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Black Gold: Molly Maguireism, Unionism, and the Anthracite Labor Wars, 1860-1880

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BLACK GOLD: MOLLY MAGUIREISM, UNIONISM, AND THE ANTHRACITE LABOR

WARS, 1860-1880

by

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B.A. May 2012, Millersville University

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ABSTRACT

BLACK GOLD: MOLLY MAGUIREISM, UNIONISM, AND THE ANTHRACITE LABOR WARS, 1860-1880

Samantha Edmiston
Old Dominion University, 2017
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The class and ethnic tensions that manifested in the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania were a microcosm of the broader, nation-wide labor wars of the late-nineteenth century. These labor wars, violent and sometimes bloody, shaped workingmen's condition and the larger history of unionism. The Molly Maguires, in both their real and imagined form counted as key protagonists in these wars between big business and unions. More local wars also occurred between workers, those like the Mollies who wanted to use violence to encourage change, and others who instead sought to peacefully organize and bargain collectively with their employers.

This thesis intends to ascertain what effect the Molly Maguires and Molly Maguireism had on the development, success, and failures of unionism in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania during the middle and late-nineteenth century. Through an examination of the development of unions and collective action in this area as well as the Irish tradition of retributive justice, this thesis suggests a complex connection between Molly Maguireism and unionism. Molly Maguireism existed alongside unionism in the anthracite region from the beginning and the concentration of violence attributed to the Molly Maguires ebbed and flowed with union progress. When union development was at its weakest, during the Civil War era and immediately following the Long Strike of 1875, the incidence of Molly violence increased. Where unionism valued organization as a means to improve life and labor in the anthracite region, the Molly Maguires instead used violence as a means to achieve the same end.

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother.
Is tú mo inspioráid. Is breá liom tú.

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This project truly began four years ago when I began conducting research for a Departmental Honors Thesis for the History Department at Millersville University. From that point until the present, I was fortunate to receive encouragement, academic advice, and assistance from professors and colleagues from the universities with which I have been affiliated as well as family. Without this unrelenting support, this thesis could not have been started, let alone completed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Kehoe was born in 1837 in County Wicklow, Ireland. He came to America along with his parents, brothers, and sisters at the age of thirteen. The Kehoe family settled in Tuscarora, Pennsylvania. Kehoe began working the mines as a teenager and at the age of twenty he obtained a job at the No. 2 Breaker Colliery of J. B. McCreary & Co. in Audenreid, Schuylkill County, where he eventually rose to the position of miner. Kehoe became a reasonably wealthy man in the Irish community of Schuylkill County emerging out of the dregs of mining into a tavern keeper, and later gaining enough influence to enter into local politics. He set up business in Girardville as a proprietor of the Hibernia House, a tavern, and was elected high constable of Girardville for two consecutive terms.¹

Historians and contemporaries of Kehoe alike have either maligned Kehoe or overlooked his somewhat atypically successful life. F. P. Dewees, one of the earliest Molly Maguire historians, described him as a handsome man with “a cold gray eye” who had “great determination of character” and “intense selfishness.” Dewees’ also showed his disgust at Kehoe’s seeming disregard for human life. No doubt, Dewees historical opinion of Kehoe mirrored head of the Pinkerton Detective Agency Alan Pinkerton’s representation of him as a diabolical mastermind.² Anthony Bimba writing in the 1930s, did not even believe the Molly Maguires existed and so to him, John Kehoe held no real importance. Bimba describes him as

¹ Charles A. McCarthy, *The Great Molly Maguire Hoax* (Wyoming, Penn: Pocket Books, 1969), 90, 101-3.

² F. P. Dewees, *The Molly Maguires* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1877), 175.

simply one of the miners the coal establishment executed and scapegoated as means to an end.³ Kehoe became an influential member of the Girardville community and held political ambitions. These ambitions unfortunately led him in the direction of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), a Catholic fraternal organization, through which members elected him Schuylkill County delegate in 1874. He replaced Bernard Dolan who was accused of embezzlement and expelled from the order. Because Pinkerton detective James McParlan and so many others believed that the AOH and the Molly Maguires were that same evil organization, in their minds, victory against that organization would not be complete until “Black Jack” Kehoe faced the gallows.⁴

And face the gallows he would. But not until 1878, and for a murder he was found guilty of committing sixteen years earlier in 1862. That year, F. W. Langdon, a mine foreman, was assassinated in Audenreid. At the time, the authorities did not convict or apprehend anyone for the murder, nor was it linked directly to the feared secret society. However, now historians consider this the first murder committed by the Molly Maguires only because the Pinkerton Detective Agency and the Coal and Iron police made it so fourteen years later when six men were finally arraigned at the Pottsville Courthouse for the crime: Neil Dougherty, John Campbell, Columbus McGhee, Michael McGhee, John Chapman, and John Kehoe. The men were tried separately.

The murder of Langdon took place against the backdrop of a Fourth of July celebration in Schuylkill County. During the festivities a group of miners began expressing Copperhead sentiments, during which John Kehoe allegedly spit on the American flag. Langdon responded by denouncing the miners which in turn, culminated in the miners shouting threats at the

³ Anthony Bimba, *The Molly Maguires*, (1932; repr., New York: International Publishers, 1950), 9, 68.

⁴ Wayne G. Broehl Jr., *The Molly Maguires* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1964), 167, 176, 186; Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 222.

foreman. On his way home, an unidentified group of men severely stoned Langdon. He died the next day. As was the case with most foremen, mine bosses, and supervisors, Langdon was unpopular with the miners and laborers as his job included checking miners' coal loads to determine if the refuse content was too high. Langdon was also an inspection boss in the mine employing many members of the Kehoe family. Operators paid their miners through a piece-rate system that became a source of grievance. They forced miners who worked by the ton to adhere to the "miners' ton," which ranged from 2,464 and 3,360 pounds, significantly more than the standardized ton. Miners complained that this was an unfair weight. Other miners paid by the wagon load insisted that their bosses had a tendency to increase the amount a wagon could hold, thus lowering their earnings. Contract miners found the practice of "docking," or deducting a certain amount from each payable unit for dirt and slate, a constant irritation.⁵

Three weeks before the murder, Langdon had docked Kehoe, theoretically giving Kehoe motive. Several people saw the stoning incident, but were too afraid to come to Langdon's aid or go to the authorities. Friends found him semiconscious, but after resting over night, he was able to walk about a mile away to his home. After being administered treatment by his doctor, Langdon succumbed to his wounds. Neil Dougherty was found guilty of second degree murder on November 30, 1876. John Campbell was convicted of second degree murder on January 9, 1877 and sentenced to prison for five years. Michael McGhee was acquitted on May 17 and John Chapman and Columbus McGhee had all charges dropped.⁶ These so called demonstrations of justice served only as precursors to the real intentions of Alan Pinkerton and Franklin Gowen, president of the Reading and Philadelphia Railroad: to finally persecute John Kehoe.

⁵ Broehl, *The Molly Magurries*, 90-91; Harold Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers: The Social Ecology of an Industrial Union, 1869-1897* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), 45.

⁶ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 334

The trial of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe commenced on January 9, 1877 with Justice Pershing presiding. Kehoe, who was already serving two seven-year terms for two other conspiracies to commit murder cases, the Major and William M. Thomas murder cases, was now convicted of first degree murder, a capital offense. Franklin B. Gowen, president of the Reading and Philadelphia Railroad, returned to Pottsville for the occasion.⁷ Gowen had also appeared during the Thomas murder trial on August 8, 1876 where he had stated that not only were Kehoe and his cronies on trial, but so too was the entirety of the Ancient Order of the Hibernians. Much of the witness testimony was circumstantial at best. Miners and Langdon's neighbor, Patrick Brady, when examined by the prosecution, testified that weeks before Langdon died, Kehoe told Langdon he was "a son of a bitch" and that he would "kill" him "before long because you only are robbing me and robbing the people here by your docking."⁸ The prosecution presented contradictory evidence. The night of the murder was dark, the recognition by eyewitnesses incomplete.

