Christmas Lights and Community Building in America

By Brian Murray
Yale College

MORE LIGHTS!

Christmas is Bill Clot's favorite time of the year. Every year during the holiday season, the Pinecrest, Florida native literally lights up with excitement as he begins to erect his world-famous holiday lights display, consisting of over 600,000 light bulbs wired to about 500 extension cords. According to Clot's son, his father's 50,000 square-foot property "looks like daylight" as he adorns trees, Santa Claus and his entourage, and even a group of ice skating penguins with brilliant lights. In 2002, NBC's *Today* labeled the display the nation's best.[1]

While Christmas lights displays may seem commonplace to us today, they were not always so. In fact, the modern ritual of hanging string after string of colored lights right after Thanksgiving (and often not taking them down until well after Christmas) only began in its current form after World War II. Our veritable front yard amusement parks of light are uniquely American in character. Drawing on ancient Pagan and Christian traditions far removed from our extravagance and coupled with an increasingly urbanized population, American Christmas lights displays represent a contrast between modernity and antiquity.

It is impossible to study the emergence of American winter light rituals without also tracing the history of the Christmas tree, which helped bring Christmas lights to the forefront of American national consciousness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For it was, in part, on the Christmas tree that Edison advertised his new incandescent light bulb, forever tying it to the evergreen branches of Christmas tradition.[2] With the popularization of the electrically lighted Christmas tree first as a local, then national symbol in the period between 1882 and 1940, the seeds of the modern American Christmas tradition were planted. Competition between Christmas light manufacturers brought new technologies to light design, making such lights more accessible to everyday people. Although World War II diverted attention from the home front to overseas conflicts, returning GIs were eager to embrace a booming economy and rejoice in their hard-fought victory. Post-war economic growth, along with an American desire for pure fantasy, led to the emergence of the modern light tradition.

---

[1] David Seidman. *Holiday Lights!* (North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2003), 34.
[2] Warren Sloat. "The Wizard of your Christmas Tree," *American Heritage*, December 2003, 36.

Christmastime ritual largely rooted in "Yule" (meaning "wheel")—the medieval pagan celebration of the winter solstice. Although there were many variations of the holiday among different cultures, Yule was generally celebrated from mid-November to the end of January and centered on the ceremonial burning of the "Yule Log" during the short, dark days of winter. The first documentary evidence of the Yule Log dates back to 1184 in Germany. Because northern Europeans could expect about six hours of daylight on the shortest days of winter, they saw the Yule log as a light in the darkness promising the sun's return. It was also thought to ward off evil spirits associated with the darkness.[3] Many churches incorporated yuletide traditions into Christmas festivals and Yule logs lit up homes on Christmas Eve until the late nineteenth century, when cast iron stoves replaced open hearths.[4] The adoption of the Yule log as a Christian tradition was representative of the central role light played in the celebration of the Christ, as Jesus himself was seen as the light of the world. The light of the Yule log thus came to represent Jesus rather than the mystical pagan spirits.[5]

In addition to burning the Yule log, Christians all over the world practiced several other light-based traditions at Christmas time. One such tradition was Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation celebrated on the second of February. According to Jewish law, every male must be brought to the temple to be blessed forty days after his birth. In Luke 2:32, when Jesus arrives at the temple to be blessed, Simeon sees him as "a light to lighten the Gentiles." In many cultures Candlemas represents the last day of the Christmas season and the time when ornaments are taken down and greenery burnt.[6] A German variation of this ritual was to determine on February 2 whether or not the dark winter would continue for another six weeks by waiting for the emergence of a hedgehog from its den. When German settlers arrived in North America, they found the groundhog to be a suitable substitute, and the tradition of Groundhog Day began.[7] Another light ritual was Christingle, or "Christ-light," service. This tradition originated in the Moravian church in the eighteenth century and gained popularity in English Protestant churches. During the service money is collected for charity with the Christingle candle representing the light of Jesus.[8] Mexicans and many Southwestern Americans light small bonfires at Christmas in the celebration of Luminaria, another celebration of the light of Jesus.[9] Light has clearly played a prominent role in different Christmastime traditions all over the world.

In the United States, the evergreen tree became the locus of Christmas ritual. The origins of ritual evergreen use can be traced to the Druids, who used holly and mistletoe as symbols of eternal life possessing of magical powers able to keep evil spirits away. In the late middle ages, Germans and Scandinavians brought evergreen trees into their homes as symbols of the life of the forthcoming spring.[10] German-speaking Moravians in Pennsylvania and North Carolina transplanted this tradition to America in the early nineteenth century. According to historian Alfred L. Shoemaker, the earliest documented reference to a Christmas tree in America is located in an 1821 journal entry of Lancaster, Pennsylvania resident Matthew Zahm: "Sally & our Thos. & Wm. Hensel was out for Christmas trees, on the hill at Kendrick's saw mill."[11] The Moravians practiced the "putzing" ("dressing up") of these trees, initiating a decorative tradition that soon came to include lights in addition to fruit, sweets and ornaments.[12] According to Charles Dickens, the Christmas tree was a "new German toy."[13]

---

[3] Gerry Bowler. *The World Encyclopedia of Christmas*. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 2000), 254-255.
[4] "The Yule Log." <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/noel/angl/buche.htm> (5 December 2004)
[5] Bowler, 133.
[6] Ibid., 36.
[7] "European Roots." http://www.groundhog.org/history/tradition.shtml (9 December 2004).
[8] Bowler, 119.
[9] Ibid., 136.

The close correlation of meaning between evergreens and lights—symbols of life and hope in the dead of winter—was not lost upon many people. Although legend has it that Martin Luther first placed candles upon a tree in the sixteenth century after being inspired by a starry Christmas Eve sky, the first documented references to this practice came more than a century later, in 1660 in Germany.[14] In 1747 the Pennsylvania Dutch introduced the "lichstock" ("light stick"), a candle-lit advent pyramid constructed of wood that is believed to be the predecessor to the modern Christmas tree. Drawing upon the German traditions of nearby Pennsylvania, in 1832 Harvard Professor Charles Follen decorated an evergreen with candles in what is believed to be the first tree decorated in such a fashion in the United States.[15]

Because Christmas trees like Professor Follen's were initially very expensive to display, many public and private exhibitions were established, often either for charity or personal profit. As the craze for Christmas trees began to catch on, entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to turn a profit and began to open tree lots. In 1851, woodsman Mark Carr opened the first of these retail outfits in New York City's Washington Market. He cut the trees himself in the nearby Catskill Mountains and soon established a steady business.[16] By 1856 the candle-adorned Christmas tree had become so popular that President Franklin Pierce decided to erect one in the White House.[17] What began as a German custom in rural Pennsylvania had become a nationally recognized symbol of the American Christmas.

As the candle-lit Christmas tree became more commonplace, many people attempted to devise solutions to deal with the variety of problems posed by candles. One of the primary issues with candles was simply keeping them attached to the tree branches as they melted down. People employed various methods of attaching them to trees, including piercing the candle and branch with a long needle, wiring the candle to the tree, using flexible candles to wrap around branches, and using melted wax to serve as an adhesive between the candle and the branch. A breakthrough came in 1878 when Frederick Artz invented the clip-on candleholder, a device that securely fastened the candle to the branch.[18] Still, people lit candles for no more than half an hour at a time and vigilantly monitored the tree, a bucket of sand or water always at hand in case of fire.[19] Some people seeking an alternative to open-flame candles attached oil lamps and lanterns to branches. However, these devices were very hot and heavy and so did little to improve tree safety. One English inventor even manufactured a metal Christmas tree with gas jets, but this idea failed to achieve widespread popularity.[20]

---

[10] "Traditions – Trees and Ornaments." http://www.christmas-tree.com/where.html (5 December 2004)

[11] Alfred L. Shoemaker. *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk-Cultural Study*. (Lancaster, PA: Intelligencer Printing Company, 1959), 52.

[12] Pat Browne and Ray B. Browne, eds., *The Guide to United States Popular Culture*. (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001), 170.

[13] Richard P. Bucher. "The Origin and Meaning of the Christmas Tree." November 2000, <http://users.rcn.com/tlclcms/chrtree.htm>, (8 December 2004).

[14] Bowler, 132.

[15] William D. Crump. *The Christmas Encyclopedia*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 88-90.

[16] "The Christmas Tree in England and America." <http://www.oldandsold.com/articles03/santaclaus10.shtml> (5 December 2004).

[17] Browne, 170.

Not surprisingly, candle-lit trees brought grief to insurance companies who increasingly had to deal with claims related to Christmas tree fires. In 1908, a group of insurance companies collectively refused to pay for fires started by Christmas trees with candles, adopting a clause of "knowing risks" in their policies. This clause was inserted partly because of the advent of the safer electric Christmas light, but also because of the fact that fire was practically inevitable when candles were placed on trees.[21] According to Margaret Bulgin, a child of the Great Depression who grew up without electricity in poverty-stricken Appalachia, "we were never allowed to use candles. They're just so tricky. And father, being in the fire-fighting business, wasn't about to let us do that anyway."[22]

Although the electric Christmas light would not become commonplace until years after Thomas Edison first created the incandescent light bulb, his invention spelled doom to the candle-lit tree. In 1879, watching the world's first truly functional light bulb give off 40 hours of continuous light, Edison knew he would be a rich man. While Edison is mostly remembered for his scientific genius, he also had a knack for making a buck. During the 1880 Christmas season, he constructed an eight-mile underground wiring system in order to power a grand light display on the grounds of his Menlo Park factory. Situated along the railroad that passed between Manhattan and Philadelphia, Edison's light display so enraptured passers-by that one reporter labeled him "the enchanter." The light show was a sensationalist bit of self-promotion and part of a bid to gain a contract to power Manhattan with electricity.[23] It was the first time (but hardly the last) that Christmas sentiment was used as a shrewd marketing tool. In 1900 retail stores began stringing lights in their windows, taking advantage of Edison's tactics and starting a trend that has lasted until the present day.[24]

In 1882, Edison displayed the first electrically-lit Christmas tree in the New York City home of his friend and the Vice President of the Edison Electric Company, Edward Johnson. The tree sat atop a motorized box that spun it around as eighty red, white and blue lights blinked on and off to the delight of Johnson's guests.[25] Powered by an Edison generator in the city, Johnson's tree soon garnered media attention. An 1884 *New York Times* article expressed the excitement many people felt for the new invention:

---

[18] Bowler, 132.

[19] Karal Ann Marling. *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 56.

[20] Bowler, 132.

[21] Penne L. Restad. *Christmas in America: A History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 114.

[22] Eliot Wigginton and His Students, eds. *A Foxfire Christmas*. (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 13.

[23] Warren Sloat. "The Wizard of your Christmas Tree," *American Heritage*, December 2003, 36.

[24] Seidman, 26.

[25] Marling, 56.

> A pretty as well as novel Christmas tree was shown to a few friends by Mr. E.H. Johnson, President of the Edison Company for Electric Lighting . . . the tree was lighted by electricity, and the children never beheld a brighter tree or one more highly colored than the children of Mr. Johnson when the current was turned and the tree began to revolve.[26]

Despite popular fascination with Johnson's Christmas tree, electric Christmas lights remained available only to the very rich until the early twentieth century. Because lights had to be wired individually and needed a power source—either in the form of an expensive generator or battery—they were not practical for the average American.[27] One 1884 *New York Times* editorial noted the exclusivity of electric Christmas lights and dubbed them "extravagant."[28] By 1900 prices had gone down a bit, but not much. A sixteen-foot strand of lights cost around $12, an exorbitant sum in those days. In fact, between the lights, the generator and wireman services, a Christmas tree could cost up to $300.[29] As a result, many people instead chose to rent lights.[30] However, by 1914, the cost of a sixteen-foot light string had gone down to $1.75.[31] By the 1920s, lights were within the reach of many Americans—the result of technological improvements spurred by business competition.

The main goals of Christmas light manufacturers were to make the lights easier to use, safer, and more economical. Although the first Christmas tree was adorned with electric lights in 1882, it was not until 1890, when General Electric bought Edison's light bulb factory, that lights were commercially distributed for the first time.[32] As mentioned before, these lights were cumbersome because they needed to be individually wired, usually by a professional. They were also very hot and, though safer than candles, could still cause tree fires. A breakthrough in lighting technology came in 1903 when GE offered the first pre-wired eight-socket light strings, also known as "festoons." These light strings were safer and easier to use than earlier lights. When GE's application for a patent on the technology was rejected, other companies quickly jumped at the chance to produce the first viably marketable light sets.[33] In 1907, the Excelsior Supply Company advertised the new technology in *Hardware Dealer's Magazine* as possessing "[n]o smoke, no dirt, no grease, no danger from fire. Candles are dangerous. Electric lights are safe." Included with each light set were "eight miniature electric lamps with assorted red, green and white bulbs and enough flexible cord to decorate any table, chandelier, or Christmas tree. Four dry cell batteries furnish the current."[34] The ad focused on the distinctions between candles and electric lights and emphasized the benefits of the new technology. No further technological breakthroughs were reached until 1927, when GE introduced parallel wiring to light strings. This innovation allowed strings to stay lit even if one bulb went out—a feature that the earlier series-wired strings lacked. This technology did not become widespread until after WWII, when larger light displays called for the reliability of parallel light strings.[35]

---

[26] "In and About the City." *New York Times*, 27 December 1884, p. 5.

[27] Bowler, 132.

[28] Judy Stark. "Starry Nights." *St. Petersburg Times*, 9 December 2000.

[29] Stark, 1.

[30] Seidman, 26.

[31] Marling, 56.

[32] Marling, 56.

[33] "Interesting Facts." *The Antique Christmas Lights Site*. <http://www.oldchristmaslights.com/interesting_facts.htm> (9 December 2004).

[34] "Winking Fairy Lights for Christmas Trees." Advertisement, Excelsior Supply Company. *Hardware Dealer's Magazine*, December 1907.

The market for lights was also completely restructured in 1925, when fifteen manufacturers joined together to form a trade union, the National Outfit Manufacturer's Association (NOMA). These manufacturers quickly dominated the market, establishing a virtual monopoly on the Christmas lights business that would last until the 1960s, when foreign imports, particularly from China, would offer stiff competition.[36]

The early twentieth century saw the Christmas tree become the household item that it is today. In 1900 one in five American families decorated Christmas trees in their homes, mostly without electric lights; by 1930, dressing up the tree was a universal custom, and the majority of Americans used electric lighting.[37] This popularization of the electrically-lit Christmas tree was due in large part to efforts by public officials and philanthropists to bring it into the public consciousness. What began in 1895 with President Cleveland's order to decorate the White House Christmas tree with electric lights soon became a national phenomenon of publicly displayed trees.[38] Electrically-lit community trees emerged as early as 1904 in San Diego and 1909 in Pasadena, but these displays failed to garner nationally significant attention.[39] The New York City Christmas celebration, begun in 1912 as the brainchild of a group of philanthropists, served to solidify the grasp of the electrically-lit Christmas tree on the public imagination and gave new meaning to its image.

The group of people who sponsored the celebration was composed of wealthy citizens with fat pocketbooks and a penchant for reform. Calling their group the "Tree of Light," these reformers mourned the loss of community that had accompanied the rapid industrialization and urbanization at the turn of the century. They thought that city dwellers lacked a sense of common identity, a characteristic feature of so many small towns.[40] According to William B. Waits, author of *The Modern Christmas in America*, the Tree of Light group wanted the Christmas celebration to inject a sense of small-town camaraderie into the impersonal New York metropolis. The reformers felt that the Christmas celebration, with the outdoor electrically-lit tree as its centerpiece (courtesy of the Edison Electric Company), would achieve three major objectives in their quest to re-instill a small-town feeling into New York. First, the celebration, which was open to all social classes, would encourage greater friendship ties between strangers from all different backgrounds and encourage social interaction between people who otherwise would not have spoken to one another. In this vein, the reformers also wanted to promote religious unity and racial mixing. The Christmas celebration was a Christian one, and by bringing it into the purview of the public the reformers hoped to promote a religious homogeneity reminiscent of a small town. However, the festival ended up promoting a secularized interaction of people of different religious backgrounds, who gathered at the

---

[35] Crump, 92.
[36] Sloat, 36.
[37] Crump, 91.
[38] Browne, 170.
[39] Browne, 170.
[40] William B. Waits. *The Modern Christmas in America*. (New York: NYU Press, 1993), 152.

Christmas tree to revel in the magnificent lights and the newfound sense of community rather than to worship Jesus. By bringing people of different nationalities and ethnicities together they sought to promote tolerance between people who felt distinctly different from one another.[41] As the *New York Times* reported days before the celebration, "New York's great foreign population will hear the music of their own lands in their own tongues—German, Scandinavian, Italian, French, perhaps."[42]

By promoting inter-class, inter-religious and inter-racial social interaction, the Tree of Light group ultimately wanted to strengthen the city's identity and create a popular consciousness of belonging. Although their goals may have been too ambitious to be fully achieved—few people actually socialized with strangers at the celebration and the city remained an impersonal place to live—the reformers succeeded in establishing the community Christmas tree as what the *New York Times* dubbed "a place where all may gather, rich or poor, on Christmas Eve . . . and feel that it is their tree, their Christmas, and that the spirit of peace and good-will encircles them, no matter how friendless they may be."[43]

The Christmas celebration held in New York City turned out to be a huge success and the tradition soon spread rapidly across the nation. Ten thousand people attended each night of New York City's weeklong celebration, with an astounding 80,000 people coming to see the tree on Christmas Eve. Smaller celebrations were held that same year in Boston and Hartford, and hundreds more cropped up in cities throughout the country during the next few years.[44] In 1913, President Wilson instituted the first national Christmas tree lighting ceremony and thereby increased demand for community tree lighting celebrations.[45] In 1914, there were more than 300 Christmas festivals in the United States, each with an electrically-lit tree as its centerpiece; by 1920 these celebrations were commonplace in most American cities.[46] The huge success of Christmas festivals surely came as a delight to the Tree of Light group, who in 1912 had "hope[d] that the public Christmas tree may become a national feature, to be found in every town and village."[47]

An unintended factor in popularizing the Christmas tree may have been the First World War. As New Yorkers had looked to the Christmas tree in the Tree of Light group's celebration as a symbol of community and identity, so too did Americans as a whole look to the tree as a means of forging a national identity. Much like the Yuletide traditions of centuries past, lights at Christmas time may have given people hope for an end to the fighting in Europe and passage through dark times.

While indoor Christmas tree lights were gaining in popularity throughout the first three decades of the 1900s, outdoor lights like those used in community celebrations had yet to be introduced to the public. The Society for Electrical Development, an electric power trade organization, recognized the potential market for outdoor lights. In 1923, the organization financed and publicized the first outdoor national Christmas tree. President Coolidge, in a concession to the power industry, agreed to move the lighting ceremonies outside the White House to the Ellipse. Although many city Christmas celebrations had already featured outdoor trees, the fact that this tree was a national symbol meant the move carried special significance.[48] Only two years later, in 1925, outdoor lights were offered commercially for the first time.[49] Sales of outdoor lights picked up when GE and Edison Electric distribution companies began to sponsor neighborhood "decorating with color-light" competitions.[50] Granted, outdoor lights were hot, impractical and expensive, but the seeds were being planted for a revolution in outdoor lighting that would commence with the close of the Second World War.

---

[41] Ibid., 154-155.
[42] "Public's Xmas Tree to Stand for a Week." *New York Times*, 19 December 1912, p. 11.
[43] "Public's Xmas Tree to Stand for a Week." *New York Times*, 19 December 1912, p. 11.
[44] Waits, 153.
[45] Crump, 93.
[46] Waits, 152.
[47] "Public's Xmas Tree to Stand for a Week." *New York Times*, 19 December 1912, p. 11.

