mills. "For the last few months," complained John Bromley, "the shop grievance committee has been presenting trivial demands . . . I want to say that they have waited upon us every day for three months . . . they want us to employ none but Knights of Labor."¹³³ Another manufacturer agreed. "One of the many nuisances which the Knights of Labor and other trade organizations inflict on

manufacturers," he said, "is the grievance committee."¹³⁴

Not all manufacturers opposed the carpet weavers' trade organization. Some employers hailed the weavers' union as their assurance of order and uniform standards within the trade. One manufacturer predicted that the assembly would meet with the "approval and support of a great many manufacturers, since its ulterior object is to regulate and equalize carpet . . . wages throughout the United States." Another agreed that the weavers' association would "insure the same wages everywhere." He added, "When wages are equalized, we will have no further strikes." The Philadelphia Carpet Trade concluded, "This association will be the most powerful body that has ever been formed in carpet . . . labor circles."¹³⁵

The importance of the weavers' trade assembly for both management and weavers was underscored in January 1887, when E. S. Higgins signed the industry's first comprehensive agreement with D.A. 126. Higgins' weavers accepted a 5 percent wage reduction in exchange for the promise of a strictly union shop.¹³⁶ Higgins welcomed the union in his shop, and claimed it "saved him many thousands of dollars per month." With the union, he said, "there was much less broken machinery and much better discipline in consequence of which the constant vigilance of an overseer was unnecessary." The weavers' district assembly, he noted, brought "perfect harmony and consequently no annoying disputes to settle."¹³⁷

While the weavers' district assembly may have eased

relations with employers, it became the center of controversy within the Knights of Labor. D.A. 49 strongly opposed the organization of trade assemblies and insisted on maintaining jurisdiction in Higgins' mill. In 1886 D.A. 49 and the Home Club expelled John Morrison from the General Assembly. Morrison had joined with Henry Skeffington and others in an effort to expose the "Ring" which they felt was controlling the organization. By this time D.A. 49 had considerable influence with Powderly and the Executive Board. At the end of 1886 the weavers' district assembly was suspended from the Order.¹³⁸

The carpet weavers' suspension raised two central questions for the Knights' organization. The first was the question of trade autonomy or "the right to regulate our own trade matters and manage our own district affairs."¹³⁹ Ultimately this became the central issue in the conflict between the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. The tension between the Knights' role as a trade union and its commitment to industrial struggle and its broader vision of cooperation and reform plagued the Order throughout its existence. The second question reflected a growing disillusionment with the Knights' leadership and a consequent tarnishing of its image as the moral alternative to the unscrupulous monopolists. The carpet weavers' executive board (including Alice McCormack from Amsterdam and Lizzie O'Mara from Yonkers) issued a four-page document detailing their case. "Speak out as free men and women,"

they urged their fellow Knights, "and let it be understood once and for all that you will not tolerate tyranny either from men in your own ranks or out of them." The Order, they declared, "must be restored to the simplicity and purity of former days, and this can be brought about only by the overthrow of the Ring now at its head."¹⁴⁰

Ultimately the trade unions, like the carpet weavers, could not function within the Order. But the reason was not, as has traditionally been argued, because the two factions held opposing visions and values. According to Philadelphia's labor newspaper, the Tocsin, the problem was not that the men and women committed to trade unions or trade districts had lost faith in the principles and "mission" of the Order. Rather, they claimed, "the Ring" (Powderly's faction) forced the trade unionists "back into their former organizations." The editors asked:

Where are the men and women who stood by their trades organizations through sunshine and through storm for years before the brain of Uriah Stevens ever conceived the grand ideal of uniting all wage workers under one banner? They entered the Order with enthusiasm a few years ago. They subscribed to its principles with such ardor as in many cases to surrendered their previous organizations. They worked day and night to bring in recruits and build up the Order. They endeavored as best they could to carry out the objects of its founders. Where are they now? Some remain active workers inside, fighting an almost forlorn hope.

The commitment and vision of these men and women was still there, argued the Tocsin, but "they have lost faith in some of the men who stand at the head of the Organization."¹⁴¹

Unlike some of the skilled trades which affiliated with the AFL, however, the carpet weavers could not sustain their organization outside the Knights' national banner. Loss of the Order's support network left the weavers vulnerable to their employers' renewed antiunion efforts. By 1887 the Smith company, for example, began a concerted campaign to break its 1885 agreement with the union. Just a few months after the strike John Swinton reported that some Yonkers union members had been blacklisted. Smith reluctantly continued to honor the 1885 agreement and employed only union weavers. In late 1886, however, Smith announced he would run an "open shop" and apparently received no opposition.¹⁴² In Philadelphia, the weavers' union had all but disappeared by 1888. That year the labor commissioner stated, "There exists no organized carpet labor union in Philadelphia."¹⁴³

The union experience of the power loom weavers placed them in the center of the Knights of Labor's industrial struggles. At the same time the weavers represented a critical aspect of the Order's organization among women. The carpet weavers defied contemporary ideals of "true womanhood" in their strikes as well as their active role within the organization. As lady Knights and as trade unionists, the carpet weavers simultaneously embodied and

challenged the Knights' most fundamental principles. The women tested the Order's commitment to industrial struggle as well as its ideal of equality within a "community of producers."

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. See Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895: A Study in Industrial Democracy, for one of the few discussions of the Knights' internal political affairs.

2. See Chapter 2.

3. Philadelphia Inquirer, 29 November 1884.

4. Inquirer, 26 November 1884.

5. Augusta E. Galster, The Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry: With Special Reference to Philadelphia. According to Galster, Skeffington organized the female carpet weavers shortly after the 1878-1879 strike. He then turned his attention to the shoe stitchers and organized the Garfield Assembly in 1881; see pages 49-54.

6. John Swinton's Paper, 6 July 1884; also Inquirer, 26 November 1884.

7. John Swinton's Paper, 8 November, 12 December 1883, 13 and 20 January 1884.

8. John Swinton's Paper, 16 December 1883; Yonkers Statesman, 27 February, 2 and 4 March 1885.

9. The description of shop committees has been compiled from various reports. See, for example, Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 July 1886 and Yonkers Statesman, February 1885. Also see accounts of the role of shop committees during the strikes in local Philadelphia newspapers.

10. For a comparison of the weavers' shop committees to those in the shoe industry see Galster, Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry, pp. 53-55.

11. See, for example, The Carpet Trade Review, June 1882; The Carpet Trade, April 1882; and Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 February 1882.

12. Yonkers Statesman, 2 March 1885; Yonkers Gazette, 9 May 1885.

13. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 November 1884.

14. Philadelphia Public Ledger, 20 November 1884; also see Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 December 1884.

15. Philadelphia Press, 20 November 1884; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 December 1884.

16. Press, 22 November 1884.

17. Public Ledger, 20 November 1884.

18. Inquirer, 21 November 1884.

19. Press, 22 November 1884.

20. John Swinton's Paper, 7 December 1884.

21. Public Ledger, 21 November 1884.

22. Public Ledger, 26 November 1884.

23. Press, 22 November 1884.

24. Inquirer, 26 November 1884.

25. Press, 26 November 1884.

26. Inquirer, 29 November 1884; also see Press, 29 November 1884.

27. Inquirer, 27 November 1884; Press, 27 November 1884.

28. Public Ledger, 1 December 1884; Press, 27 November, 1884.

29. Public Ledger, 29 November 1884.

30. Press, 2 December 1884.

31. Press, 3 December 1884; also see Press, 4 December 1884 and Inquirer, 4 and 5 December 1884.

32. For an important discussion of the relation between skilled and unskilled workers in strikes during this period and the importance of sympathy strikes see David Montgomery, "Worker's Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century." Montgomery argues that unskilled workers did not try to control the work process as skilled workers did, but rather tried to restrict hiring and regulate lay-offs and wages. Also see David McCabe, The Standard Rate in American Trade Unions, p. 27.

33. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, May 1885.
34. Journal of United Labor, 25 November 1885.
35. Press, 29 November 1884; also see Inquirer, 29 November 1884.
36. Press, 1 December 1884. Also see Galster, Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry, p. 51, for a discussion of the role of local assembly meetings during the shoe stitchers' strike.
37. Public Ledger, 27 November 1884.
38. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 7 July 1884.
39. Inquirer, 29 November 1884.
40. See weekly reports by shop committees in the local Philadelphia newspapers; for example, Inquirer, 2 November, 3 December, 9 December, 24 December 1884. Also see Press and Public Ledger for those dates.
41. John Swinton's Paper, 25 November 1884 and 22 February 1885.
42. John Swinton's Paper, 22 February 1885; also see Press, 21 December 1884 and 7 January 1885; Public Ledger, 29 December 1884 and 24 January 1885.
43. See Galster, Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry, pp. 49-54. On industrialization in the shoe industry see Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn. Also see Chapter 6.
44. Press, 20 December 1884.
45. John Swinton's Paper, 14 December 1884.
46. Inquirer, 10 December 1884; Press, 16 December 1884.
47. John Swinton's Paper, 21 December 1884.
48. Public Ledger, 10 December 1884; Inquirer, 10 December 1884.
49. Amsterdam Daily Democrat, 22 December 1884; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 January 1885; John Swinton's Paper, 3 May 1885.
50. John Swinton's Paper, 1 February 1885; Amsterdam Daily Democrat, 23 December 1884.

51. Amsterdam Daily Democrat, 23 December 1885; Press, 25 December 1884.

52. John McDonald to Terence V. Powderly, Amsterdam, 9 May 1885, Terence V. Powderly Papers.

53. John Swinton's Paper, 12 April 1885.

54. William H. Barnard to Terence V. Powderly, Amsterdam, 8 January 1885, Powderly Papers. Also see Edward P. Williams to Powderly, 24 December 1884; and J. S. Ryan to Powderly, Amsterdam, 30 December 1884.

55. Amsterdam Daily Democrat, 23 December 1884 and 3 January 1885.

56. Press, 25 December 1884. For later activity see John Swinton's Paper, 22 March, 5 April, 3 May, and 21 June 1885. Also see H. L. Bright to Terence Powderly, Amsterdam, 1 April 1885, Powderly Papers; and Alice McCormack to Powderly, Amsterdam, 24 March 1887.

57. Public Ledger, 8 January 1885. For Sanford's oath see John Swinton's Paper, 3 May 1885. At one point Sanford claimed that the Manufacturers' Association demanded a five thousand dollar fine of any employer not requiring the oath; see John Swinton's Paper, 8 February 1885.

58. Press, 14 and 29 December 1884.

59. Public Ledger, 8 January 1885.

60. Inquirer, 2 March 1885.

61. Inquirer, 20 January 1885.

62. Inquirer, 9 December 1884, 8, 14, 15 January 1885; North American, 10 January 1885. According to a later account the practice of marking scabs was historically very common in Kensington. In 1932 Gladys Palmer observed, "Formerly the odium attached to being a 'scab' invited a lasting social ostracism in the textile districts of the city. Although this has by no means disappeared, it has broken down considerably with the gradual decline in the power of the textile unions and the break-up of the old neighborhood groups near the mills. This is not to say that demonstrations are not effectively staged in front of strike breakers' homes by strikers and strike sympathizers, or that an occasional strikebreaker's home in Kensington is not painted with a coat of yellow paint . . . even today." Union Tactics and Economic Change: A Case Study of Three Philadelphia Textile Unions, p. 18.

63. Public Ledger, 15 January 1885; Inquirer, 14 January 1885; Press, 14 January 1885.
64. Press, 10 January 1885.
65. Press, 11 January 1885.
66. Inquirer, 14, 15, 16, 22 January 1885; Press, 16 January 1885; Public Ledger, 15 January 1885.
67. Inquirer, 14 and 16 January 1885; Press, 16 January 1885; North American, 16 January 1885.
68. Inquirer, 16 January 1885; Press, 16 January 1885.
69. Press, 21 and 25 January 1885.
70. Public Ledger, 28 January 1885.
71. Press, 21 February 1885.
72. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 February 1885.
73. Press, 21 and 22 February 1885; Inquirer, 14 February 1885.
74. Yonkers Statesman, 27 February and 2 March 1885. Also see Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 11 April 1885.
75. Yonkers Statesman, 27 February, 2 March 1885. Also see Public Ledger, 28 February 1885.
76. Yonkers Statesman, 6 March 1885.
77. Yonkers Statesman, 27 February 1885.
78. Yonkers Gazette, 7 March, 31 May 1885; also Yonkers Statesman, 13 March 1885.
79. See Yonkers Statesman, 2 March 1885, for a long elaboration of the weavers' grievances.
80. Yonkers Statesman, 2 March 1885.
81. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 March, 15 June 1885.
82. Inquirer, 5 March 1885.
83. Inquirer, 25 February 1885; also Press and Public Ledger for the same date.

84. Inquirer, 28 February 1885; also The Tocsin (Philadelphia), 28 February 1885.

85. John Swinton's Paper, 15 March 1885.

86. John Swinton's Paper, 1 March 1885.

87. Inquirer, 25 February 1885.

88. John Swinton's Paper, 15 March 1885.

89. See accounts of the riot in The Tocsin, 28 February 1885; Press, 26 February, 2 March 1885.

90. John Swinton's Paper, 8 March 1885.

91. John Swinton's Paper, 8 March 1885; Inquirer, 14 April 1885; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 March 1885.