Even though the murder of Langdon occurred in 1862, no one went to a local justice to have Kehoe arrested at the time. According to Brady's testimony, there was no Justice of the Peace to arrest Kehoe, demonstrating the lack of law enforcement in the anthracite region. Brady also feared that if he became an informant, his "head would be broken" before he got back. "If I went I would be apt to get the same as Langdon got. But I think I know enough of them - as much as any man in this state."⁹ Many historians argue that the Langdon murder was the first committed by the Molly Maguires, but the fact that the trial occurred several years after the fact sullied evidence and rendered witness testimony circumstantial and conflicting or downright

⁷ *Miners' Journal* (hereafter *MJ*), January 5-12, 1877; *Shenandoah Herald*, January 5-12 1877.

⁸ [E. D. York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v John Kehoe, January 9, 1877* (n.p., 1877), 44.

⁹ [York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe*, 46.

inaccurate. The one compelling aspect of Brady's testimony was his articulation of the fear felt by the community, fear that prevented men like Brady from seeking justice for Langdon's fate. Did the fear stem from the strength of the Mollies' influence at the time or simply from the long held Irish belief that an informant committed the worst kind of crime?

None of the witnesses ever saw Langdon and Kehoe together that evening. In addition, the two men lived in the same neighborhood; Kehoe resided only 150 yards away on the opposite side of the same street. Yet, Langdon claimed to not know who struck him and claimed it must have been "five, six, or seven men." If he knew Kehoe as well as he claimed, Langdon would have known it was Kehoe who attacked him. Other witnesses like William R. Roberts stated they barely saw anything. Roberts claimed he heard a commotion in the streets and the movement of men. Immediately, he shut his window and put out his light in fear. He only knew Langdon was the victim because he knew the sound of his voice.¹⁰ Roberts' testimony demonstrated how rampant violence and lawlessness in the anthracite region created a general atmosphere of fear. Many in the Irish community thought it better to ignore the violence than to become an informant. By the same token, even if they chose to turn to the police, at a time before the Coal and Iron Police, Schuylkill County lacked law officials.

There was no evidence that Kehoe directly participated in the beating and one witness stated he was not even present during the attack.¹¹ Langdon was killed forty to fifty yards from Williams' Hotel in Girardville. Other witnesses claimed they saw Kehoe amongst a group of men including John Campbell, John Chapman, Neil Dougherty, Columbus McGee, and Michael McGee, all alleged Molly Maguires, outside the hotel the night of the murder. However, none

¹⁰ [York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe*, 96.

¹¹ *Shenandoah Herald*, January 9-16, 1877; *MJ*, January 9-16, 1877; [York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe*.

definitively placed any of the men at the scene. While witness William Canvin could not identify who had assaulted Langdon, he described for the court Langdon's pitiful state after the beating: "He was beaten very badly about the head and face. His mouth was cut on the upper lip - I don't know in what shape it was cut...his teeth were loose. He was cut all over around the head and one of his ears was cut." Canvin also made reference to the condition of his clothing claiming, "it was all saturated with blood and his hair was all matted...he was flighty."¹²

Furthermore, after the beating occurred, witnesses observed Langdon staggering to his home just yards away from the crime scene where he died two days later in his bed. This factor enabled the defense to create an alternative explanation for Langdon's death, which was that Langdon did not die directly from the attack, but as a result of the over-zealous treatment administered by his doctor. Kehoe's defense attempted to demonstrate that the doctor's over-use of stimulants caused a stroke, killing his patient. Also, even if Kehoe was present during the attack, which he was not, his attorneys posited that the assault was spontaneous as opposed to premeditated. Therefore, Kehoe was liable for second degree murder at worst. The testimonies made it clear that the evening was too dark to see any of the attackers clearly. Many admitted that all they heard were rocks being thrown and Langdon's screams of, "Oh, don't, oh, don't." Above all, the Coal and Iron Police and the corrupt Pinkerton Detective Agency executed the entire investigation instead of public authorities.¹³ Anthony Dimmick, the doctor who treated Langdon, reported a great loss of blood and inflammation of the brain. He did not believe the blows to the head that Langdon received to be mortal; by insinuating that disease had caused the

¹² [York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe*, 73.

¹³ [York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe*; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 228.

inflammation of the brain, the defense attempted to introduce reasonable doubt. Langdon's body was never autopsied and a coroner's inquest was never done.

On January 16, 1877, the Pottsville jury found John Kehoe guilty of first degree murder. Incredulously, historian Kevin Kenny concluded, "Conviction of second degree murder might have been expected; but the verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree is, in retrospect at least, quite remarkable."¹⁴ Symbolizing the triumph of Gilded Age industrial capitalism over Molly Maguireism and labor unionism—which the coal and railroad barons believed to be linked—Kehoe was sentenced to be hanged on April 16, 1877. In the months between his trial and his execution, Kehoe struggled for his life. The Supreme Court denied his appeal so he moved on to the Pardons Board. Kehoe's plea for clemency was brought before the court in Harrisburg on April 10, 1878 where it seemed he had a chance. According to the *Shenandoah Herald*, "None of the previous 'Mollie' cases brought before the Board of Pardons were nearly as completely prepared as this, nor had they half the bottom to stand on that Kehoe's case has."¹⁵ Campbell and Dougherty even submitted affidavits declaring that Kehoe took no part in the Langdon murder and the theory presented by the defense that Langdon's death was due to maltreatment from his doctor started to gain ground. The Board tabled Kehoe's appeal until September 2 when the members turned it down despite the fact that Pennsylvania Governor Hartranft felt that the evidence against Kehoe was lacking. He believed that Kehoe deserved punishment, but did not deserve to be hanged for "a crime that he was not clearly proven guilty of merely because he has

¹⁴ [York], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe*; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 228.

¹⁵ Marvin W. Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading: The Life of Franklin B. Gowen* (Harrisburg: Archives Publishing Co. of Pennsylvania, Inc., 1947), 148.

been implicated in other dark deeds that, according to the law, would consign him to the gallows.”¹⁶

Even after the failed appeal, Governor Hartranft hesitated to sign the death warrant. Marvin Schlegel, writing in the 1940s, believed this was because Hartranft truly believed in Kehoe’s innocence. The reality was much more selfish. The year 1878 was a gubernatorial election year. Hartranft needed the Irish vote and therefore, stalled signing the warrant until after his reelection. Despite the fact that Hartranft set Kehoe’s execution for December 18, Kehoe continued to fight until the last breath. Kehoe demanded a third audience with the Board of Pardons, this time armed with a written affidavit from Patrick McHugh which stated, as did all the other affidavits, that Kehoe had not been present at Langdon’s beating. The Board considered the evidence insufficient and John Kehoe was hanged on December 18, 1878.¹⁷

Under normal circumstances, a jury would have had difficulty reaching a guilty verdict at the end of this trial. However, the atmosphere in Schuylkill County was far from normal during this period. Before Kehoe was brought to trial, eighteen other highly publicized Molly Maguire cases had occurred. Judge Pershing and the prosecution went to great lengths to convince the jury that despite conflicting testimony, lack of evidence, and the inability to definitively place Kehoe at the scene, Kehoe planned the murder in advance, and gave the orders for its execution. Wayne Broehl, the first major Molly Maguire historian of the latter half of the nineteenth century, wholeheartedly believed the prosecution. He argued that Kehoe was directly involved in the Langdon murder based solely on the fact that Langdon oversaw many miners who were members of the Kehoe family and that just three weeks prior to the murder, Langdon had docked

¹⁶ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 148; *Shenandoah Herald*, July 10, 1878.

¹⁷ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 149.

Kehoe's pay.¹⁸ As Broehl was the foremost Molly Maguire historian until Kevin Kenny wrote his monograph in 1998, the general consensus for decades depicted John Kehoe as "King of the Mollies"; he was unquestionably guilty and his organization was made up of into a murderous group of thugs.