The ability of Christmas lights to comfort people in desperate conditions continued to manifest itself through the 1930s, as the Great Depression cast a shadow over the nation's morale. All-blue light displays, popular during this period, reflected the somber mood of a nation in trouble.[51] However, because in 1930 only 10 percent of rural Americans had electricity in their homes, any such light displays were few and far between. As Depression-era Appalachian resident Leona Carver said, "Back then, people didn't have no electricity. There were just lamps and candles."[52] A positive development for Christmas lights to come out of the Great Depression was the 1935 New Deal-sponsored Rural Electrification Administration. The REA worked with initiatives such as the Tennessee Valley Authority to electrify rural homes. By 1939, 25 percent of rural Americans were receiving electricity, demonstrating a trend that increasingly allowed isolated Americans to enjoy the comfort of Christmas lights.[53] In an expanding global community beset by urbanization, war, depression and increasingly impersonal technology, the sight of a lighted Christmas tree continued to offer solace to millions of Americans.

During the darkest depths of World War II, millions of people still viewed the lighted Christmas tree as a symbol of hope for a peaceful future. In *Christmas Under Fire*, a British film shot during the Blitz at the end of 1940, a Christmas tree brightens a crowded tube station where a group of Britons stands huddled together "unbeaten, unconquered and unafraid." The film was made as an appeal to the United States for assistance against the relentless bombing of Hitler's Luftwaffe, its imagery selected to strike a chord in the hearts of Americans.[54] In spite of a home front desire for the comfort of electric Christmas lights, the war and its immediate aftermath put a damper on their availability. During the war, GE turned a light shortage into a war slogan by imploring people to celebrate a "Victory Christmas" by using fewer lights. By 1947, GE was still unable to meet the demand for Christmas lights, which had increased significantly since the end of the war.[55]

The economic shortages of the post-war years soon gave way to the "superabundance" of the 1950s. After years of war, returning GIs and their families were quick to embrace a booming peacetime economy marked by high consumption. As the baby boom led to a sharp population increase, the demand for housing quickly shot up as well. Homebuyers were aided by the availability of long-term mortgage loans via the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, which created a Veteran's Administration to help the sixteen million returning soldiers and sailors purchase homes. The VA worked so closely with the Federal Housing Administration to provide these loans that the two were often considered to be a single effort. As millions of families moved into their new homes, they felt a sense of hope for a better future.[56] At the national community Christmas tree lighting ceremony in 1957, President Eisenhower remarked on the power of the ceremony to bring these oft dispersed families together: "The custom we now observe brings us together for a few minutes this one night…you and I, here, are not alone in a world indifferent and cold. We are part of a numerous company—united in the brotherhood of Christmas."[57] Many Americans manifested this sentiment by stringing lights over their roofs and walls during Christmas time.[58] Armed with more disposable income than at any prior time in their lives, Americans met the post-war economic boom with a newfound sense of freedom in their purchases. The sheer availability of so many different products, coupled with a desire for a sense of community, allowed Christmas lights to become commonplace in the average American home.

---

[48] Waits, 160.
[49] Sloat, 36.
[50] "Interesting Facts." *The Antique Christmas Lights Site*.
<http://www.oldchristmaslights.com/interesting_facts.htm> (9 December 2004).
[51] Sloat, 36.
[52] Wigginton, 17.
[53] "TVA: Electricity for all." <http://newdeal.feri.org/tva/tva10.htm> (9 December 2004).
[54] A.W. Purdue and J.M. Golby. *The Making of the Modern Christmas*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 131.
[55] Marling, 58.

One of the major consequences of the new economic order and technological progress was the rise of fads in Christmas light design. While there had always been trends in light design—from pear shaped bulbs to Viennese-produced figural lights in the shapes of Santa Claus, clowns, animals, and cartoon figures—lighting after WWII was susceptible to the fickle tastes of a culture of abundance. The first great post-war Christmas light fad was the Bubble Light, patented in 1944 by Carl Otis, a Montgomery Ward accountant. When Otis's bosses at Montgomery Ward rejected the design, which consisted of a large base with a long candle-shaped bulb filled with methylene chloride, a chemical that boiled and bubbled at low temperatures, Otis took it to NOMA, which quickly purchased the design. Bubble Lights soon became the most popular Christmas lights in history as millions of Americans rushed to purchase them. However, as happens with all fads, interest in bubble lights soon declined and within a few years they were relegated to the bargain bin.[59] Another late 1940s fad was the aluminum Christmas tree, which featured "color wheels" lighted by a floodlight. One 1954 Lord & Taylor advertisement flaunted their line of Christmas lights, which included sparkle lights, twinkle lights, Swedish luma candles, star lights and elfin lights. The ad also emphasized the fact that "Christmas lights can do so many things—they twinkle, they flicker, they blink."[60] Miniature lights became popular in the 1950s and remained so until the late 1980s, when traditional cone-shaped lights made a comeback.[61] In the 1990s, electricityhogging icicle lights became popular, typifying the non-functional excess of post-war light design.[62]

---

[56] Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 204.
[57] "Message at Tree Lighting." *New York Times*, 24 December 1957, p. 8.
[58] Seidman, 26.
[59] Browne, 170.
[60] "Christmas Lights Can Do So Many Things." Advertisement, Lord & Taylor. *New York Times*, 12 December 1954.
[61] Sloat, 36.

Outdoor lighting became a popular phenomenon during the 1950s. In December of 1950, Joseph H. Ward, executive vice-president of the Noma Electric Company, predicted that the booming economy would lead to an increase in Christmas lighting: "This is the first year since the war that there is enough electrical power and merchandise to really go all out . . . I think we'll have brilliantly decorated towns for at least several Christmases to come in contrast to the blackout of Christmas lights during World War II."[63] While many community Christmas celebrations still embraced the electrically-lit tree as their focal point, Christmas lights were increasingly strung elsewhere in the city as part of the celebration. In 1957 the sixty-five-foot tree in Rockefeller Center was "lined with tributary trees . . . that bloomed in pale green with inner lighting."[64] In contrast to the centrality of the New York City Christmas celebration, festivals in Southern California reflected the suburban sprawl of the Los Angeles area. That same year the Miracle Mile was illuminated by "27 giant snowmen along Wilshire Blvd., from Sycamore to Fairfax Aves."[65] Although the display lacked a focal point like the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center, it appealed to motorists who could look out of their windows as they drove down Wilshire Boulevard and observe the lights. This automobile-centered approach to community light designs called for bigger and better light displays capable of catching passengers' attention as they drove by. In Altadena's "world famed" display, "mile-long rows" of giant Himalayan deodar trees "were strung with thousands of colored electric lights." The display was so bright that "cars driving through Christmas Tree Lane [did] not turn on lights but [instead used] the colored lights of the trees for guidance."[66] Although someone viewing Christmas lights from the windows of their car may not have felt the same personal connection to his neighbors as would have someone gathering at a community tree on foot, the immense scale of the lighting displays still provided a shared spectacle in the midst of a sprawling city.

Another factor in the popularization of Christmas lights during the 1950s was the advent of community-sponsored Christmas decoration competitions. GE had sponsored such competitions in the late 1920s, but they were not comparable in size and popularity to those of the post war years. Competitions were often sponsored by a city's chamber of commerce and judged by city dignitaries. They encouraged citywide participation, not only by homeowners but by "churches, shops and factory plants" as well.[67] As a result, Christmas lights illuminated residential, commercial and industrial landscapes. Competitions were also held between cities, further encouraging widespread light decorating. In 1956, Orange County, California, held a "40 Miles of Christmas Smiles" competition to encourage a county-wide lighting boom.[68] Christmas light competitions provided people with a unique opportunity to gain a sense of participation within their large, impersonal communities.

---

[62] Seidman, 140.

[63] "Cities Go All Out for Brightest of Christmases." *New York Times*, December 11 1950, p. 20.

[64] "About New York." *New York Times*, December 25, 1957, p.34.

[65] "Santa Pulls Switch and Lights Up Miracle Mile." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 November 1956, p.3.

[66] "Christmas Lights Gleam on Tall Altadena Deodars." *Los Angeles Times*, 25 December 1950, p.10.

[67] "Valley Cities to Pick Best Yule Decorations." *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1953, p. G14.

[68] "Christmas Lights Turned On at Laguna." *Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 1956, p. 11.

Today it is hard to imagine an American neighborhood without Christmas lights. According to Minami International Corporation, a leading supplier of Christmas lights, eighty million homes are decorated each year, with more than 150 million light sets sold annually.[69] The Christmas lights business has changed significantly since its early days; today most lights are manufactured in China, with the United States providing by far the largest market.[70] In fact, electric Christmas lights have remained a largely American custom; many Europeans still prefer to use candles to celebrate Christmas.[71] The question then remains: what is the greater significance of Christmas lights, and what do they say about the American character?

One of the key aspects of the American Christmas light display is its secular nature. Although some people do utilize lighting for religious exaltation—for example with illuminated outdoor nativity scenes—the vast majority do not directly associate light displays with religion. Christmas lights have maintained many of their original non-religious meanings. In rural America, Christmas lights hark back to yuletide tradition, conveying a sense of hope in a vast darkness. City dwellers continue to flock to community Christmas celebrations every year in order to gain a sense of common identity. Suburbanites place lights on their houses, participating in a shared ritual from which they too gain a sense of common identity.[72] Communities continue to sponsor competitions, sometimes inspiring residential light displays so bright that they have become "public nuisances" to neighbors unable to sleep at night.[73] The patriotic post-9/11 light displays of Christmas 2001 also conjure memories of similar patriotic displays on the home front during WWII, representing the will of the average American to maintain an "American way of life" during troubled times.[74] Perhaps the most uniquely American aspect of Christmas lights, though, is that they represent a desire to blur the line between fantasy and reality.

The modern American Christmas light tradition is perhaps the most visible way our culture has dealt with an increasingly technological and impersonal world. Drawing on traditions first brought to the United States by German immigrants in the nineteenth century as well as a host of scientific advancements that began with Edison's electric light, Christmas lights represent a juxtaposition of ancient ritual and modern technology. In the twentieth century, Christmas light displays became popular in large part because of their ability to convey a small-town feel among strangers in an unfriendly metropolis. After World War II, the average American acquired the monetary and technological means to construct his or her ideal Christmas light show. Reeling from the trauma wrought by the war, people took advantage of these new resources to create increasingly fantastical light designs. As people flocked in droves to Disneyland to escape into a magical retreat that evoked friendly, small-town feelings, so too did they erect gleaming, secularized shrines at Christmas time as a testament to the legacy of a simpler time.

---

[69] Seidman, 27.

[70] Chris York. Employee of christmaslightsetc.com, email to author, 18 November 2004.

[71] Sloat, 36.

[72] Sloat, 36.

[73] "Holiday Lights Go Pro." CNN.COM. 6 December 2004. <http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/12/06/bright.christmas.ap/index.html> (6 December 2004).

[74] Seidman, 48-49.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

"About New York." *New York Times*, December 25, 1957, p.34.

"Christmas Lights Can Do So Many Things." Advertisement, Lord & Taylor. *NewYork Times*, 12 December 1954.

"Christmas Lights Gleam on Tall Altadena Deodars." *Los Angeles Times*, 25 December 1950, p.10.

"Christmas Lights Turned On at Laguna." *Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 1956, p. 11.

"Cities Go All Out for Brightest of Christmases." *New York Times*, December 11 1950, p. 20.

"Couple points Grinchly finger at neighbors." CNN.COM. 26 November 2004. <http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/11/26/neighborhood.grinch.ap/index.html> (29 November 2004).

"Holiday Lights Go Pro." CNN.COM. 6 December 2004. http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/12/06/bright.christmas.ap/index.html (6 December 2004).

"In and About the City." *New York Times*, 27 December 1884, p. 5.

"Message at Tree Lighting." *New York Times*, 24 December 1957, p. 8.

Miles, C.A. *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition Christian and Pagan*. London: Adelphi Terrace, 1912.

"Public's Xmas Tree to Stand for a Week." *New York Times*, 19 December 1912, p. 11.

"Santa Pulls Switch and Lights Up Miracle Mile." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 November 1956, p.3.

Stark, Judy. "Starry Nights." *St. Petersburg Times*, 9 December 2000

Tavernise, Sabrina. "One Neighborhood's Yule: Flash and Fat Penguins." *New York Times*, 21 December 2003, sec. 1.

"Valley Cities to Pick Best Yule Decorations." *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1953, p. G14.

"Winking Fairy Lights for Christmas Trees." Advertisement, Excelsior Supply Company. *Hardware Dealer's Magazine*, December 1907.

York, Chris. Employee of christmaslightsetc.com, email to author, 18 November 2004.

Secondary Sources:

Bowler, Gerry. *The World Encyclopedia of Christmas*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 2000.

Brenzel, Kathleen N. "All Aglow." *Sunset*, December 2003, 79-81.

Browne, Pat and Browne, Ray B., eds., *The Guide to United States Popular Culture*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001.

Bucher, Richard P. "The Origin and Meaning of the Christmas Tree." November 2000, <http://users.rcn.com/tlclcms/chrtree.htm>, (8 December 2004).

Campbell, Susan. "Oy Vey! Christmas Lights Already?" *Hartford Courant*, 17 November 2004, Sec. D.

Crump, William D. *The Christmas Encyclopedia*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001.

Dempsey, Hugh A. *Christmas in the West*. Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1982.

"European Roots." <http://www.groundhog.org/history/tradition.shtml> (9 December 2004).

Golby, J.M. and A.W. Purdue. *The Making of the Modern Christmas*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986.

Hine, Thomas. Populuxe. New York: MJF Books, 1986.

"Interesting Facts." *The Antique Christmas Lights Site*. <http://www.oldchristmaslights.com/interesting_facts.htm> (9 December 2004).

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Jones, E. Willis. *The Santa Claus Book*. USA: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., 1976.

Marling, Karal Ann. *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Nissenbaum, Stephen. *The Battle for Christmas*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996.

Restad, Penne L. *Christmas in America: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Seidman, David. *Holiday Lights!* North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2003.

Shoemaker, Alfred L. *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk-Cultural Study*. Lancaster, PA: Intelligencer Printing Company, 1959

Sloat, Warren. "The Wizard of your Christmas Tree," *American Heritage*, December 2003, 36.

"The Christmas Tree in England and America." <http://www.oldandsold.com/articles03/santaclaus10.shtml> (5 December 2004).

"The Yule Log." <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/noel/angl/buche.htm> (5 December 2004)

"Traditions – Trees and Ornaments." <http://www.christmas-tree.com/where.html> (5 December 2004)

"TVA: Electricity for all." <http://newdeal.feri.org/tva/tva10.htm> (9 December 2004).

Waits, William B. *The Modern Christmas in America*. New York: NYU Press, 1993.

Wigginton, Eliot and His Students, eds. *A Foxfire Christmas*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Ethnicity, Politics, and Society in the New South: Examining German Immigrant Communities in Early Twentieth-Century Charleston

By Rebecca Wieters
College of Charleston

Machine politics and ethnic organization are two phenomena readily associated with the urban politics of Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but seldom are they considered in the context of Southern history. However, in the early twentieth century, machine politics and ethnicity actively influenced the social fabric and political dynamics of Charleston, South Carolina. Charleston's large community of German immigrants played a significant role in the city's politics and economic livelihood during this time period. An extensive network of German economic, religious, and charitable organizations united their voices and simultaneously facilitated the retention of German identity, while acculturating Germans into Charleston society.

Although Germans were present in Charleston society from the city's founding in the seventeenth century, an increase in German immigration in the 1830s resulted in the development of a new type of German community in Charleston.[1] In fact, as anthropologist Dee Dee Joyce's research reveals, German immigrants composed approximately one-third of the middle class in antebellum Charleston. The immigrants worked primarily as grocers, tavern keepers, and druggists, and German merchants often lived above their corner stores, reflecting both their occupation and their social class. Through their businesses, Germans came into contact with other immigrants, free blacks, and native born whites on a daily basis.[2]

Many aspects of Charleston society helped German immigrants assimilate into their new community. For example, Franz Adoph Melchers' German language newspaper, *Deutsche Zeitung,* printed from 1853 to 1917, informed German immigrants about Charleston news and culture in their native language. Men like German Charlestonian John A. Wagener acted as "cultural brokers," helping new immigrants find their niches inside the city and southern culture. Wagener established eight organizations (St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, the German Fire Company, Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, German Colonization Society, DeutscheScharf Schutzen Verein, and three Masonic lodges) which helped newcomers create contacts and alliances within the city between 1839 and 1855. All of these organizations served not only to strengthen German ties within the community, but also to acclimate German immigrants with the rest of Charleston society.[3]

As a result of *Deutsche Zeitung* and Wagener's cultural organizations, German Charlestonians in the antebellum South embraced the city's institutions and demonstrated their loyalty to Charleston during the Civil War by sending six militia companies and an artillery battalion to fight for the Confederacy.[4] Historian Michael Everette Bell describes their devotion to the city as both a way of defending "the German honor they brought with them" as well as displaying their acceptance of "Charlestonian cultural values."[5] Through their loyalty to the South's cause, German Charlestonians gained greater respect and status within the native Charleston community.[6]

---

[1] Michael Everette Bell, "Regional Identity in the Antebellum South: How German immigrants became 'Good' Charlestonians," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100 (January 1999):, 15.
[2] Dee Dee Joyce, "White Worker, Irish, and Confederate: Irish workers' constructed identity in late antebellum Charleston, South Carolina," (Ph. D. diss., State University of New York, 2002): 179.
[3] Bell, 18.

During Reconstruction, planters, businesses, and state governments all had vested economic interests in attracting immigrants to the South in order to fill the labor voids created by the northern migration of emancipated African-Americans.[7] In 1896, nativist sentiments were widespread throughout much of the country in response to a combination of high immigration and unemployment rates and poor economic conditions. These sentiments eventually led to the introduction of a bill in the United States Congress aimed at restricting immigration. Many Southern congressmen opposed the bill, claiming that Northerners inundated with immigrant workers did not understand the "labor stringency" facing the South.[8]

Several Southern states developed new bureaucratic departments to recruit immigrant laborers. In 1904, South Carolina established a Department of Agriculture, Commerce, and Immigration, and in 1905, the department developed a policy calling for the immigration of "white citizens of the United States, citizens of Ireland, Scotland, Switzerland, France and all other foreigners of Anglos Saxon Origin."[9] Charleston was at the forefront of the state's efforts to attract new immigrants, and in 1906, the steamship *Wittekind* brought 476 new German, Austrian, Belgian, and Dutch immigrants directly into the Charleston port.[10] Thus, the Charleston German community not only continued to thrive during this period, but it was also enriched by the presence of new German immigrants.

The life of August William Wieters—in many ways a typical German Charlestonian—shows how Charleston's German community was connected economically, politically, and socially during this period. Wieters was born on August 23, 1868 in the small town of Weddewarden in the Hanover province of Prussia. At the age of 15, he and four of his brothers came to the United States on the German steam liner, *Copernicus*. Of the five Wieters boys who came to the United States, one returned to Germany immediately, while the other four all eventually settled in Charleston. When asked why her father left his home, August's daughter, Mildred Wieters, responded that many people in her father's community were traveling and emigrating and that he, too, wanted to travel and see America. Once he arrived in the country, he was encouraged by the available economic opportunities and decided to stay. He did, however, maintain his contact with relatives on the other side of the Atlantic, where, to this day, the German descendants of the Wieters family live in Weddewarden.[11]

---

[4] Bell, 17.

[5] Ibid., 27.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Rowland T. Berthoff, "Southern Attitudes Towards Immigration, 1865-1914, *The Journal of Southern History* 17 (August 1951): 328. The role of Germans in antebellum Charleston has been thoroughly researched, but there are large gaps in the historiography of the city's German community after the antebellum period. Recent scholarship suggests that German immigration to North America should not be studied as individual periods of migration, but rather as a continuous influx from 1607 through the early twentieth century. Gunter Moltmann, "Migrations from Germany to North America: New Perspectives," *Reviews in American History* 14 (December 1986): 581.

[8] Ibid., 329.

[9] Duffy, John Joseph. "Charleston Politics in the Progressive Era." Ph. D. Dissertation: University of South Carolina, 1963: 129.

[10] Ibid, 126-130.