92. Inquirer, 14 April 1885; Public Ledger, 13 April 1885; John Swinton's Paper, 19 April 1885. One firm, James Kitchenman, who had been paying the old rate all along, began to go on double shift because demand had increased.

93. Press, 7 April 1885.

94. Inquirer, 17 April 1885.

95. Inquirer, 2 March 1885.

96. John Swinton's Paper, 5 April 1885.

97. Inquirer, 1 April 1885; also see Press, 27 and 28 March 1885.

98. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, 1 May 1885.

99. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 May 1885.

100. Press, 19 April 1885.

101. Press, 21 April 1885.

102. Press, 22 April 1885.

103. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 1 May 1885.

104. Public Ledger, 20 April 1885; Inquirer, 23 April 1885; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 April 1885.

105. John Swinton's Paper, 26 April 1885; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 April 1885. Also see Brad-streets, 25 April 1885.

106. Press, 26 March 1885.
107. Yonkers Gazette, 7 March 1885.
108. Yonkers Statesman, 6 March 1885.
109. Yonkers Gazette, 28 February 1885. Also see Press, 26 March 1885; Amsterdam Daily Democrat, 23 March 1885.
110. Yonkers Gazette, 28 February 1885; Yonkers Statesman, 2 March, 2 May 1885; Amsterdam Daily Democrat, 23 February 1885.
111. Yonkers Statesman, 2 March 1885.
112. See, for example, Press, 26 March 1885; Yonkers Statesman, 6 March 1885; Yonkers Gazette, 28 February 1885; and John Swinton's Paper, 24 May 1885.
113. John Swinton's Paper, 29 March 1885. Also see his accounts on 8 May, 24 May, and 7 June 1885.
114. Yonkers Statesman, 15 May 1885.
115. John Swinton's Paper, 15 May, 21 June 1885.
116. John Swinton's Paper, 21 June 1885; Press 19 May 1885.
117. Press, 19 May 1885; Yonkers Statesman, 16 May 1885.
118. Yonkers Statesman, 19 May 1885. Also see 18 May 1885.
119. Yonkers Statesman, 22 May 1885.
120. Yonkers Statesman, 19 May 1885; John Swinton's Paper, 24 May 1885.
121. Yonkers Gazette, 6 June 1885.
122. John Swinton's Paper, 6 June 1885.
123. See, for example, John Swinton's Paper, 4 October 1885.
124. Yonkers Statesman, 16 May 1885; also 22 June 1885. John Swinton's Paper, 21 June 1885.
125. Yonkers Statesman, 29 May 1885.
126. Smith noted he had lost the market as early as April; see Yonkers Gazette, 21 March 1885.

127. Yonkers Statesman, 13 July 1885. The provisions of the agreement are printed in Philadelphia Carpet Trade, August 1885.

128. John Swinton's Paper, 26 July 1885.

129. Yonkers Statesman, 5 June 1885.

130. For a discussion of the various factions within the Order see Ware, Labor Movement in America. The debate between trade unionists and "reformers" remains unclear. Older interpretations painted a simple picture of "modern" or "mature" business unionism versus utopian cooperations and reformers. Also see Gerald Grob, Workers and Utopia: A History of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900. More recent work has indicated the split to be more complicated and more subtle. See Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, "Hamilton and the Home Club"; Leon Fink, "Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and Local Politics, 1886-1896"; and Reinhard Schindehütte, "Organized Labor and Class Struggle, the Knights and 'All of Labor,' 1879-1900: A Working Thesis."

131. The details of the local's suspension are difficult to sort out. The various accounts are filled with personal invective and vague charges. The following account has been pieced together from documents in the Powderly Papers, notably "Why the General Officers Should Be Deposed, Report from D.A. 126, July, 1887," and a letter from Lizzie Muir to Terence Powderly and the General Executive Board, Jersey City Heights, New Jersey, 18 January 1886. Muir was one of the women accused of working "illegally."

132. Most of the replies from local assemblies in support of L.A. 2985 are in the Powderly Papers around February 1886.

133. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 July 1886.

134. Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 July 1887.

135. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, July 1886.

136. Philadelphia Carpet Trade, September 1887.

137. Ibid.

138. There is an undated report on "The Decision of the General Master Workman" with regard to John Morrison in the Powderly Papers. Morrison's own account appeared in Philadelphia Carpet Trade, September 1887. Also see "Why the General Officers Should be Deposed."

139. The Tocsin, 28 May 1887.

140. "Why the General Officers Should be Deposed."

141. The Tocsin, 21 May 1887.

142. See, for example, The Tocsin, 16 January 1886; John Swinton's Paper, 14 February 1886; Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 February, 1 October 1886.

143. J. R. Kendrick, "The Carpet Industry of Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, Annual Report, part 3, vol. 17, p. 45. Arthur H. Cole and Harold F. Williamson, The American Carpet Manufacture: A History and an Analysis, p. 187, refers to a resurgence of union activity among ingrain weavers in the 1890's and concludes that the unions were "merely dormant for a few years after 1887." The authors do not detail this claim and no other accounts mention such activity.

CHAPTER 6
WORKING CLASS WOMEN AND THE KNIGHTS
OF LABOR ROMANTIC IDEAL

The 1887 dispute over carpet workers D.A. 126 revealed the ultimately fatal tensions within the Knights of Labor. The focus of the Order's internal dispute has traditionally been characterized as "trade unionism" versus "politics" or "reform," but as the case of the carpet weavers demonstrates, the issues were more complicated. John Morrison's concern with the weavers' trade autonomy, for example, did not preclude a belief in the Order's reform idealism. Similarly, Terence Powderly, central figure in the Knights' "reform" or anti-trade union wing, at times expressed enthusiastic support for trade union measures. This was particularly true with regard to organizing women. The issues which separated the factions were rarely clear-cut and were frequently defined in peculiarly local circumstances. The strength of the Gilded Age labor movement rested on a common commitment to an alternative, moral industrial community. Energized by the same vision, Powderly and Morrison seriously differed on priorities needed to achieve their goals. But the problems of the Knights were not simply matters of contending strategies or competing leaders. Their very vision

proved both an inspirational appeal and a source of contradiction for their adherents. It was more than ironic that the Order's simmering factional disputes should erupt around D.A. 126, an overwhelmingly female assembly. For nowhere were the Knights' particular strengths and ambivalences more clearly revealed than in their attitudes towards women.¹

The Knights' vision of a universal cooperative commonwealth relied on an essentially romantic notion of domesticity as the moral alternative to the competitive wage system. The Order's ideal goal was of a harmonious producers' community in which secure homes filled with happy, knowledgeable and virtuous families complemented a cooperative work environment. This romantic ideal, however, encountered difficulty when applied to the realities of women's expanding position in the labor market. The Order encouraged collective advancement by wage-earning women like the carpet weavers. At the same time the Knights proclaimed as their ultimate goal the elimination of degrading wage work. The solution envisioned separate roles for men and women. In the ideal cooperative commonwealth each man would have an equal share in industrial or craft production, while women would be restored to their central place in the home. All factions of the Knights believed that the amelioration of women's plight lay in organization. They simultaneously joined in a celebration of the sanctity of hearth and home as a retreat from the degradation of the factory system. The carpet weavers' strike emphasized both sides of the

Knights' vision. The women discovered great strength in their own exertions and received solid support from the larger working-class community. At the same time much of the support (and perhaps the women's actions as well) was informed by an image of women's basically domestic sphere within the community.

Paradoxical as it was, the role of women in the Knights represented an important juncture in the history of both American labor and American women. The very tension between the positive role afforded women in industrial struggles and the ideal of hearth and home distinguished labor's romantic notion of womanhood from its prevailing middle class counterpart in important ways. Precisely because lady Knights came from factories and mills across the country, the Order's notion of "true womanhood" differed in critical respects from the "pure, pious, submissive" image of the nineteenth-century lady.² The way women gained entry into the Order, the scope of their activities within the movement, and the ideological justification of their experiences together defined a new and unique social role for American working-class women. The Order's strategic principles of "organization, education and cooperation" spoke directly to the needs of the growing numbers of wage-earning women in Gilded Age factories. Those principles also gave young women like the carpet weavers an important place in the producers' movement at the end of their wage-earning days. For the Order welcomed not only working women but the wives

of workingmen as well. As such it provided a lifelong role for women in a broad-based social movement. The Knights of Labor afforded women an expanded public role through educational and cooperative work as well as organizational activity within the Order. Traditional notions of moral womanhood and domesticity took on new and broader significance in the context of a class movement and through the vision of a producers' community.

Organization

The Knights were initially divided on the question of female membership, but by 1880 women in both the carpet and shoe industries demanded a role in the movement. In 1879 Henry Skeffington claimed to have brought the Philadelphia carpet weavers into the Knights. Two years later Skeffington again took the initiative, this time in response to a bitter strike by Philadelphia lady shoe stitchers. The stitchers formed their own organization, which Skeffington initiated as the Pioneer Garfield Assembly 1634 (named after the recently assassinated president), the first women's local assembly in the country.³

The Knights' General Executive Board first was reluctant to sanction women's assemblies. The Order's roots in antebellum reform and Greenback Labor politics had instilled an ideological commitment to equal rights and suffrage for women. But the practical application of their

beliefs was harder to achieve. It took a "fanatic socialist" to force the issue of women's membership into formal policy. At the 1879 General Assembly, Cincinnati Knight Phillip VonPatten introduced a resolution calling for working women to be admitted as members "under the same conditions as men."⁴ Bureaucratic haggling and the reluctance of Grand Master Workman Powderly to take a stand delayed action on the resolution for two years. In 1880 the General Assembly passed VonPatten's resolution but Powderly refused to implement the decision until a committee could "prepare a ritual for the governing of assemblies of women." Powderly claimed that women would be admitted as soon as the rules were printed.⁵ In 1881 the Pioneer Garfield Assembly unilaterally sent its master workman, Mary Stirling, to the General Assembly as a clear message that the Order could no longer drag its feet on the issue. Powderly belatedly declared that women "should be admitted on equality with men and no separate ritual would be necessary." Indeed, except for a more lenient fee scale, women were quickly afforded full equality of membership, including the right to hold any Knights' office.⁶

The Knights' justification for organizing women emerged out of their embrace of the notion of the "producing classes" inherited from the Greenback Labor and earlier labor reform movements. Although the concept of the producing classes always remained vague, it enabled the Knights to move beyond the confines of craft identity. As carpet

weavers, shoe workers, and skilled men in other trades increasingly saw unskilled women (and men) entering their industries, the older craft identities could no longer suffice as a basis of common culture and shared community life. The Knights began instead to focus on their own movement as the core of working-class community life. "The local assembly," asserted the Order's constitution, "is not a mere trade union, it is more and higher."⁷ Through organization, education, and cooperation they believed the producers' movement would counter the prevailing trend to monopoly, competition, and the degradation of wage work.

The Knights initially defended the organization of women on two counts. First, as competitors in the wage market, women appeared to bring the general level of wages down. "Unless the wages of women are raised to those of men," warned the Chicago Knights of Labor, "men must sink to the level of the wages of women."⁸ Only through organization would the movement be assured of a respectable level of wages for women and hence for the class in general. The second and possibly more compelling reason to organize women was the specter of degraded womanhood represented by the underpaid, overworked, and impoverished working woman. The effects of female wage labor and the exploitation of young girls reflected on the entire working-class community. The degraded working woman symbolized the ultimate degradation of the class. Philadelphia's labor newspaper, the Tocsin, concluded,

Hence it will be seen that it is a duty incumbent upon every workingman to assist in elevating the present position of workingwomen in all the various branches of compulsory labor, by helping them to organize for their own mutual good, for while it will be a valuable addition to the general labor movement, it will also lessen in the future the need of public and private expenditure for odious charities and reformatories. . . . If the existence of such institutions, and the evidence adduced by the overwhelming testimony of the miserable wretches who fill them is not sufficient to justify female workers taking such actions as will enable them to provide for their own future, in the name of an omnipotent and just judge, what more proof do you want?⁹

Once committed to expanding their organization to women, the Knights discovered an already vast level of activity among the nation's factory women. Philadelphia carpet weavers and shoe stitchers, Massachusetts shoe workers, New England textile operatives, and New York City tobacco workers all organized assemblies or saw their fledgling locals expand during the early 1880's. By 1883 one labor editor observed, "In almost every city where the Knights of Labor have an organization the women who work for wages have banded together and formed an assembly." He continued, "The Principles of the Order are to protect and elevate the laboring class irrespective of sex."¹⁰

The lady Knights' geographic and occupational profile indicated the Order's widespread appeal among Gilded Age working-class women. Between 1881 and 1890 at least 65,000

women in over four hundred locals joined the movement.¹¹ Just under half of all locals claiming female members were in the industrial Northeast. These were among the Order's largest women's assemblies. Indeed, assemblies like the carpet weavers' L.A. 2985 and the Lynn shoe stitchers' "Helping Hand" Assembly ranked with the Order's largest male locals. Industrial towns in the Midwest also claimed sizeable female locals. Tobacco workers in St. Louis joined clothing workers in Chicago, sewing women in Saginaw City, Michigan, and shoe workers in Cincinnati as the ranks of lady Knights grew.

