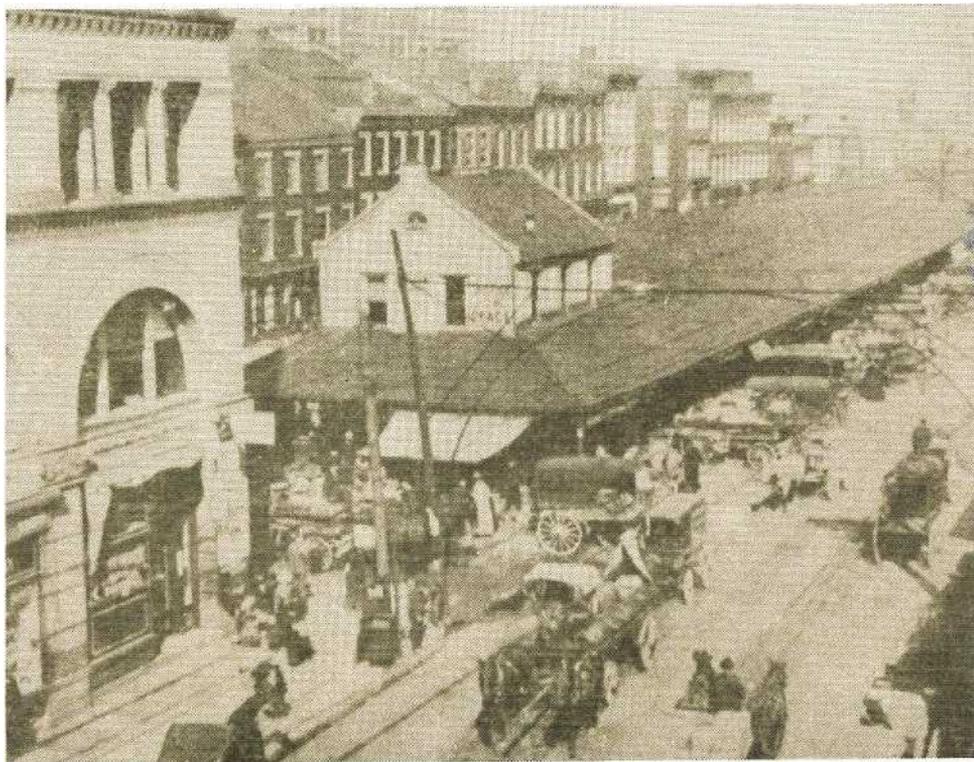


UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW



Autumn/Winter 1986

Price \$1.54

UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW

Volume XVI Autumn/Winter 1986 Number One

CONTENTS

William Dean Howells: The Ohio
Valley Years.....2
by Robert H. Sykes

The Trial of Alice Bradford:
A Study in the Politics of Prostitution
in Wheeling, W.Va..... 6
By David W. Rose

"Coketown" - A Reconstructed History 23
By Douglas Waugh

Contributors.....26

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS: THE OHIO VALLEY YEARS

By Robert H. Sykes

Having ignored him completely for 150 years, it is unlikely that the citizenry of Martins Ferry, Ohio, will sponsor any special celebration to honor their native son William Dean Howells on the sesquicentennial of his birth March 1, 1987.

At the turn of the century, Howells was the most influential literary figure in America, and he became internationally famous through the publication of more than 100 novels, biographies, and collections of essays. He is perhaps best known to literary historians and critics as the man who single-handedly defined and directed the rise of realism in America.

As a prominent editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Monthly*, and *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, he encouraged and published such emerging writers as Mark Twain, Hamlin Garland, and Theodore Dreiser. He it was who lent the money to Stephen Crane to enable him to pay for the publication of America's first naturalistic novel, *Maggie; A Girl of the Streets*. Moreover, Howells received honorary degrees from six universities; and Harvard, Yale, and Johns Hopkins universities all offered him professorships, even though he had never attended a high school or college.

For half a century, his masterpiece, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* was required reading in high schools and colleges throughout the country. The *Cambridge History of American Literature* calls him, "The principle exponent of native realism, in himself almost an entire literary movement,"¹

Yet, in spite of all that achievement, the town where he was born has not a plaque, not an historical marker, not a memorial stone, not a street named in his honor, not a sign that America's literary dictator for over a quarter of a century ever lived there.

Howells was born in Martins Ferry on March 1, 1837, to parents whose antecedents were of Welsh, German and English extraction.²

His grandfather, who had owned woolen mills in Wales, migrated to America and to eastern Ohio where he took up farming. A failure at farming, he set up and operated a woolen mill in Steubenville until that failed also. Thereupon he moved his family to Wheeling where his son, William Cooper Howells, the novelist's father, met and married Mary Dean.³ (The novelist's middle name perpetuated his mother's maiden name).

While he lived in Wheeling, William Cooper Howells was foreman of a newspaper in St. Clairsville. Then his health failed, and he took up house painting in order to work in the open air. His father-in-law advised him to buy a lot and build a house across the river in Martins Ferry.

The property was close to the river bank, and on it, according to Howells, "he built mainly with his own capable hands a small brick house of one story and two rooms with a lean-to. In this house I was born, and my father and mother were very happy there . . .

To make way for the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, in the early years of this century, the house was dismantled brick by brick and reassembled at Fourth and Walnut Streets. It was purchased in 1916 by the German Savings Bank (now Citizens Savings Bank) which demolished it the next year to erect the bank building which now stands vacant at Fourth and Walnut.⁶ Writing one of his several autobiographies at age 53, Howells said that his most vivid memory of childhood was having awakened in the Martins Ferry home and seeing through the window of that home a peach tree in full bloom.

The tender, pathetic pink of its flowers repeated itself many long years afterward in the paler tints of the almond blossoms in Italy, but always with a reminiscence of that dim past, and the little coal-smoky town on the banks of the Ohio.⁷

From his boyhood in Eastern Ohio, Howells also recalled his first pet, a deer his uncle had rescued as it swam in the Mississippi and brought home to him.

He (the deer) began a checkered career of uselessness when they were ferrying him over from Wheeling in a skiff, by trying to help wear the pantaloons of the boy who was holding him; he put one of his fore-legs in at the watch-pocket; but it was disagreeable to the boy and ruinous to the trousers.⁸

The deer became so tame that, as a house guest, it learned to eat sugar from a bowl on the kitchen table and to raid the pantry for pastries. Then, one day, a dog chased it, and, leaping out of danger, it broke its leg and had to be shot.⁹

William Cooper Howells, his health failing once again, took his family to Cincinnati where he began to study medicine and took a job as a printer.

In one of his autobiographies, William Dean Howells recounts a bizarre tale of a drowning he witnessed aboard the steamboat that carried him from Martins Ferry to Cincinnati. In the ladies' salon at the stern of the boat, he knelt looking out the window to watch the raindrops splash into the river. The steamboat stopped to receive a passenger being rowed out to it in a skiff. The passenger had only one leg and stood in the prow of the skiff with a crutch under one arm and a cane in his other hand. As the skiff came alongside the steamboat, he tried to step aboard but missed his footing and disappeared beneath the muddy surface of the river. Howells could recall no other details of the incident, although he conjectured fifty years afterward that there must have been a rescue attempt, tumult and shouting.

Howells the father mortgaged himself in 1841 to buy the Whig newspaper in Hamilton, Ohio, which he used for eight years as a vehicle for his abolitionist views. Several of his brothers-in-law, the Deans, were steamboat captains, and so it was convenient and economical for members of the family in Cincinnati - and later, Hamilton - to make frequent visits

to the Martins Ferry property, And they did so for the next ten or twelve years.