More recently, Kenny and his successor Mark Bulik analyze the Kehoe trial as well as the other showcase trials between 1876 and 1879, during which twenty alleged Mollies were put to death, within the larger context of critical nineteenth century tensions between labor and the industrial aristocracy, between unionism and capitalism. This context made it clear that railroad baron Franklin B. Gowen, and Charles Albright, a Civil War enemy of the Mollies, as well as other members of the prosecution, saw the Kehoe trial as an opportunity to eliminate the "King of the Mollies" and to connect the secret organization directly to unionism. During the trial, Albright cross-examined James Shoveland, secretary of a miners' union in 1862, and asked if they called themselves the Buckshots, a synonym for the Molly Maguires. Shoveland refuted this by saying, "The coal operators put that name on the union then." Albright switched gears and asked him if Kehoe had been a member of the union. Shoveland replied, "He must have been; he was a miner."¹⁹

Disagreements among historians over Kehoe's innocence points to the changing and contradictory views historians have held about Molly Maguireism—its existence, its origins, and ultimately, as this thesis explores, its effects on labor activism and unionism in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania.

¹⁸ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 334.

¹⁹ McCarthy, *The Great Molly Maguire Hoax*, 130.

This thesis does not intend to weigh in on the arguably exhausted debate over whether the Molly Maguires were martyrs or murderous thugs. A focus on just the Molly Maguires neglects the more important issue, raised by Aurand, of how and why workers took the initiative to address their own grievances. This thesis examines the effect Molly Maguireism had on unionism and labor in the coal mines of the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. Though some historians like Kevin Kenny contend that the Molly Maguires and unionism were separate phenomenon, my research suggests retributive justice and collective action closely connected these two entities. The Molly Maguires and the fledgling unions, most notably, the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, fought for the same values just through different methods. Where unionism valued organization as a means to improve life and labor in the anthracite region, the Molly Maguires instead used violence as a means to achieve the same end. In order to fully understand the depth to which unionism and Molly Maguireism were interconnected, a distinction must be made between the Molly Maguire ideology and that of the actual physical organization. Unions attempted to restructure the reward system of wages the operators put in place by demanding increased wages, lowered supply costs, and restrictions on the abusive practice of payroll deductions.²⁰ Molly Maguireism transcended this system where the unions of 1840-1875 failed. These ideological depictions of Molly Maguireism were disseminated mainly through men like Benjamin Bannan and his *Miners' Journal* and other local and national newspapers, Franklin B. Gowen, president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, and contemporary historians writing immediately after the trials and executions.

None of the surviving evidence is neutral, nor does it feign to be so. Most source material on the Molly Maguires is written by their enemies and detractors, thus requiring more

²⁰ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 64.

ideological reading and abstract analysis. These contemporary sources sought to use Molly Maguireism as a way to demonize a specific group of Irishmen who undoubtedly committed violent acts and to explain the variety of social problems besetting the anthracite region in the mid-nineteenth century. There is a gap between past reality and past representation that, once understood, historians can gain insight into the society in which the Molly Maguires lived, even though they provide little reliable evidence on the nature of the Molly Maguires themselves. By examining these primary sources as instances of ideology instead of straightforward representations of fact, one can attempt to answer the questions: how were the Molly Maguires described by contemporaries? Why were they described that way? How did actors use Molly Maguireism for their own power? And, less definitively, who were the Molly Maguires, what did they do, and why?

In the 1850s and 1860s, the *Miners' Journal* was the first media source to present the Molly Maguires as a synonym for Irish social depravity, anti-republicanism, and an evil terrorist conspiracy. During the Civil War, the terrorist conspiracy was adapted to early labor activism and draft resistance. With the birth of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association in 1868, it was only natural that contemporary sources associated Molly Maguireism with unionism. This thesis addresses the contemporary statements about the Molly Maguires, their ideological uses, and the particular historical context in which they emerged within the newspapers, pamphlets, trial records and local histories of the time as well as monographs like Alan Pinkerton's *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives* and F. P. Dewees's history, *The Molly Maguires*. In any attempt to write about labor history from the perspective of the laborer, we must treat the surviving evidence with the skepticism it deserves.

What is in a Name? Agrarian Justice in Ireland: The Molly Maguires in Historiographical and Historical Context

An understanding of pre-Famine peasant movements in Ireland allow for deeper comprehension of the American Molly Maguire movement and the effect that Molly Maguireism had on the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. Historians of the American Molly Maguires have importantly traced their activities to earlier protest movements, and therefore have described Molly Maguireism as a transnational movement. Early Molly historians like F. P. Dewees writing immediately after the trials in 1877 and Anthony Bimba in the 1930s simply took their evidence from James McParlan's pre-investigative research in Ireland in the 1870s. Before Alan Pinkerton unleashed McParlan upon the coal mines, he required McParlan to draw up a preliminary report on the origins of the society in Ireland. McParlan's seven-page memorandum detailed the history of seventeenth and eighteenth century Ulster secret societies. His thesis centered around the idea that members of these societies were Molly Maguires under different names. Hence, these early histories represented the Molly Maguire story in America as a phenomenon directly transplanted intact from Ireland.

More recently, however, historians have discussed the transnationalism of Molly Maguireism in more nuanced ways. Wayne Broehl's 1960s interpretation stood as one of the first attempts to emphasize the Molly Maguires' transnational roots, but failed to separate the Irish agrarian societies from their American counterparts. Broehl's contemporary, Harold Aurand, glossed over Irish agrarian protest portraying the Molly Maguires instead as a product of the atmosphere of the Pennsylvania coal fields and therefore unique to Schuylkill County. Kevin Kenny's *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* complicated previous accounts by describing Molly Maguireism as a transnational movement, while separating the American Molly Maguires from the Irish agrarian societies of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Finally, the

most recent Molly Maguire historian, Mark Bulik, augmented Kenny's argument by further connecting the American Mollies to Ireland through his examination of folk behaviors like mummary, a sort of ancient play performed by amateur troupes adorning costumes and black face who visited nearby homes during the Christmas season in Ireland.²¹ The American Mollies certainly drew upon methods of protest from their ancestors, but the organization grew organically from the Pennsylvania anthracite mines.

Historians argue that the tradition of Irish retributive justice originated in peasant protests against Gaelic aristocracy and English rule in Ireland in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Peasant farmers organized to combat Parliament's decision in the 1750s to allow the sale of Irish beef and butter in Britain which resulted in landlords evicting tenant farmers so they could graze more cattle.²² One of the most famous movements and in this case, most relevant to American Molly Maguireism, was the Whiteboy movements of the mid-eighteenth century. Whiteboyism first appeared in the winter of 1761-1762 in the counties of Tipperary, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford. Even though the Whiteboys led a primarily agrarian movement and the American Mollies carried out their labor war in an industrial setting, the anthracite region of Pennsylvania was far from an urban setting and therefore bore similarities to the Whiteboys and other agrarian secret societies in Ireland, similarities that will be discussed further in Chapter Two. However, while many early historians of the American Molly Maguires argued that they were descendants of groups like the Whiteboys, Ribbonmen, and Defenders simply transplanted in America via famine era immigration, these Old World secret societies exhibited stark differences in protest method.

²¹ Mark Bulik, *The Sons of Molly Maguire: The Irish Roots of America's First Labor War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 28.

²² Bulik, *The Sons of Molly Maguire*, 47

The Whiteboys' activities appeared defensive in methodology and had two main purposes. First, they sought to defend peasant interests against the aristocracy through persuasion and intimidation; Whiteboys swore secret oaths and distributed threatening letters and notices, similar to the oaths of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) and the coffin notices of the American Mollies.²³ In Ireland, Whiteboys issued coffin notices to landlords and other enemies to warn them that if they did not make positive changes or leave their land, a crime would be committed upon them. Coffin notices in America served the same purpose. The Mollies issued them to superintendents, operators, or mine bosses as threats to suggest that if they did not leave town or adhere to their wishes, they would wind up dead or some harm would come to their property. Coffin notices also appeared in public spaces in the collieries, threatening miners on strike, warning them not to return back to work before their needs were met. However, where the Whiteboys' letters had some semblance of legal verbiage, the American Mollies' coffin notices did not. Second, the Whiteboys, like the Molly Maguires in America, aimed to carry out punitive measures against those who broke the "laws" thus established, resulting in widespread terror in the region. At the heart of these laws, among both the Whiteboys and the American Mollies, was the conviction that society was divided into "rich" and "poor." The Whiteboys, as described by historian Michael Beames, executed "punitive raids involving the destruction of property or the beating of persons 'obnoxious' to them," death being reserved for the worst of their landlords.²⁴

Violent agrarian activity fluctuated with feast days and Gaelic holidays as well as the ups and downs of the peasant economy. Mark Bulik details similarities between the Irish and American Molly Maguires by pointing to a number of shared strategies with Irish mummers such

²³ Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and Their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), 29.

