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The Men's Clothing Industry in Rochester's History

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Men's clothing, for many decades the second most important of Rochester's products, was at various times first in employment, in the total of wage payments, and in the percentage of profits, yet the industry never held a dominant place in the city's economy. Overshadowed at the start by the flour millers, then by the manufacturers of women's shoes, and finally by the producers of photographic, optical and other technological products, the clothiers have nevertheless contributed significantly to Rochester's development. They provided useful employment to a host of newcomers, including many women and children, who urgently needed jobs for self-support during the high tide of immigration; they introduced the practice of dispatching sales agents widely throughout the country in search of orders; and they were the first to discover the merits of quality production. These firms also learned, by harsh experience, the need to achieve and maintain cordial relations with their employees. In each case they diverged from the prevailing Rochester pattern, but in the end they found themselves either complementing or formulating dominant trends in the community.

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Origins of the Industry

Jehiel Barnard, the first tailor, who reached Rochester in 1812, the year of its permanent settlement, was soon joined by other craftsmen who cut their cloth and sewed garments to the measurements of the early villagers. Their number approached a score by 1834, when Rochester became a city. Another decade passed and Rochester's population reached 24,000 before Myer Greentree, a recent arrival from Germany, began to cut cloth by standard patterns and to produce suits for a wholesale market. An influx of Jewish and other immigrants supplied workers to sew the garments cut by this enterprising merchant tailor, who joined forces with Joseph Wile in 1847. Sigmund Stettheimer opened a second wholesale establishment the next year, and Henry Michaels, a third a year later. Others quickly appeared as the market created by westward migrants on the canal stimulated the enterprise of these eager newcomers.

An account of this trade in 1848 credited Rochester with no less than thirty shops where clothing was made and sold. Eighteen of these were clustered in the low wooden structures that lined the northern edge of Main Street bridge; most of the rest occupied cramped sites on nearby Front Street. The size of these establishments failed, however, to measure their importance. They consisted of a salesroom in front, an adjoining cutting room, and space above or in the rear for storage; most of the sewing and trimming was entrusted to workers who finished the garments at home. A generous estimate placed the number thus employed at 1800 that year and valued their product at \$400,000. Although these figures were probably exaggerated, the rapid transition from tailoring to manufacturing caught the census takers without adequate categories in 1850 and 1855, and made it difficult either to tabulate or to describe this industry.

Evidence of large-scale production appeared in 1853 when a journeyman tailors' association and a seamstresses' union issued separate appeals for wage increases. The ladies won an advance to 60 cents a week, but both groups soon disappeared as the introduction of sewing machines in the mid-fifties transformed the industry. Four wholesale shops led the field in 1855, yet their smaller competitors numbered at least two score. The 1860 census counted 42 shops whose employees totaled 810 men and 745 women. Their wage payments amounted to \$270,000 and the value added approached \$500,000, both of which exceeded the reports of other local industries, including flour milling.

Even the wholesalers, however, did not as yet operate factories. They cut and matched the cloth in large cutting rooms but still bundled the pieces into packages to be taken to the homes of their workers. Some of the latter now purchased or leased sewing machines from one of the three rival agents who located in Rochester. Henry Michaels hired Rudolph Lichtenstein as a traveling salesman in 1861, sending him out to perform a function previously entrusted only to junior partners, but the large demand for uniforms during the Civil War deferred the spread of such promotional activities until the late sixties.

The return of peace brought numerous changes. Many ambitious tailors established independent shops, which increased from 42 to 82 during the decade, and several of the older ones formed new alliances. Henry Michaels took Nathan Levi as a partner in 1868; Herman Rosenberg joined with Jacob Kolb that same year, and Nathan Stein with Levi Adler the next; but none of these firms rivaled that of Stettheimer, McDonell & Co. in size. Leopold Garson, Simon Hays, and Morris Schwarz headed other wholesale shops, which numbered 13 in 1871, each with its agents on the road. The demand for ready-made suits in the West was most gratifying.

The early alliances shifted rapidly in these years. James McDonell broke with Stettheimer and opened a wholesale house on State Street to supply the smaller shops with woolens imported from Scotland. Greentree retired and Joseph Wile joined his brother, Gabriel, in a new firm which introduced an improved cutting machine in 1875. Nathan Levi withdrew from the Michaels Co. in 1875 to form one of his own with Lichtenstein and Bernard Rothschild as partners; Henry Michaels joined his son-in-law, Morley A. Stern, to form Michaels, Stern & Co. Stein & Adler, who specialized in boys' coats and pants, installed a row of sewing machines in one room of their new shop on Mill Street, attaching them to a power shaft connected with a nearby water wheel. This major step towards the development of a true factory speeded output and spurred similar moves by other firms, many of which now gravitated to Mill Street, making it the center of a thriving industry.

The depression of the mid-seventies exacted its toll among these firms. Most of the stronger wholesalers survived, often after a reorganization that brought new names into the firm. Thus Wile Bros. became Wile, Brickner & Wile; Cauffman, Strouss & Co. became Cauffman, Dinkelspiel & Co., while Strouss, Moore & Beirs appeared nearby; Stettheimer, however, failed and left for New York. Many smaller establishments disappeared or accepted the status of subcontractors for the larger firms, which now farmed out large batches of work, thus avoiding direct negotiations with the host of individuals who finished the garments at home. The 18 wholesale clothing manufacturers of 1879, most of them on Mill Street, supplied employment to some 2700 workers, three fourths of whom were women or children; they reported wage payments of nearly \$800,000 the next year and, with the aid of 70 traveling salesmen, pushed their sales to over \$4 million. Salesmen in

these years often took as many as seven trunks full of samples on their extended journeys. Only shoes, with more men than women employed, exceeded the clothiers in total wages paid in Rochester, and the city stood sixth among all American clothing centers.

Several accessory lines had already appeared and others soon developed. Moses Hays had established a necktie shop in 1869, and Max Lowenthal, a knitting factory to make mittens, socks and mufflers. The latter started with five hand-driven machines, but J. W. Lamb, the inventor of a new knitting machine, located his factory at Rochester and soon prompted Lowenthal to expand his operations. Herman C. Cohn acquired and enlarged the Hays necktie shop in the mid-seventies; Moses B. Shantz, who arrived from Germany in 1887 with a new process for making buttons from vegetable ivory imported from South America, established a button factory that soon became the largest in the country.