Among the perverse impressions William Dean Howells retained into middle age was the memory that the family burned wood in Hamilton, "but had¹² to burn coal at Martins Ferry, where everything was smutched by it."

Although Howells' steamboating uncles had grown up in a slave state, they gradually came round to the anti-slavery views of their Whig brother-in-law. And on one occasion when "an abolition lecturer was denied a public hearing at Martins Ferry, they said he should speak in their mother's house;

And there, much unaware, I heard my first and last abolition lecture, barely escaping with my life for one of the objections urged by the mob outside was a stone hurled through the window, where my mother sat with me in her arms."

In 1848, William Cooper Howells paid off the debt on his newspaper in Hamilton and moved his family to Dayton, Ohio, where he bought a tri-weekly paper, *The Transcript*. He tried to convert it to a daily, but, in spite of the herculean efforts of his sons, who set his type, printed, and delivered the paper to subscribers, the enterprise went bankrupt.¹⁴ The move to Dayton severed completely the family's connection with the upper Ohio Valley.

After a year in Xenia, Ohio, where William Cooper Howells failed as a miller on the Little Miami River (see W.D. Howells' *My Year in a Log Cabin*) the family moved to Columbus. There the father became a clerk for the Ohio legislature. His son became a typesetter for the *Ohio State Journal*.

In Columbus, William Dean Howells wrote a campaign biography of Abraham Lincoln, which earned for him an appointment as consul to Venice at the onset of the Civil War.

A collection of sketches entitled *Venetian Life*, published first in 1866 and reprinted frequently throughout his life, was his first literary success and launched his career as a prose writer.

By contemporary standards, his work is rather bland fare, consumed only by specialists, although five or six of his novels have enduring merit, and his masterpiece, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, has a secure place as an American classic.

FOOTNOTES

1. Trent, William P.; Erskine, Sherman and Van Doren, eds., *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Cambridge, Eng. 1933, Vol. III p. 77.
2. Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone, Vol. V, p. 306.

3. Howells, Wm. Dean, *Years of My Youth*, ed. David J, Nordloh, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1975, p. 6-9.
4. *Ibid.* p. 9
5. *Ibid.*
6. Howells mentions the removal of the house in *A Boy's Town* p. 7, I am indebted for much of this to the personal recollection of former Martins Ferry Police Chief John Wesley Muhleman and to Jim Everson, President of Citizens Savings Bank for verifying the location of the Howells home.
7. Howells, W.D., *A Boy's Town*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1970 (originally published by Harper and Brothers 1890), p. 7.
8. *Ibid. loc. cit.*
9. *Ibid.* p, 8
10. Howells, *Years of My Youth*, p. 9ff.
11. Howells, *A Boy's Town*, pp. 8-9.
12. *Years of My Youth* p.25.
13. *Ibid.* p. 13.
14. *Ibid.* pp. 26-38.

THE TRIAL OF ALICE BRADFORD:
A STUDY IN THE POLITICS OF PROSTITUTION
IN WHEELING, W.VA.

By David W. Rose

June 16, 1904: the fictional day on which James Joyce's Leopold Bloom made his sexual odyssey in a Dublin brothel was a very real day in the life of Alice Bradford, the Wheeling brothel-keeper, who was then on bail and contemplating an uncertain future. The owner of a row of back-alley brothels in the heart of Wheeling's red-light district, Bradford conspired to absolve herself and her colleague, Theresa Stillwell, from charges of abducting three teenage Pittsburgh girls to work as prostitutes in an Alley C whorehouse. The criminal proceedings that evolved through the summer months of that year exposed to the public the underworld of prostitution and vice that were an integral part of the city's commerce and ultimately forced the closing of Alley C, Wheeling's notorious vice district. Although the Ohio County Court proved her a willing instrument in the promotion of prostitution, it failed to curtail her business interests permanently. By the following year she opened a larger establishment at 23rd Street near the Center Wheeling Market, regrouping with other women affected by the closing of Alley C.

Alice Bradford's arrest and trial were in large part responsible for the exodus of prostitutes from Alley C which altered Wheeling's moral geography in ways that she could not have foreseen. What resulted was the expansion of a larger red-light district in Center Wheeling among workers' homes and deteriorating tenements in a low-lying flood plain of the Ohio River. While the person, Alice Bradford, and the place, Alley C, have become neglected as a part of the city's folklore, their significance here lies in what they can tell us about the social relations of working people and especially of the women who worked as prostitutes to make a living. The late historian Herbert Gutman has cited the vital role that urban subcultures played in defining the social structure of nineteenth century industrial towns, imparting to their "quality of life a special tone." While ethnic subcultures in Wheeling and other industrial cities of the Ohio Valley shaped personal life, family life, and civic institutions in unique ways, the male subculture of "the sporting life" and its reciprocal subculture of females involved in prostitution are vastly overlooked components of industrial Wheeling's social character. Many accounts of Wheeling's past have emphasized the city's manufacturing and cultural achievements, but beneath the industrial edifice the lives of the working poor lie unexamined and unappreciated, and their social institutions, as vibrant or sordid as they may appear, have faded beyond recognition and in some ways beyond historical reconstruction. It is this author's contention that Wheeling's notoriety as a sporting center and whorehouse

town matched its fame as a minor industrial power in the nineteenth century and eclipsed it in the twentieth. Local sporting institutions such as horse-racing and cock-fighting assumed great importance for working men whose lives were otherwise circumscribed by the grim realities of factory labor. Unfortunately, the subjection of women to the commercial exchange of prostitution played a large part in the ensemble of sporting institutions available to workingmen to transcend the monotony of their working lives. Moreover, as a general urban phenomenon prostitution was subject to forms of political control, rationalized by city officials as a necessary evil and perpetuated by them as a clandestine civic tradition. The assumption of unofficial management by police and health officials complicated the picture of prostitution as a simple vice problem. That one madam, Alice Bradford, played a role, however inadvertent, in changing the social structure of vice in lasting ways is the subject this essay will explore.

The development of prostitution in Wheeling has a long history, one which is difficult to trace accurately for the obvious reason that as a stigmatized and illegal activity few records adequately documented its occurrence. Like other river towns along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, Wheeling catered to the boisterous keelboatmen who transported goods downriver before the advent of the steamboat. Their rough life demanded rough pleasures, and the early development of riverfront grogshops, dance halls, and taverns evolved from their commerce.³ By the 1830s the steamboat replaced the keelboat in the transshipment of commodities and people along river routes, and with steady urban growth, inns, taverns, and brothels attained a permanency along riverfront areas. For at least the first half of the nineteenth century this pattern took hold in Wheeling because the city also stood at the intersection of the Ohio River and the National Road in the wake of the hordes of immigrants who pushed the frontier westward. Like Natchez, Mississippi, at the junction of the Natchez Trace and the Mississippi River, early known for its criminal underworld of gamblers and prostitutes, Wheeling's roots as an entertainment center and commercial stop-over resulted from its location on major land and water routes to the west.⁴