Wieters docked in New York City and originally found odd jobs in Manhattan, working in grocery stores and delivering groceries for a starting salary of four dollars a month, plus room and board. However, Wieters did not see opportunities for advancement in New York, so when John Hurkamp, a large and prominent Charleston grocer, offered Wieters a job in 1887, Wieters did not hesitate to make the move.[12] Several of Wieters' distant cousins from Hanover had already settled in Charleston by the in the middle of the nineteenth century. Wieters worked as a clerk at "Hurkamps" for three years and began familiarizing himself with his adopted city and the English language. After establishing himself financially, Wieters bought a grocery store in 1890 from E.F.E. Wieters, a distant cousin. Unlike the German grocers who lived above their businesses, Wieters lived across the street from his corner store at 119 Calhoun Street. Wieters' brother, Otto, also owned a grocery store about a mile north of August's establishment. In interviews, both August Wieters' daughter, Mildred, and his son, Raymond, recalled that many members of the German community continued to work as grocers and in other mercantile occupations during the early twentieth century.[13]

The next chapter of Wieters' life in Charleston is an excellent example of the close bonds maintained within the city's German community. In 1899, Wieters established an ice company in the city. At that time, ice was scarce and sold at high prices. Wieters decided to venture into a business that, if successful, would provide ice to the city's citizens and businesses at a more reasonable price than was offered by the city's other ice vendors.[14] To secure the capital necessary to start the business, Wieters turned to members of the German community. On June 6, 1899, a lined paper agreement proclaimed, "Whereas it is proposed to…organize a corporation for the purpose of buying, manufacturing, selling, and dealing in ice, ice machinery, and refrigeration substances," with a capital stock of $6,000 to be divided into 240 shares of twenty-five dollars each.[15] Beneath this heading are the signatures of 214 shareholders, many of whom were of German descent. Thus, with the help of many German Charlestonians, the Consumer Ice Company opened in 1899 at R.R. Crossing on Woolfe Street with August Wieters serving as the president and treasurer, J.H. Heinson as the vice president, and A.J.W. Gorse as the secretary. A 1910 article in a municipal publication promoting the city's business prospects refers to the company's officers as "very efficient men" who stand for a "'square deal' and are highly respected in the community."[16]

The Consumers Ice Company prospered, and in 1901, Wieters sold his grocery store to concentrate his full efforts on the ice business. Three artesian wells functioned as the company's water supply, and Wieters used horse-drawn wagons to deliver 150 tons of ice to customers each day.[17] The company served the Charleston community until 1924 when it was sold to a larger regional corporation, the Southern Ice Company.[18] Newspaper advertisements for Consumers Ice boast that it was the only ice plant in the city that manufactured distilled water ice.[19] Furthermore, in the summer of 1919 when ice shortages were widespread in the South, the company was successful in keeping its customers supplied with ice.[20] The story of the ice company represents not only the mutual interest and efforts of German Charlestonians towards the pursuit of economic interests, but also demonstrates the value of services provided by German immigrants to the Charleston economy as a whole.

---

[11] Information obtained through interview with Mildred and Lucille Wieters and their collection of their father's papers.

[12] Thomas Petigru Lesense, *History of Charleston County, South Carolina* (A.H. Cawston: Charleston, 1931): 166.

[13] Raymond and Mildred Wieters, interview by author, 7 December 2004.

[14] *Charleston, South Carolina: The Queen City of the South Atlantic: Illustrated Charleston: Its Commercial and Industrial Advantages in 1910.*

[15] "Agreement for Formation of Consumers Ice Co.," June 6, 1899, Papers of August Wieters- property of Mildred Wieters.

[16] *Illustrated Charleston*.

The German community in early twentieth century Charleston also combined its resources and unified to strengthen its voice politically. The political scene in Charleston at the turn of the century was unfriendly to outsiders. Like the politics of many other urban areas during the period, bloc voting and corruption characterized Charleston politics. The presence of a one-party system and a partisan police force further contributed to unjust electoral practices in the city.[21] Yet, the German-American citizens in Charleston managed to break into the city's politics through the organization of John P. Grace, a Charlestonian of Irish descent and mayor of the city from 1911 to 1915 and again from 1919 to 1923. Until the time of Grace, blue bloods or bourbons, referring to the city's elite aristocratic element, dominated Charleston politics.[22] Grace attacked the clean image of Charleston government and charged that "no man who holds high office can truthfully say he did not know that fraud was being practiced to accomplish his election."[23] He wanted the citizens of Charleston to know that "the vote of the little man counts just as much as the vote of the banker on Broad Street."[24]

From 1902, when Grace ran his first underdog campaign for the state senate, to 1911, when Grace was elected the mayor of Charleston, he built his own political machine. Grace relied heavily on support from the city's Irish and German voters, who were attracted to Grace's platform of improving conditions for the workingman. Each man in Grace's machine was responsible for recruiting five additional men to join the organization at the level under him. The Grace machine worked to mobilize voters and secure votes. By the time elections were actually held, most voters had publicly declared their allegiance to one party or the other as a result of this system.

From the beginning of Grace's political career, he enjoyed overwhelming support in Ward 5, an upper eastside ward composed of working class Charleston natives, immigrants, and African-Americans. When Grace was elected mayor in 1911, August

---

[17] Advertisement, *The Charleston American*, 5 July 1919.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Advertisement, *The Charleston American*, 5 July 1919.
[20] Article, *The Charleston American*, 19 July 1919.
[21] Doyle Willard Boggs, Jr., "John Patrick Grace and the Politics of reform in South Carolina 1900-1931," (Ph. D. diss.: University of South Carolina, 1977): 31.
[22] John Annan and Pamela Gabriel, *The Great Cooper River Bridge* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002): 37.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 27.

Wieters was elected alderman of Ward 5, a parallel indicating Wieters' role as a critical member of the Grace machine. From 1912 to 1916, Wieters served on two of the Board of Alderman's most important committees: the Ways and Means Committee and the Sanitary Committee, of which Wieters was the chairman.[25] Additionally, Wieters, like Grace, was a member of the Hibernian society which hosted many of Grace's political rallies.[26] Not only were they political allies working towards similar agendas, but also close friends, to the point that Wieters named one of his sons John, after the mayor.

Grace retired from the public sphere to practice law after a younger and more dynamic candidate, Thomas P. Stoney, ousted him from the mayoral office in 1923. However, Grace maintained ties with Charleston's German community. Three years later, he resumed his political involvement as a member of the State Highway Commission from 1926 to 1933. The German Friendly Society tracked and supported many of Grace's state highway projects.[27] Grace's ability to mobilize German and Irish voters in Charleston underscored his political successes. As a testament to the importance of immigrant populations in Charleston politics, German-Americans influenced the city's traditionally aristocratic politics in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The population of Charleston's German community was large enough to allow immigrants to maintain their ethnic ties; however, many German immigrants were determined to assimilate into the culture of their new home. As Mildred and Raymond Wieters recalled, their father never spoke German around his children—he was determined that "they were in America and would be Americans."[28]

When the United States aligned itself with Britain and the Allies of World War I, German Charlestonians found themselves in a dilemma. Balancing a proud German heritage with loyalty and patriotism to the United States became a nearly impossible task. The scrutiny of native Charlestonians towards their German neighbors intensified on January 31, 1917, when a German vessel, the *Liebenfels*, was sunk in the Cooper River. The ship had attempted to block the Navy Yard channel, and nine of its crewmembers were sentenced to a year in the Atlanta penitentiary for blockading a navigable stream.[29]

The German community responded to this war through support of the military, just as they had done during the Civil War. For example, St. Matthew's German Lutheran Church, where Wieters served on the Church Council, maintained a ladies' sewing room in the Sunday school building. Eighty-three of the church's young men enlisted to fight in the war; five of them, paying the ultimate price of loyalty to their country, were killed in battle.[30]

Many German organizations implemented changes reflecting their American patriotism. As August Wieters recorded in a paper found in his wallet after his death, the German Rifle Club changed its name to the Charleston Rifle Club and the German American Alliance was dissolved. Wieters additionally ceased to collect money for the German Red Cross, for which he had previously raised about two thousand dollars.[31] The German Friendly Society supported war efforts by passing a resolution that freed members serving in the War of their debts and dues to the society.[32] When the war concluded, the German Friendly Society held a victory celebration dinner featuring keynote addresses entitled “Our Country,” “Our State,” and “Our City.”[33]

---

[25] Paul Wierse, ed., *Deutsche Zeitung*, published by Albert Orth.

[26] Arthur Mitchell, *The History of the Hibernian Society of Charleston, South Carolina 1799-1981*, (Charleston 1981): 94.

[27] Adolph Lesemann, Jr., *Two Hundred and Twenty-Five Years of American History Taken from the minutes and other records of the German Friendly Society of Charleston, South Carolina, (*Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1999): 217-219.

[28] Raymond and Mildred Wieters.

[29] John Hammond Moore, "Charleston in World War I: Seeds of Change," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*: 39.

[30] Walter C. Davis, *100 Years of Christian Life and Service: St. Matthew's Lutheran church* (Charleston, 1940).

World War I represented a beginning of the end for a once self-conscious and proud German community in Charleston. Throughout World War I, German Charlestonians demonstrated that their identity as Americans took preeminence over any ethnic ties. The abandonment of the German language in newspapers, records, and church services and the removal of German titles from social organizations contributed simultaneously to an affirmation of American patriotism and a fracture with a German past. The Charleston community had always accepted the German community as part and parcel of its economic, political, and social life, and when German loyalties were called into question during World War I, German Charlestonians were resolute in their support of American actions. Today few visible references remain in Charleston to the large and vibrant German community that was an integral part of the city’s political, social, and economic spheres during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

---

[31] August William Wieters, note. Personal property of Mildred Wieters. Charleston, S.C.
[32] Lesemann, 214.
[33] “Knobeloch Papers,” German Friendly Society Materials (11/257/7): South Carolina Historical Society.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Charleston South Carolina: The Queen City of the South Atlantic: Illustrated Charleston: Its Commercial and Industrial Advantages 1910. Pamphlet.

"Knobeloch Papers." German Friendly Society Materials (11/257/7): South Carolina Historical Society.

Lesemann, Adolph, Jr. *Two Hundred and Twenty-Five Years of American History Taken from the minutes and other records of the German Friendly Society of Charleston, South Carolina* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1931).

Wierse, Paul, ed. *Deutsche Zeitung.* Published by Albert Orth.

Wieters, August William. Note. Personal Property of Mildred Wieters. Charleston, SC.

Wieters, Mildred. Interview by author. 7 December 2005. Charleston, S.C.

Wieters, John Raymond. Interview by author. 7 December 2005. Charleston, S.C.

The Charleston American. Newspaper. Charleston County Public Library, microfilm.

Secondary Sources:

Annan, John and Pamela Gabriel. *The Great Cooper River Bridge* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002).

Bell, Michael Everette. "Regional Identity in the Antebellum South: How German Immigrants became 'Good' Charlestonians." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100 (January 1999): 9-29.

Berthoff, Rowland T. "Southern Attitudes Towards Immigration, 1865-1914." *The Journal of Southern History* 17 (August 1951): 328-360.

Boggs, Doyle Willard Jr. "John Patrick Grace and the Politics of Reform in South Carolina 1900-1931." (Ph. D. Diss.: University of South Carolina, 1977).

Davis, Walter C. *100 Years of Christian Life and Service: St. Matthew's Lutheran Church* (Charleston, 1940).

Duffy, John Joseph. "Charleston Politics in the Progressive Era." (Ph. D. Diss.: University of SouthCarolina, 1963).

Moore, John Hammond. "Charleston in World War I: Seeds of Change." *South Carolina Historical Magazine*: 39-49.

Joyce, Dee Dee. "White Worker, Irish and Confederate: Irish workers' constructed identity in late antebellum Charleston, South Carolina." (Ph. D. diss.: State University of New York, 2002).

Lilly, Samuel Alvin. "The Culture of Revolutionary Charleston." (Ph. D. diss.: Miami University, 1971).

Mitchell, Arthur. *The History of the Hibernian Society of Charleston, South Carolina 1799-1981* (Charleston, 1981).

Moltmann, Gunter. "Migrations from Germany to North America: New Perspectives." *Reviews in American History* 14 (December 1986): 580-596.

Homefront Heroines:
The Wartime Contributions of Civic Women in Whiteville, North Carolina

By Jennifer Marie Biser
University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill

As Lieutenant Billy Bragaw, a World War II pilot from Southport, North Carolina, raced through the skies, defending his country, he must have held the women of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club in high regard. By selling enough bonds during the Sixth War Loan Drive to purchase a Hellcat fighter, the ladies of Whiteville, North Carolina, played a part in the worldwide conflict each time Lt. Bragaw took to the skies. This is only one example of the many ways in which American civic women in small town America contributed to the war effort from 1941 to 1945. The traditional roles of civic organizations as sources of community involvement and social interaction expanded and took on new meaning in the context of the war. As seen in the work of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, women's civic clubs played a valuable role in the war effort and in the continuation of American life on the homefront.

American women contributed to the Allied victory of World War II in a number of ways. There is little debate among historians about the importance of women's involvement and the spirit of volunteerism to the winning of the war. In the year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Margaret Culkin Banning published *Women For Defense* to inform women about the ways in which they would be needed for the defense effort. She wrote, "Women by themselves cannot win this war. But quite certainly it cannot be won without them."[1] Many women served in the military as Navy WAVES, Air Force WASPs, Army WACS, Coast Guard SPARs, or Marines in non-combatant jobs that ranged from flight instructors to clerical staff.[2] Actresses in Hollywood and female musicians volunteered their time and fulfilled their patriotic duty by entertaining troops. As made famous by the movie *A League of Their Own*, women began playing softball professionally when male players were drafted into military service. Across the country women traded their skirts and purses for trousers and tool aprons and swapped their rural homes for city dwellings in the centers of defense production.

Driven by patriotism and the goal of bringing loved ones home, many women who were not laboring in factories or otherwise working to earn their livings spent their time volunteering for the war effort.[3] As Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson reported in an article entitled "Women's Community Service," "More than two out of three women studied participated in community service activities of one kind or another."[4] In 1942, twelve million women in the United States belonged to clubs, and nearly every club had a specific committee working towards national defense.[5] The society pages of the county newspaper, *The News Reporter*, show that during the war years there was no lack of women's organizations in Columbus County, North Carolina. Civic groups, having already established a tradition of civic participation and community service, provided a medium through which women could contribute to the war effort.

---

[1] Margaret Culkin Banning, *Women for Defense* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942), ix.

[2] WAVES is the acronym for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service; WASPs is the acronym for Women Airforce Service Pilots; WAC is the acronym for Women's Army Corps; and SPARs is the nickname given to the U.S. Coast Guard Women's Reserve. It is a contraction of the Coast Guard motto: Semper Paratus: "Always Ready." Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers War* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 137-161.

[3] Roger W. Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 89.

[4] Margaret Kirckpatrick Johnson, et al., "Women's Community Service, 1940-1960: Insights from a Cohort of Gifted American Women," *Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1996): 63.

The Junior Woman's club of Whiteville, North Carolina, is but one civic institution among many in North Carolina and the United States that exemplifies how the local assistance of women figured prominently in the global conflict. Historians have said surprisingly little about women's voluntary services to the war through the specific study of civic associations.[6] However, studying the work of the Junior Woman's Club adds to our understanding of the ways in which citizens of small towns coped with and contributed to the war effort.

The organizational structure of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club helps to explain the accomplishments of the women during the years 1941 to 1945. The club was part of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs. Presidents of the state federation developed themes that the individual clubs worked towards such as the 1943 to 1945 theme, "Build for the future a life without fear, a faith without doubt, and a world without war."[7] In Whiteville, membership was open to women aged sixteen through thirty-five.

The group usually held their monthly meetings at the homes of club members. Participants were required to pay yearly dues, attend monthly meetings, and earn a minimum amount of points through participation in the group's activities. Each meeting began with singing the club hymn, reading the club collect (similar to a pledge), a roll call, reading and approval of the previous meetings' minutes, and the treasurer's report. Then each committee chair presented a report on her department's activities. The Whiteville Junior Woman's club minutes as recorded in the club's ledger show that the president conducted the meetings according to Robert's Rules of Order. All plans of action to be taken had to receive a motion, be seconded, and carried before going into effect. After the business portion of the meeting, the Program chair supervised the program for the month, which usually involved an educational speaker, but occasionally a musical performance or entertaining reading. Finally, the members enjoyed light refreshments and the meetings adjourned.[8] The discipline and focus of the meetings contributed to the overall efficiency of the club and allowed them to do as much as they did for the community and the war. In addition, through following proper club protocol, women practiced and preserved democracy, the ideology that Americans fought to defend.

---

[5] Banning, *Women for Defense*, 5-6.

[6] While primary sources on the topic of civic contribution are plentiful, secondary sources, specifically scholarly articles and analyses pertaining to the subject of civic contribution to the war effort, are lacking. Keith Ayling and Margaret Banning wrote books during the war that communicated the importance for women to join the fight on the domestic front explaining how they could do so. In his 1942 book *Calling All Women*, Keith Ayling wrote extensively on ways in which women could advance the war effort and protect democracy. He also reproduced the Office of Civilian Defense's list of opportunities for women volunteers. These books together with first hand accounts recorded in interviews, newspaper articles, and club minutes are primary sources offering insights into the specific response of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club to their new role in the context of a society at war. Karen Anderson's *Wartime Women*, Emily Yellin's *Our Mother's War*, and Neil McMillen's *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South* are some examples of the substantial amount of writings on women's roles in World War II. Books such as *North Carolina's Role in World War II* , Geoffrey Perret's *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph*, Roger Lotchin's, *The Good City in the Bad War*, and Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson's *Sociological Quarterly* article "Women's Community Service, 1940-1960" all address the prevalence of volunteering for the cause in general terms. Johnson wrote, "This was a time of strong national unity and patriotism. Opportunities and the awareness of opportunities to volunteer were heightened, and volunteering became simultaneously a way to help the war effort." In "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," Robert Putnam argues that civic participation has declined since the World War II generation exited civic life. His controversial argument posits that civic activity played a significant role during World War II.
Keith Ayling, *Calling All Women*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), 43-58.
Johnson, "Women's Community Service", 60.
Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6.1 (1995): 65-78.

[7] Frances Renfro Doak. *Toward New Frontiers: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1962), 24.

As the war sat on the doorstep of America, the club added a specialized National Defense Committee, or as it was called in later years, the War Service Committee, to address the challenges posed by the war.[9] The first mention of a National Defense Department in the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club is found in the minutes of the September 1941 meeting in which club president Helen Fuller appointed a few ladies to meet with the Red Cross Production Chairman.[10] The group became the Defense Committee. In November 1941, they reported that twenty-six kits containing fruit cakes, cigars, and phonograph records had been prepared to send to soldiers stationed in Trinidad during Christmas. Additionally, twenty-one sweaters were knitted for distribution by the Red Cross.[11] By 1943, the committee had changed its name to the War Service Committee. As North Carolina Federation historian Frances Doak writes:

> [T]he clubs and individuals seemed to work with a concentrated zeal at one single purpose: "Get done with the war," as reports show. While regular duties were not neglected, the war work over-shadowed all else and was a big part of the total effort of North Carolina in helping to win the war.[12]

The women wanted to devote a significant amount of their time and resources to supporting the war and bringing home their loved ones and the committee structure enabled them to do so.

Selling war bonds was one of the important projects undertaken by North Carolina defense and war service committees. The history of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs reports that in three bond drives, club women across the state raised over five million dollars. By the end of the war, sales reached $12,179,245, ranking the North Carolina Federation fourth out of forty-eight federations. With their bond sales, each of the sixteen districts in North Carolina "bought" either a fighter plane or a bomber. Together with seven local clubs, the North Carolina Federation also purchased bombers, bringing the total number of aircraft funded by North Carolina clubwomen to twenty-four. Additionally, the Fifth War Loan Campaign raised enough money to pay for one of the eighteen hospital ships, the *Larkspur*.[13]

---

[8] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club. Records and Minutes of Meetings: 1938-1946. Whiteville, North Carolina.