The 1880's brought renewed growth to the clothing firms and also a resurgence of labor-management difficulties. Many of the contractors opened shops of their own and installed sewing machines to speed production. Some became custom tailors, serving a special clientele, but most of them retained their ties with the leading wholesalers who now developed a nation-wide market.

Several of the major firms, discovering that their better grade suits were constantly in demand, determined to specialize in quality products. In order to supervise all operations, they found it desirable to gather their workmen into large factories. Accordingly Michaels, Stern & Co., L. Adler Bros. & Co., Stein, Bloch & Co. and a few others moved into large buildings erected on St. Paul Street in the eighties. Wile, Brickner & Wile expanded into some of the vacated structures on Mill Street. These shifts required huge new investments of capital, which

had previously gone mainly into supplies, but the prosperous times assured large returns that justified the outlays and encouraged the leaders to adopt brand names for their products.

The lot of the workers was not so rosy. Drawn out of their homes to attend the contractor's machines or those in the big factories, they endeavored to form unions for self-protection, but the mounting influx of newcomers from abroad, including many skilled tailors, inundated their ranks and discouraged strike calls. The managers, on the other hand, profited from that influx. Hundreds of Polish or Russian Jews arrived, seeking employment; they introduced a new team system, with one tailor, one seamstress, and one assistant working together at specialized tasks on each suit, thus speeding output. The pressure for increased production and the crowding of many eager workers into the restricted quarters provided by the contractors won these establishments the designation of sweatshops. While many freshly arrived immigrants considered themselves fortunate to find jobs that could be performed in a neighborhood loft amidst workers who spoke a familiar tongue and with their children safely at hand and usefully employed, the public authorities were becoming concerned over sanitary and other health problems and over the schooling of the children.

The German Jews who owned and managed the leading clothing firms were too busy to give much thought to the conditions maintained by the boss tailors in the sweatshops. They formed a Clothiers Association in 1883 to standardize their procedures and improve the quality of the product, but they made no effort to enroll the many subcontractors, most of whom spoke English with difficulty and felt more at home with their Polish or Russian workers. Several members of the association were already achieving positions of influence in the broader Rochester community. Simon Stein, first president of the association, was a respected member of the group that formed the Chamber

of Commerce in 1888, of which Max Brickner became fourth president in 1892. Greentree and Stettheimer served as bank trustees in the seventies, and both Joseph Wile and Nathan Levi received similar appointments a decade later. A few of these men began to move their families into the more substantial homes on South Clinton and Union Streets.

In sharp contrast, the occasional efforts of the skilled tailors and cutters to improve their conditions faced almost hopeless odds. A local branch of the Sons of Adam had enrolled several score of these men during the seventies, but its benevolent objectives were frustrated when the treasurer absconded with part of the funds. When some of the cutters formed a unit of the Knights of Labor in 1881 and called a strike against an unpopular contractor, the national leaders, who disparaged strikes, branded the action as unauthorized and withdrew the charter. A new benevolent society, formed in 1884, achieved recognition four years later by the Knights and won several concessions from management. The Clothiers Association was inclined to deal leniently with the workers; it approved the 9-hour day and some increases in pay for skilled workers in the factories. Unfortunately, more difficult times lay ahead as the cutters and other specialized workers endeavored to tighten their apprenticeship rules and adopted other measures to protect their jobs.

Labor-Management Strife

Twenty-five years of bitter though intermittent strife beset the clothing industry after 1890. The rise of the Knights of Labor during the eighties had spread their assemblies throughout the land and secured them a foothold among the clothing cutters of Rochester. Their tactics of organizing boycotts, rather than strikes, against hostile employers, seemed peaceful to many observers but posed a serious threat to the Rochester

clothiers who were endeavoring to establish the reputation of their products by the use of brand names. To finance the publicity on their boycotts, the Knights exacted penalties of \$500 to \$1500 from companies that failed to agree to their terms in advance. L. Adler Bros., who had been tardy in accepting the 9-hour day, had to pay the larger penalty in 1889, but Levi Adler determined to put an end to such practices.

Adler took the lead in calling his fellow manufacturers together. They met in November 1890 and formed a Clothiers' Exchange to take the place of the old ineffective association. Twenty-one firms joined the new body, which chose Henry Michaels as president and Sol Wile, a lawyer, as secretary. Several members endeavored to assure their workers that the objective was not anti-union but only self-protection. Nevertheless they quietly gathered evidence for the grand jury against James Hughes, master workman of the cutters' district No. 231, who had extracted the local payments, and against John Thein and other officials of the Rochester assemblies. They also refused to employ any of these men.

Few workers were aware of the impending showdown between the Knights and the Exchange. The industry was booming, with several companies advertising for additional cutters. Two firms gave their cutters night work at the special rates prescribed by the union until its officers banned such work on the ground that several blacklisted men had not been employed. One cutter brought to Rochester from New York was persuaded to refuse the job unless the company would likewise employ one of those blacklisted. Finally, in March 1891, the Clothiers' Exchange announced a lockout of all Rochester cutters. Only 350 men were directly involved, but since they occupied key positions in the industry, the action threatened the jobs of more than 5000 clothing workers and of many who performed similar tasks at home.

The announcement came as a complete surprise to the city at large. Since the clothing industry paid approximately \$2,000,000 annually in wages, a complete shutdown would prove serious, and the State Board of Mediation was hastily called in. Its investigation had scarcely begun, however, when the news broke that the grand jury had secretly indicted James Hughes, John Thein and five other officials of the Knights, charging them with conspiracy and extortion. All were promptly arrested and then released on \$2000 bail each. When asked to testify before the State Board, they were advised to say nothing to incriminate themselves. Their testimony, accordingly, was brief, while that of the manufacturers was long and detailed. Press accounts of the hearing, which published the letters Hughes had sent to local manufacturers, demanding sizeable payments for the expense of lifting the boycott, created a wide reaction against the union. The State Board's report strongly deplored use of the boycott. On the other hand, the National Assembly of the Knights, meeting in New York, took a different view of the case; it roundly condemned the State Board and voted \$75,000 to defend the indicted officials and to push a renewed boycott more vigorously.