By the 1870s Wheeling had achieved pre-eminence as "The Nail City" as well as the capital city of West Virginia. Working class residential districts, interdigitated among the factories and mills, spread north, south, and east along the flat bench lands under the hills. Prostitution activity occurring in working class neighborhoods came to be seen largely as a form of vice, but should also be understood as a form of work, for occupational opportunity and choice for women during this time was strictly defined by domestic labor and related low-paying occupations like dress-making.⁵ While prostitutes worked early on in waterfront areas and lower class neighborhoods adjacent to the mills, three identifiable prostitution districts developed over time in East Wheeling, then in Alley C, and finally in Center (often called South) Wheeling. To a steamboat pilot receiving a

cargo of nails at Wheeling's wharf or to a Pennsylvania farmer carting vegetable produce to the Second Ward Market House. Alley C was synonymous with prostitution. A comparatively small but notorious neighborhood, "Avenue C," "C Alley," or simply "the alley" referred to a single row of houses on the east side of a dirt alley between 10th and 11th Streets near Wheeling's business district. The early character of the area around the alley presaged its unglamorous image, for it was once a swamplike place with poor drainage, afterwards becoming a commons. Rebecca Harding Davis noted that "The Commons was the plague spot of the village, a collection of wretched cabins tenanted by drunken free negroes and Irish, Among its other horrors were goats and jimson weeds and a foul pond covered with yellow slime."⁶ By the mid-1870s the area from Alley C to Chapline Street and on up the hill was noted for backyard fights among tenement dwellers and other disorderly affairs. By the 1890s the row of Alley C warehouses was a central feature of Wheeling's social life, given the city's permissive attitude toward prostitution and the alley's proximity to centers of commerce. Its location a mere one-half block away from the Second Ward Market House was an organic outcome of the character of the downtown area. The Market House which paralleled Alley C on Market Street between 10th and 11th was established in 1822; after the incorporation of the city in 1836 it was "the chief municipal building . . .¹ for nearly thirty years." functioning as a town hail and county court.² In the very heart of the original town the Market House opened for business on Tuesdays and Fridays, City residents purchased local produce, poultry, meats, and dairy products from farmers and hucksters, while the latter, traveling from as far away as West Alexander, Pennsylvania and St. Clairsville, Ohio purchased provisions available in town. On market days the influx of merchants augmented the already crowded streets. Street peddlers of hardware, notions, and produce added to the congestion by using street space for their wagons and wares leaving little room for horsecart and trolley traffic.^o Prostitution became integrated into the economy of the Market House by virtue of its proximity and the demand for commercial sex by out-of-town farmers and local working men who went whoring on Saturday night binges.

It is possible that prostitution flourished in Alley C for as long as it did as a result of a private agreement between Alice Bradford and city officials, for she rented out houses at five locations there between 10th Street and 7th Alley at 1002, 1004, 1008, 1012, and 1016 Alley C from 1895 to 1903. Bradford not only rented to madams but was herself a madam and cautious manager of one of the alley's largest brothels. Whether it can ever be determined what her exact links to city hall were is another of the many uncertainties in the historiography of sexual politics during this period. Whatever her political connections, she was the owner of five key properties rented to madams for the purpose of organized prostitution that gave the alley its fame. A corpulent figure in declining health, Bradford was variously depicted as magnanimous or wicked, depending upon which side of the brothel door one stood. As with many

other madams through this period, Bradford was known by the moniker "Mom."

In the late 1880s Alice Bradford was the proprietor of Bradford's Livery Stables at 1736-38 Market Street, owned and managed by her husband Charles G. Bradford. How she came to acquire properties in Alley C is uncertain, but by 1893 she was leasing one house at 1016 Alley C to Ella Miller, a local madam, as a house of prostitution. She was joined in this enterprise by Ben Dunlap who was ironically, or perhaps appropriately, Wheeling's night watchman in the 1890s. Dunlap was later charged in 1904 with operating a "badger game" with his wife Susan on a houseboat on the Ohio River.¹⁰ In January, 1903, Bradford was one of nine women indicted by the Ohio County Grand Jury for keeping houses of prostitution in the three prostitution districts of the city. Suffering from a heart and lung condition and fearing incarceration she fled the city on the day of her scheduled court appearance for sentencing. In a statement before a notary public a month later she related:

... that while on her way to ... Court and immediately across the street from the Court House ... she saw several other women indicted for similar offenses in the custody of deputy sheriffs ... and on the impulse of the moment believing that some drastic punishment was to be inflicted upon her she went to Martins Ferry, Ohio . . .

Alice Bradford apparently had an aversion to the inconvenience of incarceration for this would not be the last time she would attempt to wriggle free of Ohio County justice. She affirmed that she closed all brothels owned by her at the date specified by the authorities (April 15, 1903) though she permitted several of the residents to stay on as "they have been unable to find places of employment or other places to lodge (and) returned begging (her) . . . to take them in in order that they might have a place to stay and sleep." The outcome of these legal difficulties was that she sold her properties in Alley C, thus abdicating her management of them, or so it seemed. However, despite Ohio County Prosecuting Attorney Frank Nesbitt's attempts to deal strictly with prostitution and gambling violations in the city (his efforts to arrest gamblers in 1903 were foiled when the news of impending raids somehow leaked to the policy shops), the madams to whom Bradford had sold her shady estate reopened the brothels within a matter of weeks. Theresa Stillwell purchased the house at 1016 Alley C which was so popular that by June 1903 a "Standing Room Only" sign hung outside its door on its busiest nights.

Public attention again turned to Alley C in September when Mary Yoder, a young girl working at Mayme Joyce's house at 1004 Alley C, died of a morphine overdose. Dr. A.J. Noome, a physician who often tended the medical needs of the prostitutes of the alley, confirmed the cause of death, and others commented that Yoder regularly purchased cocaine at Waterman's Drug Store around the corner on Market St, Nesbitt brought Bradford under suspicion for organizing the business of the

house when testimony revealed that she had been collecting money on a weekly basis from Mayme Joyce, which Joyce explained as installment payments toward the purchase of the house. Public disapproval of the alley continued to grow as residents of the surrounding black community swore warrants against several prostitutes for disorderly and boisterous conduct. Proposals by the black community and others to widen the alley into a commercial street failed to materialize, however. Many believed that such a change would lessen the traffic congestion on Market Street at the Market House and drive the prostitutes out of the alley by increasing their visibility and by raising property values.

A dance at Turner Hall at 909 Market Street just north of the Market House in March, 1904, prompted renewed police action against the public activities of prostitutes. As a lower class event "arranged by a number of young men with sporting proclivities," the dance presented no opportunity for moral "contamination" by the presence of the women of the half world, as respectable persons were conspicuous by their absence." Thronged by women from "nearly every house of ill-fame in the city," the dance offended the community with "abnormal" beer consumption, lewd dancing (the "gouge"), and women smoking cigarettes, ending in a row between a girl and "her male escort." Police Chief John Ritz was compelled to reiterate the unwritten rules governing the social behavior of prostitutes, banning their public activities after dark:

A meeting of all the proprietresses of houses of ill fame at police headquarters early last night was the sequel to all this. They had been notified by officers to appear, and when all were assembled, Chief John S. Ritz delivered a lecture, laying down his regulations in a manner so plain as to make it impossible to misunderstand him. The department has handled the social evil in a commendable manner, and the chief notified the women that trouble would follow in case they did not co-operate with him in his regulations.

The Police Department called for such convocations periodically as a customary procedure in regulating prostitution and maintaining lines of communication between the department and the underworld. Such police supervision of prostitutes enforced the social structure of their subordination as lower class women and sexual outcasts, while newspaper commentary of regulatory procedure reinforced the image of their behavior as refractory and anti-social as defined by the mores of "respectable" society. A drive to regulate the use of cocaine by city ordinance found justification in the misconception and prejudice prevalent at the time that "colored people and women of the underworld appear to be peculiarly susceptible" to its influence. Mary Yoder's cocaine and morphine habit provided additional illustration of this hypothesis, fueling Prosecuting Attorney Nesbitt's initiative to prohibit cocaine sales and prompting the Police Department to add to its corpus of unwritten regulations that "cocaine-sniffing inmates of disreputable houses . . . must leave Wheeling.