²⁴ Beames, *Peasants and Power*, 78.

as levying tribute, role-playing (dressing as women), visits to homes, blackmail, theft for food or money, and collective action taken for the collective good with collective approval. Indeed, the Molly Maguires in America shared some of these behaviors, but American Molly violence did not adhere to feast days and holidays; to the American organization, the victims were more important than when the violence occurred. However, the violent acts they organized in Pennsylvania did coincide with the ever fluctuating anthracite economy and strike frequency.

Much of the Irish peasantry supported the Whiteboy movements. This support derived mainly from a general class consciousness, or what Beames had called “peasant consciousness.”²⁵ Before Beames, who wrote in the 1980s, historians failed to credit the Irish agrarian class with class consciousness. Other Molly Maguire historians like Dewees, Bimba, and Broehl denied the Irish peasant secret societies their own historical agency. Until recently, historians tended to discuss Irish agrarian violence in terms of a nationalist, Catholic populace “struggling to cast off the yoke of the British, Protestant oppressor.”²⁶ Historians like Beames and later, Kenny, attempted to complicate this overly-simplistic portrayal by moving towards more abstract concepts of Irishness and an emphasis on class consciousness and socioeconomic relations. A collective peasant consciousness pushed back against two divisive issues in pre-Famine Ireland: strangers from other counties working in Whiteboy territory as laborers and hostility towards landlords. Similarly, Irish immigrants in the Pennsylvania anthracite region constantly feared encroachment upon their jobs and their wages, as meager as they were. Most Irish in America became staunch Democrats and during and after the Civil War they tended to take a pro-slavery, anti-black stance in fear of job competition from freed African Americans.

²⁵ Beames, *Peasants and Power*, 89.

²⁶ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 18.

Irish miners and laborers also exhibited a severe animosity towards mine owners, operators, superintendents, and those in positions above them, viewing them as tyrants. Like the peasants involved in pre-Famine movements, they refused to recognize the legitimacy of the established order.

With the establishment of the Society of Ribbonmen in the nineteenth century, the term Ribbonism also became a term used to describe rural violence. This society grew out from an organization called the Defenders, active in south Ulster and contemporaries of the Whiteboys. In contrast to the Whiteboys, the Ribbonism promoted anticlericalism. Historians have used the terms *Ribbonism* and *Molly Maguireism* interchangeably, but the Irish Molly Maguires exhibited methodology and motive more similar to agrarian Whiteboy activity even though contemporaries of the time period and early Molly Maguire historians used *Ribbonism* to describe them. Kenny described differences between the two societies: “The rural, local, and often Gaelic flavor of agrarian agitators like the Molly Maguires....marked them off as very different from the secular, cosmopolitan, and protonationalist Society of Ribbonmen.”²⁷

The Whiteboys, Ribbonmen, and other Irish secret societies perceived themselves and were perceived by their cohorts, as acting to defend of a traditional economy against the emerging British market economy.²⁸ In their attempts to achieve that cause, secret societies in Ireland have been viewed by historians as either bloodthirsty and demonic or peaceful and devout; in reality, they were both in that they employed violent *and* peaceful tactics to achieve their ends. And like their counterparts in Ireland, the same duality characterized the Ancient

²⁷ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 16.

²⁸ John William Knott, “Land Kinship and Identity: The Cultural Roots of Agrarian Agitation in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 12, no. 1 (1984): 99.

Order of Hibernians and the Molly Maguires in America, organizations that were two sides of the same coin.

The AOH was a society that originated in Ireland; the details of its origins remained shrouded in mystery. According to an early-twentieth century history of the AOH in America, branches of Ribbonmen organized themselves under names like the Hibernian Funeral Society and St. Patrick's Fraternal Society. These groups aimed to keep the Catholic Church at bay, as the church adamantly preached against the existence and participation in secret societies.²⁹ The first appearance in America of the name Ancient Order of Hibernians was in 1838, when Ribbonmen society members began a chapter of St. Patrick's Fraternal Society in New York City. These same members met with Ribbonmen in Schuylkill County to organize a new society. Over the next two years, divisions sprung up in New York City and Schuylkill County that eventually adopted the name Ancient Order of Hibernians.³⁰ AOH headquarters remained in Pennsylvania until the chapter in New York City acquired a charter in 1853.³¹ Branches were also organized in Ireland, England, and Scotland. In his initial report to Alan Pinkerton, James McParlan claimed the AOH and the Molly Maguires were imported from Ireland to America where they conspiratorially established their organization in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. The depiction of the AOH and the Molly Maguires as a foreign, rather than domestic, radical sect tainted histories of the Mollies for decades. However, according to the official histories of the AOH, no evidence existed that the organization was exported directly to America from Ireland.

²⁹ James J. Bergin, *History of the Ancient Order of Hibernians* (Dublin: Ancient Order of the Hibernians, 1910), 29.

³⁰ John O'Dea, *History of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Ladies' Auxillary*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1923), vol. 1, 14.

³¹ O'Dea, *History of the Ancient Order of Hibernians*, vol. 2, 14.

Historians have speculated about the origin of the name Molly Maguire. Until recently, the origin story was based in Irish myth and lore. One version told of a group of local peasants who organized to avenge an old widow named Molly Maguire after her British landlords evicted her from her land. Another tells of a woman named Molly Maguire who owned an illegal tavern where the first members of the secret society met to plan their violent activities. Yet another tale portrays Molly Maguire as a “fierce, young woman, pistols strapped to each thigh, who led bands of men through the countryside on their nocturnal raids.”³² Kenny presented William Steuert Trench’s explanation as the most convincing of the Molly Maguire origin stories. Trench observed that the Irish peasants who called themselves Mollies dressed in women’s clothing and blackened their faces with burnt cork, similar to earlier groups like the Whiteboys. These men claimed this mythical woman as the source of their origin because she symbolized their struggle against injustice “whether sectarian, nationalist, or economic.” They saw themselves as a “son” of Molly Maguire.³³ The American Mollies never adorned women’s clothing, but they were known for blackening their faces and performing their duty under the cover of night so as to remain an anonymous force.

Conversely, Bulik offers a different origin story. He traces the Irish Mollies back to pre-Famine Ireland in the town of Ballinmuck where Catholic peasants took justice into their own hands after Protestant tenants began dispossessing Catholics in an attempt to fix elections. As part of this protest, a band of Ribbonmen murdered a Protestant farmer by the name of John Brock within this environment. The community later attributed the murder to the Molly

³² Sidney Lens, *The Labor Wars: From the Molly Maguires to the Sit-downs* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 12; Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 25; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 22; *New York Weekly Story Teller*, March 13, April 3, 1876.

³³ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 22; William Steuert Trench, *Realities of Irish Life* (1868; repr., London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), 30.

Maguires. Bulik argued that this incident must be understood in a symbolic sense “denoting Ballinamuck as the birthplace of a new departure for the Ribbonmen.” Bulik separates himself from Kenny by concluding that the Irish Molly Maguires were a subset of the Ballinmuck Ribbonmen who later broke off to form their own society. Second, he presented another account from William Steuart Trench, whose writings would be frequently cited during the American Molly Maguire trials. Trench claimed that in May of 1843, a band of men who went by the name Molly Maguire dressed in women’s clothing and with blackened faces assaulted a man serving a federal notice to a Catholic tenant. Trench claimed that these men went by a different name, Molly Maguire. Bulik, however, condemned Trench’s observations as literary and historical fraud, arguing that there was no evidence of the term Molly Maguire in connection with agrarian crime anywhere before 1844.³⁴

Another debate among Molly Maguire historians as revolved around the very existence of the organization. For example, Anthony Bimba, writing in the 1930s, sought to firmly establish that the mine owners invented the Molly Maguires “in order to provide a convenient label for the militant miners in the Pennsylvania anthracite fields.”³⁵ He further asserted that the men who were hanged for Molly crimes were simply victims of an anti-labor and nativist system created by the impervious propaganda of the coal operators. He blamed his predecessors like F. P. Dewees and Alan Pinkerton for characterizing the Molly Maguires as a group of desperate criminals who forced other miners to participate in criminal acts. He noted that they ignored the basic class struggle and portrayed the Mollies as deserving of execution. However, Bimba’s

³⁴ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguires*, 66-76; Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, 67-72.