Meanwhile, the Rochester firms were preparing to reopen. The Exchange issued a "manifesto" to the workers, inviting all who would renounce the Knights of Labor to return to their jobs at the existing rates and conditions. Meeting in haste, the cutters' union voted to release its members to return to work; they reasoned that, since the companies would probably refuse to re-employ the strike leaders, the Exchange could then be indicted for conspiracy, too. All but a limited number renounced the Knights, and when these few were denied work, an indictment was sworn out against the 21 members of the Exchange for conspiracy to prevent them from practicing their trade. In order to clinch their case, several of the unemployed

banded together under the leadership of John Thein and formed the Solidarity Cooperative Company of Garment Workers, with a capital stock of \$20,000. The manufacturers, however, avoided the trap by granting contracts to this cooperative on the terms allowed the regular boss tailors. Thus the indictment failed for lack of evidence.

The indictments of the union officials for conspiracy were quickly dropped, but the trial of Hughes on the charge of extortion was pressed to a conclusion. When the jury brought in a verdict of guilty and recommended leniency, the judge sentenced Hughes to one year in the Monroe County Penitentiary, but his attorney, John Van Voorhis, appealed. Although the Exchange was ready to drop the case at this point, hoping to bring the boycott to an end, Hughes and his attorney sought judicial vindication.

Thus the lockout ended but the boycott continued. Considerable indignation was felt, even among the workers, when reports reached Rochester of the speech of James A. Wright of the Knights of Labor at a national meeting of the Farmers' Alliance at Indianapolis in which he denounced the Rochester clothing industry and publicized the boycott. Nevertheless, when the boss tailors called a mass meeting in protest, a number of loyal Knights attended and vigorously challenged their critics. Apparently the Exchange determined at this point to undermine the boycott by making peace with one branch of labor, the A. F. of L. At all events, Henry White of the recently formed United Garment Workers came to Rochester in April 1892 and organized a local union which promptly adopted resolutions condemning the boycott and the Knights who sponsored it. Much excitement greeted this action, and the Trades Assembly, A. F. of L., previously on good terms with the Knights, refused at first to admit the new local. A message from Samuel Gompers, supporting White, changed that stand, but

the U. G. W. Local 32 was repeatedly denounced as a tool of the Exchange and failed to attract much support among clothing workers.

Although the Knights were rapidly losing their grip in Rochester as throughout the country, the boycott they had started continued. The local clothing industry was even cited for disapproval in the Omaha Platform of the Peoples Party in July 1892. Nor was the extortion case against Hughes forgotten. His appeal was lost that June, but reluctance on the part of the companies or the courts to press the charges delayed resentencing until October; he was not actually confined to the penitentiary until February 7, 1893. Two weeks later, A. C. Wright, who served in place of Hughes during his confinement, "negotiated a settlement of the boycott" with Sol Wile of the Exchange. The latter denied any concessions, and in fact the Knights received no immediate advantages, though Hughes did secure a pardon from the Governor after serving four months of his term.

Despite the protracted boycott, the clothing industry was achieving increased stability. Several of the companies expanded their plants, and Michaels, Stern & Co., which erected a fine new seven-story factory on North Clinton Street early in 1893, equipped it with electric lights, steam heat, elevators and power-driven cutting machines. Most of the workers remained non-union, but the organizing efforts of the U.G.W. were freely tolerated, and its local did win a victory over the boss tailors, compelling these subcontractors to grant a regular 55-hour week and a weekly pay day. The dejected leaders of the old Knights of Labor assemblies took gloomy comfort from the fact that plans for a U.G.W. convention in Rochester had to be cancelled that October because of the onset of the depression.

The industry presented a bold front when a federal investigation of sweatshop conditions reached Rochester. Simon Stern

of Wile, Stern & Co., speaking for the manufacturers, declared that between one third and one half of the city's output of men's clothing, valued at \$10 to \$12 million annually, was produced in factories and that most of the remainder was cut there and let out to contracting tailors to be finished, with only a small volume going out into unsupervised homes. When questioned on the supervision of the contractors' shops, he admitted that no regular procedure existed but "presumed" that sanitary conditions must be pretty good since no epidemics had been reported. Factory conditions had improved greatly during the previous decade, he maintained, and no children under fourteen were employed there. Moses Garson added some wage data which revealed that boys and girls started at fourteen at \$2 a week, and that some women earned as much as \$9.50, and some men as much as \$15 a week.

The depression of the mid-nineties hit the clothing industry with full force in 1894. Of course, the dissolution of the old firm of Wile, Stern & Co. in June 1893 was unrelated to the financial crisis that year. Julius Wile, now advanced in years, simply wished to retire, and Simon Stern formed a new alliance, Rothschild, Baum & Stern. The Clothiers' Exchange elected Max Brickner as president in December, but retained Sol Wile as secretary. Most of the wholesalers, with many advance orders, faced the winter with confidence; they cut prices as the general gloom deepened, but their quality market was less severely affected than the cheaper lines, and they passed the necessary curtailment along to the subcontractors. The latter, who had formed an association of their own the previous year, seized the opportunity to announce successive wage cuts and to enforce a new task schedule on the workers they retained. Those who resisted faced unemployment.

The United Garment Workers had made little progress in reorganizing the disillusioned workers after the disastrous

defeat of the Knights, but their prospects brightened in 1895. The machine operators in the factories, the girls in the finishing departments, and other specialized groups, including the Christian minority in this predominantly Jewish industry, each sought and secured local charters. Their membership totaled 1200 by September when they supplied more than a third of the marchers in the Labor Day parade. These new locals had scarcely been formed, however, when a new wage slash in the contract shop of Morris Rosenberg precipitated a strike. It was only a minor strike at the start, but Rosenberg, as secretary of the Clothing Contractors Association, rallied support on his side, while his practice of deferring payments to the workers for a week or more after the jobs were completed was so widespread that men in other shops, too, joined the walkout. By August 28, an estimated 1200 garment workers were on strike.