In the summer of 1904 the issue of prostitution came to a boil with the trial of Alice Bradford and Theresa Stillwell. The trial gave a prolonged period of publicity to the open nature of prostitution in Alley C and its toleration by city officials prior to its reorganization on an even larger scale "over the creek" in Center Wheeling. On May 27 Pittsburgh police arrested Mrs. Elizabeth "Belle" Foley for transporting three Pittsburgh girls, all minors, away from their South Side homes, taking them to Wheeling to install them as prostitutes in Theresa Stillwell's Alley C brothel. A Pittsburgh telegram alerted Wheeling police to the abduction, and detective Jerry O'Leary quickly located the girls, Stella Grossman, 14, and two sisters, Lizzie and Bessie Yantz, ages 14 and 17, along with a Wheeling girl, Annie Rhodes, 14, at 1016 Alley C. Police then arrested Stillwell as operator of the house along with its purported landlady, Nice Bradford. As events unfolded during the summer, the public learned that Bradford still managed the business of prostitution in the alley; her well-publicized and well-attended trial provided a glimpse into the social microcosm of prostitution, heightened by the perceived menace of interstate traffic in women.¹⁷

Thus implicated in the abduction of three teenage girls, Bradford and Stillwell were released on \$5000 bond while Wheeling police closed their Alley C house indefinitely. The police also detained the three Pittsburgh girls in jail as witnesses for the duration of the four-month proceedings; each earned \$1 per day as a witness fee. The girls had been employed in a glass factory in Pittsburgh and were brought to Wheeling by "Belle" Foley, known locally as the "paramour" of "Steeple Jack" William Johnson, an uncle of the Yantz girls, who had recently committed suicide by hanging in a church steeple. Foley herself had originally attempted to purchase the house at 1012 Alley C from Bradford, but, unable to complete payment, she fell into the role of procurer. The girls' mother learned of their disappearance through a friend, and William Yantz, a millworker and father of the Yantz girls, pressed charges against Foley in Pittsburgh and traveled to Wheeling on June 6 to file a \$15,000 damage suit against Alice Bradford.¹⁸

Though Pittsburgh authorities refused to release Foley for prosecution, the Ohio County Grand Jury convened on June 6 and indicted Bradford, Stillwell, and Foley for the abduction. In addition, the jury charged Bradford and Stillwell with misdemeanors for operating a house of prostitution and for selling beer on the premises without a license. Their attorney, J.B. Handlan, demurred the felony indictments and requested access to the detained girls for questioning. Though Nesbitt insisted on keeping the girls free from outside influence, they had already been approached and bribed by another Alley C madam in Bradford's employ, Mabel Copeland, arrested on a disorderly charge and jailed with the girls. She allegedly promised the three money and free transportation back to Pittsburgh in return for withholding incriminating testimony relating to Alice Bradford's involvement in Stillwell's brothel. The girls reported the attempted bribery to Nesbitt, and Copeland was

placed in solitary confinement until a prostitute from Stillwell's house posted bond for her release. The authorities then freed Annie Rhodes on \$1000 bond furnished by Orloff Zane, Bradford's real estate agent, though he declined to identify the source of the money, claiming not to know.¹⁹

Judge Hugus overruled the felony indictments on June 20, and Nesbitt quickly called for a special Grand Jury session to reframe the indictments in accordance with the court's specifications. The defense attorneys filed pleas of abatement, further delaying the trial, and by mid-July the court found the new indictments faulty. Press and public reaction was unfavorable, alluding to possible connivance between the court and the underworld, and Nesbitt, frustrated in this prime opportunity to clamp down on the alley, bitterly complained that the court's decision was incomprehensible.

Public criticism crested on the desire to eradicate the vices of Alley C, "the greatest blot or Wheeling's face." Wheeling authorities contributed to the atmosphere of repression and possibility of renewal: police raided the house of Lou Falkenstein at 1043 Market Street, a well-known madam who also sold poultry at the Market House, and Ritz publically warned saloons and hotels that condoned prostitution. Ritz stated: "No special privileges will be enjoyed by any saloonist who is caught operating a fake hotel ... The fake hotel will not be tolerated in Wheeling under my administration."²¹ Ritz fulfilled his pronouncement by raiding Conrad Hagamaier's saloon and "Drummer's Exchange" and the "Jerome Saloon and Quick Lunch Room" opposite the B & O Railroad depot at 1516 Main Street which advertised "furnished rooms in connection." Police arrested four women and five men at the Jerome although the proprietors insisted that the women had been segregated in the dining room and were being served drinks. Black residents on Chapline Street between 9th and 11th objected to the "unbearable" disturbances in Alley C: a black janitor, J.R. Mason, swore warrants against Mayme Joyce's and Mahle Copeland's houses (1004 and 1006 Alley C) "charging them with drunk and disorderly and annoying the residents of that section of the city." The black community had been complaining about alley disturbances for weeks and the *Wheeling Register* reported that "a general crusade on the alley is ripe and ready for action." Working-class blacks were also outraged that the prostitutes hired black school children from the segregated Lincoln School to carry messages and run errands, bringing them into contact with the alley's activities.

Wheeling newspapers publicized the police raids and disturbances, giving great attention to the Bradford-Stillwell affair. The *Intelligencer* editorialized on "Wheeling's Moral Condition" and "A Lack of Law," portraying Alice Bradford as a "distinct menace to the morals of this community." The *Wheeling Register* vociferously objected to Bradford's twice escaping felony indictments for procuring minors, attacking hers as an especially flagrant case of the promotion of vice:

Without going into the noxious depths of this special case, however, there is certainly no lack of law to warrant the authorities in cleaning out this nest of vice in Alley C. The whole district should be cleaned out as the moral cess-pool and pestilence-breeder it is. It has far too long been a sort of Augean stables, a blot on the city, the shame and disgrace of Wheeling. Away with it!

The Bradford-Stillwell trials allowed the community at large ample opportunity to witness the prosecution of organized vice interests. Throngs of people crowded the courtroom as the newspapers blasted: "Moral Rottness of Alley C Is Disclosed." The trial itself was unusually lengthy, given that the two women were being tried on misdemeanors only, but a number of factors seemed to necessitate protracted proceedings: the vigor of state prosecution, the expectation that a new round of felony indictments could evolve, and the public interest in the notoriety of Alice Bradford and her latest egregious offenses.²⁴

The prosecution desired to prove not only that Theresa Stillwell illegally sold beer in her brothel but that Alice Bradford still held the reins of the operation, even though as a matter of public record she had ostensibly sold all her Alley C holdings a year earlier as promised to the court. The defense attorneys, J.B. Handlan and R.B. Addleman, constructed their defense around Stillwell's guilt in an attempt to protect Bradford, apparently with Stillwell's sanction. The centerpiece for the state's case rested on the three girls procured from Pittsburgh, and their interrogation in court revolved around details concerning the management and operation of the house. Stella Grossman, Lizzie Yantz, and Bessie Yantz all testified to the conditions of their recruitment and work: Belle Foley brought them to Wheeling with the knowledge that she would secure "positions" for them, though Lizzie Yantz acknowledged they knew the real nature of the house in the alley. At Stillwell's brothel they met "a fat woman they all called 'Mom' and were given a room." The "fat woman," Bradford, made arrangements for their work as prostitutes, giving them all account books and instructing them to keep a regular account of entries as they would receive "\$5 a week and half (of what) they made." The following day the girls were escorted to a nearby house where Bradford employed a seamstress; here they were furnished with robes and their clothes were taken, Lizzie Yantz testified: "We were given instructions to go out to the gate, ... and pull in the men." In a separate incident a young prostitute related that Mrs. Bradford once insisted that she purchase such robes as were used in the house. When the girl refused, Bradford assaulted her with a beer bottle.