³⁵ Bimba, *The Molly Maguires*, 9.

depiction of the Molly Maguires as a fictitious propaganda ploy created by mine owners is an oversimplification.

Historians have exhausted debates over the origin of the name Molly Maguire, the extent to which the American manifestation was connected to earlier Irish iterations, and whether they existed at all. While acknowledging the importance of this historiographical debate, historians must move beyond this and focus on the extent to which the American Molly Maguires, in both their real and imaginary form, affected unionism among Irish miners in Pennsylvania. A good example of a scholar who moved beyond these debates, is labor historian Harold Aurand, who set himself apart from his contemporaries like Broehl within the Molly Maguire historiography by focusing primarily on the labor culture of the Pennsylvania coal region as opposed to focusing specifically on the Molly Maguire saga. He placed the labor history and industry of the coal region at the forefront and sought to situate the Molly Maguires in this broader context. Aurand explored the unique identity and history of the coal region by delving into the creation of industry wide unions that originated and died there.³⁶ As this thesis contents, the names of and distinctions between, the various agrarian protest groups, while important, matter less than what they all stood for: as both terror-inducing criminals and martyrs fighting for the peasant class, they all served as a symbol of the peasant struggle in pre-Famine Ireland. This tradition of retributive justice and collective action and the well known methods of previous secret societies influenced the American Molly Maguires, although this did not make them all one and the same. This thesis argues that to say that the American Mollies were the descendants, an imitation, or a transplantation of their pre-Famine era counterparts is an oversimplification. They shared several of the same methods and behaviors as the agrarian peasant societies, but the organization in the

³⁶ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, specifically Chaps. 2, 7, and 8.

coal region grew out of the atmosphere created there by class, ethnic, and capitalist struggles unique to mid-nineteenth century Pennsylvania.

For over one hundred years, Molly Maguire historians have debated the role the Mollies played in America and more specifically Pennsylvanian labor history. Historians demonized the Mollies during and immediately after the showcase trials and executions of 1876-1878 until the early- and mid-twentieth century. Early apologists portrayed the Mollies as primitive terrorists, Marxists and socialists saw them as labor martyrs, and Irish Americans saw them as victims of the coal conspiracy. Owen Hunt, writing in the 1920s, emerged as a dissonant voice by declaring Reading and Philadelphia Railroad President F. B. Gowen, his constituents, and the Pinkerton detectives Gowen hired to infiltrate the miners' union as the true villains in the Molly Maguire saga. Mark Bulik, the most recent Molly Maguire historian argued that today, there is no consensus amongst historians and therefore, many have separated themselves from the arguments of these previous historians.

The Molly Maguires, both in their physical and imagined form, counted as key protagonists in what the *New York Times* in the late-nineteenth century, and historians since, called the "labor wars" between big business and unions of the Gilded Age. In the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania, however, more local wars also occurred between workers, those like the Mollies who wanted to use violence to encourage change, and others who instead sought to peacefully organize and bargain collectively with their employers. Molly Maguireism existed alongside unionism in the anthracite region from the beginning and the concentration of violence attributed to the Molly Maguires ebbed and flowed with union progress. When union development was at its weakest, the incidence of Molly violence increased. The Molly Maguires and groups like them emerged out of the failure of unionism to give the miners the rights they

deserved. As Sydney Lens argued, the labor wars of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era were characterized by “violence, bitterness, deception, illegality, immorality, and conflict.” Over time, historians have characterized these violent conflicts as steps towards “friendly, organized progress.”³⁷ These labor wars, violent and sometimes bloody, shaped workingmen's condition and the larger history of unionism. They also provided the context within which the Mollies lived, worked, and protested. Indeed, Molly Maguireism, the Workingmen’s Benevolent Association, and other labor organizations in Schuylkill County offer important local examples of the broader nation-wide labor wars of the late-nineteenth century.

³⁷ Sydney Lens, *The Labor Wars*, 8.

CHAPTER 2

ANTHRACITE AND FIRST ATTEMPTS AT UNIONISATION, 1840s TO 1850s

It would be in Pennsylvania's isolated coal country, rather than in more urban industries in nearby cities like Philadelphia or New York, that Molly Maguireism would flourish. The coal industry's unique society, economy, and geography created an atmosphere of general violence and unbridled unrest that more population-dense and policed urban areas rarely experienced. The union movement also experienced less success in organizing the coal industry than it did in industries centered in cities. Craftsmen and skilled laborers dominated early nineteenth century urban, unions organized by trade rather than by industry. The interdependence of miners and laborers inherent in the functional organization of work in the coal region, however, meant that in the coal industry, collective action had to be made on an industry-wide basis. Organization of work into functional operations created a status hierarchy for anthracite mine workers.³⁸ Geographic and economic division within the coal industry and Pennsylvania anthracite region further impeded collective action by workers, making the formation of an industry-wide union close to impossible. In order to comprehend why Molly Maguireism rooted itself so strongly in the Pennsylvania coal region and why unionism failed, an understanding of the characteristics and inherent weaknesses of the coal industry must be established.

Black Gold: A Brief History of Pennsylvania Anthracite

Mine owner Abraham Pott funded and contracted the first railroad in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania in 1826. It connected his mine to the head of navigation at the mouth of Mill Creek and extended only a half of a mile. A nineteenth century history of Schuylkill County described

³⁸ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 36.

the railroad, “It had wooden rails and the cars running on it, carried each one and a half tons of coal.”³⁹ A forward-looking man and entrepreneurial thinker, Pott predicted the anthracite coal industry would flourish and rail was the only way to transport the “black gold.” By the middle of the nineteenth century, Philadelphia and Reading Railroad absorbed Pott’s railroad into its ever expanding network across southern and central Pennsylvania. With the help of the railroads, the anthracite coal fields expanded across seven counties: Schuylkill, Lebanon, Dauphin, Northumberland, Columbia, Luzerne, and Carbon. One of the main coal fields, the Eastern Middle Field, stretched into Schuylkill County and became the center for Molly activity.

Anthracite was first used in the 1830s to replace charcoal as fuel in the smelting process of iron. Iron furnaces sprung up in Schuylkill County beginning with the Lehigh Coal and Navigation company, built in Mauch Chunk (today Jim Thorpe) and Pioneer Furnace near Pottsville. At first, miners dug the ore from outcroppings. Prototypical mines were rudimentary pits that sunk from elevated positions from which miners hauled the coal above ground with a windlass. Due to lack of technology and any method for water drainage, these first mines were quickly abandoned after reaching thirty to forty feet.⁴⁰ Later, the mineral was recommended for household fuel because of its cheapness and by the 1840s anthracite became “a necessity for rich and poor.”⁴¹ Anthracite coal became a nationally important and desired resource in the years leading up to the American Civil War. The industry was a major employer in Pennsylvania and provided fuel to the iron industry as well as for public consumption. Used more widely than bituminous coal, anthracite played an integral part in the economic development of the nation

³⁹ [Munsell & Co.], *History of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers, 1811-1881* (New York: W. W. Munsell & Co., 1881), 84-85.

⁴⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 57; Munsell, *History of Schuylkill County*, 34-41.

⁴¹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 12.

and due to demand, the hard coal regions were among the first state areas to yield to corporate domination.