The State Board of Mediation stepped in promptly and soon brought the opposing parties to a compromise agreement on all but one issue: the old demand that "union men only" be employed. Public sympathy supported the workers, and some of the contractors were soon ready to sign, but the union determined to hold out for a complete agreement. When the manufacturers, who had not previously been involved, became restive over the stoppage of their outside work and started to open finishing shops of their own, employing non-union workers, the union proclaimed a boycott against the Rochester clothiers. To show its determination, it dispatched several cutters to seek jobs in other cities. Funds for strike benefits flowed in from many unions, both locally and nationally, and Samuel Gompers came to Rochester to bolster the union and find a settlement.

The boycott proved ill-advised, for the memory of earlier boycotts in the clothing and shoe industries cost the union its popular favor. A compromise settlement, when finally negotiated, assured the 55-hour week and weekly payments but omitted

any reference to union recognition, and the strikers voted it down. The overwhelming vote dismayed union leaders and management as well. However, the workers, who thus expressed their belief in solidarity, could not maintain it after a return to their homes. Within a week many were flocking back to the shops. Most of the men sent to other cities returned as soon as they could raise the train fare, and by November 7 all but the union president had reported back on the job, and his job, as so often happened, vanished. The defeat of the union became complete on New Year's Eve when an announcement appeared in all shops and factories that a 58-hour week and wage cuts of 10 to 27 per cent would take effect on January 1. Loud protests sounded in the streets, but there the matter ended, for the spirit to resist had been broken.

Most of the leading clothiers of Rochester survived the depression and soon acquired new prestige in the industry. Although the volume of their output was but a small fraction of that of New York, and less than a third of Chicago's, the quality achieved by several firms, each protected by its brand name, won respect. Only Chicago boasted of clothing factories that rivaled those of Rochester in size or in excellence of product, and the stability of the Rochester Clothiers' Exchange enabled Sol Wile to assume the lead in the organization in January 1897 of the National Clothiers Association. Wile also dispatched letters a year later to 4500 dealers throughout the country inviting them to a style show at Rochester that spring and promising to pay half the round-trip fare. The failure of Cauffman, Dinkelspiel & Co. in 1897 failed to dampen the spirits of other local clothiers; indeed Jeremiah Hickey and Jacob L. Freeman, after several years in the employ of the Wile, Brickner Co., raised \$40,000 in 1899 to form a new company of their own.

The Rochester clothiers, proud of their accomplishments, were shocked that March to read that Daniel O'Leary, a state factory inspector called to testify before the U. S. Industrial Commission at Washington, had deplored the sweatshop conditions in upstate cities, including Rochester. "There are no sweatshops in Rochester," declared Henry Michaels, whose factory had been hailed, at its opening a few years before, as a model. All the clothing he produced was cut in the factory, and most of the operations were completed there, he maintained; only a few of the sewing tasks were given out to women who worked at home. "There are no subcontractors or middlemen to operate sweatshops," he concluded.

Yet his description did not apply to all Rochester clothiers. Many of the large firms dealt with subcontractors; indeed the total number of shops had increased to 307, according to the census that year, giving employment to 5293 workers. The next decade brought continued growth to the major firms—Stein-Bloch built a spacious factory adjoining its warehouse on St. Paul Street in 1903; L. Adler & Co. erected a model new factory on the city's northern outskirts six years later, and the Hickey-Freeman Co. completed its building on Avenue D in 1911. Many small shops disappeared, but many others persisted, making a total of 196 in 1909, when their employees, including those at the factories, numbered 8559. The capital invested increased a third during the decade, while the wage fund and the profits doubled; nevertheless, many unwholesome conditions persisted, and a state-wide factory investigation conducted by Robert F. Wagner in 1911 produced some embarrassing reverberations.

Wagner's investigation was sparked by the disastrous Triangle fire at a New York sweatshop in which 143 workers lost their lives. The hearings in Rochester examined many witnesses and brought out some disturbing evidence, yet the press

dismissed it lightly. Indeed the report itself attracted little interest locally until the *New York World*, perhaps piqued by upstate allusions to the deplorable conditions in "Gotham," picked out the testimony on Rochester and sent a reporter up to check the findings. An interview with Dr. George Goler, Rochester's outspoken health officer, gave confirmation, and the *World* published an article which started off with a sarcastic jibe: "In the model city of Rochester, where civic pride is eclipsed only by the pursuit of the almighty dollar, girls sit in unsanitary and unventilated rooms for ten hours a day stitching garments. . ." A stinging restatement of the charges appeared in the *Toledo Blade*, which concluded sneeringly, "Possibly it may not be denied that 'Rochester Made Means Quality.' But in the light of the factory report, 'Rochester Made' means disease, dirt, poor air, poor light and the exploitation of the flesh and blood of children."

Such attacks could not be passed over in silence. The Clothiers' Exchange requested the Chamber to conduct an investigation of its own. A committee, headed by the Reverend Dr. Edward J. Hanna, whose integrity and broad sympathies assured an honest report, visited all the clothing shops and factories it could locate and submitted a report which was by no means a whitewash. Its specific recommendations called for improvements in 52 of the 139 establishments visited; their outside toilets, improper vaults, heating by coal stoves, or lighting by gas merited condemnation, the committee found; it added, however, that barely 15 per cent of the 8859 workers suffered any or all of these hardships, while the rest worked under good or excellent sanitary and safety conditions. The State Factory Commission, exploring these matters further at a second hearing in Rochester, discovered grounds for concern as well as for satisfaction; continued debate over the accuracy of these findings helped to set off a new outburst of labor unrest.