[9] Other club committees included Education, Public Welfare, Ways and Means, Publicity, Fine Arts, and the Program. Banning, *Women for Defense*, 6.

[10] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 9/41, 115.

[11] Ibid., 11/41, 135.

[12] Doak. *Toward New Frontiers*, 21.

Such strong results from the Tar Heel state were the consequence of hard work being done by clubs on the local level. Clubwomen in Whiteville did their part to sell and purchase war bonds. One common and fashionable way of vending defense stamps was to make stamp corsages worn in place of floral corsages. At the January 1943 meeting, War Service Chairman Erma Weaver reported that the committee had sold thirty defense stamp corsages, totaling $50.08.[14] The following month, Belk Department Store ordered one-hundred corsages. Women who typically wore floral corsages on Easter purchased sixty-seven stamp corsages in April of 1943.[15] Men and women who attended the club's square dance and auction in 1944 sported war stamp boutonnieres and corsages to show their patriotism.[16] Flowers to finance the fight against fascism became Whiteville's latest trend.

The Whiteville Junior women became a driving force behind the seven war loan drives of Columbus County.[17] The ladies sold $62,775 worth of bonds in the Fourth War Loan Drive of 1943-1944.[18] In June of 1944, the Juniors took part in the Fifth War Loan Drive by canvassing the residential districts of east Whiteville. During that drive, the club sold $25,050 series E bonds, $74 series F bonds, and $3,000 series G bonds.[19] The women, however, outdid themselves in the following drive in 1944, selling $99,345.55 worth of E, F, and G bonds.[20] The bonds from the Sixth War Loan Drive went towards the purchase of a Hellcat fighter plane. *Air Classics* magazine editor Michael O'Leary' writes in "Incredible Cat" that "the initial cost for a Hellcat, minus government furnished equipment, was $50,000, but this dropped to $35,000 by the end of the production."[21] While the exact price paid by Junior Woman's Club for the plane is not recorded, the bonds sold would have more than covered the cost. A plaque recognizing the efforts of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club was placed on the plane flown by Lieutenant Billy

---

[13] Emma Gay Stephenson. *Challenges for Change: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Volume IV* (Charlotte: The Delmar Company, 1982), 34.

[14] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 193.

[15] Ibid., 197.

[16] Ibid., 211.

[17] In August of 1941 President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churhill met and drafted the Atlantic Charter. Its terms upheld the right of all people to choose their own governments and affirmed the Anglo-American dedication to peace after the destruction of the Nazi tyranny. By the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club joining the war effort, they agreed to uphold the goals set forth in the Atlantic Charter, to help get rid of tyranny and ensure the world the right to democracy.
Michael Lyons, *World War II: A Short History, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 147-48.*

[18] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records., 249.

[19] Ibid., 279.

[20] Ibid., 323. Series E, F, and G Bonds were issued by the United States Treasury and did a great deal for financing the war. Series E bonds were issued at 75% of their face value, F Bonds at 74%, and G Bonds at their face value and paid interest by Treasury check every six months. Bureau of the Public Debt. "Series A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, and K Savings Bonds and Savings Notes." 2005. <www.publicdebt.treas.gov/sav/savold.htm> (3 March 2006).

[21] Michael O'Leary. "Incredible Cat," *Air Classics*, January 2000, <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3901/is_200001/ai_n8901621#continue> (1 November 2005).

Bragaw. Acknowledging the women's contribution in a letter to W.B. Keziah of Southport, North Carolina, Lieutenant Bragaw wrote:

> I have a new plane that I thought you might like to hear about. It is a Hellcat Nightfighter, the same as I flew on my last cruise, but this one has a little sticker just forward of the cockpit. It reads, 'This aircraft was bought through an equal amount in war bonds purchased by the Junior Woman's Club of Whiteville, North Carolina' . . . I am the only Tar Heel pilot on our squadron. The plane should be assigned to me. The next time you are over in Whiteville and should see any of these worthy ladies of the Junior Woman's Club, I wish that you would express to them my personal thanks. Tell them that this plane, which they bought, is the last word in carrier fighters.[22]

The plane was with Admiral Halsey's fleet off the coast of Japan and "giving the Japs trouble a plenty."[23] The cities that hosted war-time industry had much to boast about when it came to their contributions to the war effort, but little attention has been given to the aid received from small towns. Whiteville, a rural, southern town was certainly not a center for defense production; yet its citizens took pride in the modest contributions they could make. Bragaw had reason to be grateful for and proud of the way his fellow North Carolinians supported him and his comrades. The efforts of Whiteville women gave the United States a plane that truly had an impact on the war.

Even after this tremendous gift, the clubwomen did not stop, but continued to finance the fighting. Showing their determination and loyalty to the cause until the very end, in 1945 the club sold $75,112.50 in bonds in the seventh and final war loan drive of the conflict.[24] In a war finance publication, Mabel Wingfield, the society editor for *The News Reporter* and county chairman of the Woman's Division for the sale of War Bonds, stated that her best help in selling war bonds in Columbus County was the Junior Woman's Club.[25] Indeed, its members took advantage of every avenue possible for the advancement of the war.

Tobacco markets provided one such innovative opportunity to serve the cause. The Junior Woman's Club made Whiteville the first tobacco market town in North Carolina to launch the Tobacco Bond program.[26] From August 8 through October 13, 1944, tobacco warehouse bond sales totaled $37,500.[27] The campaign eventually extended to every North Carolina tobacco market town. Referring to the work of the Whiteville Junior Woman's club the state chairman of the Warehouse War Bond Program said, "If every group is as well organized and functions as smoothly as the one in Whiteville, the state committee will be highly gratified."[28] If the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club was representative of what women's organizations were doing across the country, then the entire nation had reason to be thankful.

---

[22] "Pilots Junior Woman's Club 'Hellcat'," *The News Reporter*, 30 July, 1945, p. 1.

[23] Ibid., 1.

[24] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 373.

[25] Ibid., 379.

[26] "State Chairman of Tobacco Program in Whiteville." *The News Reporter*, 24 Aug. 1944, p.1.

[27] "Junior Women Report Sales." *The News Reporter*, 5 July, 1945, p.1.

[28] "State Chairman Pleased at Progress Here," *The News Reporter*, 28 August, 1944, 1.

In addition to their fundraising efforts, the ladies used club money to purchase bonds. In January 1942, the guild obtained a Defense Saving Stamp book.[29] For every \$18.75 invested in a war bond, \$25 would be returned in ten years.[30] The organization was able to purchase its first one hundred dollar war bond in March of 1942.[31] Throughout the war years, the Ways and Means committee held various fundraisers such as bazaars, rummage sales, and the sale of magazine subscriptions and wrapping paper.[32] "We were always raising money for something," former clubwoman Katherine Sledge recalled in a November 2005 interview.[33] Ten percent of the money made by the Ways and Means committee of the club was earmarked for stamps and bonds as well. By 1945, the Junior Woman's Club possessed \$600 in war bonds.[34] The returns on investments later went towards building a club house.[35] Taking the initiative to purchase bonds, the club set an example for its individual members.

The organization also held its members accountable for personal contributions. At the November 1943 meeting, the women had to report on the total amount of war bonds they purchased individually.[36] As many hours as the women put into selling bonds, none of them had an excuse not to own stamps and bonds for themselves. The Whiteville club, however, made it even more convenient for their members to own bonds by financing the sale of war stamps at every club meeting from October of 1944.[37] These efforts did not go unrecognized. In June 1945, the organization was one of the sixteen clubs in the state to receive the Minute Man Flag, an award reserved for North Carolina Women's clubs in which at least 90 percent of members bought war bonds or stamps on a regular basis.[38]

The club also sought to boost soldier morale. For the first months of the conflict, the club served coffee and doughnuts to the young men boarding buses and trains bound for military bases.[39] For many men it was their first time leaving Whiteville. Unfortunately some never returned, but the hospitality and kindness of the Juniors provided them a last minute reminder of what they were fighting to protect. Before heading into the war zones, the men first stopped at domestic army or navy bases scattered across the country. Airmen of Maxton Air Base, located about an hour west of Whiteville, received support regularly from the Junior Woman's Club. In March of 1943, clubwoman Erma Weaver received a letter from James McKinney, chairman of the "Dayroom Project" at the Maxton Airbase requesting that the club donate ten dollars towards the furnishing of the day room. The motion to send the ten dollars was carried as was a motion to send a year's subscription of *Readers Digest*.[40] Later that year the District War Service Chairman, Mrs. McKinnon, requested that a subscription to *Life* magazine be sent to the troops at Maxton.[41] The women's organization also packed ten Christmas boxes for soldiers in the Maxton Air Base hospital.[42] The women worked to provide the soldiers with as many luxuries they could, both on and off the base.

---

[29] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club. Records, 143.
[30] Ayling, C*alling All Women*, 30.
[31] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 153.
[32] Ibid., 183.
[33] Sledge. Interview.
[34] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club. History of Whiteville Junior Woman's Club: 1938-1945, Whiteville, North Carolina.
[35] "Two Woman's Clubs Plan Club House," *The News Reporter,* 11 October, 1945, 1.
[36] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 237.
[37] Ibid., 295.
[38] Ibid., 367.
[39] Ibid., 153.
[40] Ibid., 203

On weekends, soldiers were allowed to travel off base, and Whiteville was a destination for many of them, especially after the opening of the Servicemen's Center at the American Legion Hut. Twenty-five men from nearby Camp Davis were invited to attend the grand opening Christmas party on December 25, 1943. One of the ninety servicemen who attended that night, Sergeant Eugene R. Askin of Chicago and Camp Davis said "that servicemen were most appreciative of the center and showed the 'Yankees' what southern hospitality really was like."[43] Financed with $2,500 by citizens of Whiteville, the center operated under the direction of committees of various civic organizations including the Junior Woman's club.[44] In addition to acting as hostesses on some weekends, the Juniors supplied playing cards and games to the center.[45] The weekend hangout entertained soldiers and tried to make them feel as much at home as possible.[46] Some of those servicemen visiting were indeed very far from home. An October 1944 article titled, "Center Suspends Activities on a Temporary Basis," reports that 1,473 enlisted men from every state except Utah had registered at the center from its opening until its closing in September.[47]

As in the Servicemen's Center, some of the outreach efforts of the Junior Woman's Club required joint ventures. While there were several ways in which the women could aid soldiers stationed on the home front, the club's arm did not reach across and touch the soldiers fighting on the European and Pacific fronts. The Red Cross, however, did have the means of directly helping the soldiers overseas. Therefore the club partnered with the local chapter of the American Red Cross to extend their work into the struggle.

To raise money for the American Red Cross, the Public Welfare committee sponsored a play, "Mystery at Midnight" on February 5 and 6, 1942.[48] Not only was the play intended to raise funds for the Red Cross, but by providing entertainment during a troubled time it was also to serve as a distraction from the war. For reasons left unexplained in the club minutes, $18.50 were actually lost on the play.[49] Fortunately, this one disappointment was not the only attempt of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club to work with the international relief agency. The women saw much better returns in March of 1945 when the War Services department raised $664.20 for the Red Cross canvass.[50]

---

[41] Mrs. McKinnon's first name not recorded.

[42] Ibid., 237

[43] "Yule Party for Servicemen Was Grand Success," *The News Reporter,* 30 December 1943, p.1.

[44] "Servicemen's Center to Open December 25th with Christmas Party," *The News Reporter*, 13 December 1943, p. 6.

[45] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 245.

[46] Frances Wheeler. Personal Interview by author. 21 Oct. 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.
In the United States, the USO provided recreation to servicemen outside of camp in their off duty hours. USOs combined the efforts of the YMCA, YWCA ,the Salvation Army,the Jewish Welfare Board, the National Catholic Community Service, and the Traveler's Aid Society.
Megan Kate Winchel, "Good Food, Good Fun, and Good Girls: USO Hostesses and World War Two," University of Arizona, 2003.

[47] "Center Suspends Activities on a Temporary Basis," *The News Reporter*, 9 Oct. 1944, pg.1.

[48] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 145.

[49] Ibid., 149.

The Juniors also partnered with the Red Cross to sponsor first aid classes.[51] In December 1942, Mrs. Franks, supervisor of Red Cross Nurses for North Carolina, spoke at a club meeting about the need for classes on nurse's aids and home nursing, and in February 1944, the Education Department of the club sponsored a Red Cross course in home nursing.[52] Americans everywhere were encouraged to receive first aid certification, which would be greatly needed if the homeland were attacked. Ayling wrote that the Red Cross worked "to mobilize all men and women able to take training in first aid and accident prevention so that on every city block and in every rural center in America there [would] be a trained first aider."[53] Due in no small part to the Whiteville Junior Women, Columbus County citizens did their share of work in preparing for an enemy attack.

The war created a shortage of nurses, and the clubwomen did what they could to remedy the situation. As reported in the history of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, state federations provided a total of $234,834 dollars in nursing scholarships to increase the limited numbers of trained nurses.[54] The Whiteville guild created the Nurses Scholarship Fund, for which they raised money by selling magazine subscriptions, sponsoring a "Sunday picture show," and collecting revenue from each member hosting a bridge table. They also used funds from the club bank, to which each member contributed ten cents in each month.[55] In 1944, the Juniors awarded a $250 scholarship to a nursing student at Pembroke College.[56] Because of their efforts, Whiteville the club found a place on the National Honor Roll for the Red Cross Nursing Scholarship.[57]

Through the Red Cross, the Junior Women's club also lent their needles and thread to the war effort. The Red Cross established a sewing room in a local armory, where the women could work as a club or individually. Between September 1941 and May 1942, the club members spent 102 hours in the sewing room and produced 104 articles of clothing.[58] "I remember knitting all the time," former clubwoman Katherine Sledge remarked. "It was interesting and you felt like you were doing something that would help. I remember the Junior Women's Club knitted a lot of women and children's sweaters."[59] As a way to reward efforts made outside of the club, members were awarded one point towards their club participation for every hour of war work, including time spent in the sewing room. However the hope for a triumphant conclusion to the conflict and not the reward of points was the incentive. As Sledge said, "Everybody was after one goal, to just have peace."[60]

---

[50] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 343.

[51] Ibid., 145.

[52] Mrs. Franks first name not recorded. Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 185; Ibid., 251.

[53] Ayling, *Calling All Women*, 71.

[54] Mildred Wells White. *Unity in Diversity: The History of the General Federation of Woman'Clubs* (Washington, D.C.: GFWC, 1953), 233.

[55] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 195.

[56] Ibid., 263.

[57] Ibid., 259.

[58] Ibid., 163

[59] Sledge, Interview.

[60] Ibid., Interview.

Some women, however, had to stay at home with their children and had limited time for participation in war-related club activities. As Sledge explained, "It was hard to have time. It was hard to have help, because everyone was involved in the war effort. Even if you have two or three little children around, that takes a lot of time."[61] In October 1942, the Whiteville Juniors proposed a solution to the childcare problem. Under the jurisdiction of the War Services department, the women began a cooperative club nursery.[62] Local Girl Scouts helped in the nursery, and the First Baptist Church donated Sunday School rooms.[63] This type of group childcare became a national trend. As Karen Anderson writes in *Wartime Women*, "the lack of public child care services spawned makeshift, informal group care arrangements which were almost impossible to regulate or eliminate."[64]

The women's clubs also maintained their traditional activities during the war. In fact, the Education, Public Welfare, and Ways and Means committees of the club were just as busy as the War Service committee. Undeniably, the struggle against the Axis powers was central to life on the homefront, but women could not let the war distract them from everyday needs and routines. Author of the wartime book, *Calling All Women*, Keith Ayling, elaborated on this idea:

> [W]e must educate and feed the children and keep our homes running smoothly and efficiently, a little more efficiently than before . . . Imagine the distress of sons and menfolk coming on furlough at finding the homes closed, and their bitter disappointment at being forced to spend their well-earned leisure hours in strange surroundings.[65]

To allow the distractions of the war to interrupt American life would have provided a sort of victory to the Axis powers. The Whiteville Junior Woman's Club strove to see that life continued as normally as possible.

To improve the local education system, women donated considerable efforts to local schools and libraries. Mildred Wells, historian of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, claims in her book *Unity in Diversity* that "interest in library work has never flagged." She continues, "Clubwomen have always realized that libraries are an integral part of the great scheme of public education."[66] In February 1942, the club purchased twenty-two books for the local library. Because of the club's support, the library featured a Junior Woman's Club shelf.[67] When the public library was briefly closed, the club contributed books to Whiteville Primary School.[68]

The club also worked in organizing the local instructional infrastructure. In January 1945, Helen Fuller and Elizabeth Baldwin of the club's Education Department were appointed to represent the club on a committee to establish a city school system in Whiteville.[69] The Whiteville City Schools system that stands today resulted in part from the contributions of these women. A club member also served on the enlarged library board, which initiated a movement to establish the Whiteville memorial library.[70] The committees for the city school system and library would have been incomplete without representatives from the organization that had already contributed so much to the instruction of neighborhood children.

---

[61] Sledge, Interview.
[62] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 179.
[63] Ibid., 197, 239.
[64] Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 126.
[65] Ayling, *Women for Defense*, 153-154.
[66] Wells, *Unity in Diversity*, 165.
[67] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 151.
[68] Ibid., 259.
[69] Ibid., 325.

The most significant club contribution to local education was the Public Welfare Department's establishment of the first kindergarten in Whiteville. Plans were submitted and approved in the September 1943 meeting, and by October 1943 kindergarten was being held in the home of the teacher, Emiline Smith.[71] Tuition was five dollars per week, not including the fees for lunch and supplies.[72] The kindergarten project earned the club second place in a competition for the most outstanding community service work, sponsored by the state Federation of Women's Club.[73] In its first year of operation, the kindergarten graduated seven pupils, and the following year it opened with twenty-six.[74]

The Junior Woman's Club also showed concern for even younger children. Soon after the club was formed in 1938, it adopted the Columbus County Hospital nursery and spent almost $535 on related equipment and supplies.[75] By 1944, the Columbus County Hospital was able to operate independently, and the club decided to discontinue its maintenance of the nursery.[76]

The hospital nursery project was just one of the many ways in which the club demonstrated its concern for the health of Columbus County citizens. Throughout the war years, the organization contributed to several public health funds. Consistent with what was happening in clubs across the state, the women supported the Polio Fund, the Tuberculosis Christmas Seal Sale, and the Cancer Control Fund.[77] Interestingly, the Tuberculosis Christmas seal sale of 1944 was postponed because of the Sixth War Loan Drive indicating that war activities had acquired priority over other activities.[78] However, the ladies did not neglect the Christmas Seal sale. The February 1945 minutes point out that total receipts for the TB Christmas Seals campaign amounted to $342.20.[79] The clubwomen did not disregard other important causes because of the war; they simply worked harder. As former Whiteville Junior Martha Burns said, "We just did everything that was necessary."[80]

Involvement in civic organizations also offered time for recreation. Clubwomen worked very hard, but club work and meetings also functioned as an escape from daily duties. Monthly meetings were not strictly business; they additionally provided time to socialize. The Whiteville Junior Woman's Club planned events whose only purpose was entertainment. For example, in the December 1943 meeting took the form of a Christmas tea.[81] In April 1944, and again at Christmas, the ladies entertained their husbands or escorts in a banquet held at Lake Waccamaw, North Carolina.[82] Not all of the Juniors' husbands were drafted into the service. Katherine Sledge was one of the fortunate women whose husband, Ferbie Sledge, was able to attend the banquets. Ferbie worked in the lumber industry and his service was needed there rather than in the military.[83] Many women were not so fortunate. To distract themselves from the anxiety of having loved ones in the war, the citizens of Whiteville needed recreational activities.