While several of the other thirteen prostitutes working at the house testified for the defense that Theresa Stillwell managed the house, one young girl, Dora Gray, emphatically stated that "Mom Bradford .. was the head leader." Gray reported that the house next door, formerly owned by Bradford, was now owned by Mabel Copeland by a "fake

deed." When asked what a fake deed was she said "it was longer than a good deed by about an inch and a half." This caused a laugh and prompted Handlan to capitalize on her naivete by attempting to discredit her testimony, stressing her unreliability as a cocaine addict. Before the crowded courtroom Handlan angrily demanded of the girl: "What do you use? Do you use any stimulant? Do you use dope?" She was then led directly before Bradford to make positive identification of the woman her testimony was incriminating. Before she stepped down from the stand, shaken by her forcible encounter with Mrs. Bradford, she admitted using cocaine occasionally but denied being a "fiend."²⁶

The defense then introduced a new witness, Mrs. Mary Miles, and attempted to suggest that she was the "fat lady" seen on the premises at 1016 Alley C, and that the three girls mistook her for Alice Bradford. Mrs. Miles had been visiting her daughter, a prostitute at the house, who was ill and being treated by Dr. Noome for an abscess on her neck. Theresa Stillwell then testified that she had purchased the property in question from Orloff Zane, Bradford's agent, and that she since had full authority in the house. Upon questioning she reluctantly admitted that Bradford prepared and kept charge of the prostitutes' account books. Stillwell's claim to the ownership and management of the house was corroborated by Ohio County deputy sheriff John Crawford, as well as Henry Murray, an agent of the Ohio Valley Lumber Company and customer at the house. Deputy County Clerk Charles Dannenberg also confirmed the proper transfer of deeds. However, the volume of defense witnesses notwithstanding, the court convicted both Bradford and Stillwell on July 20, Minnie Seidler, Mrs. Bradford's daughter, went as surety on a \$2500 bond for each of the women. Handlan charged that the indictment was an attempt to extort money from Mrs. Bradford resulting from William Yantz's suit, and Nesbitt also employed the angle of financial motivation to his benefit, orating that he "was not influenced by financial consideration like the other attorneys," charging the defense with scheming to cover up "the larger criminal," For a third time Nesbitt called for a Grand Jury session in August to reconsider the felony indictments.²⁷

The penultimate twist to the proceedings was yet to come. The court reconvened on July 25 to try the two women on the second misdemeanor of the illegal sale of beer. At this juncture the three Pittsburgh girls reversed their testimony; one of them, Lizzie Yantz, openly admitted that she had perjured herself. At the trial the week before the issue of their recognition of Alice Bradford had been downplayed, even when questioned directly. Now the girls not only admitted knowing of Alice Bradford's involvement as manager of the house from the moment of their arrival in Wheeling, they revealed that Mrs. Yantz (the mother) and Mrs. Bradford pressured them to conceal this knowledge with the offer of money for bond and "the privilege of skipping it." Other testimony yet seemed to absolve Bradford of her recent complicity in the operation of the brothel when four police officers and other businessmen dealing with the house gave credence to the defense's case. C. Hal Brues, cashier and

collector for the Wheeling Electric Company (later a Board of Control member, city councilman, and city manager) "testified to having collected money from the house for lights for fourteen years, and that since the property had changed hands he had always collected from Mrs. Stillwell." The next day however the defendants were found guilty as charged.²⁸

The wave of publicity and reaction found its mark for the following week the third Grand Jury indicted Bradford, Stillwell, and Foley again, and, in a display of moral indignation against the leaders of the tenderloin community, it indicted 23 additional women, "either in charge of or interested in alleged houses of ill-fame." Mrs. Bradford was cited on yet another count for her collusion with Mabel Copeland and "Big Bess" Allen in the operation of their houses as landlords and madams flocked through city hall to respond to the charges. Judge Hugus offered the vague hope that the state would assist the city in establishing a reform home for prostitutes modeled on the Industrial Home for Girls in Salem, W.Va., though this never came to pass. Two weeks later Hugus sentenced Bradford and Stillwell to one year in jail, allowing a stay of 45 days for an appeal. The excitement over the cases subsided and in September Judge Thayer Melvin of the circuit court overruled the third and final felony indictments. The three girls, confined for 3Y2 months as witnesses, were released to the custody of their parents.²⁹

The denouement of the Bradford affair belongs as much to the folklore of prostitution in Wheeling as to its politics. For reasons inexplicable, Wheeling authorities took no action against Bradford and Stillwell for seven months after their sentencing! During this time city and county elections commanded the attention of city officials, and no one attempted to enforce the women's detention. Bradford's presence in the city was certainly public knowledge for newspapers reported her sale of property in lieu of opening another whorehouse. Suddenly, in late March, 1905 it was discovered that the two had fled the city to Ohio, Stillwell to Steubenville and Bradford to Pasco, a small suburb a mere five miles from Wheeling but out of reach of West Virginia authorities. Theresa Stillwell never returned; it was later rumored she returned to her birthplace in East Liverpool, Ohio. Bradford, however, again for reasons inexplicable, returned to Wheeling of her own volition to begin her term in the Ohio County jail on March 20, 1905.³⁰

In August a public furor again centered on the woman when Charles Henning, clerk of the criminal court, mistakenly authorized her release. Wheeling newspapers sensationalized her escape and criticized the authorities for this latest breach of justice. Meanwhile, confusion prevailed as to when her jail term should actually have begun: on August 15, 1904 (the date of sentencing), 45 days thereafter (as provided by a stay of execution), or on the first actual day of incarceration. Mrs. Bradford herself forestalled further controversy and again voluntarily returned to fulfill her one-year sentence. Rumors circulated about her acts of generosity to other prisoners in the jail, providing bedding, clothing,

and food for them and nursing the sick, only to contract typhoid fever from an inmate she cared for for five weeks. The press depicted her as "Our Lady Bountiful," an epithet which could also be applied with some irony to her professional interests for within months she opened another, larger whorehouse in South Wheeling "over the creek."

The public attention and political enthusiasm invested in the prosecution of two well-entrenched madams precipitated a far more consequential repression of the community of professional prostitutes and their organizers. After the mass indictments in August, 1904 stemming from the Bradford-Stillwell trials, Police Chief John Ritz ordered the closing of all the Alley C brothels in November, 1904. Motivated by stakes in the upcoming municipal elections, Ritz called a conference with Ella Miller, Mayme Joyce, and other madams in his office to deliver an ultimatum to terminate their operation in the alley under a penalty of a \$50 fine and 90 days in jail. Denying any political motivation for the move Ritz nevertheless attempted to use this tactic of a vice crackdown under the ideological cover of regulation to his advantage in the January elections when the twin issues of prostitution and saloons emerged in high relief,