A renewed effort to organize the clothing workers had commenced in 1903. The cutters were the first to re-establish a U.G.W. local. They submitted demands for an 8-hour day, and when the managers refused either to hear their delegates or to answer their pleas, the union called out 350 members. As the cutters' strike seriously threatened the livelihood of several thousand workers, violence soon flared at those plants that brought "scab" cutters from other cities. The police quickly rounded up the "rioters," most of whom were promptly released the next day, but the press helped, by featuring the disorder, to create a hostile public opinion. When Samuel Gompers offered to come to Rochester to negotiate a settlement, the Exchange refused to see him; moreover, its determined stand helped to check a compromise move in other cities. The strike gradually petered out, and the Rochester clothiers received credit for a national victory. Sol Wile was able to report a year later that the open shop doctrine had gained wide acceptance in the industry.

Despite the good times, a fiercely competitive trade brought disaster to some firms and fortune to others. Allen, Straus & Co. folded in 1900, but two years later Garson, Meyer & Co. moved into a spacious factory on St. Paul Street erected two decades before by H. H. Warner. Nathan Stein and his wife celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1905 by giving a banquet to all Stein-Bloch workers (700) plus their outside workers (300). Sol Wile submitted a proposal, at the annual meeting of the National Clothiers Association that year, urging all employers to take out life insurance policies for their skilled workers. Six years later Simon Adler, on his seventy-ninth birthday, gave \$50,000 to establish a pension fund for the benefit of deserving employees.

Yet many workers, though glad to honor the boss at a company picnic, retained a stubborn loyalty to the union. Despite

a steady influx of new immigrant tailors, many now from Italy, the old cutters and tailors continued to hold their jobs in the factories and in the quality shops. They rallied annually to march in Labor Day parades, and they turned out a thousand strong at a mass meeting called by the U.G.W. in July 1911 in support of a clothing strike at Chicago. Ten months later the journeymen tailors won a strike against the custom tailors for a 10 per cent wage boost and other benefits. Their gains, though modest, fired the hopes of workers throughout the industry.

Several months later, when a fresh strike broke out in New York and some Rochester shops began to fill orders for their New York competitors, as they had done in 1903, a team of organizers arrived to call the Rochester workers out, too. One of the organizers spoke Yiddish, another Polish and another Italian, which enabled them to reach a larger portion of Rochester's clothing workers than ever before. A great mass meeting at Convention Hall heard the arguments for and against a strike. Emanuel Kovelski, long a popular leader of the Central Trades Council, served as chairman, while Chief of Police Joseph M. Quigley sat on the platform as a guarantee of the democratic procedure. When the vote came, 2644 favored and 228 opposed a strike for an 8-hour day, a 10 per cent increase, union recognition, and extra pay for overtime and holidays.

Sol Wile, spokesman for the manufacturers, denied that the Rochester companies were filling orders for struck firms in New York and warned that, if the 3000 on strike did not return promptly, the factories would shut down entirely, throwing an estimated 12,000 out of work. That strategy had worked in previous crises, but now the workers rallied to the strike call. Daily parades through the clothing district provided a dramatic atmosphere. Chief Quigley or one of his deputies and frequently one or two of the social-gospel ministers marched with the parade leader bearing the stars and stripes, and a spirit of

good will prevailed for several days. James McManus of the State Board of Mediation arrived to investigate the dispute. A few friends of labor spoke out in their behalf, but the press was beginning to relegate strike news to a back page when a sudden outburst of violence forced it again into the headlines.

It was shortly before five on a dreary afternoon in February when two straggling bands of strikers were converging on Clifford Street that somebody saw the lights of a subcontractor blazing through the dusk and hurled a stone through the window. One strike leader soon began to pound at the front door, another at the back door, calling out the workers. In his excitement the proprietor snatched a rifle and shot into the crowd, wounding several and killing 17-year-old Ida Braiman. The violence came so unexpectedly that the police, who had accompanied the marchers, were able to arrest the proprietor and hustle him off before any further violence occurred. All workers and most other citizens were stunned by the tragedy. Several thousand turned out to march in the funeral procession two days later. In a surge of sympathy for the strikers, charitable leaders opened soup kitchens and held benefits to collect strike relief; the Clothiers' Exchange at last agreed to a conference.

Unfortunately, neither side was ready for a settlement. Four independents accepted the union terms and reopened, but the Exchange members remained adamant and offered only to dispense with subcontractors. McManus left for Albany, and the strikers resumed their parades and mass meetings. As the third and fourth week passed, hunger and cold depleted the ranks of the marchers, some of whom found other jobs. Confident at last of success, the Exchange announced a reopening of the factories for February 27. Picket lines reappeared, and both sides claimed success when approximately 30 per cent of the workers returned. Peace reigned at first, but as the days grew

into weeks, hostility developed between the pickets and those going to work, particularly where they happened to differ in ethnic background. When the strikers choked St. Paul Street in the factory section at quitting time one day to hoot the departing strikebreakers, mounted police charged the crowd to open a passage of escape. Some 25 pickets, arrested on this and other occasions, spent a night or two in jail, and although only two faced specific charges, the atmosphere grew increasingly tense.

The Ministerial Association appointed a committee to renew mediation, and the Common Council named a panel of arbiters. A compromise settlement of the strike in New York stirred hope, but the Exchange stood firm. Finally the city officials, after long hesitation, granted permission for a tag day which netted \$3359 for strike relief, slightly more than Syracuse and Buffalo tag days had contributed to Rochester a week or so before. As the strike continued into the eighth week, and Rochester's estimated losses mounted to \$3,000,000, even the Chamber considered an appeal to the National Clothiers Association for pressure on the local body to compromise. Finally the Exchange announced a 52-hour week at the 54-hour rate but refused other concessions.

Yet, when state mediator McManus reported the manufacturers' offer to the strikers, they voted it down. He could not show an offer in writing, and their fear of a trick and disappointment over the terms renewed their determination. The Reverend Paul Moore Strayer, who attended the meeting, again urged McManus to convene the State Board. Finally on May 18 the board met and prepared a settlement which proved acceptable to both sides: the abolition of subcontractors, a 52-hour week at the old pay, time-and-a-half for overtime, no work on five legal holidays, no discrimination for strike activity or union

membership, and no union recognition but an agreement to meet with shop committees.