As operators gained greater knowledge and capital, the methods of extracting coal improved. They designed shafts located directly above the ore deposits. Miners and material were hoisted in and out of the mine through the shaft. Much of the coal deposits laid below the water level, which made accessing the fuel source difficult. As a solution, operators introduced two kinds of mines: slopes and tunnels. Slopes drove from the surface to the coal or along a coal seam. On the other hand, tunnels drove horizontally into the hillside. Tunnel mines essentially connected shafts as they were driven at right angles into the hillside and intersected seams.⁴² In order to solve the excess table water problem, operators learned to drain the water to the bottom of the shaft and then pump or bring it up to the surface by hand. Once the Reading and Philadelphia Railroad had effectively taken over Pennsylvania's anthracite region, deep-shaft mining became more popular. The methods used to extract coal from the mines depended on pitch and thickness of the seam, the texture of the coal, and the pressure and composition of the roof, walls, and floor. Although miners still practiced more primitive methods of extraction like scraping and digging, the methods of pitch mining became more efficient.

The pitch mining method was more commonly used by the miners in the lower anthracite fields of Schuylkill County, the world of the Molly Maguires. The most popular pitch technique was chute mining, which involved driving a gangway near the bottom of the seam and driving a timbered chute upward into the coal at an angle. Each chute contained batteries, or bulkheads, which allowed the miner to have control over the release of the loose coal that he had mined from the face above. A laborer opened the battery occasionally to allow the coal to fall to a car

⁴² Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 58.

waiting below. The coal dust that flooded the gangway below was so thick, the laborer who loaded the car could only see a few feet in front of him. In order to check that the car was full, he needed to dangle his feet down from the chute and measure by the touch of his feet.⁴³

The Southern Coal Field, where Molly Maguireism was most prevalent, contained more than three thousand foot deep, steeply pitched seams that in some cases tilted at a ninety degree angle. This exceptionally dangerous type of mining laid the groundwork for future battles over mine safety measures with Pennsylvania legislatures for mine safety measures, one of the many anthems of the Mollies and their fellow workingmen.

Labor Hierarchy and Challenges to Economic Mobility

The anthracite regions underwent rapid industrialization starting in the mid nineteenth century and absorbed nearly ever major ethnic group; thus, the Pennsylvania coal region represented a microcosm of broader economic and social processes affecting the entire nation. While paralleling trends in other parts of the country, the Pennsylvania anthracite regions developed a unique identity.⁴⁴ The anthracite region was divided into two socially, geographically, and economically different locations: the upper anthracite region consisting of the Northern and Eastern Middle coal beds, and the lower anthracite region consisting of the Western Middle and Southern coal beds. The lower coal fields lacked the economic infrastructure of the upper fields, which possessed more large-scale corporations allowing for deeper shafts, massive breakers, and the extensive operations necessary for gaining access to deep lying coal. The Delaware & Hudson Canal, the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western

⁴³ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 58-60.

⁴⁴ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, vii.

Railroad, and the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Company dominated the industry in the upper fields and fed their product to New York rather than Pennsylvania. However, by 1851, the major mining companies in the upper fields sought expansion into eastern markets; this threatened to monopolize trade and leave Schuylkill County, which traditionally supplied Pennsylvania, without its customers.⁴⁵

The more stable mining environment of the upper fields, which included safer working conditions and better pay for miners, allowed employers to more easily discipline and control their workers; this stability discouraged unionism from becoming industry wide and Molly Maguireism from acquiring a tight grip. Conversely, the unstable nature of lower field coal extraction and production characterized by volatility, unsafe working conditions, an undisciplined labor force, and very low pay, produced an environment ripe for the development of trade unionism and Molly Maguireism.⁴⁶

Working conditions above and below ground in the lower fields of Schuylkill County were terrible by modern standards. Aside from child labor, operators and superintendents employed corporate punishment. The mines also lacked light and safety precautions. Deaths and injuries were prevalent. Due to frequent suspensions caused by overproduction, the mines became idle for long periods of time producing poor ventilation, stagnant water, standing gas, and decay of timber in the shafts. Irregular employment explains in part why the wages of anthracite workers were much lower than those for workers in other major industries during the mid-nineteenth century. Workers in steel mills across the mid-Atlantic were also paid a higher wage.

⁴⁵ Munsell, *History of Schuylkill County*, 38.

⁴⁶ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 49.

The inherent weaknesses of the anthracite industry explain in part the poor wages and working conditions. And it was these weaknesses that would inspire and allow for collective action by workers. Historians of Ireland have already demonstrated that collective action among Irish peasants in Ireland proved effective in pushing back against English rule.⁴⁷ Similarly, in America during the labor wars, laborers from different ethnic backgrounds found that collective action was the laborers' most effective strategy for effecting change.

Success and failure of unionism in the coal region depended on the unions' ability to come to terms with the mine workers' environment. Coal mining was back breaking and labor intensive, effectively immune to the technological improvements of other industries. The difficulty of introducing machinery to the mines gave workers a sense of job security, but it also produced a somewhat rigid labor hierarchy.⁴⁸ The contract miners, mostly English and Welsh immigrants paid by the piece, stood at the top of the anthracite pyramid. The day miners, working for definite wages, ranked directly below. Highly skilled employees were underneath the day miners, and the unskilled laborers at the bottom. The Molly Maguires and a majority of their fellow Irish migrants fell into this bottom category. However, this hierarchy was not completely immutable. Some unskilled laborers made the transition to skilled employee. Also, as historian Harold Aurand argued, skilled laborers could move laterally, "from one occupation to another regardless of change in status or in geographical position."⁴⁹ Indeed, the nature of the anthracite mining industry relied on the geographic mobility of workingmen. Operators depended on an imported and transient labor force due to the relatively isolated location of coal in Pennsylvania. And yet, because mining companies owned or controlled most of the land,

⁴⁷ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 19, 21; Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, chapter 3; Beames, *Peasants and Power*, 23-25, 79;

⁴⁸ Harold Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 56.

⁴⁹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 55.

miners rarely had the opportunity of purchasing their own house and land. Had they had access to land ownership and property, immigrant miners may have been more invested in the community and hence, more likely to stay. Because the mining industry completely dominated the area, the only way to get out of the industry was to leave the anthracite region. Immigrant miners who did leave went one of two ways: back to the “Old World” or out West. While geographical mobility was common, socio-economic mobility for new immigrant miners proved more complicated. Higher positions in the mining industry such as foreman or superintendent required skills, capital, and education that made these positions less accessible to Irish and other immigrant miners and laborers and the mainly English and Welsh men who held those privileged positions labored hard to keep them in their hands. With the exception of changing his occupation, a miner remained limited in terms of upward mobility and opportunity.

Contract miners had the most independence and more control over the production process in addition to being the best paid the most within the tiered system. They earned wages depending on the amount of coal they produced as opposed to a daily wage. Operators measured production by carload or weight of each car. Therefore, it proved easy for operators and superintendants to claim more slate in the coal than it actually contained, a strategy called “short weighing.” In some of the coal region, companies paid miners by the yard, meaning they were given wages according to the rate at which they advanced into the ore seam. Miners, contracted or otherwise, hired the unskilled laborers, making them subject to the miners, rather than to the colliery owners or superintendents. Once contract miners were done for the day, they had the ability to leave the colliery, and their hired laborers remained to shovel coal into cars for transport and bring them to the surface and pile waste to one side. Operators never employed women in the mines, but children were not off limits. Three thousand nine hundred eighty boys

worked in the mines of Schuylkill County in 1870; almost a quarter of them worked below ground, in charge of mules and ventilation, with the rest remaining above ground to pick slate out of the coal in the breakers.⁵⁰

In addition to the economic differences, the geographic layout of the anthracite region and specifically Schuylkill County allowed for Molly Maguireism to take hold. Hills and mountains separated the county in half effectively leaving northern Schuylkill County isolated. This region suffered from general violence and crime as well as from intense Molly activity after 1870. During the mid-nineteenth century, violence did occur in urbanized settings, but such violence took on a different form. Cities like Philadelphia or New York employed large police forces that largely prevented Molly Maguireism or similar groups from permeating the community. As historians such as Kevin Kenny and Mark Bulk have argued, the unique landscape and economic circumstances of the lower anthracite fields largely imitated the environment of the eighteenth century Irish countryside.