The Knights' impact on women was not confined to industrial wage earners in the East and Midwest. One third of all assemblies with female members were located in southern states. Only New York rivaled Virginia in the number of assemblies with women; the populous southern state had locals comprised of tobacco workers, parlor maids, laundresses, and farm hands. While southern assemblies were in general much smaller than their northern industrial counterparts, the wide distribution of locals hints at the Order's growing national presence. Women joined assemblies in Franklin, Louisiana; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Wheeling, West Virginia; and Raleigh, North Carolina. Southern assemblies included black as well as white women. Although local assemblies were usually racially distinct, the Knights became the first labor organization actively to include black women under its banner.¹²

The occupations of lady Knights reflected both the Order's appeal to working women and its vision of a community of "toilers." The movement united skilled and unskilled men and included housewives and servants as well as factory women. Textile work, the major female manufacturing occupation of the day, claimed a quarter of all women's trade assemblies. Joining the carpet workers were cotton mill workers from throughout New England, woolen workers from Connecticut, and silk workers from New Jersey. Shoe workers represented another 20 percent of all women's trade locals and numbered among the most active women in the Order. Clothing and tobacco workers also claimed large numbers of lady Knights with strong assemblies in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati.¹³

Fully one quarter of all women's trade assemblies identified themselves as domestic workers, meaning housewives, servants, or housekeepers. By including domestic work as part of the community toil, the Knights opened important options for working-class women. One woman told the readers of John Swinton's Paper, "The housekeeping wives of laboring men are a class of people." She went on to describe the conditions of this class--long hours, subsistence recompense--in much the same terms as were used to describe the plight of female wage earners.¹⁴ Another woman told Chicago's Knights, "The wives of nine out of ten laboring men work more hours per day than you do."¹⁵ Cooks, parlor maids, laundresses, housekeepers, and housewives

took advantage of the Knights movement and formed local assemblies throughout the country. In 1883 Shawnee, Ohio, housekeepers formed the "Good Will" Assembly and in 1885 Jackson, Michigan, housewives chartered a local there. In 1886 Wabash, Indiana, housekeepers formed the "Martha Washington" Assembly and their counterparts in Lynchburg, Virginia, did the same. Cooks in Georgia, black parlor maids in Arkansas, and housekeepers in Illinois all became lady Knights.¹⁶

Almost half of all assemblies with female members were mixed trade locals. This coincided with the Order's general policy of industrial (as opposed to craft) organization. The mixed locals brought together all working class women in a town or all women in a certain factory or mill. These assemblies often acted as the social center of the movement. Amsterdam, New York's Victory Assembly (whose Master Workman Leonora Barry became the first woman on the General Executive Board) included "all female employees in the city; carpet and hosiery operatives, dressmakers, milliners and music teachers."¹⁷ The Zanesville, Ohio, "Ladies of Labor" invited "all who labor at any useful employment and especially . . . the ranks of those who earn their own livelihood" to join their local.¹⁸

Despite the burgeoning activity among working-class women around the country and the great influx of women into the Order, only three women attended the Knights' national General Assembly in 1885. They were Lizzie Shute, a

Haverhill weaver, Mary Stirling, veteran shoe stitcher from the Garfield Assembly, and Mary Hanifin, a Philadelphia saleswoman. They formed their own committee on women's work. The first focus of its activities was to investigate the condition of working women and to encourage more women to "realize the benefits of organization." The women surveyed all ladies' locals and reported that while the condition of women already organized is "far from encouraging," it would "mean luxury to those who have not felt the benefits of organization."¹⁹ Within a year the women's number swelled to sixteen representatives at the General Assembly, and in 1886 the women pushed the Knights to appoint a permanent Committee on Women's Work.

The Knights' 1886 Richmond convention brought into focus many of the issues plaguing the fast-growing Order. The same convention that refused to seat carpet weavers' leader John Morrison and other dissident trade union factions also defied southern racial codes and appointed the first woman national officer in the organization.²⁰ Throughout the sixteen-day session the women delegates caucused regularly with the aim of developing a strategy for women in the Order "as this is certainly work that can only be done by women."²¹ The women came from New York, New England, Pennsylvania, and Chicago, and represented the lady Knights' major occupations. Five shoe operatives, four weavers, two seamstresses, a saleswoman, a burler, and an ironer joined housewife Elizabeth Rogers and machine operative Leonora

Barry among the assembly's delegates.²² The women pressed the assembly to approve a permanent organization which would "investigate the abuses to which our sex is subjected by unscrupulous employers, to agitate the principles which our order teaches of equal pay for equal work and the abolition of child labor."²³ The women insisted on the appointment of a full-time paid "Investigator for Women's Work" and recommended Leonora Barry for the job.

Two of the women at the Richmond General Assembly revealed in their own lives and their role in the movement the potential of the Order's commitment to women. Leonora Barry, the Amsterdam knit goods worker, and Elizabeth Rogers, the Chicago housewife, both became important representatives of the Knights movement during the 1880's. The two women expressed the promise of the movement as well as the frustrations they faced as women within the organization. More importantly, each in her own way reflected on the tension between prevailing notions of womanhood and the task of organizing the "cooperative commonwealth."

Housewife Elizabeth Rogers represented the Knights' domestic ideal. She charmed the Richmond convention with her two-week-old daughter, her tenth child, and recalled, "I was the first woman in Chicago to join the Knights. They offered us the chance and I said to myself, there must be a first one, and so I shall go forward."²⁴ The wife of an iron molder and labor activist, Elizabeth was involved with the labor movement from a young age. Irish-born like many

of her fellow Knights, she came to America at the age of six. She settled with her mother in London, Ontario, during the mid-1850's and grew up amid an active labor community. There she met and married George Rogers. As a union organizer, George was blacklisted "all over this western country," and for six years the couple was constantly on the move. To keep her growing family together, Elizabeth ran boarding houses. Simultaneous commitment to principle and the family required sacrifice from the Rogerses. Three times during her married life Elizabeth had had to sell all her furniture.²⁵

Elizabeth Rogers began her own labor career when she and her family settled permanently in Chicago during the mid-1870's. There she became the presiding officer of the "first women's union" and in 1877 was elected one of the few female delegates to the Illinois state trades assembly. Despite the burden of housework and a growing number of children, Rogers continued her labor activities and in 1882 became Master Workman of Chicago's L.A. 1789. She represented that body in the city's fifty-thousand-member D.A. 24. In 1886 the district Master Workman died and Rogers took over the office as the Order's first female Master Workman.²⁶

Elizabeth Rogers displayed an undeviating commitment to both family and political concerns. When her husband once suggested that she resign her labor activities to concentrate on the family, Elizabeth reminded him, "Women should do anything they liked that was good and which they could do well."²⁷ Her decision to remain active was an

easy one, she said. "Knowing my duty to my sex I thought it was an opportunity to show our brothers how false the theories are that women are not good for anything."²⁸ Indeed, Rogers' public commitments went beyond the labor movement. She was active in Irish affairs and temperance politics as well. Perhaps the most striking feature of Rogers' career was her consistent devotion to family life. She bore twelve children, raised ten, and kept house for a workingman. She said proudly, "I do and always have done, all my own work." At the same time, as Master Workman of D.A. 24, Rogers presided over meetings of three hundred or more every two weeks, and she spent many other hours at Knights of Labor duties. Temperance advocate Frances Willard once visited Rogers in her "small but comfortable house." She was greeted at the door by "a woman . . . with sleeves rolled up and babe in arms." Her "healthful" complexion and "honest gray eyes" combined with a "round, clear voice, gentle and womanly," showed Willard a person with "her mental faculties . . . thoroughly well in hand." This "warm and motherly" woman defied the strictures of nineteenth-century womanhood by becoming an important figure in the public world.²⁹

If Elizabeth Rogers represented the Knights' domestic ideal by combining hearth and home with a commitment to the labor movement, Leonora Barry represented the Order's ideal wage-earning woman. Barry was forced into wage work by necessity but immediately joined the Knights in an effort

to ameliorate her condition. Barry was also more typical of later female labor activists. During her four-year tenure as General Investigator, she gave up most family concerns and devoted her life entirely to the movement.

A "tall commanding figure" with a "warm voice," Leonora Barry came to the labor movement late in her life.³⁰ She was born in Ireland in 1849 and settled with her family in upstate New York during the 1850's. There she became a rural school teacher. In 1871 she married William E. Barry, an itinerant painter and musician. The couple moved from town to town for ten years, during which time they had three children. In 1881 Leonora lost both her husband and her only daughter to one of the persistent fevers of the time. Left to support herself and two boys, she attempted to take in sewing but found the strain too great on her eyes. Living in Amsterdam, New York, the center of the nation's knit-goods industry, Leonora then sought employment in one of the local mills. As a machine operator, her first pay only came to sixty-five cents a week.³¹

Barry's labor career began soon after she entered the factory. Women in Amsterdam had organized the Victory Assembly in early 1883 and within a year claimed fifteen hundred members. Barry joined the local in 1884, just before the carpet weavers at Sanford's mill left to form their own assembly. Leonora soon became Master Workman of the remaining nine-hundred-member mixed trade local. The next year she went as a delegate to the district assembly and

in 1886 joined Elizabeth Rogers at the Richmond General Assembly.³²

When the Richmond convention appointed Barry as General Investigator for Women's Work, she anticipated some of the difficulties of her job. In her acceptance speech Barry promised to "investigate the condition of working women, instruct and educate them in the Order, and organize female locals when it will not conflict with more important work."³³ She set up subcommittees in every district assembly and encouraged all lady Knights to "acquire a thorough knowledge of the condition of working women within their jurisdiction." Barry assured the women that "any abuse existing which a female local would be delicate in mentioning to the General Executive Board may be communicated to the president of the Committee on Women's Work."³⁴

During her four years as General Investigator, Barry devoted her entire life to the Knights' movement. She spent most of those years on the road visiting local assemblies in almost every part of the country. Barry travelled all but two weeks of the year, and lived out of a suitcase. She stayed at little hotels or with friendly Knights of Labor families and had no time for her own family concerns. She entered one son in a Philadelphia convent school and placed the other with her sister-in-law. Like many women who turned to labor activism, the movement demanded a difficult choice between more traditional feminine concerns and a significant role in public life.³⁵

The problems of organizing women became apparent during Barry's first year in office. She was charged with "investigation" but had no legal authority to enter factories or to act on violations she saw. In her first annual report she said, "I was obliged to refrain from going through establishments where the owners were opposed to our Order lest some of our members be victimized."³⁶ She did accompany various state factory inspectors and gave the General Assembly detailed reports on the condition of working women. Her reports on women's work pointed to the need for organization and protection through the Knights. But she also became a strong advocate of state and federal protective legislation. Her annual reports chronicled the difficulties faced by working women. In 1887 Barry visited Auburn, New York, sewing machine operators who were required to purchase their own machines and thread and were paid but fifty cents a week.³⁷ That same year she reported on the condition of striking Paterson, New Jersey, linen thread workers. The women demanded an increase of five cents per day. Their working conditions were among the worst Barry had ever encountered. In this industry, she reported, "Women must stand on stone floors in water the year round, barefoot, with sprays of water constantly at their breast." They were not allowed to change their clothes before going home and were constantly beset by colds and other ailments.³⁸

Barry's discouraging investigative experience turned her increasingly towards the Order's educational activities.