Since the resumption of production entailed many opportunities for controversy, the union asked Strayer to cooperate with its officials in supervising the return to work. As subcontracting was abolished, many shops remained closed, and the Italians, who had invaded that phase of the industry in recent years, feared a loss of their jobs. Yet much work had piled up, and fortunately Adler Brothers hired Philip Gilberg, local president of the union, and assigned him the task of interviewing the displaced workers and assuring them that new jobs would be available as quickly as the manufacturers could organize their own outside shops. A few disgruntled strikers, who had voted against the settlement and refused to be mollified, were branded as I.W.W.'s, but their cohorts dwindled as practically all the workers were taken on within the first week.

The New York organizers, discredited because of their quick acceptance of the first proposal, hastened back to the metropolis where a revolt was brewing within the U.G.W. Since the national officials had been similarly impatient for a settlement, an insurgent group of local leaders was emerging in New York. Rochester watched with interest as the insurgents, headed by Sidney Hillman, bolted the national convention of the U.G.W. at Nashville in 1914 and formed the new Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America at New York a few months later. The Rochester locals, of which four had now been formed, crowded Kaplan's Hall a month later to hear Sidney Hillman explain the objectives of the new movement and voted enthusiastically to affiliate with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Even some members of the Exchange appeared more hospitable to the new union leadership than their fellows in other clothing centers, and Rochester prepared to entertain the first national convention of the Amalgamated the following year.

A Generation of Labor-Management Cooperation

The clothing firms, like the unions, faced many uncertainties after 1915 but gradually achieved a new stability. Several of the wholesale shops consolidated, while others disappeared as their total dropped from 43 to 25 in the next five years. The death or retirement of vigorous proprietors sometimes prompted these mergers, as in the case of L. Adler Bros. & Co., whose aging executives decided in 1922 to join Levy Brothers in order to gain the dynamic leadership of Jacob Levy, who became president of Levy Bros. & Adler-Rochester, Inc., with an authorized capitalization of \$3,500,000. Max L. Holtz of L. Holtz & Sons Co., who became president of the Exchange in 1919 and served for many years in that capacity, absorbed two lesser firms during the twenties as this process continued.

In spite of the incessant reorganizations, the Exchange maintained a degree of unity. It drew 19 of the larger firms into cooperative efforts to maintain standards and promote the welfare of the Rochester market. It avoided open recognition of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers until new trouble developed during World War I. Because of its many orders for uniforms, the War Department had appointed Professor Meyer Jacobstein as special consultant on labor-management problems in the Rochester clothing industry, and in July 1918, when a strike threatened at one plant, Jacobstein, aided by Louis E. Kirstein, a Boston buyer formerly from Rochester, was able to bring Samuel Weill of the Stein-Bloch Co. and Max Holtz, president of the Exchange, into cautious negotiations with Hillman. Jeremiah Hickey and other members of the Exchange joined in the agreement which granted 10 to 20 per cent increases and time-and-a-half after 48 hours.

The end of the war and of price and wage controls brought rapid changes. When Hillman secured much more favorable

contracts in Chicago and New York, he again approached the Rochester clothiers requesting similar terms. He had taken as his model an arbitration scheme worked out at Chicago some eight years before by Hart, Schaffner & Marx, a quality competitor for whom Weill and Hickey had great respect. With Jacobstein's assistance they drafted an agreement establishing an arbitration procedure for the settlement of future disputes. The agreement called for the appointment of an Impartial Chairman, and Jacobstein helped to select Professor William M. Leiserson of Toledo for that post; the simultaneous adoption of a 44-hour week assured the new experiment in peaceful relations a propitious beginning.

These achievements occurred in the last months of war-time solidarity before the labor troubles and the Red scare hit Rochester. Unfortunately one major Rochester firm, Michaels, Stern & Co., was not a member of the Exchange, and Hillman's effort to bring it into the agreement precipitated a strike in July that divided the community into two camps. Hillman was dubbed a Bolshevik, his union an I.W.W. organization, and the rival United Garment Workers was invited to organize the plant. When disorder at the picket lines brought an injunction prohibiting any picketing, the Amalgamated engaged Professor Felix Frankfurter of the Harvard Law School and an impressive list of associates, including James C. O'Brien of Rochester, to present its plea for a withdrawal of the injunction and a dismissal of the damage suit for \$200,000 which the company had initiated against Hillman. Their elaborate brief assembled much sociological evidence concerning wage standards and trends, living standards and shop practices; but Judge Adolph J. Rodenbeck, who presided at the trial early the next year, accepted the view of Arthur E. Sutherland, attorney for the company, that the only question at issue was the evidence of violence on the picket line. The injunction was upheld and

made permanent, and while the damage suit was set aside, the court costs to the union approached \$100,000 and left the industry divided between two bitterly hostile unions.

The Clothiers' Exchange, which had tried in vain to prevent the introduction of a second union, nevertheless benefited by that threat to the Amalgamated the next year when, in the midst of falling prices, it asked and received the latter's consent for a reduction in wages. The question arose in January 1921 and reached peaceful settlement in October, when the board of arbiters set the reduction at 15 per cent rather than 25 as requested. The fact that the Amalgamated accepted this reduction in good spirit did much to clear it of the opprobrium formerly heaped upon it. An article by Paul Blanshard in *The New Republic*, "The Class Struggle in a Ball Room," described the negotiations which took place at the Powers Hotel in a more respectable setting and more cordial atmosphere than many readers supposed possible. The Amalgamated renewed its contract the next year without a restoration of the 15 per cent cut but refused to give up the 44-hour week. Despite some discontent in the ranks, stability was maintained and, while the reduction rankled until restored in 1923, steady employment benefited both the workers and the companies. The Rochester clothing industry, which produced 1,500,000 suits and overcoats in 1919, maintained its full-time labor force at slightly over 10,000 but upped its total wage payments and the value of its product 40 per cent during these ten years.