Pottsville, laid out by John Pott, functioned as the county seat for Schuylkill county. The population of Pottsville rose from 2,464 in 1830 to 12,384 in 1870, as it evolved into the economic center for the lower anthracite industry as well as the iron and steel industry. Pottsville also boasted the development of the first newspaper for the mining community, the *Miners' Journal*, established by George Taylor in 1825. Other cities in Schuylkill county grew in a similar manner and a similar time frame. The county's population reached 116,428 by 1870 and by that year, 30,856 of residents were foreign born. As in other areas with high concentrations of the foreign born workers, forty percent of Schuylkill's immigrant population was Irish and

⁵⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 60; Priscilla Long, *Where the Sun Never Shines: A History of America's Bloody Coal Industry* (New York: Paragon, 1989), 75.

inhabited mostly the mining districts.⁵¹ This large number and concentration of Irish Catholics in Schuylkill County allowed Irish immigrants to retain many elements of their folk culture. Gaelic served as the first language for many Famine-era Irish migrants into the late 1870s. Irish migrants preferred the communal life they were accustomed to from back home and therefore, settled primarily in the rural or semi-rural townships or “patches” clustered around the collieries. Welsh-, English-, and American-born miners dominated the more urbanized towns such as Pottsville, Tamaqua, or Minersville. This ethnic separation exacerbated class and ethnic stratification already put in place by mining management.

Mine operators in Schuylkill county used their economic and political influence to implement an industry-community relationship dominated by the mining and railroad industries. Local businessmen needed the mines to survive and the mines could not operate without the community that surrounded them. This mutual dependency was especially prevalent due to Schuylkill County’s geographic isolation. Coal mines and mining settlements were geographically fixed by the mineral’s location which in turn, functioned as the only source of employment for inhabitants. Aware of this control, operators believed they acted as masters of the industry’s and community’s future. Operators consolidated their control by owning the land where their collieries stood, which allowed them to pick and choose who could and could not live there, evicting “undesirables” and refusing entry to those they did not like. In this way, the coal “patch” resembled, as Bulik put it, a feudal fief.⁵² As in other mining regions in the West and Southwest, in Schuylkill county, the mining companies were omnipresent in miners’ lives; they owned the mines, the land, the streets, and usually the workers’ houses. Miners could only

⁵¹ Edward J. Davies, *The Anthracite Aristocracy: Leadership and Social Change in the Hard Coal Regions of Northeastern Pennsylvania, 1820-1930* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985),102; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 51.

⁵² Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 21.

purchase goods for their occupation and their lives in company stores. Miners received pay in script or store orders which could be traded in for cash at a discounted change-over rate or used to buy shoddy company store goods at inflated prices.⁵³ These corporate towns proved very different from the more economically diverse “free towns” in the Pennsylvania coal region. In these “free towns,” the majority of the male population worked in the mines; however, the existence of other industries and businesses beyond the coal companies created a more heterogeneous class structure that allowed members of the community to explore other economic pursuits.

Historians have painted a picture of the coal industry in corporate towns as an overarching monolith of economic, social, and political power that controlled the lives of the community they encompassed. This was certainly true in the case of Schuylkill county. Attorneys on the railroad company’s payroll protected the companies’ interests. For example, M. E. Olmsted, a Harrisburg lobbyist for the anthracite industry, possessed great influence over the governor of Pennsylvania and its legislature.⁵⁴ Another example was Franklin B. Gowen who became the district attorney for Schuylkill County before achieving the presidency of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. However, this portrayal of the coal industry as a political and economic hegemon leaves little room for recognizing the agency of the miners and laborers themselves.

⁵³ For more on company towns in other mining regions see Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 23.

Early Attempts in Trade Unionism, 1842-1860

The year 1842 signaled an upswing in the American economy after a long depression that began in 1837. During this period of recovery, the labor movement nationwide took a step towards solidarity. A movement in support of a ten-hour work week took hold in several industries in the United States. The movement did not result in solid legislation until the 1850s, but remained strong throughout the decade. The American workers' movement was not gradual and progressive, but a sporadic and fierce struggle, interrupted frequently and often just when the workingmen seemed to gain ground. These interruptions compelled the workers' movement to constantly reassess the situation, their gains and losses, and begin their battles once again.⁵⁵

When the Reading and Philadelphia Railroad reached completion in 1842, a rivalry over coal transportation ensued between the railroad and canal industry. As a result, competitors slashed rates for the transportation of coal and the mining companies cut prices; this had the effect of glutting the market. Lower coal prices meant lower wages for workers as well as partial employment. In some cases operators ceased to pay their workers in cash, instead playing workers in kind with goods from the company store. Operators made agreements with store owners for advanced credit, against which they wrote orders for merchandise. Operators redeemed these orders as soon as they received cash for their coal. Wages went from six dollars to five dollars and twenty-five cents a week for miners, and four dollars and twenty cents for laborers. Anthracite workers in Minersville, a borough in Schuylkill County, struck that July to protest the store-order system and to demand higher wages. District Attorney Francis W. Hughes initiated the formation of a committee to come together and take down the workers' grievances.

⁵⁵ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, The State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7-8.

However, despite Hughes' actions, the operators refused to recognize the organization, forcing the dejected workers back to the mines. These main grievances that caused the strike of 1842—low pay and poor working conditions—motivated subsequent strikes in the coal fields.

As the ten-hour movement ran its course, a more prominent movement began, a nationwide movement to reform industrial capitalism by turning production into a more cooperative enterprise through the unionization of industries. For example, in 1849 miners and laborers formed the Bates Union under labor leader John Bates. Bates's solution to keeping wages high was to raise the price of coal by controlling the amount supplied to the market through suspension of operations.⁵⁶ On May 2, the day work was set to resume, more than two thousand miners met in Minersville, the site of the strike of 1842, and passed a resolution impressing “upon the miners and laborers of Schuylkill County the importance of unanimous, firm, determined, but at the same time mild and respectful action.” They recommended, “the appointment of a committee of two from each colliery to form a central committee to make the necessary arrangements for the formation of a miners' union if they shall deem it necessary, and also to negotiate with employers.”⁵⁷ The miners struck on July 4, 1849 and passed several resolutions that introduced a new theme that would occur in subsequent strikes in anthracite region: that their interests “and the interests of [their] employers are so connected and identified that it would be impossible to separate them.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the goals of the labor leaders and those of the workingmen clashed as bands of miners traveled from colliery to colliery

⁵⁶ Harold D. Aurand, “The Anthracite Mine Workers, 1869-1897: A Functional Approach to Labor History” (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1969), 132.

⁵⁷ *MJ*, May 5, 1849.

⁵⁸ *MJ*, July 7, 1849.

brandishing weapons, threatening non-striking miners to cease work and join the cause.⁵⁹ As fate had it, the Bates Union collapsed shortly after the strike as rumor spread that John Bates had embezzled money from the treasury.⁶⁰

The movement toward unionism in Schuylkill County saw a second major setback during the Panic of 1857 when mine workers went on strike in Ashland in 1858 to demand higher wages. This strike was notable for two reasons. First, it was the first instance of labor violence where Molly Maguireism was involved. Strike leaders urged workers to avoid employing any violence, “not to get drunk, bellow, make threats, give insults, stop those who wish to work from doing so, annoy persons, or other things unlawful.”⁶¹ Despite this warning, notices appeared outside collieries complete with images of coffins and pistols, common in Molly coffin notices, warning miners of dire consequences if they did not stop working.⁶² Second, the strike of 1858 set a precedent for the use of military force to put down labor disputes in the anthracite region. On May 21, after strikers paraded through the town of St. Clair, shutting down collieries as they went, the sheriff decided to mobilize an entire militia unit consisting of one artillery company and one cavalry company. The regiment marched to St. Clair, arrested five labor leaders, four of which were convicted, and three of which were sentenced to sixty days in prison.⁶³

Privileging a transnational perspective, historian Kevin Kenny put forth that these pre-Civil War strikes and early efforts at unionism in the anthracite region reflected anti-British

⁵⁹ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 68; for more on the strike of 1849 see Peter Roberts, *The Anthracite Coal Industry* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1901), 172-73.