She became one of the Knights' most popular lecturers at public meetings as well as at private Knights' gatherings. She was "to the women of the Order," wrote one labor editor, "what Terence V. Powderly is to the men."³⁹ Barry made it her duty to publicize and raise funds for women's strikes around the country. She encouraged a wide range of women's activities, including educational sessions and cooperatives. In 1888 Barry delivered a Fourth of July speech to over three thousand people in Rockford, Illinois. In her honor the women's local there renamed the holiday "Foremothers' Day."⁴⁰

Barry's annual reports outlined two major obstacles to organizing women. The first was continued male hostility to the presence of women in their organization. The second was women's own reluctance to take advantage of the movement. "While the cause of [women's] lack of interest in organized labor is largely due to their own ignorance of the importance of this step," she said, "yet much blame can be attached to the neglect and indifference of their brother toilers . . . who seem to lose sight of one important fact, that organization can never do the work it was intended to do until every competitor in the labor market can be taught its principles."⁴¹ Barry warned the Knights, "If those pledging themselves to the support of [equal pay] do not resolve to trample underfoot their selfish personal ambition and for a time turn their attention to the poor downtrodden white slave as represented by the women wage

earners of this country, then let us here and now withdraw the 22nd plank out of our platform and no longer make a farce of one of the grandest principles of our Order."⁴²

Because of these problems, Barry and the Committee on Women's Work recognized the need for a special women's organization within the Order. Although women could join mixed local assemblies with men, only one-third of the lady Knights chose this option. Two-thirds of all assemblies with female members were strictly ladies' locals.⁴³ The sexual division of assemblies appealed to both men and women and satisfied some internal critics who looked with moral disfavor on the organization of women. One Knight, writing to Leonora Barry, expressed the fear that in joining the Order women would be "obliged to visit a place where men smoked or chewed." Barry assured him that ladies' assemblies could operate independently and "by taking in their symbols and going into executive session men could not visit them."⁴⁴ George Bennie from Erie, Pennsylvania, expressed his own hesitation regarding lady Knights in a letter to Powderly. "I submit Sir, that it was never meant . . . that men and women should sit in each other's company from half past seven at night until eleven o'clock p.m. in an assembly of Knights of Labor . . . as much as I respect and honor the Knights of Labor and although I try to do my duty in meeting and out of it, before I would allow my wife to rise up amongst a lot of men I would leave the Knights a thousand times over and bear the brand of scab

or anything else they chose to put upon me." In his reply Powderly revealed the moral basis upon which the Knights justified organizing women. "I regret that you entertain so poor an opinion of your wife," he wrote, "as to say of her that you would not allow her to mix among a lot of men who are sworn to defend her life interest and reputation . . . who are pledged to aid and sustain her . . . we place women on the same plane as men, we would exalt them to a still higher plane . . . she does not unsex herself by going where her father, brother or lover goes in the evening. If the assembly is a bad place for a woman to go it is a bad place for the man to go." Powderly added, however, that the solution to the "evil minded gossips" was for the women to form their own local assemblies.⁴⁵

Women's own reluctance to assume leadership roles highlighted their difficulties within the Order. While women enthusiastically accepted their role as active members in the movement, they were less sure that they should occupy positions of command and authority. Leonora Barry once observed that if "some of those whose voice we hear in the capitalist press should ever get the Order in their power, then I would use every effort to put women forward to defeat their intentions. But as things stand now I believe in having the women in this cause do as God intended them to do, help and assist noble men who are its leaders but never desire to be foremost."⁴⁶ Powderly and the Committee on Women's Work often received requests from ladies'

locals asking to bring in men as their master workmen. Schenectady Knight Mary St. Brier told Powderly that "it is impossible to find a member who will accept the position." The Franklin, Louisiana, "Fidelity" Assembly wrote, "No one in our assembly feels herself competent to hold the position." The Liberty Assembly of Gloversville, New York, even admitted, "we do not think any lady is capable of filling the office."⁴⁷ Most of the time Powderly granted such requests and appointed a man from a nearby local assembly, often the brother or husband of the petitioner.

Although many women seemed reluctant to assume a leading role in the movement, there is evidence that experience in the Knights was crucial to those who did become active. The succeeding generation of women labor leaders and industrial reformers testified to the importance of the Knights on their early labor education. Mother Jones, the "Miners' Angel" who remained active until her death in the 1930's, recalled her experience in the Order's early days. "The Knights of Labor was the labor organization of those days," she wrote. "I used to spend my evenings at their meetings listening to splendid speakers. Sundays we went out into the woods and held meetings."⁴⁸ Mary Elizabeth Lease, the well-known populist organizer, began her career as a Knights' lecturer, and in 1887 became Master Workman of one of Kansas' largest local assemblies.⁴⁹ Leonora O'Reilly, who was Illinois' assistant factory inspector at the turn of the century and served on the board of the Women's Trade

Union League, recalled joining the Knights in 1886. She had accompanied her mother to "various labor and radical meetings," and then turned to the Knights.⁵⁰ Agnes Nester, who was also active in the Women's Trade Union League, was too young to join the Order, but her father, a staunch Knight of Labor, taught her trade union principles.⁵¹ Alzina P. Stevens, a "bright and brainy little woman" who taught herself the printing trade and became the first woman member of Toledo's Typographical Union No. 63, used her experience in the Knights to become an active labor reformer and trade union advocate throughout the populist era and into the twentieth century. Stevens joined the Order during the early 1880's. She became Master Workman of Toledo's Joan of Arc Assembly 2341 and in 1886 was elected District Master Workman of the city's populous D.A. 72. In 1890 Stevens was nominated to succeed Leonora Barry as General Investigator. She declined and turned instead to factory reform and Populist politics. During the 1890's Stevens became Ohio's assistant factory inspector. Later she joined Jane Addams at Hull House.⁵² Although scant records of lady Knights survive, these few experiences attest to the impact of the Order among many working-class women of the day and to the important part the Order played in training the following generation of female labor leaders.

Education and Cooperation

The Knights viewed their organization as the basis of an alternative industrial order. Their principles of education and cooperation were to be cornerstones of an ideal producers' community. Collective action combined with moral and political education and cooperative production defined a culture which the Knights hoped would counter the prevailing trend towards individualism, competition, and monopoly. The movement's daily life and local presence owed much to the various educational programs and social activities sponsored by local assemblies. Lectures, newspapers, reading rooms, concerts, and benefit balls anchored a lively labor-based cultural world. Through these programs the Order's gospel of organization, cooperation, and reform took shape and spread. The issues raised in the educational programs spanned contemporary popular concerns from temperance, suffrage, the land question, and labor to spiritualism, health reform, child rearing, and the family. In that respect the treatment of popular topics differed from the conventional lecture circuit. Each issue contributed in some way to building the movement's common cultural base. Lady Knights took a leading role in the Order's educational programs and often served as speakers and lecturers. As they framed the issues of debate, the women helped define ideals and values for the movement.

Women lecturers saw themselves both as educators and

as organizers. Some were recruited from the popular lecture circuit. Others came directly from industrial struggle. However they came to the Order, lady Knights soon became well-schooled in the movement's principles and the leading social questions of the day. By 1883 women were regularly commissioned as paid organizers and lecturers. Each woman took on a specific travel territory in which she could initiate local assemblies and hold educational sessions. An integral part of the organizer's task was to give public lectures on the labor question and to hold private educational meetings for ongoing local assemblies. Women often organized men as well as women, although some, like Philadelphia shoe stitcher Mrs. L. M. Eaton, preferred to concentrate on "organizing members of the gentler sex."⁵³

The career of Mrs. E. C. Williams Patterson, an organizer, illustrates how the Knights used the popular questions of the day to illuminate the goals and ideals of their movement. Born in the "burnt-over district" near Seneca Falls, New York, Mrs. Patterson was one of fourteen children. Her French mother and Scottish father held an uncharacteristic belief in education for their daughters and sent her to a country school and ladies' academy. When her schooling was completed, Mrs. Patterson moved to California, probably with her new husband, where she lived on a farm for several years. As a member of the Universalist Church, Patterson began her lecturing career with speeches on spiritualism. She soon broadened her range

to include temperance, suffrage, and "all kindred topics." She considered herself a "progressive spiritualist" and joined the Theanthropic Society, where she embarked on the professional lecture circuit. In 1885 Patterson joined San Francisco's Local Assembly 2999 and turned her energies to the labor movement. Her first lecture topic for the Knights was "woman's position as related to the labor movement." This topic was "enthusiastically received" and she became widely sought on the Knights' lecture circuit. Patterson reportedly delivered 129 lectures in two months' time and "half as many assembly talks." By 1886 her popularity was unquestioned and the Order put her on salary with a commission to lecture in Illinois. Once in the Midwest, Patterson organized assemblies and held regular educational sessions. One Illinois newspaper praised her work, saying, "She has done more than any other woman in Illinois to organize factory girls and thus pave the way for them to receive equal pay for equal work with men."⁵⁴

Patterson became one of the Order's most popular lecturers in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa. Her "highly nervous temperament" was tempered by a "great executive ability" which enabled her to bring the Knights' philosophy to scores of small midwestern towns. Patterson always considered herself a "firm believer in evolution." She was committed to women's rights as much as to the labor question and felt the Order allowed her to be "free and frank to avow her belief upon any topic, claiming for her

sex equal rights to every opportunity and condemning fearlessly every wrong action which debars her sex of these rights."⁵⁵

The Knights supported women's rights in a broad sense but distinguished labor's position from that of the contemporary feminist movement. The Order granted women equality within the movement and supported women's demands for equal pay at the workplace. Within the laboring community the Knights encouraged women to "demand their rights because they are theirs."⁵⁶ But the gap between middle-class feminists and working-class women was difficult to bridge. Lady Knights' industrial concerns seemed far removed from the lives of many feminists. Labor reformer Florence Kelly criticized middle-class feminists for ignoring the concerns of working-class women. During the Yonkers carpet weavers' strike Kelly told the readers of the Women's Journal, "I have been pained at seeing how all our organs have ignored the Yonkers strike; Susan B. Anthony alone mentioned it once incidently in the Journal, while of the American Suffragists whom I have met . . . not one had heard of it."⁵⁷

The question of suffrage highlighted the difference between labor feminism and the middle-class movement. The Knights supported women's suffrage and frequently welcomed speakers on that topic to their local assemblies and lecture platforms. But lady Knights tended to see industrial problems as their major concern while the feminists increasingly focused on the vote as the key to woman's position.

In 1886 the Committee on Women's Work said there was "more important work for women to do before they are prepared to vote in the affairs of the nation."⁵⁸ A few months later the Knights' official Journal of United Labor told its readers, "The enfranchisement of woman means much more than the ballot, and while this advance step is imperatively called for, there are other reforms that rest on woman herself and need not wait for legislation, indeed, legislation can do little toward their accomplishment." The Journal focused on the central problem for working women and observed, "In the matter of the individual relation of woman to her employer, while the ballot would doubtless make her an important factor in social and political economics, it does not touch the more important business relations."⁵⁹

Lady Knights also distinguished themselves from contemporary feminists in their willingness to join a predominantly male organization. Indeed, for Gilded Age working-class women there was little alternative. Veteran lady Knight Mary Hanifin did suggest a "woman's organization run by women" but apparently received little support for her idea. Leonora Barry strongly rejected the plan. "I never wish to see that day," she said. "Knights of Labor pure and simple furnishes all the protection necessary for any working man or woman and it is that or nothing."⁶⁰

One issue which did unite lady Knights with the broad feminist movement was temperance. The Order embraced the temperance cause and often sponsored lectures on the subject.

Frances Willard, leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, occasionally spoke at Knights' assemblies. She praised the Order's work and said, "When I read that instead of declaring that women must not compete with them, and thus diminish their chance of earning wages, the working-men claim that the weaker toilers by their side shall have equal pay for equal work I see that the Knights of Labor are also Knights of the new chivalry. . . . Who knows but these men shall bring in the new Republic."⁶¹

A major focus of the Knights' temperance activity fell on the liquor seller and the saloon. The Knights banned liquor dealers from the Order and advised against serving alcohol at public affairs. In many working-class communities the saloon was the traditional meeting place. This not only supported the monopolistic brewing interests but also encouraged division within the family, since women and children were reluctant to attend meetings in a bar.⁶² On at least two occasions lady Knights insisted that the General Executive Board define its position on the family in light of the temperance problem. In 1885 the Rome, New York, Equity Ladies' Assembly requested that the wife of a liquor dealer be granted membership. The assembly's recording secretary told Powderly, "She gets her living by doing housework and also partly by keeping boarders . . . she never sells any liquor." The secretary added, "It is true that her husband does sell liquor and probably what assistance he gives her comes from the product of such

sale." Despite her husband's occupation, the local felt the woman would "be of great help," and urged Powderly to be flexible in his interpretation of the constitution.⁶³

On another occasion, Miss Mary Daulson asked on behalf of Marblehead, Massachusetts' L.A. 2827 that Powderly suspend the rules for three daughters of a rum seller. The girls, Daulson wrote, worked in a factory and "would make good members."⁶⁴ Powderly's ruling in these cases remains unclear, but Leonora Barry maintained a hard line on the families of liquor dealers: "Man and wife, being one, their interests are identical and we could not ask a wife to go against her husband." Even if the women wanted to join the Order, Barry said, "The home is a meeting place and if it was a saloon, liquor might be served."⁶⁵ The Knights' view of the local assembly as an alternative center of community life to the saloon was particularly important for working-class women.

The Knights' principle of cooperation further emphasized the ideal of a producers' community. Although on the national level the Knights took only a minor interest in cooperative ventures, the ideal of a cooperative commonwealth and economy gained widespread popularity within the movement. While the idea was often only a topic for the lecture platform, cooperatives held a special importance for women. Because women had been excluded from trade unions, cooperatives represented one alternative to the exploitation of the wage system. Through cooperative

ventures female wage earners might begin to "gain the fruits of their toil."⁶⁶

Lady Knights often organized cooperatives in their trade or locale. By advocating cooperatives of sewing women, for example, many ladies' assemblies hoped to solve the problem of women as low wage competitors in the labor market. Women's cooperative ventures, widely publicized in the pages of the labor press, became models for the movement. Lady Knights in Danville, Massachusetts, formed a cooperative underwear factory and urged men in the Order to "help the noble women on to success."⁶⁷ Massachusetts shoe stitchers formed a cooperative stitching room, as did their fellow workers in Philadelphia and in Binghamton, New York. The Philadelphia stitchers augmented their efforts with a cooperative shoe store in 1885.⁶⁸ Women in the Indianapolis Martha Washington Assembly formed a cooperative sewing shop to which Powderly contributed "in the name of women who couldn't afford to buy a share."⁶⁹ New York City cigar workers opened a cooperative factory in 1886 while textile workers and sewing women across the country opened underwear factories, shirt cooperatives, and clothing factories. In 1886 Cincinnati's Fannie Allyn Ladies' Assembly (named after the woman who founded the local) organized a cooperative fair. The women invited all cooperative concerns to send their manufactured goods. The fair included a raffle and a prize of a large-sized photo of Grand Master Workman Powderly.⁷⁰ In addition, Knights in many neighbor-

hoods and towns formed consumer cooperatives designed to help members keep down the cost of living.