The Rochester clothiers made still greater progress in the field of labor-management relations. Although Hillman had reluctantly included an open-shop clause in the original contract, he secured its omission in 1922 but deferred pressure for a closed shop. Instead, the Amalgamated established an employment bureau, which listed all acceptable workers in the area and gradually persuaded the companies to use it as their source

for fresh supplies of labor; by 1928 the Exchange was ready to accept a preferential shop clause. Each of the major firms had meanwhile appointed an expert labor manager—Stein-Bloch engaged Jacobstein's services; Hickey-Freeman brought Dr. N. J. Stone, a young labor economist, to Rochester for this purpose; while Leroy Snyder left the Bureau of Municipal Research to become labor manager for several of the smaller firms and to act as chairman of the group in negotiations with the manager of the Rochester Joint Board of the Amalgamated. Individually they dealt directly with the union shop stewards and committees in working out the details for new piece-rate schedules after 1922 and in settling other day-to-day issues; they also represented the companies in numerous cases submitted to the impartial arbitrator. Dr. Leiserson had a busy schedule in the early years and decided a total of 548 cases before his return to Toledo in 1921. The issues requiring arbitration began to drop off after a time, however, and Dr. Henry Moskowitz, his third successor, who was appointed in 1928 and served for four years, commuted to Rochester for a day or two a week until the need for such services practically disappeared in the thirties.

If hostility between the two unions benefited management during a period of declining wages, rivalry between the two management groups aided labor in good times. When the Exchange granted the Amalgamated a modest increase in 1926, the leading independents, Michaels, Stern & Co. and the Keller, Heumann, Thompson Co., made similar concessions to the United Garment Workers. Two years later, when under the leadership of Abraham Chatman, manager of the Rochester Joint Board since 1924, the Amalgamated launched a new drive for members in the Michaels, Stern plant, Henry M. Stern and Sol Heumann promised their workers a 40-hour week with no reduction in pay. Thus when Holtz of the Exchange met Hillman and Chatman at a bargaining session in the Seneca Hotel

that April, he found them eager to negotiate a basic new agreement. Instead of a cut in hours, Hillman proposed a small wage boost and the adoption of an unemployment insurance scheme similar to one recently launched in the Chicago clothing market.

The agreement thus reached not only introduced a new concept to Rochester, giving the union's ten thousand members a new sense of security, but it also assured members of the Exchange a stable labor force. The skilled workers so essential for the maintenance of quality, valued security and higher wages more than free time, and Hickey-Freeman, which specialized in hand work, was able to increase its labor force and to build a new addition to its plant in Clinton Street. Michaels, Stern & Co., on the other hand, was forced to turn increasingly to machine production. Stein-Bloch merged with Weber & Heilbrunner and Fashion Park to become Fashion Park Associates in 1928; they were thus able to consolidate their sales and office forces, and they seized the occasion to install new labor saving machinery, too.

Mergers, together with forced or voluntary liquidations, reduced the number of independent firms from 137 to 39 during the postwar decade without, however, curtailing the work force. The great depression that followed not only cut the latter number in half, but also put thousands out of work, yet a half dozen major firms, assisted by the NRA and by their own workers at critical moments, were not only able to survive but also to draw a larger portion of the local industry into their hands. They slashed the costs of sales promotion by consolidating routes, reducing the number of traveling salesmen to approximately 100 and their burdens to one trunk full of samples.

Again the Rochester clothiers, producing for a quality market, were less severely hit by the onset of the depression than

many of their competitors elsewhere. Some suspended operations, never to reopen, but most of the leaders shifted cautiously to part-time schedules or announced temporary layoffs. The Exchange made regular payments of unemployment insurance, under its contract with the Amalgamated, and although the sums distributed were not as large as intended, since the union had neglected to collect contributions from the workers, the benefits—first of their kind in Rochester—helped to maintain confidence in the industry. Both Fashion Park and Levy Bros. & Adler were back on full schedule by the fall of 1931, and several other firms that had made layoffs also endeavored to resume full production.

This early confidence soon proved premature, however, and new layoffs occurred in succeeding months. Hickey-Freeman instituted a share-the-work schedule to reduce its costs but stubbornly refused to discharge its employees and suffered a 16.5 per cent loss in place of its customary profits in 1932. Some of the workers raised funds for cash loans to the struggling companies, and the Amalgamated accepted three successive wage cuts of 15 per cent each during the next two years. In an effort to stimulate trade, the Exchange staged a style show at the Chamber in 1932, though with little effect. Max Holtz and Jeremiah Hickey journeyed to Washington the next spring to help work out a suitable code under the NRA; there they collaborated with Hillman and others in drafting a code that erected safeguards against cutthroat competition and benefited the Rochester workers as well as the companies.

The Amalgamated seized the opportunity to press the Keller, Heumann, Thompson Co. for a union contract, which the company granted after a dramatic two-weeks' strike. With little fanfare the union negotiated a new agreement with the Exchange in 1934; it accepted the third 15 per cent cut at this time but defined it as a loan to be paid back as soon as possible; it

also enlarged the contributions to the insurance fund and extended its application to three independent clothing firms. Most of the loans were repaid by 1938, when, finally, Michaels, Stern & Co. requested admittance to the Exchange and accepted the Amalgamated as the bargaining agent for its 900 employees.

One bright spot in the midst of the depression was provided in 1934 when Barney Ruben, formerly of Rochester, returned as the head of Bond Stores, Inc., and announced his plan to establish a factory in Rochester. He opened modestly in the old Yawman & Erbe plant on Hand Street that year, giving employment to 400 at the start. Organized under the name of the Aplo Co., it produced men's clothing for the economy market served by his chain of stores, the largest of which was located in Rochester. As the demand increased, Ruben leased another old factory and expended his labor force until it exceeded that of any local clothing firm by 1938, when he announced plans for the erection of a modern new factory on North Goodman Street in order to consolidate most of his operations in Rochester.

The second World War delayed the completion of the new Bond factory, the largest of its kind in the world, until 1948. Meanwhile, other shifts in the local industry saw the retirement of Sol Heumann and the reorganization of his firm as Timely Clothes, Inc., in 1939. Levy Bros. & Adler-Rochester finally merged, a dozen years later, with Michaels, Stern, reducing the number of major companies to five—Bond and four members of the Exchange: Hickey-Freeman, Fashion Park, Michaels, Stern, and Timely Clothes. Numerous orders for officers' uniforms kept the factories fairly busy during the war, and the early postwar years again brought increased demands for men's suits, boosting the work force above 9000 in 1947 for the first time in two decades. The wages had doubled in that period,

and so had the productivity per man day, at least at the Hickey-Freeman Co. where comparable statistics were available.