The prostitutes who worked in the alley and vicinity scrambled to relocate; in one case, a madam and five women traveled en masse to Clarksburg, while others scattered to Pittsburgh, Sistersville, and Parkersburg. Many more simply moved over the creek to a tenderloin region already established in South Wheeling. As Ritz had restricted his ultimatum only to those residents of Alley C, he effectively manipulated a dispersal of women to the south side where he knew another community of prostitutes had been growing in a slum area near the river. The *Intelligencer* reported: "The policy of removing the women has been questioned by many on account of the fact that it makes no provision that they shall not inhabit more respectable parts of the city, and thus embarrass the entire community." However, the exiled prostitutes were women who could little afford rent in so-called "respectable" neighborhoods though they relocated to a lower-class slum in the Center Wheeling flood plain area which happened to border on certain older upper- and upper-middle class streets. But the real issue lay not in the potential embarrassment to the community for the general public well knew why hordes of men streamed into Wheeling every weekend, especially after the recent publicity. Ritz's proclamation to close Alley C responded unsuccessfully to the overtly political problem of how to maintain the shifting social/spatial boundaries of an officially tolerated vice district. Though he was closing Alley C as the city's major public institution of commercial sex, the total suppression of prostitution was not at issue due to its financial importance and its articulation within the political structure of local government. Ritz had thus set in motion a continuation of the instrumental policy of municipal control for the effective management of prostitution by redrawing the boundaries of its containment. What followed is history:

Reports have it that a large number of the women have rented houses along Water Street below Twenty-second. Certain houses in that vicinity have already gained notoriety for vice only differing in degree from that attained by the Alley C buildings. Other reports had it that a colony of the outcasts had migrated to West Wheeling, and there was consternation in that peaceful burg across the river yesterday.

Though Ritz paid lip service to the supposed danger of prostitutes scattering to other sections of the city, he did nothing to prevent this obvious result. In fact, the so-called "purge" of the alley was itself ineffective for some women returned to the vicinity for at least five years afterwards. The *Intelligencer* complained:

If the Augean stables are to be cleaned in one section of the town, why not in the other sections? The expediency of a move that will merely scatter a plague may well be questioned and we may be prepared in the course of time to receive complaints from eminently respectable quarters of the city anent unwelcome neighbors, which condition followed the evacuation of the city gas plant district half a dozen years ago.

A broom that will sweep all parts of the house and not merely a room, judging by experience, is to be preferred.

A few madams like Mayme Joyce and Ella Miller chose to linger a while in Alley C, testing the determination of the Police Department, but a general shift of prostitution activities to the south side was now begun.

John Ritz's inclination to bolster the Democrats in the 1905 municipal elections by closing Alley C was not wholly successful. On January 26 the Wheeling electorate ushered in the Republican, William Clemans, as new Chief of Police. However, the Democratic candidate for mayor, Charles Schmidt, defeated his opponent Dr. Thomas Haskins despite adverse criticism that his reputation as a brewer and his alignment with the Schmulbach faction would retain the status quo of vice. The Republican *Intelligencer* went so far as to detail Schmidt's council voting record on the fake hotel in 1900 in the midst of a reform movement, underscoring his support of the notorious White Cloud Hotel. Soon after the election Clemans renewed the cleanup of Alley C when the police raided the "last" house there, forcing Mayme Joyce to relocate to Water Street nearer her compatriots. A month later she stated: "I won't go to the house in Alley C because Chief Clemans told me that if I was ever caught there an example would be made of me." By October Schmidt and Clemans boasted a more effective administration of prostitution; the *Intelligencer* flatly announced "City's Social Evil Under Better System." The purge of Alley C remained in effect, and the Center Wheeling red-light district became the official segregated area. The district already had an undesirable reputation, crowded as it was with troublesome "foreigners," inundated by periodic floods, and clogged with the smoke of the mills. Lo-

calizing the prostitutes here was thought to improve surveillance, but brothels were already strung out along Water, Main, and 23rd Streets, as well as the back alleys of the neighborhood, The Police Department instituted a registration and identification system for all women working as prostitutes, whose street activities at night were also restricted.³⁴

This new pattern of segregating prostitution cannot be attributed solely to the policies of one or two individuals however, for larger social forces were at work. Wheeling, as other larger cities, experienced the painful process of rapid urbanization in ways typical of the period. Wheeling's population expanded by 12.6% in the decade prior to 1900 bringing its population to 38,878. Ohio County's population at this time was nearly 50,000, and Wheeling stood at the center of several other municipal satellites: Bellaire, Bridgeport, and Martins Ferry, Ohio and McMechen, Benwood, Warwood, Glennova, and the smaller suburbs out the pike." Eastern European and other immigration added to the ethnic complexity of the established Anglo, Irish, and German groups, and throughout this period capitalist mergers rationalized and severely delimited the trajectory of economic growth of the city, given the constraints of its urban topography. More significantly, the social transformations accompanying rapid urban growth had increasingly dysfunctional aspects: poverty and prostitution were endemic, and the chronic municipal problems of decaying tenements, inadequate sanitation, and an impure water supply were more often debated than ameliorated. Wheeling did not effectively solve the problem of water purity until 1920, and the morbidity rate for typhoid fever (as a result of coliform bacteria in drinking water) was higher than for any other disease. In 1911 the city Health Department reported that the leading cause of death was by violence, combining totals of industrial accidents, homicide, and suicide. During 1904 and 1905 dozens of people committed suicide by drinking carbolic acid (a popular method sensationalized in the press) or by drowning in the Ohio River. The social landscape was fraught with other dangers. Juvenile gangs roamed the streets and sometimes fought violent battles defending their neighborhood turf: the Dirty Dozens of Goosetown were arch-rivals of the Fightin' Irish and the Howleytown Gang of South Wheeling. Professional tramp-thieves, called "yeggs," moved through the city, and other vagrants congregated along the riverbank or at the upper Market House to find overnight shelter. Police often evicted vagrants from the Market House, arresting them en masse to work off their sentences at the city workhouse or ejecting them from the city entirely. Before the closing of Alley C in 1904 more tramps than usual were seen than in previous years, and the Alley C/Market House area compacted a picture of social demoralization into a distinct spatial zone.

The image of Wheeling in the tri-state region was thus commonly associated with its function as a rough sporting center and wide-open town. The articulation of the social organization of prostitution among other sites of male working class culture in saloons, gambling dens, and dance halls magnified the importance of vice and the sporting life in the

image of Wheeling as a unique urban place. The social perception of this articulation cannot be better evidenced than in an appreciation by a Fairmont, West Virginia editor, C.E. (Ned) Smith, writing in the *Fairmont Times* in 1928. In his editorial he lamented the passing of the "old Wheeling:"

The only reason anybody from this section of the state goes to Wheeling nowadays is for something special. Nobody ever goes to bum around and have a good time like they used to.

Night life in Wheeling was something in the old days. In this year of grace the region below the Creek lies dark and sordid beneath the street lights. A speakeasy or two in every black and some outward evidence of respectability and decay are all that greets the eye of the nocturnal visitor these days. But twenty-five years ago, after Alley C had moved over the creek, Wheeling crooked the finger of hospitality in every direction like the temple tower in ancient Corinth pointed the way to the sailor to that city of pleasure.

Steel workers from the mills, tinplate workers, river men, cattle buyers, farmers, coal miners, horsemen, gamblers, German brewmasters, Irish saloon-keepers, politicians big and little, and boys edging out into the currents of life as one who wades timidly into the cool waters of a mountain stream these all and many others found Wheeling a Mecca to which they made pilgrimage.³⁶

This chauvinistic eulogy enumerates several components of the cultural distinctiveness of Wheeling: as an urban place, an entertainment center, and a context for socialization and the camaraderie of workingmen. As much as its industrial distinctiveness as "The Nail City," Wheeling's cosmopolitanism also derived from an array of entertainments, reflected here in a male-centered perspective, the ideology of "the sporting life." Tragically, the underside of this appreciation resided in the deliberate exploitation of women, culturally mediated in the commercial exchange of prostitution. Curiously, women are absent in Ned Smith's depiction; their existence and degradation are sublimated in his odd but quite appropriate spatial metaphor: "after Alley C had moved over the Creek." But it was not the alley that moved, for the women were expelled; the accommodation of prostitutes "over the creek" perpetuated their subordination as a distinct underclass, and their social segregation as substitutes for working class men completed the industrialization of their sexual function.