Perhaps the Knights' most far-reaching critique of competitive capitalism came in their discussions of housework. The notion of cooperation as applied to women's traditional work did not simply challenge the wage system but questioned the traditional sexual division of labor. Although the Knights did not reject the home as woman's natural sphere, they recognized the important role of housework in the wage system. The most positive solution put forward in the Knights' literature to the problems of housework and the plight of the overworked housewife was cooperative housekeeping. "Only cooperation," wrote one woman in the Journal of United Labor, "offers escape for the overtired housekeeper."⁷¹ Another woman assured her readers that "there are many ways in which housemothers can help one another that will serve to lighten daily toil and increase happiness." One scheme called for "neighborly neighbors to work together: Let their bread making all be done on one day and let them take turns at baking it, even including the making of it. One doing it one week, the other the next. It entails upon the one extra work for that week, but she finds compensation in being exempt from this duty the succeeding two, three or four weeks."⁷² Following this suggestion Alzina Stevens' Joan of Arc Assembly formed a home-baked goods cooperative and New York tenement women pooled their incomes to buy supplies in bulk.

The New York women reported a saving of nearly 50 percent in their weekly budgets. "Why should there be as now," they asked, "in one block of dwellings from thirty to forty cooks with attending waste of materials and physical strength?" The New York tenement cooperative reflected the Knights' limitations when, considering themselves successful, the women hired a cook and laundress and began to take in sewing to earn money for the group.⁷³

The extent to which the Knights' cooperative ventures actually succeeded is difficult to determine. Individual cooperatives such as "Our Girl" sewing factory in Chicago or Indianapolis' Martha Washington Cooperative received wide publicity in the labor press. Most labor newspapers carried weekly reports of women's cooperative efforts both local and national. The ideal of cooperation posed serious alternatives not only for growing numbers of female wage earners but for housewives and entire families as well.⁷⁴

The Knights' discussion of cooperation also provided an important arena for cross-class activity among women. Traditionally, working women and trade unions counted on middle-class reform sentiments to pass protective legislation and to put moral pressure on particularly notorious employers. The Knights of Labor did not hesitate to appeal to the moral sentiment for reform which was growing among the urban middle class and professional population. Leonora Barry took as one of her tasks the agitation for factory legislation. She worked with a variety of groups to

ameliorate the condition of working women through shorter hours laws, inspection rules, and wage standards. The Order urged middle-class women to help organize and finance cooperatives which would "pay a fair wage and give work to the destitute." The Knights also urged women to "buy no goods made by non-union labor." The Journal of United Labor warned, "When you go into a store for clothing, shoes or any other goods insist on buying goods made by union men. It rests with you to make the boycott effective."⁷⁵

Lady Knights viewed middle-class women as potential allies who, if properly educated, would not hesitate to support their cause. During the carpet weavers' strike in 1885, the Philadelphia women appealed to their middle-class sisters as equals in a common moral cause. A poem dedicated to the striking weavers included two verses which vividly expressed the perceptions of the lady Knights:

How many ladies proud and fair,
Will tread o'er our carpets woven with care?
With never a thought for the pale working girl,
Whose youth is blighted with weary toil.

Ladies by fortune and fashion spoiled,
But not our superiors, nay the world
Holds not the one who is above
The working girl toiling for duty and love.⁷⁶

One lady Knight warned her middle-class sisters, "If the garment had the power to reflect as from a mirror the tears, groans and hunger of the poor stitcher, the garment would

be flung aside in horror. No purchaser could be found to wear it . . . the remedy lies in the hands of the women of America."⁷⁷

Echoed in the popular and widely circulated labor press of the 1880's, the Knights' principles of education, organization, and cooperation came to define for the nation the goals and vision of this working class movement. Labor papers in cities across the country ran women's columns which combined news of women's strikes and industrial condition with lessons in cooperation, suggestions for self-education, and advice on domestic concerns. The "labor book news agency" printed in every labor newspaper recommended reading for local assemblies and offered books at discount rates, particularly to locals desiring to establish libraries or book exchanges. For women, the lists and libraries represented a crucial link to the Knights' movement which expected them to be as educated in the "questions of the day" as their brothers. Mrs. L. Wright warned her sister readers, "Don't let your natural love for 'nice things' prevent you from sparing a little for books and papers from which to study the social and labor questions. A great deal of reading may be enjoyed for a small sum by exchanging with each other and will be a preparation for you to assist in the work which needs the united efforts of all earnest, thoughtful men and women--the emancipation of the workers from the thralldom of wage-slavery."⁷⁸ The Knights' book lists included books on the woman question such as August

Bebel's Woman and Socialism, Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and the feminist lectures of Lillie Devereau Blake, a popular writer who vehemently replied to a prominent New York Episcopal bishop's attack on women's rights. The list also suggested readings in political economy and literature. Among the recommended authors were Karl Marx, LaSalle, George Eliot, and Samuel Coleridge.⁷⁹

The Order's literary advice tempered the isolation of women in the home and brought them into contact with contemporary political and cultural trends. Domestic advice in the columns of the labor press served a similar end. Suggestions on "Food for Hard Workers" were interspersed with reminders that "housework is not mere physical labor, it requires as much hard work to keep a house successfully as to build a house successfully."⁸⁰ Another insertion noted that "fourteen states now grant the right to women to vote in school board elections. Demand this in your state."⁸¹

Domestic advice in the labor press addressed the entire family. The Knights welcomed children at local assembly meetings and encouraged women to bring along their small babies. The emphasis on families in the local assemblies underscored the Knights' ideal of cooperative community life. One Kansas Knight even recommended a life-long membership policy which would ensure the benefits of organization from birth through burial. Chester Morehead, from Leavenworth's L.A. 3809, proposed a plan which would "bind

man to man and man to family." He suggested a "child initiation" ceremony where a child could receive a special Knights of Labor symbol. At the age of eighteen the child would become a full member of the Order. Morehead also proposed a "national Knights of Labor home" to which infirm Knights and those over age fifty could retire. By this scheme, Morehead observed, a member would be able to "live in the Order and be supplied by the Order the rest of his life."⁸² Morehead was not the only Knight concerned with family membership. The Detroit Labor Leaf advised all boys and girls, "According as your fathers' succeed now will be your opportunities. . . . It rests with you in great measure whether you will help or hinder your own good. Recollect when you hear of a strike that somebody's father is trying to make things easier for you and always remember to be honorable to union men and women. . . ." ⁸³

The Knights expected all members of their producers' community to educate themselves in the principles of the organization. The movement was a literate one as the number of local labor newspapers suggests. The content of those papers, the poems, stories, and advice, all became part of an attempt to define a working-class community and spread the culture of the movement. One serialized novel in particular highlighted the Knights' romantic ideals. The novel used the popular sentimental form, but turned the elements of sentiment into a lesson for the movement. "Ella Inness, Romance of the Big Lockout, or, How a Knight Won the Prize"

appeared in the Boston Labor Leader during March and April 1887.⁸⁴ The novel wove a moral lesson very different from most serialized romances of the day. Couched in the sentimental romance was a pointed indictment of the "greedy monopolist" and a prescription for reform through the Knights of Labor. Through the story of a lockout in a New England shoe factory and the romance of the Knights of Labor workman with a farmer's daughter, the author drew out the themes and concerns which informed the Knights' ideology and values and the vision which shaped their movement. Each character in the story illustrated some aspect of the Order's critique of the industrial system or its ideal of the cooperative industrial order. The story revealed in full the central place the values of hearth and home held for the Knights and offered a way to restore those values to the center of the community.

The setting for "Ella Inness" reflected nostalgia for a rural past tempered by a respect for "progress" and the potential of industry. Lakefield "was one of those villages which during the last quarter of a century have been undergoing the change from an agricultural to a partly manufacturing community." A large shoe factory had recently opened its doors in the otherwise quiet rural village. "The old farmers on the hillside had hardly as yet become reconciled to the new life thus given the village and the new ways of thought brought by the shop workers." "The New England farmer," observed the author, "is an individualist. The

New England factory worker will be a socialist."

Ella Inness, heroine of the story, represented the Knights' ideal woman who "knew but little of the world beyond the village hills save through the medium of books and newspapers her father subscribed for." She was a virtuous woman who at the same time exercised her intelligence. Her father was one of the town's old farmers. Silas Inness "entertained a positive dislike of innovation natural to a man whose father and grandfather, like himself had been born and bred in the narrow groove of rural life." Ella's suitor, George Colewell, came from a well-to-do farming family and was a "well meaning fellow, rather slow in mind and body but esteemed a likely young man by the neighbors."

Colewell's rival, the story's hero, was Ernest Rogers, a shoemaker by trade and master workman of the Lakefield local assembly. Rogers, earnest as his name implies, was the labor reformer par excellence. A "student and an idealist," Rogers was self-educated and committed to his fellow workmen. "Compelled by the death of his parents to leave school at the age of twelve and to do battle with the world for his daily bread," the young man turned to shoemaking. In a chapter entitled "A Labor Reformer," the author detailed the character of an ideal Knight of Labor. "Externally a quiet and somewhat reserved mechanic," Ernest Rogers was no wage slave. He considered his trade "rather as the means to than the end of existence" and had other, higher interests. Rogers held a "keen sympathy for human suffering

stimulated by actual contact with the hard, bare lives of many of the working poor with whom he had been flung." The young man's situation led him "naturally" to the "problem of social equality," and he early became "one of the camp of insurgents that society looks askance at and dubs contemptuously 'labor reformers.'"

The story's other major figure was Mr. Batchelburt, owner of the local shoe factory. Batchelburt, a "square-set dogged-looking man," had built up his business from small pre-Civil War beginnings. He was a "self made man" but had what the Knights considered to be the fatal human flaw--greed. Batchelburt was an "autocratic director" who "measured the world by the test of his ledger and valued most things by their relation to the manufacture of boots and shoes." He demanded absolute control of his business. Upon hearing of the Lakeville Knights of Labor assembly, Batchelburt vowed to "stamp them out."

The romance revolved around one of the Knights' central concerns--providing secure homes for workingmen's families. Ernest Rogers and Ella Inness met in a true Knightly fashion when Rogers saved the young woman from a mad dog's attack. After Rogers' chivalrous act, "The least Ella could do . . . was to invite him to call at her home so that her parents might have an opportunity to thank him also." The first call led to another and yet another until the young mechanic became a serious rival of the staid farmer, Charles Colewell. As time went on, however, Silas

Inness increasingly disapproved of the relation between his daughter and the shoemaker. To Inness the young man's major drawback was that he "hadn't a dollar to his name beyond his weekly earnings." He feared Rogers would not be able to provide his daughter a home. When Rogers asked to marry Ella, the farmer replied, "It will be time enough for me to give you my little gal when you've got a home to take her to."

The problem of providing a home for Ella was complicated by the realities of the industrial system. A strike at Batchelburt's factory in which Rogers, as master workman, played a central role, interfered with the hero's new-found life purpose. The immediate cause of the strike was Batchelburt's vow to "take the first pretext of crushing the Order out of existence in Lakefield." Batchelburt arbitrarily fired Ernest Rogers. When the master workman confronted his employer to find out the reason for his dismissal, Batchelburt told him, "Allow me the privilege of deciding as to who I shall or shall not have to work for me." The manufacturer added, "I do not mind saying to you, however, that I have no fault to find with your skill as a workman." With that, Rogers warned Batchelburt, "You are making a mistake . . . if you think by my discharge to intimidate your employees from joining the Knights of Labor. The organization does not depend even locally, upon one man for its continuance."

Rogers' first reaction to his situation was deep

despair. He feared he would never be able to provide Ella Inness with the home her father "rightly, he felt," demanded. Rogers knew the notice would spark a strike in the factory because the hands would not willingly give up their allegiance to the Knights of Labor. Rogers' own allegiance to the movement brought him out of despair. He suddenly realized the selfish path his thoughts had been taking. There "thrilled through him a sense of shame that in absorption in his own affairs he was in danger of forgetting the larger interests and deeper concern of the many who were affected by this mandate." As Rogers contemplated his situation, "there seemed to grow before his eyes a sturdy figure, clothed in bright armor, in whose right hand gleamed a flashing sword and on whose left arm hung a massive shield with the motto inscribed in golden letters, 'protection for the weak.' Even as he gazed, a voice, grave and majestic sounded in his ears, saying, 'an injury to one is the concern of all.'"