---

[70] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records,, 379.
[71] Ibid., 231, 235.
[72] Ibid., 235.
[73] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, History, 1.
[74] Ibid., 259, 309.
[75] "Junior Woman's Club Has Good Project Record" *The News Reporter,* 27 July 1944, pg. 1.
[76] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 277.
[77] Doak, *Towards New Frontiers,* 22.
[78] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 315.
[79] Ibid., 331.
[80] Martha Burns. Personal Interview conducted by author. 11 Nov. 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

The Junior Woman's club hosted several leisure opportunities, not only for themselves but for all Whiteville residents. In November 1944, the group planned to kick off the Sixth War Loan Drive with a box supper, square dance, and auction event.[84] In the summer of 1944 clubwomen and their husbands built a park, complete with swings, benches, sandboxes, and a fire pit on the club lot.[85] While some of these events raised money for club projects, maintaining civilian morale was the most important service of these activities.

Finally, on August 14, 1945, the Junior Women of Whiteville celebrated the surrender of Japan with the rest of the nation. The women gathered that day for what was likely an emotional, celebratory monthly meeting. However, while the war had ended, the work to rebuild the world had just begun. During the first post-war years, the president of the state federation declared "Beginning at Home, Build a Better World" to be the theme of the individual organizations.[86] In their support of the state objectives, the Juniors endorsed the rebuilding of the Manila clubhouse destroyed by the Japanese.[87] By 1945, the War Service Committee had become the Post War Service Committee, which was active at least through 1946. However, the committee did not record most of their activities.[88] Just as the statewide theme from 1945 to 1947 suggests, the women of Whiteville continued to work as hard as ever to further the cause of peace, prosperity, and democracy for the nation and the local community.

Whether working directly to advance the cause of freedom or to improve the aspects of day-to-day life, the Whiteville Juniors contributed significantly to the homefront war effort from 1941 to 1945. Men such as Lieutenant Billy Bragaw and women who became Rosie the Riveters are often celebrated as heroes of World War II. However, frequently forgotten homefront heroes are the twelve million civic soldiers who worked determinedly for the war effort and the ideals for which it stood. Civic women, as exemplified by the Whiteville Junior Woman's club, responded to the call of duty on a local level and made a global impact.

---

[81] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 243.
[82] Ibid., 261.
[83] Sledge, Interview.
[84] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 315.
[85] Ibid., 287.
[86] Doak, *Towards New Frontiers*, 30.
[87] Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 385.
[88] Ibid., 477

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Articles

"Center Suspends Activities on a Temporary Basis," *The News Reporter*, 9 Oct. 1944, pg.1.

"Junior Woman's Club Has Good Project Record" *The News Reporter,* 27 July 1944, pg. 1.

"Junior Women Report Sales." *The News Reporter,* 5 July, 1945, p.1.

"Pilots Junior Woman's Club 'Hellcat'." *The News Reporter.* 30 July, 1945, p. 1.

"Servicemen's Center to Open December 25th with Christmas Party," *The News Reporter*, 13 December 1943, p. 6.

State Chairman of Tobacco Program in Whiteville." *The News Reporter*. 24 Aug. 1944, p.1.

"State Chairman Pleased at Progress Here." *The News Reporter*. 28 August, 1944, 1

"Two Woman's Clubs Plan Club House," *The News Reporter,* 11 October, 1945, 1.

"Yule Party for Servicemen Was Grand Success," *The News Reporter*, 30 December 1943, p.1.

Books

Ayling, Keith. *Calling All Women*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942.
Banning, Margaret Culkin. *Women for Defense*.
New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942.

Interviews

Burns, Martha. Personal Interview conducted by author. 11 November 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

Sledge, Katherine. Personal Interview by author. 11 November 2005. Whiteville, North Carolina.

Wheeler, Frances. Personal Interview by author. 21 October 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

Wingfield, Mabel. Personal Interview by author. 21 October 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

Wyche, Ray and Melba. Personal Interview by author. 11 November 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

Unpublished Records

Whiteville Junior Woman's Club. *Records and Minutes of Meetings: 1938-1946.* Archives of Mark Gilchrist Whiteville, North Carolina.

___________ *History of Whiteville Junior Woman's Club: 1938-1945.* Archives of Mark Gilchrist Whiteville, North Carolina.

Secondary Sources:

Articles

Johnson, Margaret Kirkpatrick, Kristie Long Foley, Glen H. Elder, Jr.. "Women's Community Service, 1940-1960: Insights from a Cohort of Gifted American Women." *Sociological Quarterly*. vol. 45, no. 1 (1996): 63.

O'Leary, Micahel. "Incredible Cat." *Air Classics*, January 2000, <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3901/is_200001/ai_n8901621#continue> (1 November 2005).

Putnam, Robert B. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy*. Vol 6 no. 1 (1995).

"Series A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, and K Savings Bonds and Savings Notes." 2005. <www.publicdebt.treas.gov/sav/savold.htm> (3 March 2006).

Winchel, Megan Kate (2003) "Good Food, Good Fun, and Good Girls: USO Hostesses and World War Two." Doctoral dissertation. University of Arizona, Tuscon.

Books

Anderson, Karen. *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Doak, Frances Renfrow. *Toward New Frontiers: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs.* Raleigh: Capital Printing, 1962.

Lemon, Sarah McCulloh. *North Carolina's Role in World War II*.
Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1985.

Lotchin, Roger W. *The Bad City in the Good War*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

Lyons, Michael J. *World War II: A Short History*.
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004.

McMillen, Neil R. *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South.*
Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.

Perrett, Geoffrey. *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People 1939-1945*.
New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973.

Stephenson, Emma Gay. *Challenges for Change: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs.*
Charlotte: The Delmar Company, 1982.

Wells, Mildred White. *Unity in Diversity: The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.*
Washington, D.C.: GFWC, 1953.

Yellin, Emily. *Our Mother's War: American Women at Home and the Front During World War II*.
New York: Free Press, 2004.

Immigrant Health and the Public Schools: A Discussion of Public School Reform in New York City, 1900-1920

By Carolyn Rothman
Yale College

Between 1880 and 1920, New York City's simultaneous industrial boom and immigrant influx created deplorable living conditions for its ethnic poor. Overcrowding in tenements facilitated the spread of disease and restricted space for indoor movement. Tenement housing offered little in the way of light, ventilation, plumbing, or sanitation. Urban traffic clogged streets and made street-play dangerous for children. Nearby factories sullied the air with smoke and soot.

These urban industrial conditions wreaked havoc on the health of poor immigrant school children, gravely concerning middle-class New Yorkers. Between about 1900 and 1920, some urban reformers began to look to public schools as a means to combat these health problems. In contrast to the overcrowded, poorly-lit, badly ventilated, and largely unsanitary tenements, urban reformers called for the construction of schools that could promote good health among the students through carefully designed buildings. Reformers demanded facilities and curriculum for physical education, programs that would help teachers and school nurses to identify children with serious health defects and encourage all students to develop habits of good hygiene. Some reformers even argued that schools should offer programs to distract students from temptations of urban life such as boxing matches, dance clubs, and pool halls. The public school in early twentieth-century New York was therefore an instrument through which reformers sought to fight urban threats to children's physical and moral health and to assist in the students' absorption of middle-class American values.

Middle-class Americans were absorbed by the pursuit of health and fitness throughout the nineteenth century, motivated in large part by religious ideas that linked good physical health with sound morals. Between 1800 and 1840, the idea that humans could perfect themselves physically and morally—and that the Messiah would not return until they did—became popular among many American Christians.[1] Throughout the 1850s and the 1870s, the English idea of "Muscular Christianity" was prominent in the United States, explicitly encouraging people to exercise in order to improve their physical and moral discipline.[2] As adults struggled for self-improvement, the idea that children were inherently good and pure, and only corruptible by external influences, began to take hold.

These ideas gained particular currency in the fast-growing urban context of the late nineteenth century. By 1860, over half of the residents of the Northeast lived in cities, where they turned to exercise to counteract the stress of being distant from nature, removed from traditional community structures, and drained by sedentary office jobs.[3] Writers like Catharine Beecher and William Alcott wrote that exercises such as Swedish calisthenics and German gymnastics should be taught to school children.[4] Cities such as New York and Cincinnati borrowed the idea of the public gymnasium from the German immigrants who arrived in the late 1840s, using these facilities to provide social centers for fractured urban communities and wholesome activities for young middle-class men and women.[5] Families for whom traveling to a gymnasium was inconvenient purchased exercise equipment such as Indian clubs, weights, and rowing machines. Authors such as physical education instructor Dioclesian Lewis published books, articles, and pamphlets on how to exercise properly, with detailed instructions, helpful diagrams, and passages extolling the virtues of physical fitness.[6]

---

[1] Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 82.

[2] Ibid., 183.

[3] Ibid., 182.

Between 1880 and 1900, the flood of immigrants to northeastern cities gave middle-class Americans fresh reasons to worry about their health. The development of the germ theory of disease in the 1870s by German scientist Robert Koch created an enthusiasm for public health in most major cities as people began to understand the connection between poor sanitation and the spread of disease.[7] Cleanliness itself began to be considered an American value, and the poor sanitation evident in immigrant homes demonstrated to the middle-class that the immigrants were fundamentally different, inferior, and even dangerous. Nativists frequently described immigrants as unsanitary breeders of disease. Inspection sites were established at Ellis Island to weed out immigrants who showed symptoms of ailments ranging from conjunctivitis to tuberculosis to mental illness, and thousands of unlucky immigrants were sent back across the Atlantic without entering New York.[8] Nativists also viewed large immigrant families with alarm, fearing that the large and fast-growing immigrant population would soon outnumber white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Americans, who tended to have a lower birth rate. In response to this fear, some white Americans drew a connection between improving their own health and increasing their strength and virility as a race. As Dioclesian Lewis wrote in support of exercise regimens, “He who has not seen in the imperfect growth, pale faces, distorted forms and painful nervousness of the American People, enough to justify any and all efforts to elevate our physical tone, would not be awakened by words, written or spoken.” Similarly, as Theodore Roosevelt himself summed up in 1899, “Over-sentimentality, over-softness, in fact washiness and mushiness are the great dangers of this age and of this people.”[9]

But while some Americans worried increasingly about their own health, others grew concerned about the immigrants’ health in the city environment, and particularly the health of children. Reformers began to take action to protect young immigrant children from the corrupting influences of both urban life and un-American parents. As Dominick Cavallo wrote:

---

[4] Green, *Fit for America*, 96.

[5] Ibid., 99.

[6] Ibid., 184; Dioclesian Lewis, “The new gymnastics for men, women and children” (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864); available from http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=AEN3465.0001.001; Internet; accessed 10 April 2005.

[7] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the “Immigrant Menace”* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 55.

[8] Ibid, 4.

[9] Lewis, 9; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Hill and Wang, 2000), 3.

> "Child saving" was perhaps the most widely supported reform movement in the United States between 1880 and 1920. However vehemently social reformers disagreed among themselves about other issues, nearly all of them supported a host of child-saving efforts aimed at rescuing city children—especially working class, ethnic children—from a cluster of social and economic hazards.[10]

Among these reformers were "play organizers" spearheaded by the Playground Association of America, which lobbied for cities to develop community playgrounds—with space and equipment for outdoor play—and full-time directors to oversee organized games, sports, and classes for children. The playground movement's aim was to encourage discipline and physical health within the chaos of the city, and the reformers were fairly successful: by 1920, America's municipal governments had collectively spent over a hundred million dollars to fund playgrounds and playground programs.[11] But because these programs were voluntary, and because the immigrants spoke diverse languages and had varied value systems, the reformers had no way to ensure that children used the equipment or participated in the activities. Frustrated, reformers began to turn to the public schools.

Reformers found public schools to be apt venues for several reasons. First, beginning in Massachusetts in 1852, all American states had established compulsory education laws by 1918, providing reformers with a captive audience in the public school classrooms.[12] Second, public financing for schools saved reformers the trouble of private fundraising. Third, throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, school construction took place at a fast pace in many cities because of the need to accommodate the large numbers of immigrant children. Novel curricula such as manual and industrial training were established to teach students relevant skills and to make schools more interesting, thereby limiting truancy, lowering drop out rates, and providing students with practical skills to apply in industrial jobs after graduation.[13] The increasing presence of the schools in American cities, and the heightened discourse on public schools in the media and among civic leaders raised the schools status within the city, lending a certain institutional authority to reform programs implemented in the schools.

One of the most influential reformers of the day was William Henry Maxwell, who ascended from the office of Superintendent of Brooklyn schools to become the Superintendent of all New York City Schools when the five boroughs consolidated into New York City in 1898. Maxwell had immigrated to the United States in 1874 after working for a few years as a schoolteacher in Ireland. After arriving in the United States, Maxwell worked as a newspaper reporter—an experience that brought him in close touch with New York's impoverished immigrants and their horrific living conditions. His powerful writing on the deficiencies of the public schools became so widely known that he was made Assistant Superintendent of the Brooklyn Schools in 1882 and Superintendent in 1886 where he remained until he assumed control of all New York schools.[14]

---

[10] Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 1.
[11] Ibid, 2.
[12] William M. Landes, and Lewis C. Solmon, "Compulsory Schooling Legislation: An Economic Analysis of Law and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 32, No. 1. March, 1972; available from JSTOR; Internet; accessed 11 April 2006.
[13] Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1964, 28; Charles A. Bennett, *History of Manual and Industrial Education, 1870 to 1917* (Peoria, Ill.: The Manual Arts Press, 1937), 353.

Once in office, Maxwell was confronted with a school system inadequate to meet the needs of the increasingly industrial, multiethnic, and impoverished city. Schools were badly overcrowded and students were turned away when the schools reached capacity. Although Maxwell quickly implemented emergency measures to handle overcrowding, such as opening the school to one shift of students in the mornings and another shift in the evenings, these emergency measures were insufficient to meet the city's long-term needs. Between 1898 and 1911, the population of New York's schools jumped from 400,000 to 808,000.[15] Students who did not speak English or who suffered from physical or mental handicaps received no special accommodations and usually fell behind. Many students came to class ill-fed or ill-clothed, and children who were sick went untreated, often infecting other children. Teachers were poorly paid and not uniformly qualified. School building types ranged from one-room wooden structures to large brick buildings of various shapes and sizes.

Maxwell believed that the purpose of public education was to prepare citizens to participate intelligently in civic life, and therefore that all students should have equal access to a "minimum amount of knowledge necessary for citizenship." His school reforms were intended to equalize the learning process for students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, physical and mental abilities, and economic levels.[16] To this end, he implemented a uniform eight-year standard curriculum for all New York elementary schools.[17] He empowered the Board of Examiners to implement standards for teacher qualifications and salaries citywide.[18] He created special classes for students who could not speak English and for students with physical and mental disabilities, and he supported school-sponsored breakfasts and lunches for poor students. Maxwell also advocated vocational and technical training programs to prepare immigrant students for work in the city's industries.[19]

Maxwell's reforms were supported by diverse reform agencies, including the Public Education Association, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, the Children's Aid Society, and settlement workers.[20] But Maxwell's efforts to improve the physical health of the immigrant children received the greatest support of all and were continued and expanded by his successors. These reforms were rooted in the ideas that children must be protected from unhealthy urban living conditions and that physical and moral health are inter-related and fundamentally American.

Building new schools had become necessary by the time Maxwell came into power. Maxwell demanded that these new "healthful schools" be specially designed to accommodate the developing bodies and special health needs of children, inspiring a trend toward child-friendly school design in New York.[21] Members of the playground reform movement, such as Playground Association of America President Luther Gulick, a variety of social scientists, physical education experts, and medical professionals played important roles in defining the ideal school architecture and determining the most suitable equipment for the schools. The qualities identified by these reformers as necessary for a healthy urban school largely reflected the ideas advanced in the 1870s by the tenement reform movements, such as the idea that cleanliness was fundamental to an American home, and thus unhygienic conditions were un-American. Tenement reformers demanded that apartments be constructed with greater access to light and air. They called for clean water and sanitary waste removal. Some reform-era tenement designs included courtyards for children's play and adult socializing away from the busy street.[22] In a sense, the school reformers picked up where the tenement reformers left off, but rather than striving directly to make immigrants' homes more livable, school reformers sought to make the schools havens of health where children could acclimate to American standards of health and behavior and take some of these lessons back to their families.

---

[14] Selma C. Berrol, "William Henry Maxwell and a New Educational New York," *Studies in Urban Education III* (1968): 215-228, 216.
[15] Kraut, 227.
[16] Berrol, 222.
[17] William H. Maxwell, *A Quarter Century of Public School Development,* (New York: American Book Company, 1912), 288; Berrol, 220.
[18] Maxwell, 107, Berrol, 220.
[19] Berrol, 221.
[20] Ibid., 223.

In constructing the schools, reformers confronted many of the same urban issues that had challenged tenement reformers. Light and ventilation, for example, were critical concerns. "Even in our new buildings it is not by any means certain that the system of ventilation in use is the best which modern science has devised," wrote Maxwell in his book, *A Quarter Century of School Development*.[23] In 1913, the governor appointed the New York State Ventilating Commission, which developed five principles of proper ventilation, including that air should be "warm, not hot," "clean, not dirty," "moist, not dry," moving, not still" and "of changing temperature."[24] Implementing these conditions in the city's schools presented a challenge. Although devices such as humidifiers were installed in some schools to regulate humidity and hot-air furnaces were replaced by steam boilers, the equipment was temperamental. For example, opening the windows interfered with the thermostat systems, yet contemporaries strongly believed that windows should be opened to permit fresh air to flow through the classrooms. In a 1918 textbook called *Healthful Schools*, a carefully-researched set of guidelines for school construction, the authors asserted that, "Stagnant air is like a hot wet blanket wrapped tightly around the person's body, so thick and impenetrable that the body heat cannot escape, and a man is, in a certain very real sense, 'consumed in his own fires.'"[25] For students with serious respiratory illness, open air classrooms on the rooftops of buildings were used to provide maximum exposure to fresh air while protecting healthy children from infection.[26] But the freshness of the city air itself was also dubious in New York and other major cities, as one survey of Salt Lake City's public schools demonstrates: "The discolored wall of very many rooms show that dirty air is being forced into the buildings." The surveyors recommended installing "air washers" to "prevent the breathing of much injurious dust."[27]

---

[21] May Ayres, Jesse F. Williams and Thomas D. Wood, *Healthful Schools: How to Build, Equip, and Maintain Them*, (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1918).

[22] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2001), 124, 125.

[23] Maxwell, 180.

[24] Ayres et al, 135.

[25] Ibid., 130.

[26] Lina Rogers Struthers, *The School Nurse*, (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1917), 132.

Light was similarly problematic. The children's poor eyesight was a real concern to school reformers, particularly those like Maxwell and school nurse Lina Rogers Struthers who saw disease and disability as unfair disadvantages to children struggling to learn. To help children with poor eyesight and to protect the strong eyes of other students, medical workers pushed for better blackboards, duller paper in textbooks, and better lighting in classrooms to reduce eye strain.[28] School reformers advocated buildings with larger, wider windows to allow more light into the classrooms, but noted that "Tall buildings crowd in on every side…there is difficulty in securing proper lighting…we often furnish the pupil with an uninspiring view of brick walls and iron fire escapes."[29] The authors of *Healthful Schools* specified such details of proper window-building as the placement of windows in the classroom (set back from the blackboard to prevent glare), the proportion of window space to floor space (1:4), and the height of the windows from the floor (low enough to permit light to flood the room but high enough to prevent children from being distracted by the view).[30] Overhead electrical lighting was still relatively new during this time and mainly confined to factories and a few schools scattered throughout the country. By 1918, although reformers generally recognized that overhead lighting was beneficial because "all parts of the room are lighted equally well, and there are no disturbing shadows," a few were concerned that the electric light would be too bright and would damage the students' eyes. The authors of *Healthful Schools* ultimately concluded that a combination of windows and electrical lights was ideal, noting the special challenges of lighting and air quality in the city:

> It will be found that an astonishing difference is made in the amount of light admitted to schoolrooms by the simple expedient of cleaning windows more frequently. Dust and smoke gather on the outer surface of the glass and form a curtain which effectually bars out entering light rays.[31]

Proper sanitation was critical to the school reform agenda as well. Unlike rural schools of the day, which relied on individual wells or springs for their water supply, city schools depended on the city to provide clean water. "If the water contains impurities schools can do little except complain to the authorities….Fortunately public health boards are now thoroughly awake to the perils of impure drinking-water, and most cities are under constant and careful supervision," wrote the authors of *Healthful Schools*.[32] By 1918, New York had outlawed the use of a common drinking cup, and school nurses distributed disposable paper cups to students to prevent unsanitary sharing. "Bubbling fountains...present[ing] a stream two inches high" were installed in some of the larger schools, although the authors of *Healthful Schools* warned against one particular health risk of this innovation:

---

[27] Ayres et al, 127.
[28] Kraut, 246.
[29] Ayres et al, 4.
[30] Ibid., 67.
[31] Ibid., 74.
[32] Ibid., 88.