The Rochester clothiers have attained remarkable stability in recent years. Although the local production has not kept pace with expansion elsewhere, with the result that Rochester has dropped from fourth to fifth place in volume of output, the four quality firms still hold their position in the high-price market. Morton J. Baum, now president of Hickey-Freeman, served as president of the National Clothiers Association through most of the fifties. The top designers at these leading firms, such as Hugo J. Gemignani, in charge at Hickey-Freeman since 1943, have been respected members of the International Association of Clothing Designers, and although their number has declined from 40 to seven since the first World War, they have maintained the quality traditions fostered by Harry D'Annunzio at Fashion Park in that period.

In similar fashion, Abraham Chatman maintained the friendly labor-management traditions nurtured by Sidney Hillman, whose death in 1946 prompted the Joint Board and the Exchange to join in a national movement for a memorial fund, a portion of which was used locally to endow a series of annual lectures at the University of Rochester on current problems. Chatman continued to emphasize the Amalgamated's educational program, which had brought Paul Blanshard and Hortense Powdermaker to Rochester for stimulating work with the members of its eleven affiliated locals during the twenties; although the intervening years have altered the ethnic character of these units, and the character of the educational program has changed, its successive directors have kept the union membership more alert to civic and economic issues than is the case in many unions. As a national vice-president, Chatman cooperated with Jacob Potofsky, Hillman's successor as president, in the industry-wide negotiations that now prevail and in

other Amalgamated functions. In 1956 he negotiated a separate agreement with the Rochester Exchange, and with other companies for which the Amalgamated has become the bargaining agent, for the collection of small but regular contributions from the workers and the companies to provide for the establishment of a health clinic to be operated jointly for the benefit of all present and retired members of the Amalgamated. An act incorporating the clinic finally passed the state legislature in 1960.

Thus the clothing industry, while exceeded in these latter years in Rochester not only by the photographic and optical producers, but also by manufacturers of electrical supplies, of other machinery and of food products, alike in number of employees, in total of investment and in rate of return, nevertheless continues to play an important role in the city's economy. An established reputation for the quality of their products and a vigorous policy of negotiating firm agreements with widely dispersed outlets aided the more successful firms. Michaels, Stern had lined up 1500 retailers by the mid-fifties, Timely Clothes, 1000, and more exclusive Hickey-Freeman, 400, while Fashion Park also dealt with a chain of stores; yet these affiliates were not, as in the case of Bond's 24, wholly owned. As the widespread shift from formal to informal attire slashed the market for men's suits and overcoats, Bond Stores, Inc., serving a field where the competition was most severe, was induced in 1958 to sell its huge factory to the Stromberg-Carlson Division of General Dynamics, but it extended its chain of outlets and continues to supply jobs to some 2500 workers in its former plant on Martin Street.

A major problem confronting the clothing manufacturers in recent years has been the scarcity of skilled workers in this field. To offset the local shortage, most of the firms have opened auxiliary shops in area towns where the competition for skilled craftsmanship is not so keen; several have also

endeavored to recruit proficient tailors in Italy and elsewhere helping to secure them the necessary visas under the federal preference quota. By these and other measures they have maintained a thriving industry, and the 7900 employed at Rochester in March 1960, though now only 7.5 per cent of the city's total engaged in manufacturing, still produce some 15,000,000 suits and coats each year. James Weil, treasurer of Michaels, Stern and president of the Exchange, has a recognized voice in community affairs.

Bibliographical Note

In addition to the contemporary news accounts culled from the Rochester papers and the statistical data gleaned from state and federal censuses, I have found much valuable information in a number of primary and secondary sources. An extended collection of the record books of the L. Adler Bros. firm and some of its successor, Levy Bros. & Adler-Rochester, has shed much light on the character of the industry during the high tide of its influence in Rochester. A scholarly study by Boutelle E. Lowe, *Representative Industry and Trade Unionism of an American City*, published at New York in 1912 but now out of print, deals intensively with the growth of the Rochester clothing industry and describes its organization in detail. Among several official reports of public hearing or investigations, that of the U. S. Department of Commerce on *The Men's Factory-Made Clothing Industry* (Washington, 1916), that of a Committee of Manufacturers on "Sweating" in the House of Representative *Reports*, 1893, the U. S. Industrial Commission *Reports* (1900), and that of the Wagner Commission in the *New York Senate Documents* (1912), No. 30, are most important.

Special aspects of the story are revealed in *An Investigation of the Conditions Existing in the Clothing Factories of Rochester, New York* (Rochester Chamber of Commerce, 1912); Edwin and Catherine Rumball, "The Working Girls and Women of Rochester," *Common Good*, February, 1913; Harvey F. Morris, *The Story of Men's Clothes* (Hickey-Freeman Co., Rochester, 1926); Felix Frankfurter, *Memorandum of Law in the Case of Joseph Michaels, Morley A. Stern, et al. vs. Sidney Hillman . . . and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers* (1920); Matthew Josephson, *Sidney Hillman* (N. Y., 1952); The Rochester Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, *Rochester Clothing Labor, 1915-1939* (Rochester, 1939); and Donald B. Straus, *Hickey-Freeman Co. and Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America: A Case Study* (Washington, 1949).

Several reminiscent and biographical articles have also proved useful. Edward Rosenberg, Sr., and Jeremiah G. Hickey wrote such articles for *Rochester Commerce* in April 1933, and Hickey among others supplied information for similar articles in the April 1920 and February 1946 issues; most of the May 1954 issue of that magazine was devoted to the clothing industry. Good summary articles by Howard C. Hosmer and others have appeared in the Rochester press in recent years, notably in the *Times-Union*, January 8, 1949, May 13, 1952 and March 7, 1960. Several men whose association with the industry dates back several decades have helped me find evidence on specific points, and I am especially indebted to Mr. Abraham Chatman and Mr. Earle E. Levy who have read the manuscript and made helpful suggestions.