With this vision before him, Ernest proceeded to the local assembly meeting, ready to lead his fellow workers in whatever course they decided to take. At the assembly meeting several hundred men and women gathered in a mood of "casual banter" and excitement. The men from the machine room and the lasters indulged "in that shop badinage which in each craft has a language and flavor quite its own." The women from the stitching room "doffed their shop frocks and [made] themselves, with feminine care, presentable for

the street." The meeting appointed a committee which met with Batchelburt but his position was firm. The next day the assembly voted for a strike and announced, "No surrender could be made to the condition of employment to be exacted by the notice without a surrender of independent manhood and womanhood." The Lakefield strike followed the typical pattern of Gilded Age strikes. The Knights appointed relief committees and Batchelburt locked the shop doors.

The strike polarized the entire community. Lakefield's farmers, storekeepers, and professional men were in general "unsparing in their censure of the Knights." Ernest Rogers especially came under public fire. Silas Inness called the mechanic a "good for nothing communist" and forbade Ella to see him. The couple decided to meet secretly. Through these meetings with Rogers, Ella Inness began her education in social theory and political economy. She heard Batchelburt's side of the conflict each Sunday in church, and so found Rogers' teachings to be revelations. As the strike wore on, Ella began to see the contradictions in the manufacturer's words and became "increasingly disillusioned with the goodness of man." Ernest helped her replace her religious faith with a new belief in social Darwinism, rationalism, and the prospects for a cooperative commonwealth.

As the couple parted one evening after such a lesson, Ernest heard the cries of "Fire" near the factory. He rushed over to help stop the blaze, but little could be done

to save the factory. The next day Rogers was arrested and charged with setting the fire. Unable to set bail, the young man was forced to remain in jail until his trial. Public sentiment might have gone in his direction but he refused to reveal where he had been on the evening of the fire. Rogers' landlady testified that he was not at home and other observers claimed to have seen him near the mill.

Ernest spent two weeks in jail waiting for his trial and thinking of Ella Inness. He had expected some note or word from her, but none came and he soon began to despair. He could not believe that she would desert him but could think of no reasonable explanation. The answer came on the final day of his trial. At the last minute, "the door of the ante-room opened and Ernest's heart leaped within him as he saw Ella approaching. The girl's face was pale but her eyes shone like stars." Without flinching, Ella gave evidence that she had been out walking with the prisoner at the time of the fire.

Within minutes after Ella's testimony the court pronounced Ernest a free man and he "clasped the exhausted girl in his arms." News of his arrest had thrown her into a fever from which she had only just arisen. At first her parents and the doctor refused to allow Ella to testify, but they saw that this only made her fever worse and finally agreed to "the lesser of two evils."

With such a show of love and devotion, Silas Inness "concluded that it was useless for him to attempt to oppose

her union with Ernest." And, "in the golden autumn days when the harvests were ripened and forests radiant, there was a wedding in the old farm house on the hillside." The account of the wedding was in keeping with the mechanic's stature. "It was not a grand wedding and it was not a grand home to which Ernest took his bride--merely a little cottage in the suburbs of a manufacturing city where the young shoemaker obtained employment--but grandeur is not always necessary for happiness in the strange world in which we live." Ella Inness and Ernest Rogers faced "not wealth or fame but that richer boon than all, the joy of companionship of two minds and hearts attuned to the highest earthly accord." As for Batchelburt, his factory was rebuilt and "there was nothing said about the 'ironclad' when its doors reopened." Batchelburt had learned the lesson of the "industrial war"--that in "that greater lockout and strike which extends so widely through our producing world today, that justice must be accorded both by and to him who sells his labor as well as by and to him who buys it."

The story of Ella Inness and Ernest Rogers is important for what it revealed of the Knights' vision. Their sentimental attachment to the current romantic mode, their ideals of harmony in a producers' community and their definition of the villain in industrial America all emerged from the drama of the romance. The author hints at the respect the Knights afforded working girls as well as the veneration they gave the ideal woman. Their very reason

for organizing was justified and upheld by their devotion to an ideal of domestic and community harmony where the mechanic and his wife would equally share in the benefits of citizenship and the fruits of toil. The story confirms the Order's acceptance of the industrial system; Ernest and Ella did not retreat to her father's farm in what would truly have been romantic nostalgia. Rather, they settled in a humble cottage in the suburb of a manufacturing town. Their future fit more a mechanic's than an agrarian dream. Through his trade and noble character, and fostered by his association with the Knights of Labor, Ernest was finally able to provide a home for his bride, and to realize the Knights' ideal of a craft, a home, and a family.

The Knights of Labor Romantic Ideal

The Knights' message was infused throughout with a romantic ideal. Yet as romantic and sentimental as the vision often was, it gave the movement a strength and energy which for a time overcame the pull of factions and the power of employers to oppose industrial organization. The Knights' hope for the future society included an ideal of virtuous womanhood. But to achieve this ideal the Order encouraged working-class women to step outside the narrow sphere of nineteenth-century domesticity and assume an active role in the movement, including a vigorous defense of their rights at the workplace. The tension between these two

aspects of working-class womanhood informed the spectrum of Knights activities and lent a sense of strength and commitment to their work. It also inlaid a romantic sentimentality to their purpose. Working-class women symbolized both the problems of the wage system and the solution. Indeed, a large part of the Order's appeal rested on its promise of a moral industrial order in which labor would reap fruits of toil and the home would be restored to its central place in the community.

The central tension for lady Knights lay in the contradiction between their increasing presence in the industrial world and the Order's more traditional notions of domesticity. This contradiction was heightened by the Knights' unqualified commitment to a defense of women's rights and actions while at the same time claiming their purpose to be, in Powderly's words, to "secure homes for the women."⁸⁵ Upon retiring as General Investigator in 1890, Leonora Barry told the assembled Knights, "If it were possible, I wish that it were not necessary for women to learn any trade but that of domestic duties, as I believe it was intended that man should be the bread winner." But, she added, "As that is impossible under present conditions, I believe women should have every opportunity to become proficient in whatever vocation they choose or find themselves fitted for."⁸⁶ Barry's work as General Investigator embodied the contradiction. Although she believed that "man should be the bread winner," Barry devoted four

years to making women "acquainted with her own values and the important part she plays in the industrial and social welfare of our nation and encouraging her in demanding and securing that which is her just right."⁸⁷ She warned women who "foolishly imagine that with marriage their connection with and interest in labor matters ends" that they would only find the "struggle harder when forced to work for two instead of one."⁸⁸ One reader of the Journal of United Labor echoed Barry's words and cautioned women, "As you doubtlessly have already or will soon pledge yourself to the man you love for better or worse, let me tell you that if you do not join him in his efforts to organize labor it will be all 'worse' and no 'better.'"⁸⁹

The ideal of hearth and home provided a powerful ideological symbol for the Knights' movement. The Journal of United Labor approvingly quoted Republican orator and free thinker Robert Ingersol, who observed, "The family is the heart of all society. If we have no family we can have no community, no township, no state, no nation. Disrupt the family and you eventually disrupt the nation. The greatest patriots are those who seek to preserve the family intact; the most unpatriotic are those who disintegrate the family by compelling women and children to toil for scanty subsistence."⁹⁰ The Knights defined themselves as the "greatest patriots" and set as their task the preservation of the family. In the process they also sought to reshape both work and community life. They envisioned a community

united by a common cooperative ideal which would be the producer's utopia and the mechanic's dream. Exploitation and misery would be replaced by harmony and equality and the moral values of family, work, and cooperation would provide the standards by which the community lived.

The contradiction between the Order's support of women outside the family sphere and their reverence for domestic values led the Knights to a definition of womanhood which differed in important respects from the emerging middle-class ideal of true womanhood. As the economy's productive life shifted to the factory, the middle-class housewife found her range of responsibility and activity severely narrowed. Although the nineteenth-century ideal woman had many features, her most pervasive characteristic came to be virtuous passivity. In contrast, the ideal lady Knight was not an isolated, fragile, or idle figure. She was, rather, a hardworking member of the laboring community who shared in both the toil and the product of labor and who participated in the rights to which each citizen of the republic was entitled. Unlike the emerging housewife of the middle class, the workingman's wife was to be part of a broad movement. The domestic sphere for the Knights was a productive arena and was organically part of the producer's community. Terence Powderly told the Knights' 1888 General Assembly, "The rights of the sexes are co-equal. Their privileges should be the same and I can see no reason why women should not be entitled to share in giving to the

world its products as well as man . . . the working women of America ask not for charity at the hands of the other sex. They do not ask for the cooperation of men in their society affairs as a favor but as a right to which they are entitled by reason of the nobility of toil no matter by whom performed."⁹¹

The lady Knights' role in the movement and in their communities was as important to the Order's romantic ideal as its sentimental view of domestic life. Indeed, a crucial difference between the Knights' ideal of womanhood and that espoused in popular literature was precisely this connection to community life. Mrs. Cecilia Schuler, leader of a New York necktie workers' local, told her striking sisters in 1886, "The present industrial system under capitalist rule is destructive to family ties and has already succeeded in forcing women out of their natural positions at home." But she then warned, "It is high time we too awaken to the necessity of taking part in all that concerns the welfare of the human race." Admitting that "this was my first debut as chairwoman and you may easily imagine that the event was a little embarrassing to me," Schuler led the necktie workers to a successful settlement.⁹² Her devotion to woman's "natural" place in the home was tempered and informed by an equally strong commitment to asserting women's role in the working class community. Another woman told the readers of John Swinton's Paper, "Human misery must be cured and not diminished. But in order to cure, one must know

the cause of the malady. Think then, think hard, working girl! To find out the cause, and when you have done so, new duties, new obligations toward yourself and society are in store for you."⁹³

Domesticity for the Knights of Labor was not simply a reverence for or a capitulation to middle-class values. Rather, the Order transformed the traditional values of feminine morality and virtue into a fundamental critique of the contemporary social order. Indeed, the Knights countered the society's growing reverence for individual achievement and competition with a notion of collective action and cooperative work. The sentimental and romantic notion of womanhood served as a justifying vision for the movement, a call to reclaim their communities and to define themselves in opposition to the prevailing trend toward corporate dominance. A poem written by "one of our sisters" and dedicated to the striking Philadelphia weavers in 1885 expressed the romantic goals of the movement.⁹⁴ After a vivid description of work in a carpet mill the poet outlined the women's chief concerns.

What would you have? The despot will ask,
Would you always in sunshine and idleness bask?
Would you be set up on a coach and four,
And a palace a home and still want more?

What would we have? Ah, well you know!
We would give the children time to grow
E're sending them out to earn their bread,
Poor little wretches, half clothed, half fed.

But protection of the home required new responsibilities for women which made it imperative that they join in the movement to assert the "rights of man." The poet continued,

Give the toiler his just reward!
Think of the millions you may hoard,
Let the hours of labor be reduced,
In the end there will be as much produced.

We ask not your pity, we charity scorn,
We ask but the rights to which we were born,
For the flag of freedom has waved o'er our land,
We justice and equality claim and demand.

Ultimately justice and equality, indeed, the movement itself, served the domestic ideal as the poem's next verse explained:

Then strive for your rights, O, sisters dear,
And ever remember in your own sphere,
You may aid the cause of all mankind
And be the true woman that God designed.

Lady Knights did not "unsex" themselves by stepping into the fray; rather, they symbolized and reaffirmed the movement's values of equality, justice, and morality. By joining the movement women infused the cause (indeed the workplace too) with a higher purpose. Join the movement, advised one lady Knight, "because it is a striving for a noble equality, join to help protect the chastity of the home."⁹⁵ Women's actions would result in a victory and the creation of a new order to which both factory girls and housewives might aspire:

Then brothers and sisters be of good cheer,
The "good time coming" will soon be here.
When all united in one great band,
We may hold our own throughout the land.

And while I am weaving carpets gay,
In dreams I am weaving the future day,
When in sunshine, pure air and leisure hours,
We may have our share of nature's flowers.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Until recently Commons' interpretation has held sway. See John R. Commons, et al., History of Labour in the United States; and Gerald Grob, Workers and Utopia: A History of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900. For recent reinterpretations of the Knights movement see the papers from the Knights of Labor Centennial Symposium, especially David Brundage, "The Producing Classes and the Saloon: Denver in the 1880's"; Leon Fink, "Uses of Political Power: Towards a Theory of the Labor Movement in the Era of the Knights of Labor"; Steven J. Ross, "Strikes, Knights, and Political Fights: The May Day Strike, the Knights of Labor, and the Rise of the United Labor Party in Nineteenth Century Cincinnati"; and Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, "Hamilton and the Home Club."

2. See especially Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." Also see Mary Ryan, Womanhood in America, from Colonial Times to the Present, pp. 137-95 *passim*.

3. Augusta E. Galster, The Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry: With Special Reference to Philadelphia, p. 52. Also see Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in America, 1860-1895: A Study in Industrial Democracy, pp. 346-49. For information on women's strikes during this period see United States Labor Bureau, Third Annual Report, 1887, Strikes and Lockouts.

4. Knights of Labor, Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1879; also see Ware, Labor Movement in America, pp. 346-49.

5. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1879 and 1880.

6. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1881. Fees generally were one half the normal rates for women in mixed assemblies (fifty cents for initiation and twelve and a half cents per month for dues). Ladies' assemblies paid ten collars for charter fee while the usual rate was fifteen dollars. See Journal of United Labor, 25 October 1884; The Voice of the People (New York), 11 February 1883; and "Essay on the Knights of Labor," by Ebenezer A. Hodson, read before the Minneapolis General Assembly, 1883, in the Powderly Papers.