> [The fountain] should be protected by a frame which prevents the mouth from coming in contact with the outlet, but care should be taken to make this frame in such a way that children will not run any danger of breaking their teeth upon it. There is something so peculiarly helpless in the appearance of another person bending over a drinking fountain that most normal children, and some adults, are filled with a sudden strong desire to push the drinker's head down into the water. If the fountain is not designed to protect the child against just such accidents painful injuries may sometimes result.[33]

New York City's water system allowed pressure sufficient for indoor flush toilets but the *Healthful Schools* authors bemoaned the fact that by 1918, "few definite standards had as yet evolved concerning the number and location of lavatories."[34] By 1918, school reform experts pushed for the installation of individual porcelain flush toilets and urinals in easy-to-clean, white-tiled bathrooms wherever possible, with seats set at varying heights to accommodate the diverse sizes of the school children.[35]

One of the unique challenges facing school builders in big cities like New York was the problem of finding a site for construction. Land in the city was limited and expensive, so finding adequate land was difficult and sometimes required the destruction of existing structures. "That there is such a necessity of the power of eminent domain for the condemnation of property for public educational purposes…'goes without saying' so far as the courts are concerned," wrote Dr. Frank E. Henzlik in a 1924 analysis for Columbia University's Teacher's College.[36] School reformers usually maintained that "[n]o child should have to walk more than a mile and a half to school," but it was sometimes difficult to gauge exactly where the children would be walking from because neighborhood compositions changed rapidly during this period.[37] New groups of immigrants inundated neighborhoods and as families relocated frequently following jobs, it was difficult to make any long-term projections about how many students would be attending a school or who those students would be.[38] Once suitable land for a school was acquired, other urban challenges presented themselves, such as the dangers of street traffic to students walking to and from school and the nuisance of street noise outside classroom windows.[39]

Although adjusting the architecture of the school building may have been effective for improving students' health, these reforms did not encourage students to be accountable for their own wellbeing. Reformers like Maxwell and his followers believed that schools should teach students to take active responsibility for their bodies, especially due to the dangers of the urban environment. "In the new buildings the sanitary conditions are very good; in many of the older ones….they are very bad. But in all, the physical health of the children might be improved by appropriate and regular exercise," wrote Maxwell.[40] Physical education was understood by school reformers as critical to the students' mental and moral development. "Civilized countries have been slow to recognize that the school is the training ground of every child for the battle of life," wrote Struthers. "A child's school life should mean a preparation and training that will fit him physically, mentally, and morally for his place in the world, so that each one is given the opportunity to secure health, happiness, and success."[41] On October 19, 1916, a few years after Maxwell's tenure as superintendent came to an end, the New York Board of Regents voted that "all male and female pupils above the age of eight years in all elementary and secondary schools shall receive as a part of the prescribed course of instruction…physical training."[42]

---

[33] Ayres et al, 93.
[34] Ibid., 91.
[35] Ibid., 107, 110.
[36] Frank E. Henzlik, *Rights and Liabilities of Public School Boards Under Capital Outlay Contracts,* (New York City: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1924), 11.
[37] Ayres et al, 2.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 4.
[40] Maxwell, 170.

Physical education had three main components: health inspections, hygiene courses, and physical activity. The physical education model curriculum followed a program developed by the state Military Training Commission, which called for "medical inspection, talks and recitations in hygiene and all forms of healthful physical exercise." The Regents acknowledged that, "New York City has all the elements of this program in one form or another in or related to her public schools," including "a new syllabus on hygiene…[adopted] this calendar year, setting-up drills," and gymnastic exercises.[43]

Medical inspections were a critical part of the school reformers' efforts to improve the quality of the schools. Maxwell began establishing a system of medical inspection early in his tenure as Superintendent, which ultimately included physical inspections of teacher applicants, physical inspections of students for diseases and disabilities, and "inspection of the sanitary arrangements of schools and of the work of janitors in cleaning and disinfecting."[44] Ordinary teachers were trained to identify symptoms of illness in their students, and procedures were developed through which the teacher could report these observations to the school nurse or school doctor. School nurses undertook regular and rigorous examination of the students' hair, teeth, skin, hands, and posture, looking for symptoms of ailments ranging from head lice to scoliosis to rotting teeth, as well as signs of poor hygienic practices.

Within the schools, nurses and teachers taught students proper hygienic practices. "The highest objective of all efforts is to teach students how to *be* healthy and how to *stay* healthy," wrote Struthers.[45] Courses in hygiene ranged from nose-blowing drills to hand-washing and tooth-brushing practice.[46] "Little mothers classes" were offered to teach girls how to care properly for an infant's health and how to manage a hygienic home. Facilities for these and other domestic arts courses were included in the high school design, sometimes including full-scale kitchens and nurseries.[47]

Facilities for physical activity were also incorporated into high school design with the construction of school gymnasiums and sometimes even playing fields and indoor swimming pools.[48] New gyms included space for showering, offices for the full-time medical inspector or physical education teachers, and floors made of maple boards to make the space suitable for school functions after hours.[49] But acquiring extra land for playing fields was not always possible: "Property values…[were] apt to be so high that the schools feel extra grounds an extravagance, and little space is secured for playgrounds, athletic fields, or gardens."[50] Therefore, Maxwell pushed for his teachers to be specially trained to teach calisthenics and encouraged them to allot time for physical exercise within their regular lesson plans: "In a city where there are so few small parks and where schoolhouses are practically unprovided with playgrounds…I think it indisputable that physical exercises introduced between lessons are a great boon for the growing children."[51] In the Board of Regents' 1916 plans for implementing physical education statewide, various curricula were included to accommodate both schools with gymnasiums and playing fields, and schools without these amenities.

---

[41] Struthers, 2.
[42] New York (State) Military Training Commission, *General plan and syllabus for physical training in the elementary and secondary schools of the state of New York,* (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1917), 13.
[43] Ibid., 191.
[44] Maxwell, 184.
[45] Struthers, 40.
[46] Ibid., 70, 218.
[47] Ibid., 117.
[48] Maxwell, 171.

Cleanliness, health, and hygiene were fundamental to middle-class American values during this time. Efforts by school reformers to educate students about proper health and hygiene had an underlying purpose to Americanize immigrant communities by educating them about a sanitary lifestyle. Reformers reached out to parents both indirectly and directly through the schools. The reformers instructed their pupils to bring their lessons about proper child care, nutrition, exercise, and hygienic practices home to their families. Lina Rogers Struthers wrote of her little mothers, "These girls love to pass on this information to their neighbors and many a 'little mother' leads a mother in Israel [a Jewish neighborhood] into the paths of tidiness and cleanliness."[52] School nurses also frequently made "home visits" to teach immigrant parents how to care for their sick children, as well as to offer tips on how to clean, feed, clothe, and bathe children according to American standards. "The school…in some measure, must take the place of the home," wrote Struthers, "but this should be a partnership between the State and the family and bring the school into closer relation with the home."[53] Through direct and indirect means, public school physical education programs became avenues through which school reformers could encourage immigrant families to assimilate and improve their children's health.

While reformers used the public schools to shape children's physical health and to extend to the children and their families an American appreciation for hygiene, they also believed that their work in the public schools benefited the students' moral well-being. First, the reformers sought to use the physical space of the school as a place for organized activity that could keep the children off the streets and away from the immoral temptations of city life. Second, reformers followed through on the nineteenth-century idea that physical and moral health are intertwined, acting on the belief that through physical education children could be taught social values that would be useful in the city.

Within the school reform movement, a sub-group formed that believed that public schools should provide a range of community services. Maxwell himself shared this belief, arguing that "the public school best serves its neighborhood when it is made the center from which all organized civilizing and elevating influences . . . should radiate."[54] Members of the social center movement believed that the facilities of the school, such as the libraries, gymnasium, and auditoriums, should be open for public use after school hours to bring communities together across ethnic, religious, and linguistic divisions.[55] Supporters of the social center movement argued that not only would these activities help build neighborhood morale, but would recreate some of the city's social attractions in a supervised space. The schools could then provide a safe yet attractive alternative to immoral and congested social spaces in the children's communities.[56]

---

[49] Ayres et al, 40.
[50] Ibid., 4.
[51] Maxwell, 171.
[52] Struthers, 126.
[53] Ibid., 134.

School reformers specifically saw physical education as critical to building social values that were useful in urban life. By using team sports and coordinated gymnastic movements, the reformers hoped to build a sense of unity and teamwork among immigrant children from diverse backgrounds.[57] Luther Gulick argued that athletics appealed to children's sense of fair play, and required children to analyze a situation and react quickly.[58] The discipline required for athletic activity was also viewed as morally enriching for the urban youth by providing immigrant children with structure: "Play advocates perceived the peer group as a community-controlled institution providing adolescents with values and skills that were not being transmitted by the urban, especially ethnic, family."[59]

Cleanliness and hygiene themselves were believed to encourage moral behavior and social values. The acceptance of the idea that illness could be spread by poor sanitation made hygiene a civic duty: by keeping clean, good people could protect others from harm. Reformers understood the responsibility of caring for children as a moral duty, because healthy, happy children would grow into productive members of society in the future. As Lina Rogers Struthers wrote, "These early lessons will prepare them [the students] for citizenship, make them lovers of law and order, health and cleanliness, honesty and morality, and thus insure a happy contented neighborhood."[60]

In response to the living conditions and social disjuncture that resulted from massive industrialization and immigration to New York City around the turn of the twentieth century, some reformers looked to the public schools as a means of protecting students' health and instilling American social values. Under the initial leadership of reform Superintendent William H. Maxwell, and later continued by other reformers, as well as the state and city governments, new school construction was undertaken specifically to protect students from some of the ill-effects of urban life. Physical education, including medical inspections, hygiene courses, and athletic training were instituted to instruct students and their families about physical fitness and ways to maintain a healthy American lifestyle. Through physical education reformers believed they could instill in students an appreciation for American social values like fair play, team work, discipline, and healthy competition. Proponents of the social center movement thought that schools could be havens, not only from the foul living conditions of the city, but also from its social dangers by providing students and their communities with supervised arenas for entertainment and enrichment. New York’s school reformers enjoyed great success in their efforts. By the early 1920s, experts on school construction considered many of the innovative ideas advanced by Maxwell as standard for public schools. The decision by the state to make physical education mandatory statewide reflected the full incorporation of Maxwell’s reform ideas into the state’s own agenda. Thus, schools at the turn of the century were transformed into instruments of immigrant aid and assimilation, providing reformers with a means of addressing threats to the physical and moral health of the immigrants within the evolving industrial urban context.

---

[54] Maxwell, 2.
[55] Maxwell, 2; Ayres et al., 248.
[56] Ayres et al, 248.
[57] Cavallo, 6.
[58] Ibid., 6.
[59] Ibid., 7.
[60] Struthers, 124.

Bibliograpy

Primary Sources

Allen, William H. *A Broader Motive for School Hygiene.* New York: New York Committee on the Physical Welfare of School Children, 1908.

Ayres, May, Jesse F. Williams and Thomas D. Wood. *Healthful Schools: How to Build, Equip, and Maintain Them.* Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1918.

Ayres, Leonard Porter. *Laggards in Our Schools; A Study of Retardation and Elimination in City School Systems.* New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1909.

Ayres, Leonard Porter. *The New Attitude of the School Towards the Health of the Child.* New York: Department of Child Hygiene, Russell Sage Foundation, 1911.

Betelle, James O. *Checking Schedule for Projected School Buildings.* Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1919.

Bruce, William C. *High school buildings, Volume II.* Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1919.

Henzlik, Frank E. *Rights and Liabilities of Public School Boards Under Capital Outlay Contracts.* New York City: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1924.

Holy, Russell. A. *The Relationship of City Planning to School Planning.* New York City: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1935.

Lewis, Dioclesian. "The New Gymnastics for Men, Women and Children." Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864.Available from http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/textidx?c=moa;idno=AEN3465.0001.001. (10 April 2005).

Leonard, Fred Eugene. *A Guide to the History of Physical Education, 3rd ed.* Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1947.

Maxwell, William H. *A Quarter Century of Public School Development.* New York: American Book Company, 1912.

New York (State) Military Training Commission. *General plan and syllabus for physical training in the elementary and secondary schools of the state of New York.* Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1917.

New York (State) Military Training Commission. *General plan and syllabus for physical training in the elementary and secondary schools of the state of New York.* Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1921.

Struthers, Lina Rogers. *The School Nurse.* New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1917.

Secondary Sources

Bennett, Charles A. *History of Manual and Industrial Education, 1870 to 1917.* Peoria, Ill.: The Manual Arts Press, 1937.

Berrol, Selma C. “William Henry Maxwell and a New Educational New York.” *Studies in Urban Education III* (1968): 215-228.

Cavallo, Dominick. *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

Cremin, Lawrence A. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957.* New York: Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1964.

Goodenow, Ronald K. and Diane Ravitch, eds. *Educating and Urban People: The New York City Experience.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1981.

Green, Harvey. *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Hill and Wang, 2000).

Katz, Michael B. *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975.

Kraut, Alan. *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the “Immigrant Menace.”* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Landes, William M. and Lewis C. Solmon. “Compulsory Schooling Legislation: An Economic Analysis of Law and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century.” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 32, No. 1. March, 1972. Available from JSTOR. Internet. Accessed 09 April 2006.

Reese, William J. *The Origins of the American High School*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.

Tyack, David B. *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education.* Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1974.

Welch, Paula D. *History of American Physical Education and Sport, Third Ed.* Springfield, Ill: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd., 2004.

Welter, Rush. *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America.* New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962.

Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America.* Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2001.

Little Dragons: Chinese American Childhood in the San Francisco Bay Area at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

By K. Ian Shin
Amherst College

The childhood experience of Chinese Americans in the San Francisco Bay area has changed dramatically since the turn of the twentieth century: from political rejection and discrimination to political acceptance; from independent single life to family life; from menial labor to education. This historical shift makes for an interesting study of Chinese American childhood. Theirs was a unique situation. The hardships of immigration, combined with the stresses and responsibilities of being pushed prematurely into adult life, converged on the children of a culture that expected nothing less than blind obedience to the expectations of their elders. The contributions of Chinese American children to public and private histories are thus easily forgotten. Their struggles, which inform a growing interest in the role of children in political, economic, and social life, are generally ignored. A nuanced narrative covering both general trends and local issues and stories finds that, among tragedies of racism, economic hardship, and gender oppression, there are surprising and encouraging accounts of Chinese American childhood in the San Francisco Bay area in the early twentieth century.

Although a large number of their ethnic compatriots had immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century, the children were part of a Chinese community in California whose population had only begun to stabilize by 1900. Traditional city-centers were slowly bleeding away their Chinese residents. Chinese faced widespread discrimination not only in government policy but in their daily interactions with other Americans as well. The gender distribution of the Chinese community held serious implications for the family situation of its youth, especially in Contra Costa County, located in the San Francisco Bay area. These conditions in Contra Costa County were not hospitable for childhood, but children learned, played, and lived there nonetheless. It is precisely this contrast that makes Chinese American childhood in the San Francisco Bay area at the turn of the twentieth century especially noteworthy.

What makes the children's experience with the trans-Pacific journey to the United States remarkable is that despite their age children were afforded no special considerations or care. The conditions onboard the emigrant steamships were not intolerable, but their unfamiliar conditions were the main concern of children traveling alone to America. Lee Chew was sixteen when his father gave him $100 to move to the United States. Chew recalls: "Everything was new to me. All my life I had been used to sleeping on a board bed with a wooden pillow, and I found the steamer's bunk very uncomfortable, because it was so soft."[1]

During the voyage to the United States, American skepticism and suspicion of the Chinese were often returned at the "white devils," as Whites were known vernacularly in the community. An illustration in the 20 May 1876 issue of *Harper's Weekly* depicts mealtime onboard the steamship *Alaska*. While the White captain and cook of the boat discuss the dishes prepared and spread on the floor for the Chinese passengers, three Chinese men stand to the side examining a steaming pot, their faces sullen and doubtful about the food with which they have been called to partake.[2] Mrs. Chin, who was nineteen-years old when she left for America in 1913, recounts that coming by ship was not a hardship, "not as long as you didn't get seasick."[3] Most children recognized that the real difficulty lay not in crossing the ocean, but in gaining entry once they had arrived at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco.

---

[1] Hamilton Holt, ed., *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* (New York: James Pott & Company, 1906), 289.

As the western counterpart of New York's Ellis Island, the Angel Island Immigration Station was the gateway to America for all immigrations coming from the Far East. The examinations at Angel Island attained such cult status that entire industries sprang up in China to help immigrants pass the verbal tests. The tests include a medical examination that thoroughly humiliated the very modest Chinese. Mr. Lee, who arrived at Angel Island in 1930 when he was twenty-years old, remembers: "The doctor told us to take off everything. [It] was humiliating. The Chinese never expose themselves like that."[4] After the physical examination, immigration officials called the Chinese individually into hour-long interrogation sessions. The officials queried about seemingly trivial matters, such as the number of hours in the subject's village or the number of steps between the subject's house and his neighbor's.[5] In truth, the minutiae were instruments to draw out discrepancies between the testimonies of family members and friends, thus disqualifying as many potential entrants as possible under the terms of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Sometimes, according to Mr. Chew, who arrived in 1920 when he was fourteen, the interrogations were simply inhumane:

> One person even went crazy. Her husband said he had four sons. Of course, Chinese always reported sons in order to have them come to America to make a fortune. Who would report daughters? So this inspector tried to trip her and said, "Your husband said you had four daughters. Why are you saying four sons? We're going to send you to jail before we deport you." So they drove her insane.[6]

Similar to their experiences on the steamships to America, what the Chinese children underwent at Angel Island was disturbing. The immigration facility made no effort to distinguish between youth and adult in its operations, perhaps because children were not significant enough a population at Angel Island to have merited the additional resources. The combination of adults and youth is thus very telling about the size and Whites' perception of the young Chinese population. Many children were left alone once they arrived at Angel Island. Mr. Gin, who came to America in 1915 with his uncle as a six-year old, remembers: "As soon as the ship landed . . . [immigration] took me to Angel Island and he just came back to Chinatown."[7]

---

[2] See plate 2, "Chinese Emigration to America – Sketch on Board the Pacific Mail Steamship 'Alaska,'" *Harper's Weekly*, 20 May 1876, p. 461. Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, ed., *Coming Man* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 26.

[3] Mrs. Chin, interviewed by Judy Yung, *Angel Island Oral History Project*, box 1, folder 2.

[4] Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), 48.

[5] Chetin, 19.

[6] Mr. Chew, interviewed by Judy Yung, *Angel Island Oral History Project*, box 1, folder 11.

[7] Mr. Gin, interviewed by Judy Yung, *Angel Island Oral History Project*, box 1, folder 6.

The system that the Chinese adopted to circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Act called for papers to be purchased for children in China who would come as the false sons of merchants returning to the United States. These children, who were commonly called "paper sons," bought entry documents and coaching instructions for the Angel Island examinations for sums upward of $1,500.[8] This system of false identities led to a complicated web of relations in the Chinese community; it forced the Chinese to re-evaluate and extend the traditional definition of family, leading to some very peculiar developments in a lived sense of family.