(In a subsequent article in the next issue the author will trace the history of the sporting life in Wheeling and explore its relation to prostitution and leisure patterns of working men.)

FOOTNOTES

1. Gutman, Herbert G. *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* 1977 Vintage Books: N.Y., p. 272.
2. Ruth Rosen in *The Lost Sisterhood.- Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (1982 Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore), has delineated the major features of commercialized prostitution and its female subculture in the U.S. in the Progressive Era; in another major study, Judith Walkowitz *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* 1980 Cambridge University Press, has explored this subculture in British cities, with emphasis on state regulation through the Contagious Diseases Act in the nineteenth Century.
3. See Baldwin, Leland *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters* 1941 University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, pp. 87, 114, 186. Baldwin suggests keelboatmen were often accompanied by prostitutes on their voyages, p. 217, note 20. See also Blair, Walter and Franklin J. Meine *Mike Fink: King of the Mississippi Keelboatmen* 1933 Henry Holt & Co.: N.Y. for a lively account of the keelboatmen's machismo and violence.
4. Matthias, Virginia "Natchez-under-the-Hill as it Developed under the Influence of the Mississippi River and the Natchez Trace" October, 1945 *Journal of Mississippi History* 8(4): 201-221. Smith, Catherine B. "The Terminus of the Cumberland Road on the Ohio" 1952-3 *West Virginia History* 14(3): 193-264.
5. See Rosen, Ruth *The Lost Sisterhood*, pp. 147-161 on the relationship between prostitution and women's work.
6. Rebecca Harding Davis *Bits of Gossip* 1904 Houghton, Mifflin, & Co.: N.Y., p. 22.
7. *Wheeling News-Register*, March 11, 1951.
8. *Wheeling Register*, Sept. 18, 1879, August 17, 1890.
9. The account of the trial here is based on *Wheeling Intelligencer* and *Wheeling Register* coverage through the summer of 1904 and on Ohio County Court Records (hereinafter, OCCR) located in the West Virginia Collection at WVU. The relevant information on Alice Bradford in the latter source may be found in Envelopes 386 E-1, 369 E-2, 386 E-2, 387 E-1, and 387 E-2.
10. OCCR Env 369 E-2. A badger game is an extortion racket in which

a woman lures a man into a sexual situation; the victim is then confronted and blackmailed by her husband or pimp.

11. OCCR, Env 386 E-1: See Doctor's Certificate by A.J. Noome; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Jan. 7, 1903.
12. OCCR, Env 386 E-1.
13. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 15, 1903.
14. *Ibid.*, Sept. 3 & 4, 1903, Sept. 17, 1903; *Wheeling Register*, July 28, 1904.
15. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 24, 1904. For a biographical sketch of John Ritz, see *Progressive West Virginians* 1923 Wheeling Intelligencer Publishing Co.: Wheeling, p. 333.
16. *Ibid.*, March 23 & 25, 1904, May 23, 1904.
17. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 28, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, May 28 & 29, 1904.
18. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 6 & 7, 1904.
19. *Ibid.*, June 13, 1904, June 18, 1904.
20. *Ibid.*, June 21, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, June 21, 1904.
21. *Wheeling Register*, June 26, 1904; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 27, 1904.
22. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 29, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, June 26 & 28, 1904.
23. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 1, 1904, July 19 & 20, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, July 19, 1904.
24. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 19, 1904.
25. *Ibid.*; *Wheeling Register*, July 19, 1904.
26. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 20, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, July 20, 1904.
27. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 20 & 21, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, July 20 & 21, 1904.

R

28. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 26, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, July 26, 1904.
29. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, July 27, 1904, Aug. 2, 4, 15, 16, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, July 27, 1904, Sept. 25, 1904. A Florence Crittendon Mission for the rescue of "fallen women" sponsored by the Wheeling chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union had opened in East Wheeling in 1895 but its operation was comparatively small and ineffective.
30. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 20, 1905; March 21 & 23, 1905.
31. *Ibid.*, August 23 & 25, 1905, Jan. 10, 1906, March 19, 1906.
32. *Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1904; *Wheeling Register*, Nov. 18, 24, 1904.
33. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Nov. 22, 1904, Nov. 17, 1904.
34. Within a decade the close supervision of registered prostitutes broadened into medical surveillance as well, with the city Health Dept., Union Mission, and hospital clinics certifying the presence or absence of venereal diseases. By 1916, thirty-five houses of prostitution with a total of 230 women operated in the Center Wheeling district. See McLain, W.H. "The Enforcement of the Injunction and Abatement Act" West Virginia State Dept. of Health, *Quarterly Bulletin*, October, 1926, 13(4): 20-22. On the history of Schmidt's political alliances see *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Jan. 19, 23, 26, 27, 1905. On Clemons' continuation of the Alley C cleanup see *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Feb. 7, 1905, March 10, 1905; "City's Social Evil Under Better System," Oct. 13, 1905.
35. West Virginia State Dept. of Health, *Annual Report*, 1918, pp. 51-4, "Wheeling's Water Supply;" Health Dept., City of Wheeling, *Annual Report*, 1912-13, pp. 8-9; on tramps at the Market House, see *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Feb. 5, 1904, April 12, 1904, Feb. 15, 25, 1905.
36. Quoted in May, Earl Chapin *Pr/no/pia to Wheeling, 1715-1945, A Pageant of Iron and Steel* 1945 Harper and Bros: N.Y., pp. 305-6.

"COKETOWN"
A RECONSTRUCTED HISTORY
By Douglas Waugh

INTRODUCTION

Modern industry forged its way into the upper Ohio Valley, and by the turn of the last century, numerous industrial establishments developed along the river in the Steubenville/Follansbee area. Among the more noted of these establishments were the La Belle Iron Works in Steubenville, The Jefferson Glass Company in Follansbee (1907), and the Koppers Industrial Products Division, also in Follansbee (1914).

The advent of this new industrial growth brought about the creation of several mill and mining towns south of Steubenville on the West Virginia side of the river, Follansbee, established by June, 1906 (its charter date) by Benjamin G. Follansbee and the Brooke County Improvement Company, originally housed employees of the Follansbee mill and other industries in the immediate vicinity. Other company towns included Power, Windsor Heights, and Beech Bottom, all created by the Beech Bottom Power Company of West Virginia and located about ten to fifteen miles south of Follansbee.

In the years before W.W. I, the La Belle Iron Works Corporation, needing coke as a resource to operate its Steubenville plant, approached the Wheeling Steel Corporation's Ohio County branch and expressed the economic benefits that a coke-producing plant in the immediate Follansbee vicinity could provide for local industries. If Wheeling Steel would erect such a plant, La Belle would have direct access to a coke source to drive its iron blast furnaces, and the other major steel corporations in Weirton and Follansbee would also benefit.

Wheeling Steel, already with plans on the table for the construction of an electrically-driven sheet mill at Beech Bottom, agreed to establish a coke division near the Koppers plant north of Follansbee.

A NEED FOR HOUSING

The new Wheeling Steel Coke Plant immediately encountered a problem common to plants in rural areas such as Follansbee: a shortage of local labor. Follansbee had a relatively small population in the early 1900s, and most of its inhabitants were already employed in other occupations (i.e. - mills, glass-making, farming, etc.). This labor problem, coupled with the cost and inefficiency of transporting out-of-town employees daily to and from work, placed the plant at a disadvantage. Beset with these problems, Wheeling Steel sought to obtain nearby land from the La Belle Corporation for the building of company lodgings to house its out-of-town workers and their families.