7. See the Knights' constitution in Ware, Labor Movement in America, p. ; see also his discussion of the ideological roots of the organization, pp. 381-89. Also see Grob, Workers and Utopia; Jonathan Grossman, William Sylvis, Pioneer of American Labor: A Study of the Labor Movement during the Civil War; and David Montgomery, Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872.

8. Knights of Labor (Chicago), 21 May 1887. For a critique of labor views on working women see Alice Kessler-Harris, "Women's Wage Work as Myth and History."

9. The Tocsin (Philadelphia), 25 September 1885. For an elaboration of the roots of the Knights' ideology regarding the wage system see Samuel Walker, "'Abolish the Wage System': Terence V. Powderly and the Rhetoric of Labor Reform."

10. The Voice of the People (New York), 11 February 1883. Also see John Swinton's Paper, 11 April 1886.

11. The following breakdown is based on an exhaustive list of women's and mixed-sex assemblies compiled from labor newspapers; Jonathan Garlock and N. C. Builder, "Knights of Labor Data Bank: Users' Manual and Index to Local Assemblies"; and John B. Andrews and W. D. P. Bliss, History of Women in Trade Unions. In 1888 Leonora Barry estimated there were 65,000 women in the Order; The Advance and Labor Leaf (Detroit), 15 December 1888.

12. The Knights' organization of servants, especially black servants, was practically unique in labor history. On the Knights and the race question see Leon Fink, "Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor in Local Politics, 1886-1896," chapter 4.

13. The count of occupations is from my list of local assemblies.

14. John Swinton's Paper, 19 December 1886.

15. Knights of Labor, 11 September 1886; also see The Labor Leaf (Detroit), 7 October 1885; and Journal of United Labor, 8 October 1887.

16. My count. Domestic workers are widely defined, including housewives, boarding house keepers, housekeepers, and servants such as laundresses, cooks, parlor maids.

17. Journal of United Labor, 16 July 1889.

18. Clipping from Zanesville, Ohio, 3 June 1883, entitled "Ladies of Labor," announcing the organization of

a female assembly with eleven charter members; in the Terence V. Powderly Papers.

19. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1886. See also "Report of the Committee on Women's Work," Proceedings, 1884 and 1885.

20. On the Richmond Convention, see Ware, Labor Movement in America. Also see Fink, "Workingmen's Democracy," chapter 4.

21. "Supplementary Report," by Mary Hanifin, Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1886.

22. Roster of Women from the delegate lists, Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1886.

23. Report of the Committee on Women's Work, Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1886.

24. Frances Willard, Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman, p. 523. (I would like to thank Mary Jo Bohle for pointing this passage out to me.)

25. The Labor Leaf, 29 December 1886.

26. Ibid.

27. Willard, Glimpses of Fifty Years, p. 523.

28. Knights of Labor, 5 March 1887.

29. Willard, Glimpses of Fifty Years, p. 523. For additional information on Rogers see Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary (hereafter, NAW), 3: 187-88; and Journal of United Labor, 8 January 1886.

30. The Advance and Labor Leaf (Detroit), 15 December 1888.

31. NAW, 1:101-2.

32. Journal of United Labor, 16 July 1889.

33. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1886; also circular entitled "Women's Work," in Powderly Papers.

34. Circular, "Women's Work."

35. NAW, 1:101-2. See "Annual Report" of the General Investigator, 1887-1889, in Knights of Labor, Proceedings, for Barry's schedule of activities. Also see Alice Kessler-

Harris on the strains between union activism and personal life for women, "Organizing the Unorganizable: Three Jewish Women and Their Union."

36. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887, p. 1581.
37. "Annual Report" of the General Investigator, Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887.
38. "Annual Report" of the General Investigator, Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1888.
39. The Labor Leaf, 15 December 1888.
40. "Annual Report" of the General Investigator, Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887.
41. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887.
42. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887.
43. My census of local assemblies with female members.
44. Leonora Barry to Terence Powderly, Amsterdam, 31 December 1886, Powderly Papers. (I would like to thank Bruce Palmer for bringing this letter to my attention.)
45. George Bennie to Terence Powderly, Erie, Pennsylvania, 24 January 1887, and Powderly's reply, 28 January 1887; in Powderly Papers.
46. Leonora Barry to Terency Powderly, Amsterdam, 31 December 1886, Powderly Papers.
47. Mary St. Brier to Terence Powderly, Schenectady, New York, 5 May 1887; Julia Mitchell and Selestine Collins to Terence Powderly, Fidelity L.A. 9870, Franklin, Louisiana, 13 May 1887; Tillie Fallis to Terence Powderly, Liberty Assembly No. 4589, Gloversville, New York, 27 June 1887; all in Powderly Papers.
48. Mary Harris Jones, Autobiography of Mother Jones, p. 14; also NAW 2:287. She claims to have sought refuge in the Knights of Labor hall during the 1871 Chicago fire and to have joined the Order shortly after.
49. NAW, 2:380; Henry Perry to Terence Powderly, Wichita, Kansas, 7 February 1888, Powderly Papers.
50. NAW, 2:652.
51. NAW, 2:616.

52. NAW, 3:368; also see The Labor Leaf, 22 December 1886.

53. John Swinton's Paper, 6 July 1884. Also see A. A. Carlton to Terence Powderly, 1 October 1884, Powderly Papers; and the Philadelphia Inquirer, 13 September 1884.

54. Clipping from Industrial Leader (Dubuque, Iowa), 13 August 1887, in Powderly Papers.

55. Ibid.

56. John Swinton's Paper, 26 December 1886.

57. The Woman's Journal (Boston), 11 July 1885.

58. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1886.

59. Journal of United Labor, 25 November 1886. For a critical discussion of feminism, suffrage, and the labor movement see Ellen Carol DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869, pp. 119-21, 134-35, 148-61.

60. Leonora Barry to Terence Powderly, Amsterdam, 31 December 1886, Powderly Papers.

61. Anti-Monopolist (Enterprise, Kansas), 28 April 1887. (I would like to thank Leon Fink for this reference.)

62. See Brundage, "The Producing Classes."

63. L. B. Sherman to Terence Powderly, New York, 13 December 1885, Powderly Papers.

64. Mary E. Daulson to Terence Powderly, Marblehead, Massachusetts, 9 March 1886, Powderly Papers.

65. Journal of United Labor, 6 September 1888.

66. On cooperation in the Knights see Ware, Labor Movement in America; also Clare A. Horner, "The Knights of Labor and Producers' Co-operation."

67. The Laborer (Haverhill, Massachusetts), 30 April 1886.

68. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887-1889, Report of the General Investigator.

69. Mary C. Armstead and Catherine T. Kirn to Terence Powderly, Indianapolis, 10 February 1887, Powderly Papers. Also see Labor Leader (Boston), 1 January 1887; and Inquirer, 3 September 1884.

70. Announcement of the Fannie Allyn Cooperative Fair, L.A. 4457, Cincinnati, Ohio, 28 February 1886, Powderly Papers. Also see The Laborer, 16 February 1886.

71. Journal of United Labor, 24 December 1887. This article, entitled "Paper Dishes and Cooperation," also recommended the use of paper dishes to ease the burden of housework. The author observed, "Dishwashing of a family is the most laborious part of the domestic work."

72. Ibid.

73. Journal of United Labor, 2 April 1887.

74. We know some detail about one cooperative in Chicago. "Our Girl Co-op," begun in 1886 by a group of women locked out and blacklisted from Chicago's garment industry, set up a room with thirty to forty sewing machines and took in work from "the great manufacturers" under the banner "co-op or starve." The women produced ready-made coats, pants, and vests, saying their work "in no manner interferes with the great manufacturing houses but simply does away with the sub-contractor." The women appealed to the Knights to buy shares in their co-op and only to purchase their label. Part of their founding statement read: "We, as wage workers, have been in the work shop for years . . . and not wishing to be dependent upon a wage system, we have formed a cooperative company." Knights of Labor, 11 December 1886; also see John Swinton's Paper, 9 January 1887. The Our Girls Co-op apparently lasted about two years. In Indianapolis the Martha Washington Assembly began a cooperative underwear factory "to give employment to unemployed women and also to give the laborers the profit of their labor." Catherine F. Kirn and Mary E. Armstead to Terence Powderly, 20 January 1887, Powderly Papers.

75. Journal of United Labor, 20 September 1888; also 10 December 1887; and The Labor Leaf, 7 October 1885.

76. Journal of United Labor, 10 January 1885.

77. Journal of United Labor, 21 January 1888.

78. John Swinton's Paper, 12 December 1885.

79. See, for example, The Tocsin, 7 August 1886. This issue advertised the "Knights of Labor Library," including "32 separate works by 28 authors" to be sent at the reduced price of five dollars to Knights of Labor local assemblies and other libraries. The works included Bacon, Bebel, Darwin, Henry George, John Swinton, Marie Howland, and others. In John Swinton's Paper, 2 March 1884, Swinton

advertised "Swinton's Storyteller." A subscription of one dollar per year would yield the reader the works of Twain, Poe, etc. On 5 July 1885 Swinton announced the New York Labor Lyceum and Circulating Library. Included among the books offered were Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, L. D. Blake, Woman's Place Today, stories such as "The Young Step-Mother," plus dictionaries and copies of the Constitution of the United States.

80. Journal of United Labor, 8 October 1887.

81. Journal of United Labor, 26 May 1887. See, for example, a list of famous women in the issue of 26 May 1887 and 25 November 1886; an article on painless childbirth, The Labor Leaf, 1 September 1886; and an article on food adulteration in The Labor Leaf, 23 February 1889.

82. Chester C. Morehead to Terence Powderly, Leavenworth, Kansas, 2 December 1886, Powderly Papers.

83. The Labor Leaf, 7 October 1885.

84. The Labor Leader, 19 March to 30 April 1887.

85. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1889, Report of the Grand Master Workman.

86. It is generally assumed that Leonora Barry's retirement speech reflected her own motivation for retiring from the Knights upon her remarriage in 1890. There is evidence, however, that Barry was forced to retire her position and disband the women's committee under financial pressure from Powderly. In July 1888 Barry wrote a "strictly confidential" letter to Charles Lichtman, saying: "I have this day received a positive yes . . . from our GMW to retire from the lecture field. Of course he knows best and I obey. When my voice is lifted for the K of L again it will be under different circumstances than now exist." Lichtman replied, "I sympathize with you fully in what I know are your feelings. It seems to me that economy may be practical in other directions without clipping the only work being done in behalf of women." Lichtman then added, "The time will come when we can speak with perfect freedom and satisfy our consciences at the same time. But more of this when we meet." Although this communication reveals some underlying tension between Barry and Powderly, in public she remained a Powderly supporter. Leonora Barry to Charles Lichtman, July 1888 (no day supplied), and Lichtman's reply on the same date, Powderly Papers.

87. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1887, Report of the General Investigator.

88. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1889, Report of the General Investigator.

89. Journal of United Labor, 15 October 1887.

90. Journal of United Labor, 10 March 1885.

91. Knights of Labor, Proceedings, 1888, Report of the Grand Master Workman. Also see Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood"; and Ryan, Womanhood in America.

92. John Swinton's Paper, 31 January 1886.

93. John Swinton's Paper, 1 March 1885.

94. Journal of United Labor, 10 January 1885.

95. Journal of United Labor, 15 October 1887.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Two orthodoxies have shaped historians' views of American working-class women. Until recently, labor historians have followed John R. Commons' celebration of the American Labor Federation (AFL). The longevity of that particular trade union philosophy and practice has been taken as a sign of inevitability. Historians of both the left and right viewed the Knights of Labor and other forerunners of the AFL as immature or backward-looking preludes to a "mature" labor movement able to function successfully in corporate America. Studies of working-class women have accepted these terms of debate and have focused on the question "Why are women difficult to organize?" They search for answers in the temporary status of women's participation in the labor force, the unskilled and low-paid nature of women's work, and traditional cultural assumptions concerning female behavior. The studies concentrate on women as competitors in the labor market and are generally unable to reconcile the consistent militance of wage-earning women with their minor role in the trade union movement.¹

This study of carpet weavers in the Knights of Labor raises serious questions regarding the conventional approaches

to labor history and the study of working-class women. The process of internal struggle within the Knights of Labor between trade unionist groups like John Morrison's carpet weavers and Terence Powderly's cooperationists revealed the roots of twentieth-century trade union philosophy. At the same time the conflict within the Knights raised the possibility of a broader alternative for the labor movement. The issue of trade autonomy, which drew the carpet weavers together and ultimately caused their break with the Knights, was not initially at odds with the broad goals and ideology of the Order. For several years during the 1880's the trade unions and the Knights shared a common vision of industrial reform and an ideal of a producers' community. The ideal of the cooperative commonwealth was a powerful alternative for the Gilded Age working class. It united skilled and unskilled workers and encompassed the wives of laboring men as well as wage-earning women. As such it is the historic failure of this possibility--rather than any absolute economic or cultural factors--which appears to have shaped trade unions in the "modern period."