The trauma of this "paper son" system probably caused some psychological damage to the children involved. The system continues to manifest itself in the Chinese who experienced it as children at the turn of the century. Mr. Chan, who came to the United States as a "paper son" when he was sixteen, refused to disclose his real name even as late as the 1970s. During an oral history interview, he was afraid that revealing his illegal entry might jeopardize his current resident status.[9] The "paper son" system also bred a deep distrust of American government.

Aside from isolation from their relatives, children's lives on Angel Island seem idyllic. Of the fifty-eight immigrants interviewed for the Angel Island Oral History Project, the lengths of their stays at the facility ranged from three days to a year. The differences in duration made it difficult to arrange schooling for the children entering Angel Island, and no formal education was provided. Six-year old Gin remembers no other children at Angel Island during his three months there: "There were no kids. I don't remember what I did with the time—fool around, I guess."[10] There was no English instruction, implying that Whites did not expect Chinese children to assimilate into the mainstream community. A few lucky children with families in the city received consoling letters, but immigration officials opened and inspected the letters before they were passed to their designated recipients.[11]

Education was uncommon for Chinese children, mostly because it was not a readily available resource or an economically viable option. When Chinese children received education, it was in segregated schools taught by White teachers, usually females. Christian churches ran many of these schools. Census data shows that younger Chinese children enjoyed a better chance at receiving an education than older children. In California, among 2,944 Chinese children aged seven to thirteen, 2,609 were listed as attending school in 1920. Of 2,235 Chinese children aged eighteen to twenty, however, only 708 were listed as attending school.[12] From the discrepancy, one might argue that younger children enrolled in school were typically members of higher-class Chinese families that could afford the expensive trans-Pacific passage without demanding an economic return from those children. California census numbers also demonstrate that Chinese girls were more likely to receive an education than boys, with 60 percent of girls attending school in 1910 compared to 40 percent of boys.[13] The likelihood of schooling for girls suggests that they were not expected to contribute to the family economy as much as boys were expected to contribute. The value of girls lay in preparing for the future, whereas the value of boys lay in their potential immediate economic payoff.

---

[8] Wong Yow came to America in 1921 after his father paid a merchant named Mr. Wong $1,650 for passage. Peter C.Y. Leung, *One Day, One Dollar* (El Cerrito: Chinese/Chinese American History Project, 1984), 48. Quoted in Choy, 45.

[9] Mr. Chan, interviewed by Judy Yung, *Angel Island Oral History Project*, box 1, folder 7.

[10] Mr. Gin, interview.

[11] Mrs. Chong, interviewed by Judy Yung, *Angel Island Oral History Project*, box 1, folder 22.

[12] *Fourteenth Census*, 1044.

[13] *Thirteenth Census*, 1140.

Photographic evidence offers some hints to school life. An undated postcard entitled "Chinese Primary Public School" shows a class of Chinese boys in session.[14] From the all-male composition of the class in the photograph, it seems that schools were divided by gender. A White female teacher sits in the front, leading her seventeen students in the reading of some book. Few of the students seem truly interested in the teacher or engaged in the lesson, which seems to be conducted in English from the cursive writing sample on a chalkboard on the sidewall. Many of the students turn distractedly to look at the photographer, and others stare blankly at the book on their desks as they recline, sitting on their hands. Drawings of tigers, elephants, and horses decorate a blackboard in the back of the classroom, suggesting that the class might be discussing science or zoology. The classroom scene gives a rather unfavorable impression of the education offered to Chinese children. Met by teachers who could not bridge the cultural divide between Whites and Chinese, children were ineffectively taught subjects that were irrelevant to their most salient roles as economic actors.

Although the youngest members of the Chinese community might have escaped the expectation of being gainfully employed, the majority of children contributed to the community's economy in some way. This was especially true in Contra Costa County, where the privilege of education was lost to all thirty-seven individual cases of Chinese children identified in the 1910 and 1920 U.S. Census.[15] Thirty-six of these children, males ranging in age from three to twenty, were listed as laborers of one form or another. The last child of the group, an eight-year old girl named Faun Lee, had no occupation listed. It is almost disturbing that a child as young as three-years old, Kew Ten of Antioch, would be listed as a laborer, but this fact demonstrates the rigorous employment culture in the Chinese community, particularly in Contra Costa County.

Chinese children mainly took jobs in manual labor or service and support industries. Of the thirty-seven individual cases identified between 1910 and 1920, the majority of the children were employed on farms. However, there seems to be no steady trend of child employment in the fields of Contra Costa County. Fourteen-year old Sun Toy of Palm Tract, for example, was the only hired hand under twenty years of age working at a potato farm. He did the same work of men twice his age.[16] Others, like fourteen-year old Ah Wee of the unincorporated Second Township, worked as servants and cooks in a boarding house.[17] Nilda Rego, a local historian, reports "many of the leading families of Contra Costa and Alameda counties had Chinese cooks. John and Louis Strenzel Muir not only hired a Chinese cook, but house cleaners and farm laborers."[18] Young Chinese also staffed workplaces such as mining and fishing camps.

---

[14] Britton and Rey, "Chinese Primary Public School, 920 Clay St., Chinatown, San Francisco," undated, "SF – Social Groups – Chinese: postcards," California Historical Society, San Francisco.

[15] Original census schedules from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth U.S. Census can be found online at the HeritageQuest program. *Thirteenth Census* and *Fourteenth Census*, "HeritageQuest Online Search Census," via HeritageQuest Online, 1999-2004, <http://www.heritagequestonline.com/prod/genealogy/searchadvanced> (26 February 2004).

[16] *Thirteenth Census*, series T624, roll 75, p. 15. Via HeritageQuest Online.

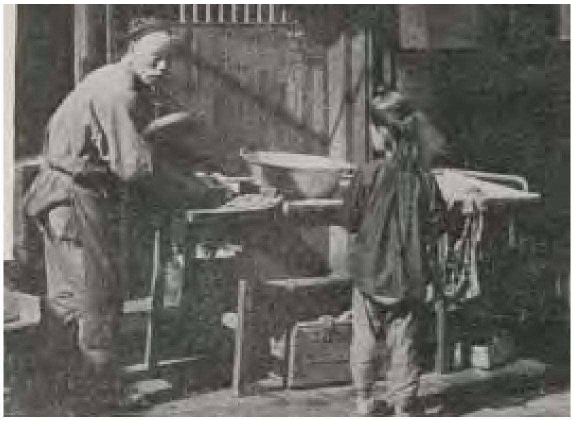
[17] *Thirteenth Census*, series T624, roll 75, p. 45. Via HeritageQuest Online.

[18] Nilda Rego, "A bride abducted from the Chinese laundryman's," Contra Costa *Times*, 12 March 1992, 2.

The high rate of mobility demonstrated in census data suggests that Chinese American children were forced to adopt an independent lifestyle even at a young age. The data shows no continuity from census to census. The two California-born workers in the 1920 Census, eighteen-year old Jung Mon and twenty-year old Gene Ong, do not appear in any California census records since 1860, suggesting that the children may have been part of migrant families that evaded the census count in 1910. Alternatively, the scarcity of family units suggests that Mon and Ong were part of the young adult population from China identified as "boarders" in terms of their relationship with the head of the household. As boarders, Chinese youth received food, lodging, and perhaps a small stipend for the work they performed for the household. As independents, Chinese youth had greater control over their incomes and fewer restrictions on the type or the location of their work. The discontinuity between censuses proposes that, when work opportunities ran short, the child laborers had few reservations about relocating to more fruitful surroundings.

An 1897 Arnold Genthe print from a series on Chinese shrimp camps in Point San Pedro shows a young boy as a cooking assistant (Figure 1).[19] An older man, probably in his twenties, prepares a meal for the camp and looks up to give instructions to the youngster. The boy is dressed in ragged clothes, his signature Manchu hair queue hanging shaggy and unkempt. It is clear from the boy's clothing and position that his days are full of hard work and hurried orders; there is no time to waste on sartorial order.

Figure 1



Although boys were the most commonly employed of Chinese youth, one Genthe photograph, entitled "The Fish Dealer's Daughter," reveals that girls sometimes shared the burden of manual labor, in this case carrying shrimp baskets for her fisherman father.[20] Genthe catches the girl in her work, the baskets strewn about her as she stops momentarily for the portrait. Her face evinces no childish joy or happiness; rather, her furrowed eyebrows betray a premature adult stress. While the census provides the sterile data that Chinese child employment was prevalent but not methodical in Contra Costa County, the Genthe photographs reveal the pain and hardships that these young laborers endured.

---

[19] Arnold Genthe, *Genthe's Photographs of San Francisco's Old Chinatown* (New York: Dover, 1984), 36, plate 19.

[20] Ibid, 37, plate 20.

The public lives of Chinese children also come through in their encounters with the police and the courts. Writing at a time when negative stereotypes of the Chinese abounded, sociologist Mary Coolidge asserted that the Chinese were actually a more law-abiding citizenry compared to other ethnic groups. Between 1870 and 1900, Chinese males made up 14 percent of the adult male population on average, but only 11 percent of the criminally held in state prisons and 4.2 percent of those deemed insane.[21] In contrast, British males made up only 4 percent of the total male population but made up 52 percent of the criminal population and 6 percent of the insane.

The most well known Chinese criminals were highbinders, or mobsters hired to enforce the rulings of the village associations known as *tongs*. Although highbinders were mostly older men, some young Chinese became involved in the dangerous underworld of mob politics as well. The *tong* wars that sometimes ripped apart the San Francisco Chinatown spilled over to Contra Costa County. On 21 April 1917, the Contra Costa *Gazette* reported a double murder in the city of Martinez by two highbinders of the Hop Sing Tong organization.[22] An elaborate entrapment led Ah Toy and Lee Toy to their deaths as twenty-two-year-old Joe Lum gunned them down on Escobar Street. Lum was arrested and sentenced to San Quentin State Penitentiary on 24 April 1917 and served three years.[23] The remarkable thing about Lum's case is that it was the singular Chinese criminal case reported in the hundreds of files at San Quentin. The only other two criminal cases involving Chinese youth were reported in the county's Register of Patients and Inmates, where fifteen-year old Frank Chew and fourteen-year old Alfred Beo were "diagnosed" with juvenile detention.[24] In total, there were three cases of criminality in a population of 343.

The only other court documents relating to Chinese youth in Contra Costa County address issues of family life. George Guen Ong, a nineteen-year old Chinese male, is mentioned in Superior Court documents in 1923 regarding a change in guardianship. Surprisingly, the adopter is a White female: Adalyne Dungan of Pittsburg. Ong's parents, Chang Wah Ong and Chan Shee Ong, passed away in February 1923, and George, according to the court documents, "nominated [Dungan] as . . . guardian."[25] Dungan's previous relationship to Ong is described as a "friend," although a mentoring or teaching relationship may be more accurate.

The case of George Guen Ong is important for several reasons. First, it sheds light on the non-existence of nuclear Chinese families in Contra Costa County (Dungan could only become guardian because the court found no extended family in the county). Second, it establishes the closeness of relationships that some Chinese shared with Whites, enough to cause Ong to request Dungan as his legal guardian. Finally, the case highlights the agency Ong takes in deciding his own fate. The adoption case of George

---

[21] Coolidge, 448.

[22] "Highbinders of Suey Sing Lie in Wait for Victims," Contra Costa *Gazette*, 21 April 1917, 7-8.

[23] Office of the Clerk of Contra Costa County, "Description and Photos of Contra Costa County Prisoners, Martinez No. 2461," 1920, *Descriptions and Photographs of Discharged Prisoners – San Quentin*, Contra Costa Historical Society, Martinez.

[24] Contra Costa County Hospital, "Number 4805 and Number 4806," 1908-1926, *Register of Patients and Inmates*, Contra Costa Historical Society, Martinez.

[25] Louis Stein, "Documents relating to appointment of Adalyne Dungan as guardian of George Guen Ong," 1923, box 1, folder 17, *Documents Relating to Chinese in Contra Costa County, California, 1873-1923*, University of California Ethnic Studies Library, Berkeley.

Guen Ong is an anomaly in the otherwise grim public experiences of Chinese children in Contra Costa County.

The private lives of Chinese children in California, particularly the domestic living situations, are difficult to discern because of the lack of documentation. Family structure and family values can be gleaned from sociological studies such as Coolidge's *Chinese Immigration*. However, outside of oral history, there are few accounts of Chinese home life at the turn of the century. The lack of historical family documents should not be surprising considering the circumstances. Migratory families are less likely than settled families to document their living spaces and family lives because they do not hold any sentimental value to their temporary home; economic needs simply do not make family portraits and other such trivia cost-efficient. As a result, children's experience in family life must be gathered from what scanty evidence there is of their public interactions.

The Chinese family structure was highly patriarchal. Coolidge writes: "The treatment of women is the darkest blot upon the civilization of China. Daughters are unwelcome in the family because, when married, they are lost by absorption into the husband's family."[26] In Coolidge's observation, there is a sense that every child is a potential economic contributor, and his or her value is appraised by his or her potential contribution. A Chinese Hawaiian explains: "It is generally believed that in a typical Oriental family, the mother is secondary and unimportant, she being so submissive and meek."[27] While the men and the boys worked outside the home, girls "were taught to clean the house, help with the cooking, wash the dishes and in general do all the household duties that a good daughter should know."[28] In private homes, the hierarchy would be organized along the lines of gender, with the elder receiving more respect than the younger. Nevertheless, this theoretical system of family organization was never consistently applied because the rules, and the demographics of the community necessitated its change. Social pressures forced the Chinese to re-evaluate their definition of family and, in many cases, re-evaluate the role of children in their lives.

One of the ways in which the definition of family was changed by social pressure can be found in many of Arnold Genthe's photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown. From the photographs, it would appear that fathers were the primary caretakers of the children. Indeed, very few of Genthe's family photographs show a woman with her children in public. In Genthe's "Reading the Tong Proclamation," a father dressed in western garb stops along a wall to read announcements from his neighborhood association.[29] The daughter, dressed in traditional Chinese clothes, clings to him and looks down the street, oblivious to whatever important news her father brought her out to see. The father-child relationship in this photograph seems distant, each member having a different concern and neither taking interest in the other.

The daughter might have yearned for her mother, who usually did not show her face in public under the community's rules of decorum. Sociologist Ivan Light explains: "As late as 1900, married Chinese women never dared to venture on foot in the streets of

---

[26] Coolidge, 10.

[27] Hoobler, 87.

[28] Ibid.

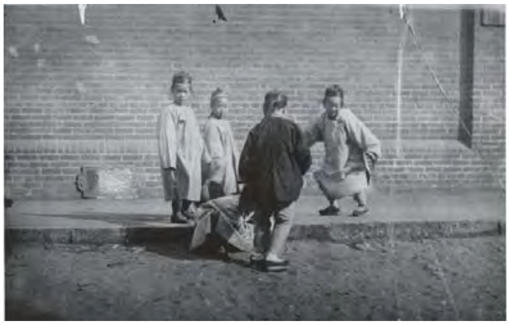
[29] Genthe, 67, plate 53.

San Francisco's Chinatown. Because of the numerous street walkers…'no Chinese man…who has respect for his girl friend will be seen with her in Chinatown.'"[30]

The girl might also have yearned for her neighborhood "uncles." One 1927 Genthe print shows a group of three men in Western dress on a street corner interacting with three small children while an older man, possibly the children's grandfather, looks on.[31] These three men would have been known as "community uncles." As historian John Tchen writes of these phenomena, "One of the deepest sentiments running unbroken from the bachelor society of the 1800s through that of the early 1960s was the great affection the community's many 'uncles' had for the children of the quarter."[32] As a bachelor society and a society generally unfamiliar to the concept of family, the Chinese community came to redefine public family roles in the care of its young, and it seems, from the convulsing delight of a young Chinese boy playing with his community uncle, the children took the redefinition to heart without reservation.

Even without the accompaniment of their families, children maintained a conspicuous presence in the Chinese community. Genthe's photographs of the San Francisco Chinatown capture many moments of children at play, often with siblings but sometimes alone. As seen in "The Crossing" and "Their First Photograph," older brothers and sisters were often responsible for their younger siblings in the public, though they look no older than seven years old themselves. Children enjoyed myriad diversions; although, without adult supervision, the diversions sometimes became mischief. There was much to see in the Chinese quarter of the city, and Genthe captures many children parading around Chinatown. "Boys Playing Shuttlecock" catches five boys in a favorite street game in which the object is keep a feathered shuttlecock in the air by kicking it and passing it with the feet (Figure 2).[33] In "His First Cigar," Genthe spies on a group of four Chinese children engaged in something less innocent: experimenting with tobacco.[34] A boy no older than six years holds a cigar to his lips, his hands poised to light it as the others look on. A nearby girl seems to view the smoking with particular disdain.

Figure 2



Genthe's photographs might be somewhat misleading; he is known to have shot more women and children because they were "exotic" and commercially profitable. But the spontaneous moments of childhood still show that Chinese children enjoyed many freedoms within the confines of their ethnic neighborhood. Outside those confines—for example, across the bay in Contra Costa County where the Chinese population was too small to have formed a booming Chinatown—childhood was a different experience.

---

[30] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (August 1974): 379.
[31] Genthe, 131, plate 127.
[32] Ibid, 131.
[33] Ibid, 118, plate 113.
[34] Ibid, 120, plate 117.

The Chinese children of Contra Costa County were mostly laborers living in boarding houses, their lifestyle and culture varied greatly from that of an established Chinatown. The lack of families hastened the maturation process for children as they were expected to take on more than their share of professional and social responsibilities. Residents of the same boarding house often shared similar local background. In an oral history interview, Wei Bat Liu recalls his communal living experience: "In 1913, all the cousins from the Liu family in my village had one big room so all the members could fit in it, and we slept in that room, cooked in that room."[35] Communal living was a necessity in this time of temporary and migratory work. Youth contributed to the pooling of resources such as rent and rice.

Weekdays were filled with work; sixteen to twenty hour workdays left little room for leisure time. On the weekends, wages earned during the week might be spent on opium, a prostitute, or theater. The unemployed resigned themselves to swapping stories, complaining of their troubles, and playing the Chinese tile game of mahjong.[36] For the independent Chinese children of Contra Costa, life was listless and repetitive, but there was always the promise of marriage or moving elsewhere.

The Chinese girls of Contra Costa County maintained a separate and distinct experience from that of the working boys. Although the census only records one underage female between 1910 and 1920, press clippings show that Chinese girls lived in Contra Costa County in larger numbers. With only seventeen females to 326 males, every girl was a commodity. Fifteen-year old Yee Ying of Walnut Creek was set to marry someone of her choice when suddenly a court order to desist arrived from Cheyenne, Wyoming where another Chinese merchant had arranged with Ying's parents to marry her for $3,000.[37] In fact, the sale of girls into marriage was something of a norm in Contra Costa.[38]

The possibility of marriage at times even instigated violence. This was the case in 1892, when armed gangsters forced their way into the home of Pon Lin to kidnap fifteen-year-old Lin Oy, who, though she had run away to elope with another man, was still considered the property of her first husband.[39] In these few cases, the ability for Chinese girls to press for their own romantic lives was remarkable, considering their general economic circumstances. To that end, enterprising Chinese girls found respite and stability in marriage, and Chinese men were more than happy to oblige a steady companion.

By 1911 children were beginning to enter the mainstream of American culture in their daily lives. Earlier photographs show that children remained close to Chinese customs, particularly in dress. A class portrait from 1911 shows a class of Chinese girls, half of whom wear the customary Chinese pantsuit for women while the other half wear simple, white dresses.[40] Family relations changed as well. Asian studies scholar Betty Lee Sung tells the story of Eddie Wang's father, who encountered a note from his son asking for his black shoes to be polished in preparation for a dance. "Why the very nerve of that boy!" Eddie's father thundered. "Asking me – his father – to shine his shoes for him! Why, it's utterly disrespectful! When I was a boy, I spoke to my father only when spoken to." But Eddie's father complied with the request. "What could I do? Sometimes Eddie's actions appall me, but we enjoy a warm relationship that I never experienced with my father," he said.[41] Again, children were at the very forefront of immersion into American cultural values.