La Belle owned several large tracts of forest and grassland across the river which the company dealt to Wheeling Steel because La Belle needed

Wheeling Steel's coke and wanted to do what was necessary to keep the new plant happy and thriving, This move solved Wheeling Steel's labor shortage, and it also offered incoming employees an adequate and inexpensive housing opportunity. Wheeling Steel began construction on the housing project in 1921, although the actual deed of sale was not signed by both parties until April 10, 1923.

COKETOWN IS BORN

Perhaps the most important plot was a strip roughly 600 feet long, just east of the plant and north of Follansbee. It was here that Coketown was born.

The Wheeling Steel Corporation hauled twenty prefabricated houses onto the newly purchased strip and completed the La Belle Iron Works Detail Layout in less than six weeks. Plant management immediately hired twenty out-of-town employees to fill the vacant houses, therein completing establishment of Coketown. Some have argued that the twenty houses were transported from an abandoned mining town near Burgettstown, Pennsylvania, and were reconstructed on the newly acquired property, but Wheeling Steel and the majority of former Coketown residents maintain that the buildings were new.

Employees paid for their lodgings through an \$18.00 payroll reduction. As the Ohio Valley recovered from the Depression, the plant management increased this deduction to \$23.00, They raised it later to \$35.00 and \$48.00 during the 1940's and 50's. The deduction covered all utility expenses except electricity, a minimal extra expense. The plant assumed all responsibility for repairs and maintenance, but employee families often carried out basic maintenance duties.

THE LAYOUT OF COKETOWN

The Wheeling Steel Corporation erected a mini-modern town. Coketown was arranged into four rows of five houses each, with "row one" being the northern-most line of houses, "row two," the next line, and so on, moving southward. The porches of the first row faced northward; those of the second, south; the third, north, and those of the final row, south. The plant apparently arranged the rows this way so that no one house would face the rear of another, and more importantly, to accommodate the dual sewage pipeline system (of which rows one and two would share one line and rows three and four would share the other). Combination out houses/coal storage sheds were erected between rows one and two and between rows three and four, each line of five running parallel to the two sewage pipes running east to west (there was one outhouse for every two houses). The small town rested upon a gradual decline (from east to west), and draining ditches were conveniently dug along each row of houses so that water could run, along with the sewage, into the main sewage pipeline,

The town obtained its electricity from a power line stretching

north to south, installed by the Monongahela West Penn Power Company to serve the entire northern panhandle of West Virginia. Coketown residents also had convenient access to a small trolley system and station and the telephone service by the Bell system serving Follansbee.

LIFE IN COKETOWN

Nothing remarkable or alluring characterized Coketown: Wheeling Steel was little concerned with the project's beauty, only with its practicality. The houses were identical "shoehox" constructions of 30 x 22 feet, with each having a living room, small kitchen, and two bedrooms (Coketown didn't have modern, built-in bathrooms until the 1940's). However nonelegant the project may have appeared to outsiders, its occupants recognized it as home, and the members of these twenty families soon established a closely-knitted relationship.

Most of the families were new to the Follansbee area and didn't know many people in the surrounding towns. The men worked in the mill daily and came to know each other; the isolation of location brought the children of Coketown together and cemented happy friendships as well as a bond among the mothers. Although they used trolley cars as transportation to neighboring Steubenville and Follansbee, these families found it much more convenient to remain at home.

With the widening of Sinclair Avenue (now Route 2) between Follansbee and Steubenville, the beginning of an independent bus system from Wellsburg to the Steubenville Bridge in 1935, Coketown residents started to become interchangeable in a sense and sometimes synonymous with Follansbee citizens. Tradition still kept Coketowners together, but then such common grounds as Follansbee High School, Wheeling Steel's expanded Coke plant (at which more Follansbee men then worked), and Follansbee's commercial mainstreet drew the two populations together and weakened Coketown's seclusion.

Coketown, although not possessing the commercial genre of a Follansbee or Steubenville, did produce a few memorable social facilities: the Red Horse Tavern, a speakeasy opened after prohibition (later called the Red Flamingo), and Young's Diner, an abandoned trolley car converted into a makeshift restaurant just south of the housing complex. Likewise, George Y, Dean's Tea Company, located in the Coketown landlord's farmhouse, and Celick's Gas Station (later Durham's), a candy source for Coketown's youth, just behind the farmhouse, were other examples of the small town's enterprises. Amusingly enough, Coketown even boasted its own fire department, a small fire hose in wheels, located between rows two and three.

The children of Coketown were as innocent and inseparable as any others their age in the 40's and 50's. The boys played football in an uneven field just north of their houses, while the girls, using collected bottle and box labels from empty grocery containers, set up a simulated store and created their own local company. At nightfall all of the kids

would return to their homes, blackened by the sooty air, to soak in a scalding tub until their skin regained its original color.

Bathing and washing clothes were two facets of the Coketown repertoire which could not be neglected. Wives would wash and rewash laundry daily to keep a step ahead of the filthy mist constantly circulating throughout the town. Children sometimes bathed twice a day, and a soiled husband, returning from a day's work at the plant, was "immediately hiked to the tub to strip and receive his scrubbing." Women today complain of having to dust their furniture once a week, when in contrast, Coketown women dusted twice daily! Combatting the filth of Coketown became commonplace, but in no way did it detract from their intrinsic happiness or their standard middle-class respectability.

DEMISE

So, this was Coketown, and such was its story. A supposedly temporary housing development, having been given a life expectancy of five to ten years, somehow survived until the 1960's. Time and weather took their toll: the buildings visibly deteriorated faster than Wheeling Steel could mend them. As it became evident that the old, weak houses were beyond repair, Wheeling Steel announced plans to condemn the town as each house was vacated.

The corporation issued no eviction notices, nor did they force any of the families to vacate their dwellings by any other means. The people merely foresaw the eventual fate of their beloved neighborhood, and one-by-one sought alternate housing in Follanshee and other nearby areas. As each family moved out, its house was destroyed. Wheeling Steel condemned the last of Coketown by 1969. A once-thriving section of the Follansbee/Steubenville area exists no longer.

SOURCES

Primary research was done from maps and deed information in the Brooke County Courthouse in Wellsburg, the Follanshee City Building, and the State Road Department in Wellsburg.

Interviews were conducted with Grover Pugh, former resident, Shirley and William Columbo, former residents, Tom Care, former head of the payroll department of Wheeling Steel, and John Stiff, oldest surviving resident of Coketown.

CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Sykes has a master's degree in American studies from the University of Pennsylvania, a Ph.D. in American literature from the University of Pittsburgh, and a master's degree in Japanese studies from Kyushu Daigaku, Kita-Kyushu, Japan. Having formerly taught at Bethany College, he has been on the faculty of West Liberty State College since 1968. As a Fulbright Exchange Professor to Japan in 1963-64, Dr. Sykes taught at Kanazawa University, Hiroshima University, and the University of Tokyo.

David Rose, formerly of Elm Grove and now a resident of Mt. Vernon, New York, published an article in the Autumn/Winter 1985 issue. He earned his M.A. at the New School for Social Research.

Douglas S. Waugh, formerly of Follansbee, West Virginia, teaches ninth grade English at the Seminole Presbyterian School in Tampa, Florida. This essay originally was written as a research assignment in a West Virginia studies class at West Liberty State College, where he was graduated in 1986.