The Knights' organization declined rapidly after 1886. Split by internal tensions and defeated in key industrial struggles, the movement could not sustain its massive following. For carpet weavers the Knights' decline meant a weakening of their national organization and a loss of the vital support network which had existed between the Philadelphia and eastern mills. Although some Philadelphia shop committees

reportedly remained active into the 1890's, their formal affiliation to the Knights lapsed after the suspension of D.A. 126. The strength of Philadelphia shop committees was based on an artisanal tradition that antedated the Knights movement. Their entrenched position in the Philadelphia factories did not automatically translate to the eastern mills. Isolated by the demise of their national organization, the unions at Sanford, Smith, and Higgins were unable by the late 1880's to meet their employers' concerted anti-union initiatives. An early open shop drive by the Smith company, for example, combined with an effort to reestablish the firm's paternalistic image devastated the local union. By the early 1890's Smith became one of the pioneer companies to institute corporate welfare. As early as 1886 the company granted weavers a paid Saturday half-holiday, and by the late 1880's old time employees received yearly bonus payments.²

Although the Mohawk Valley district assembly gave the Amsterdam weavers a slightly longer life, the Amsterdam weavers' local assembly ultimately succumbed to the same isolation and company pressures as the Yonkers women. Sanford's weavers found their fate tied to that of the area knit-goods workers' assemblies and local political efforts. The knit-goods workers' defeat in a long and bitter confrontation with Mohawk Valley manufacturers during the winter of 1886 weakened the carpet weavers as well. One of Amsterdam's stalwart Knights wrote that Sanford "appears to be

following in the footsteps of Smith of Yonkers."³ During the knit-goods lockout, Sanford weaver Alice McCormack told Powderly, "The carpet workers . . . find that it has also affected them. . . . Our employers . . . are doing everything they can do to discourage our best workers, having discharged three of our leading lights in as many weeks." McCormack also accused the presiding officer of the men's carpet assembly of advising his members to disband. The women asked Powderly to "wake up our sleepy numbers" and added, "This is no idle request we make to you, something must be done and that quick or a collapse cannot be avoided."⁴ Powderly refused to aid either the weavers or the knit-goods workers. The Sanford weavers were further demoralized when the Knights' labor candidate, Henry Cummins, met defeat in the 1887 congressional election. By the end of the decade the Amsterdam carpet weavers had few resources left with which to resist Sanford's policies.

The carpet weavers' fate was not linked solely to the demise of the Knights of Labor. The weavers' organizations were fundamentally affected by the industry's general decline during the 1890's. By the mid-1890's consumer tastes and increased buying power of the urban middle class turned the industry increasingly away from ingrains and towards more luxurious types of carpet such as Wiltons and tapestries. These heavier and more expensive carpets involved a loom technology different from the ingrain power loom. For Philadelphia the transition proved a disaster. The

city's carpet workforce shrank by half in the years after the turn of the century. Eastern firms, more able to invest in new machinery, took over the carpet market. In Philadelphia the male Wilton and tapestry weavers maintained shop organizations in the tradition of hand loom weavers. Elsewhere mills remained unorganized. After the turn of the century the eastern mills increasingly used the broad loom. This machine was much larger than the original carpet power loom and was usually operated by a man. By 1909 carpet mills employed the highest proportion of male workers in the textile industry. When they organized at all, the new male carpet weavers did so to the exclusion of most women and other laborers in the mills.⁵

With the decline of the Knights' industrial organization, the women carpet weavers, like other unskilled workers, found no place in the labor movement. The weavers' district trade assembly never became part of the growing AFL. Despite the fact that D.A. 126 had briefly catalyzed the "trade union" versus "reform" forces within the Order, the district itself was too diverse to qualify as one of the federated trades. The carpet weavers' district included largely unskilled female machine operatives and combined workers from different mill departments. D.A. 126 could not shift to a labor movement defined by skilled craft unions. Some women's unions, like the Lynn shoe stitchers, for example, tried to maintain their organization by treating each department as a separate skill. Similarly, the

Women's Trade Union League in New York tried to classify early twentieth-century women garment workers by "craft." The League organized tiny locals of buttonhole workers, collar stitchers, or suspender makers. Since each so-called "craft" consisted of only a few unskilled and relatively isolated women, however, devotion to strictly craft organization failed to provide any lasting protection.⁶

These later efforts at unionization probably had little impact on the Knights' carpet weavers. It is likely that most women who worked in the carpet mills and joined the Knights of Labor had already left the workforce by the early 1890's. During the late nineteenth century female factory operatives had an average worklife of three to five years. There is no reason to assume the carpet weavers were an exception. Nonetheless, because of the unique position the Knights movement afforded to housewives, it is probable that some of the women remained active in the organization through the 1890's. The carpet weavers' experience as wage earners and as members of the Knights movement linked them in crucial ways to the national labor movement of the day. The movement's decline and the subsequent success of "pure and simple" craft unionism severely limited the avenues of organization open to wage-earning women and entirely excluded the wives of workingmen.

The impact of the Knights cannot be measured simply in terms of a rise and fall in membership and national prestige. The Order's decline, although precipitous, proved

uneven. Throughout the early 1890's the Knights maintained a presence on the labor scene. Local assemblies in various parts of the country continued to vie with the new AFL trade unions. In the West and South some Knights' assemblies allied with the growing Farmers' Alliance and Populist movements. The strength of employers' reactions during the Great Upheaval of the 1880's can be seen in one sense as a reaction against the powerful and idealistic combination of the "producing classes." The harsh reality of Jay Gould and his allies in every industry combined with a faction-ridden organization and an admittedly self-contradicting leadership led the Knights to their ultimate decline. The ideal of the cooperative commonwealth was no match for the realities of mechanization, organized manufacturers' associations, and the institution of "scientific management." The triumph of craft unions and the AFL during the 1890's was not so much a victory for "mature" trade unionism as an admission on the part of labor that the forces of capital had defeated the workers' movement. The only option left to the labor movement after the serious defeats of the late 1880's and 1890's appeared to be a defensive and carefully circumscribed trade union stance.

The very success of the AFL was a measure of its limits. Without the cloak of a broad labor movement the trade unions retreated from the ideals of the Knights' era into a more defensive and hence more limited type of unionism. The movement could no longer afford to encompass the

masses of unskilled workers, women, and blacks who had flocked into the Knights of Labor. Where the Order had broadly defined its community, including (almost indiscriminately) "all those who toil," the AFL unions narrowed their scope.

The labor movement's retreat resulted in a limited self-conception for unions and a conscious narrowing of goals for the movement. Trade unions no longer claimed to be the voice of a larger laboring community. Rather, unions began to define themselves as the only significant working-class community. "Trade unionism," asserted Samuel Gompers, "contains within itself, as a movement and as a mechanism, the possibilities for establishing whatever social institutions the future shall develop for the workers."⁷ The union and not the movement became labor's central principle. A conscious narrowing of labor's goals accompanied the elevation of the union to the status of the movement. The Knights' movement constantly posed an alternative to monopolies and the wage system and asserted as its very purpose the shaping and redefining of American society. "It is time to make a struggle for the Declaration of Independence," declared one of John Swinton's readers, "and build one great American community."⁸ The Philadelphia Trades called for "all wealth producers" to unite in "an industrial federation . . . for the reorganization of government and the establishment of an enlightened economical system by the adoption of humanitarian principles which will secure to

each citizen that liberty promised in the Declaration of Independence."⁹ In contrast, the AFL fundamentally limited its goals to gains on the industrial front and eschewed any broader demands on the society. Gompers' well-known 1912 debate with the socialist Morris Hillquit highlighted labor's retreat. Hillquit asked Gompers to define "a better life for all." Gompers replied, "the best possible conditions obtainable for the workers. . . ." Hillquit pressed further for some definition of goals and asked, "Yes, and when these conditions are obtained?"¹⁰ Gompers declared, "Why, when we want better." The labor movement no longer saw itself as able to assert a vision and impose its own values on American life. Instead labor's task became the defense of workers on a daily basis against the ever-encroaching threats of management. The unions sought to appropriate for their members a share of the nation's expanding wealth but chose to leave the direction and nature of the economy to their employers.

The retreat of labor into craft unionism was particularly serious for women, because as a consequence they were essentially written out of the labor movement. The Knights considered all members of their producers' community, both workers and wives, to be productive partners. The presence of married women in the Order was especially important. By extending their vision to include women not directly engaged in the labor market, the Knights accepted work in the home as a crucial part of the community toil. Since the movement

defined itself so broadly, women did not have to retire from participation upon marriage. In fact they were encouraged to continue their activities as vigorously as before. The Order attempted to create alternative meeting places which would not only accommodate women but would encourage whole families to attend the local assembly. With the retreat into craft unionism, the social core of the Knights' movement--the lecturers, entertainments, sociables, and cooperatives--became minor aspects of the labor movement. Burned by the Knights' defeats in the industrial sphere, workers' defense on the job took on prime importance for the unions. Women who did not have a job had little role to play in the movement.

The serious problem for early twentieth-century working-class women was not so much that unions hesitated to organize women. It is true that the AFL generally did little to implement its rhetorical commitment to organize working women. The source of that failure, however, was not a conscious decision regarding women. Rather, the unions' hostility towards working women grew because they now defined women like other semi- and unskilled workers solely as competitors in the labor market and no longer as equal members of the producing class. When unions addressed women at all, they concentrated on wage-earners. Thus the vast majority of working-class women remained outside the sphere of organization. If women were doomed to drop out of the labor movement upon marriage, their temporary status

in the workforce indeed became a liability. The unskilled, low-paid nature of women's wage work posed a threat to unions committed only to a defense of skill and to a constant struggle to maintain wage standards. Once married women could look forward at most to an auxiliary role in the labor movement, the working class itself effectively split. The strict line established between wage-earning and other women only paralleled the larger gulf separating organized from unorganized labor.

For working-class women the Knights' broad vision also provided a strength in relation to the contemporary feminist movement which trade union women afterward lost. By extending woman's traditional moral sphere to encompass the life of the entire community--both home and work--the Knights provided women with an unprecedented opportunity for political maneuver. Equal rights regardless of sex were theoretically a central part of the movement's vision. This did not mean that the Order was inherently feminist or that lady Knights did not face a constant struggle for influence within the organization. It does suggest, however, that the movement's scope provided the possibility for addressing issues beyond strictly trade union concerns and gave women leeway to address both women's rights and industrial questions. The labor movement afterwards concentrated on strictly industrial issues. Questions of suffrage or equal rights, for example, were considered "women's issues" and outside the scope of union concern. Working-class women,

especially active trade unionists, henceforth saw their interests unnaturally divided. Women were faced with the difficult choice of "feminism" or "class consciousness" with no institutional mechanism for addressing both areas of concern.

Despite the Knights' vision and ideal, the Order was fraught with inconsistencies in thought and action. But even in their failure the Knights revealed the alternatives posed by Gilded Age men and women. The ultimate nature of industrial society and the role of the labor movement within it still appeared open and subject to change. The present shape of American working-class communities and institutions appears less inevitable when viewed as the product of such historic struggles. In particular, the question "Why are women hard to organize?" should take on a new dimension when considered in light of the goals and scope of the movement trying to organize them.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. See general labor histories, including John R. Commons, et al., History of Labor in the United States; and Phillip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, from Colonial Times to the Founding of the American Federation of Labor. Also see Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in America, 1860-1895: A Study in Industrial Democracy; and Gerald Grob, Workers and Utopia: A History of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900. For an account of women in trade unions see Alice Kessler-Harris, "Where Are the Organized Women Workers?"

2. Sophie Green, "The History and Development of the Carpet Industry in Yonkers." Also see John Swinton's Paper, 14 February 1886, and Carpet and Upholstery Trade Review, 15 February 1886.

3. John McNally to Terence Powderly, Amsterdam, 15 March 1887, Terence V. Powderly Papers.

4. Alice McCormack to Terence Powderly, Amsterdam, 24 March 1887, Powderly Papers.

5. See Gladys Palmer, Union Tactics and Economic Change: A Case Study of Three Philadelphia Textile Unions; and Arthur H. Cole and Harold F. Williamson, The American Carpet Manufacture: A History and an Analysis, pp. 151-55 and 187-95.

6. On the Women's Trade Union League see Robin Miller Jacoby, "The Women's Trade Union League and American Feminism"; and Nancy Schrom Dye, "Feminism or Unionism? The New York Woman's Trade Union League and the Labor Movement." Also see Gladys Boone, The Women's Trade Union Leagues in Great Britain and the United States of America. For a discussion of the lady shoe stitchers in Lynn during the period just after the Knights of Labor see Mary Blewett, "The Union of Sex and Craft in the Haverhill Shoe Strike of 1895."

7. Louis Reed, The Labor Philosophy of Samuel Gompers, p. 19. Also see Ann Schofield, "The Rise of the Pig-Headed Girl: Images of Women in Three Labor Periodicals."

8. John Swinton's Paper, 11 November 1883.
9. This was the masthead of The Trades (Philadelphia); see, for example, 29 March 1879.
10. Reed, Samuel Gompers, pp. 11-12; Green, "Carpet Industry in Yonkers," p. 57.

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