---

[35] Victor Nee, *Longtime Californ'* (New York: Pantheon, 1973), 61.

[36] Genthe, 62.

[37] "Walnut Creek Chinese Girl Sold as $3,000 Bride Charge," Contra Costa *Gazette*, 25 November 1916.

[38] "May Hai, Well Known Chinese Girl of Richmond Was Sold in Marriage at Age of 13 Claim in Divorce Suit," Richmond *Daily Investigator*, 16 August 1922.

[39] Rego, 2.

This is only a very brief survey of the experience of Chinese American children in the San Francisco Bay area at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly in Contra Costa County. As witnessed by the systems of "paper sons" and "community uncles," children were often at the center of a constant storm in the Chinese community to redefine family as necessitated by political and social changes. Within the boundaries of their own ethnic enclaves there was predictability, but for those who moved outside into areas like Contra Costa, life remained difficult, lonely, and impermanent. The most promising aspect of the Chinese childhood experience was that Chinese children remained the sector of the Chinese population most susceptible to American cultural influence. The youngest of the community became leaders in making the Chinese full-fledged members of American society.

---

[40] "Chinese students," circa 1911, "San Francisco schools: an album of photographs," Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

[41] Betty Lee Sung, *The Story of the Chinese in America* (New York: Collier, 1967), 151.

Bibliography

Books

Chang, Iris. *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*. New York: Viking, 2003.

Chetin, Helen. *Angel Island Prisoner, 1922*. Translated by Catherine Harvey. Berkeley: New Seed Press, 1982.

Chinn, Thomas W. ed. *A History of the Chinese in California*. San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969.

Choy, Philip P., Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, ed. *Coming Man*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Coolidge, Mary R. *Chinese Immigration*. New York: H. Holt, 1909.

Genthe, Arnold. *Genthe's Photographs of San Francisco's Old Chinatown*. New York: Dover, 1984.

Hoobler, Dorothy and Thomas. *The Chinese American Family Album*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Lee, Anthony W. *Picturing Chinatown*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Lee, Rose Hum. *The Chinese in the United States of America*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960.

Nee, Victor. *Longtime Californi'*. New York: Pantheon, 1973.

Rice, Richard B., William A. Bullough, Richard J. Orsi, ed. *The Elusive Eden*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

Schaller, Michael, Virginia Scharff, and Robert D. Schulzinger, ed. *Coming of Age*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.

Sung, Betty Lee. *The Story of the Chinese in America*. New York: Collier, 1967.

Articles

Chang, Pao-Min. "The Age and Sex Composition of Chinese Americans: Recent Trends." *Asian Profile* 8, no. 5. October 1980: 409-420.

Light, Ivan. "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction." *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (August 1974): 367-394.

Government Documents

"About the County." *Contra Costa County*. N.D. <http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/main.htm> (28 April 2004).

Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census. *Twelfth Census of the United States (1900)*. Online via HeritageQuest Online Census Index. <http://www.heritagequestonline.com/prod/genealogy/index> (2 Mary 2004).

Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States (1910)*. Online via HeritageQuest Online Census Index. <http://www.heritagequestonline.com/prod/genealogy/index> (2 Mary 2004).

Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States (1910)*. Washington: GPO, 1913.

Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census. *Fourteenth Census of the United States (1920)*. Washington: GPO, 1922.

"Town Facts." *Town of Moraga*. 1 April 2003. <http://www.ci.moraga.ca.us/facts.htm> (26 April 2004).

University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center. "1890 U.S. Census Data – Chinese Population, 1870-1890." *United States Historical Census Data Browser*. 1998. <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/censusbin/census/cen.pl> (26 April 2004).

Oral History

Lai, Him Mark, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung. *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980.

Yung, Judy. Oral interview transcripts. *Angel Island Oral History Project, 1975-1990*. University of California Ethnic Studies Library, Berkeley.

Periodicals

Contra Costa *Gazette*, 1916-1917.

Contra Costa *Times*, 1992.

Richmond *Daily Investigator*, 1922.

Collections Materials

Britton and Rey. "Chinese Primary Public School, 920 Clay St., Chinatown, San Francisco." *SF – Social Groups – Chinese: postcards*. California Historical Society, San Francisco.

"Chinese students." *San Francisco schools: an album of photographs*. Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

Contra Costa County Hospital. *Register of Patients and Inmates, 1908-1926*. Contra Costa Historical Society, Martinez.

Office of the Clerk of Contra Costa County. *Descriptions and Photographs of Discharged Prisoners – San Quentin*. Contra Costa Historical Society, Martinez.

Stein, Louis. *Documents Relating to Chinese in Contra Costa County, California, 1873-1923*. University of California Ethnic Studies Library, Berkeley.

A History of Wine in America: From Prohibition to Present. **By Thomas Pinney. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Pp. 532. Hardback, $45.00)**

The American wine industry is currently experiencing a period of unprecedented prosperity, with vineyards and wineries found in all fifty states, from Florida to Alaska and Hawaii to Maine. Given this boom, it easy to take American wine for granted; but its history over the last hundred years is filled with false starts, speed bumps, and road blocks. In *A History of Wine in America: From Prohibition to Present*, Thomas Pinney thoroughly and entertainingly details this winding road, from the dire straits of Prohibition through the viticultural affluence of recent times.

The central defining event in the history of American wine was undoubtedly the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment, and this is where Pinney begins his narrative. Passed in 1919, the so-called Prohibition Amendment made it illegal to manufacture, sell, transport, import, or export "intoxicating liquors." America's dry zeal virtually destroyed the wine industry. Some winemakers staggered through Prohibition by producing various combinations of communion wines, medicinal tonics, and flavoring syrups, all of which were allowed through legal loopholes. However, the industry essentially began from scratch when the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed by the Twenty-first in 1933.

With Repeal, America's relationship with wine reached a crossroads, and this is one of the most interesting parts of Pinney's book. In 1934, an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture named Rexford Tugwell visualized a European-style future for Americans and wine, which he hoped could become a regular part of the diet. Using his position in the Department, Tugwell initiated a comprehensive, scientific study of wine. The flagship of the enterprise was a state-of-the-art model winery in Maryland, which was to serve as his team's research headquarters. However, the Twenty-first Amendment had not quelled the fervor, nor lessened the influence, of many temperance groups. At their behest, Congress passed legislation banning the use of agricultural funds for alcohol research. As Pinney tells us, "The winery never crushed a grape. Its equipment was sold . . . the building . . . given over to such things as the seed production laboratory and the nut investigations section" (38). This event was emblematic of the difficulties facing the development of American wine after Prohibition.

Additionally, "there was no positive federal policy toward wine," Pinney writes. "The flow of wine across the country that might have been imagined to follow Repeal was impeded, obstructed, and diverted in a thousand unpredictable and arbitrary ways—and still is" (52). Indeed, this "fantastic balkanization of liquor regulation," as Pinney terms it, is the overarching theme of the rest of his book.

Prohibition created other problems for the wine industry, too. For example, after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, many grape growers replaced their wine grapes with Concords, which were better suited for juice than wine. When Repeal arrived, there were scarcely any decent plantings of wine grapes left in the country. A self-perpetuating cycle followed, with poor grapes resulting in poor wine, which led to poor sales, which in turn reinforced the hesitancy to plant wine grapes.

Pinney walks the reader through each frustrating step of American wine development over the next several decades. Gradually, farmers planted better grapes. Winemakers became more scientifically precise in their craft. Entrepreneurs with names like Gallo and Mondavi discovered the unexplored profit potential of wine. More Americans acquired a taste for dry wine, rather than the sweet fortified wines that had long been their peculiar favorites. And the industry grew enormously—so much that the United States presently ranks fourth behind Italy, France, and Spain in wine production. Yet, Pinney concludes, "for all that, wine is still far from an everyday, familiar creature for most Americans…the status of wine remains problematic—put in question by legal restrictions and moral disapproval" (367).

Overall, *A History of Wine* demonstrates that Pinney, although by profession a professor of English, is a rather good historian. This is a thoughtful, detailed—perhaps over-detailed at times—and highly interesting account of a very intriguing American industry, and the book is well worth reading for anyone at all fascinated by the story behind the bottle.

Eric B. Burnette
Appalachian State University

Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917. By Matthew Frye Jacobson. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. Pp. 336. Paperback, $15.00)

In *Barbarian Virtues*, historian Matthew Jacobson thoughtfully outlines the dramatic changes in the political and cultural landscape of an evolving "Americanism," following the Civil War. Spanning from the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 (when the United States proclaimed its power to international eyes and ears) until the beginning of World War I (when America utilized that power through military force), Jacobson examines the formation of a national identity in the midst of expansionist foreign policy abroad and massive population influxes at home. He asserts that from these defining dual developments, an over-the-top confidence in American superiority was manufactured to mask a "plaguing-if-quieter-sense-of self-doubt" (3).

This central thesis becomes powerfully embodied for readers, as Jacobson provides exhaustive evidence—through political documents, travelogues, academic treatises, and visual imagery—of America's highly racialized anxiety. Moreover, he describes the ways in which the newly expansive economy was put into overdrive by a dependence on immigrant labor on one hand and a reliance on overseas markets to absorb American products on the other. As Jacobson writes, "Immigration and expansion constituted two sides of the same coin." Furthermore, the massive population increases and interventions abroad, both stemming from the same economic engines of industrialization, generated a fusion of "public discussion of problematic aliens at home" with "national debate over the fitness for self-government of problematic peoples abroad" (4).

Jacobson reminds us that modern American identity was brought into being within a global cauldron of immigration and empire-building. Through this process, there was a sweeping obsession not on 'sturdy' American virtues, but rather on *barbarian* virtues themselves. Jacobson wittily borrows his title from an 1899 quote by Theodore Roosevelt in a transcribed conversation with his psychologist G. Stanley Hall. Roosevelt claims that "Over-sentimentality, over-softness, in fact washiness and mushiness are the great dangers of this age and of this people. Unless we keep the *barbarian virtues*, gaining the civilized ones will be of little avail" (1). By using Roosevelt's ironic dichotomy and civilization rhetoric as the theoretical grounding of his argument, Jacobson positions himself to counter the historical erasure and amnesia within collective American memory, regarding both immigration and imperialism.

In particular, Jacobson uses the US involvement in the Philippines at the close of the century, as a springboard for his analysis. First, he wants to awaken our faulty national memory, as the American presence in the Philippines continues to be the "most forgotten war." From there, he illustrates his theory of collateral damage, in which U.S. imperial strategists used the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico as mere stepping stones to the aggrandized China-market and to the Isthmian Canal. Jacobson goes on to assert that "This approach to entire peoples as pawns in a vast geopolitical game represented a heightened degree of imperialist vision, which was to become standard fare over the course of the twentieth century" (7). Any violation of a colonial subject's rights was collateral damage in a larger project of global domination through industrial imperialism.

Barbarian Virtues is a forceful book that poignantly reflects the author's passion to rethink, disrupt, and unravel the myths of American political life and question the tactics of erasure produced to hide our very real legacies of domination and empire-building. The work comes to life with a sense of urgency, as Jacobson contests the assertion that a re-evaluation of history "is worth looking at so closely precisely because neither the processes nor their results are safely fossilized in a bygone epoch," particularly in an age where dominant notions of national identity are heavily relied on to justify interventionist actions taken in the name of "democracy" (8). More than ever, Jacobson's contribution to a contested version of American identity should be required reading for all students of history.

Faron Levesque
Smith College

Origins of the French Revolution. By William Doyle. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. 246. Hardback, $53.60).

On July 14, 1789, a Parisian mob stormed the infamous Bastille, effectively marking the beginning of one of the most significant periods in history. The French Revolution brought about sweeping changes as citizens overthrew the House of Bourbon and established the First Republic. The Revolution also provided men such as Napoleon Bonaparte with the means to advance according to their virtues and talents, ultimately resulting in the collapse of the ancient, monarchical structure of Europe. But what was the cause of the French Revolution? The answer to this question has been debated among historians for many years. In *Origins of the French Revolution*, Professor William Doyle summarizes past theories on this subject, while also attempting to explain how recent research has altered how many historians view the Revolution.

Doyle divides his book into two parts: an examination of the writings on the origins of the French Revolution since 1939, and an explanation of what historians now view as the causes of the breakdown of the *ancien régime*. Doyle states that although the two parts are meant to complement each other, those more interested in one part should have no problem in bypassing the other.

Part one of Doyle’s book appears to offer more appeal to scholars and students interested in the historiography of the French Revolution during the past one hundred years. Doyle asserts that by the 1940s, a general consensus had emerged among historians in regard to the causes of the French Revolution. In 1939, Georges Lefebvre, a Marxist and the leading authority on the Revolution, published his most influential book entitled *Quatre-Vingt-Neuf*. Lefebvre asserted that the main cause of the Revolution was the rise of the bourgeoisie, a view that would become widely accepted among French historians. Doyle states that although historians in France were largely content with Lefebvre’s interpretation, scholars outside the francophone world soon challenged his view and offered alternative explanations. During the 1960s, the research of Alfred Cobban uncovered additional problems with Lefebvre’s theory, causing many scholars to reinvestigate the origins of the French Revolution. As a result, the consensus eventually collapsed, and historians were left with a new body of research from which to form their own conclusions.

In the second part of Doyle’s book, he summarizes this research and provides his own interpretation of it. Doyle describes every aspect of French political structure prior to the Revolution, while also describing how events in the years leading to 1789 provided the ideal climate for social and political reform. The financial crisis of the French monarchy, caused by numerous wars and general mismanagement of the government, was undoubtedly the most significant event leading to the Revolution. Doyle asserts that the strain on the finances, coupled with the unwillingness of French government officials to attempt any sort of structural reforms, made the fall of the old regime inevitable. According to Doyle, the ideology of the French Revolution, expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, was by no means new and had existed long before the Enlightenment. The collapse of the old regime created a “vacuum of power” as well as the need for a new system of government, and the revolutionaries were merely reacting to problems that had long needed to be addressed. Thus, according to Doyle, “The

French Revolution had not been made by revolutionaries. It would be truer to say that the revolutionaries had been created by the Revolution" (213).

Doyle does an excellent job of presenting the various views concerning the origins of the French Revolution. While he also offers his own analysis, he welcomes criticism and acknowledges that future research will undoubtedly reveal flaws in his view. *Origins of the French Revolution* is extremely well written and is worth reading for anyone interested in modern European history.

David B. Fuqua III
Appalachian State University

The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class, revised edition. By David Roediger. (New York: Verso, 1999. Pp. 200. Paperback, $19.00)

As a pioneer in the fields of labor history and critical race theory, David Roediger maintains his legacy of exceptionally deconstructed history through the problematization of race. In this revised edition of the seminal 1991 survey of whiteness in the American working class, the sincerity of the text is a treat for students of history accustomed to dry rhetorical approaches and a distanced authorial tone. Rather than assume some kind of forged "objectivity," Roediger begins his argument from a point of personal narrative in the section "On Autobiography and Theory." Growing up in an a small German-American quarrying and farming town, Roediger questions the fictions of whiteness, and the way Americans are socialized into race through a variety of ideological mechanisms. "Even in an all-white town," he writes, "race was never absent. I learned absolutely no lore of my German ancestry and no more than a few meaningless snatches of Irish songs, but missed little of racist folklore." By acknowledging the role of personal trajectories in shaping the how, when, and why of history, Roediger's thoughtfulness snags the reader right from the start.

By questioning why the main body of white, Marxist work has "neutralized" whiteness and over-simplified race in the United States, Roediger concentrates the thematic structure of his sweeping analysis from this point of contention. The idea of "profiting" socially, psychologically, and economically, from the "wages of whiteness" is taken from the fundamental theory of W.E.B. Dubois. Emphasizing that even though white working classes earned low wages, Roediger asserts that their compensation went beyond the monetary to include a public and psychological wage. Moreover, "Status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South. White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as 'not slaves' and as 'not Blacks.'"

Beginning with the post-Revolution coding of independence as a powerful masculine symbol, continuing through the schizophrenic effects of the Civil War, and focusing on the hyper-industry which saturated the Gilded Age, pinpoints trends over quite an extended time period. He suggests that the first sixty-five years of the nineteenth century marked the embryonic stage of constructing a concept of whiteness, but acknowledges that earlier "trends of mind" and colonial oppression of Native Americans constituted an important "prehistory of working class whiteness." Drawing on the important and relatively untapped scholarship of George Rawick, Roediger controversially suggests that the formation of "blackness" and "whiteness" were concurrent.

Specifically during the period of British colonization prior to the American Revolution, the Anglo-American middle class fostered a repositioned racism, which generated a momentum leading up to the Revolution. Roediger asserts that blackness took on a powerful symbolism developed during British colonialism, which came to represent the grudging sacrifices of growing capitalism and the yearning for pre-industrial life. Consequently, the pre-capitalist ways of living were officially disregarded by whites, but projected into the once empty concept of blackness, filling it to the brim with the guilty justification of their new identities. Nevertheless, by creating a "pornography" of an imagined former life to insure psychologically that he will not revert to the pre-industrial ways of life, a sharply constructed divide "between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled" was put into place. Therefore, the construction of the illusions of racial identity and superiority occurred at the same time.

Within the historical legacy of racial invention, Roediger superimposes a constrained lens to question the evolving, technological operations of racial mechanisms amidst the objects of industry, folklore, humor, song, and language used to build an insidious racial hierarchy with ultimate staying power. Surprisingly readable considering the range of theory covered, *The Wages of Whiteness* remains a classic work of American history turned on its head and a must-read for people questioning the way race operates in the United States.

Faron Levesque
Smith College

War, Women, and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts. By Philip Freeman. (University of Texas Press. Austin, Texas. 2002. Pp 91. Hardback, $16.72)

The Celts were a very intriguing, almost mysterious people. Living in Europe before the Romans, and battling them for control of much of the continent, the Celts are often seen in books and movies as "naked barbarians charging Roman legions," (Freeman xi). This is an obvious stereotype and oversimplification of the Celts, but, with scarce first-hand accounts we actually know very little about them. In *War, Women, and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts*, Philip Freeman has organized the surviving primary documents into one concise volume.

The Celts were very different from tribe to tribe, but they had one common thread: they were a people constantly at war. Rome coveted the Celts' land, and the Romans saw the Celts—who practiced human sacrifices, had no written language, and let their women fight along side the men—as barbarians. On the battlefield, the Celts were formidable enemy; their holy men, called druids, were enough to scare even the most seasoned Roman warriors with their ferocity and war-painted bodies.

Indeed, since the Celts had no written language, much of what we know about them comes to us from their Roman enemies, who saw them as less than human. Most of these accounts were written by Roman or Greek authors and are found in histories, letters, and poetry. Many of the references are mere mentions of the Celts while others such as those found in Julius Caesar's letters include detailed accounts. Arranging the topics by subjects such as poetry, religion, war, and feasting, Freeman gives the reader each quote verbatim with relevant historical and contextual information.

The Celts own history of themselves was handed down orally from generation to generation. Bards were the "voice of their people," creating and singing songs and poems, praising the deeds of kings and warriors of their time times past. Bards were respected members of their societies and expected to be paid for their services. After the once vast Celtic people were pushed by the Romans back to the British Isles and eventually only Ireland, Christian missionaries arrived to convert these people. Much of the Celtic culture died or was assimilated into Medieval Christianity, and the bards no longer sang about their history. Thus, the most reliable source for learning about the Celts vanished.

Some of the accounts do mention women fighting in battles, their strength matching that of the men. Queen Boudica, for example, led a united Celtic people to expel the Romans from Britain. However, despite the romantic portrayal of Celtic as having complete equality with their men, Celtic wives were completely subjective to wills of their husbands much like their Roman counterparts.

Freeman himself draws few inferences from these quotes and accounts. The straightforward, factual reporting can seem a bit choppy, but at ninety one pages, the book is overall a quick read and a great resource for research. Considering his task of searching through fictional poetry and factual histories spanning over 600 years, Freeman does an excellent job.

M. Allison Jobe
Appalachian State University