⁶⁰ Aurand, “The Anthracite Mine Workers, 1869-1897,” 133; Munsell, *History of Schuylkill County*, 53-57.

⁶¹ *MJ*, May 29, 1858.

⁶² Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 68.

⁶³ *MJ*, June, 19, 1858.

“modes of intimidatory action derived from the Irish countryside.”⁶⁴ As proof he shows that many of the Irish who settled in the part of Schuylkill County where labor organization was most present, arrived from the Kilkenny and Castlecomer regions of Ireland that boasted some of the only workable coal mines in the country. The intimidatory actions of posting coffin notices did derive inspiration from eighteenth century Irish agrarian justice; however, Kenny neglects to acknowledge that while Irish workers’ actions were informed by their pre-migration experiences, the reasons for the strikes and attempts at unionism in Pennsylvania grew organically out of the specific social, economic, geographical characteristics of the region’s coal industry. After the Panic of 1857, the Pennsylvania coal fields were fraught with constant striking, labor unrest, unemployment, and widespread hunger. In many ways indeed, Schuylkill County resembled the Old World that Irish migrants had left behind; in both, Irish workers experienced religious bigotry in the form of anti-Catholicism and a militarized force that threatened miners’ ability to advance themselves through collective action. The looming threat of the militia, and in the coming decades, the company-controlled Coal and Iron Police, taught mine workers that in order to succeed, strikes would have to be “run from the shadows by men ready to use violence.”⁶⁵ As we shall see in the proceeding chapters, the Molly Maguires represented this precise mindset. They believed that the AOH, unionism, and other methods of collective action employed by the AOH and unionism failed to improve the livelihoods of their fellow Irishmen and miners and therefore, decided to take matters into their own hands.

⁶⁴ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 69.

⁶⁵ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 163.

CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST WAVE: THE GROWTH OF MOLLY MAGUIREISM AND UNIONISM DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The name “Molly Maguire” appeared in print for the first time in 1857. Benjamin Bannan, editor of the *Miners’ Journal*, the region’s leading newspaper, complained about the political nature of the St. Patrick’s Day speeches in reference to the Hibernian Society made by Democrat Francis Hughes that year. Bannan further suggested that St. Patrick’s Day celebrations were degenerating due to “party matters and philippics.”⁶⁶ Then in October of 1857, Bannan wrote, “The Molly Maguires - A new and exclusively Catholic secret organization...has recently sprung up in our Eastern cities.”⁶⁷

Benjamin Bannan was born in Berks County Pennsylvania in 1807 to a Welsh farming family of middling means. As a young man, he was an apprentice to a printer until 1829 when he relocated to the lower anthracite region of Schuylkill County. Bannan purchased the *Miners’ Journal* and served as its editor for the next forty years. Under Bannan, the *Journal* evolved into the leading Whig, nativist, and Republican publication in the predominantly Democratic lower anthracite region. Upon its pages, he spilled his anti-Catholic ideology and a vision of America, characterized by “honest, productive work and its social rewards, a strong conviction that a virtuous citizenry was impossible without social mobility and the possibility of economic independence for all, and a related emphasis on the harmony of interests between labor and capital.”⁶⁸ The journal’s promotion of class harmony and its belief in the possibility of economic

⁶⁶ *MJ*, March 21, 1857.

⁶⁷ *MJ*, October 3, 1857.

⁶⁸ Kevin Kenny. “Nativism, Labor, and Slavery: The Political Odyssey of Benjamin Bannan, 1850-1860,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 118 (October, 1994), 329-330.

mobility made it a publication that represented the economically more secure small operating class, rather than the interests of the mine workers and trade union movement.⁶⁹

Bannan used his paper to espouse his idea of an ideal labor society in which unskilled workers moved up the labor hierarchy to become skilled miners, small operators, and property owners, and in which a large middle class of small-scale entrepreneurs dominated the economy, rather than a few powerful corporations.⁷⁰ However, the presence of a large number of unskilled Irish laborers, who never seemed to be able to move up the social hierarchy, shook Bannan's ideal society to the core. To Bannan, the Irish symbolized "the prospect of a permanent, laboring class, morally depraved, socially dependent, and a blight on his cherished republican polity."⁷¹ What Bannan and other nativists overlooked was the reality that a miner, regardless of his ethnicity, rarely rose above his station. The majority of Irish could not hope to achieve any occupation above that of laborer let alone be upwardly mobile and possess land; blind to this reality, Bannan attacked the Irish and every aspect of their livelihood including their religion, their culture, their ways of working, and their drinking practices.⁷²

In 1857, much to Bannan's dismay, Democrat William Packer defeated Republican David Wilmot for Governor of Pennsylvania and Democrats were elected to most local offices in Schuylkill County. This political clean sweep led to Bannan's first printed mention of the idea that a secret society was active in the anthracite region. He became obsessed with this theory throughout the 1860s and 1870s, and Bannan used it to accuse Irish Catholics of political corruption. Because the Irish habitually bloc voted, Bannan declared Democratic victories as

⁶⁹ Kenny, "The Political Odyssey of Benjamin Bannan," 330.

⁷⁰ Clifton K. Yearley, *Enterprise and Anthracite: Economics and Democracy in Schuylkill County, 1820-1875* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), 57-92.

⁷¹ Kenny, "The Political Odyssey of Benjamin Bannan," 334.

⁷² Kenny, "The Political Odyssey of Benjamin Bannan," 331.

electoral fraud; the puppeteers behind this fraud, he claimed in the October 3, 1857 edition of the *Miners' Journal*, was a group he called “the Molly Maguires.” Thus Molly Maguireism was born, and in Bannan’s hands, it became associated with local, Democratic political conspiracies. Bannan also proved instrumental in linking the Molly Maguires to organized patterns of violence.

In his role as president of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad, Franklin B. Gowen acted as a second catalytic individual in the evolution of Molly Maguireism. In order to understand the effect Gowen had on Molly Maguireism, his familial and political background must be explored. Franklin Gowen was born in 1836 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In 1852, he and his brother Thomas decided to devote all their attention to the coal trade. At nineteen, he relocated to the coal town of Shamokin to manage an iron furnace. Gowen partnered with J. G. Turner as co-operators of a colliery in Mount Laffee in 1858. The mine failed a year later, and Gowen decided to shift his career in the direction of law. By 1860, he was elected to the Schuylkill County bar and became increasingly involved in Democratic politics. In the election of 1862, Gowen ran on the Democratic ticket for district attorney of Schuylkill County and won.⁷³ By the end of the Civil War, after his feeble attempt at a private practice, Gowen took on the role of representing the Reading Railroad in 1864, a role that later allowed him to build a monopoly in coal production in the southern coal fields.⁷⁴ Where Bannan had the media, Gowen used his legal prowess as well as his presidency as a vehicle to spread Molly Maguireism and unknowingly perpetuate its influence on unionism in the coal fields.

⁷³ Bulik, *The Sons of Molly Maguire*, 113.

⁷⁴ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 1-5.

Molly Maguireism and Unionism during the Civil War

After Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861, President Abraham Lincoln immediately called for 75,000 volunteer troops. The initial response from the anthracite region was enthusiastic. By April 25, Schuylkill County men made up twenty two companies who had made their way to Washington DC.⁷⁵ In regards to the evolution of Molly Maguireism in the anthracite region, the American Civil War functioned as a major turning point. Irish violence developed into a collective force for the first time in light of the subsequent draft riots. Furthermore, with the help of Benjamin Bannan and his *Miners' Journal*, the term Molly Maguire became synonymous with murder and conspiracy. The Civil War era also saw Franklin Gowen take hold of the presidency of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad, which gave him the power to spark an industrial monopoly, igniting a battle between workingmen and the mining aristocracy. This battle would end in a fierce industry-wide strike and the hanging of twenty men.

In a broader sense, the Civil War transformed the economy of the Pennsylvania anthracite region. At the beginning of the war, that transformation was not for the better. The first years of the war crippled the anthracite industry. After the call for troops in 1861, mine work was delayed or halted altogether as laborers left work to enlist in the Union army. The demand for coal also lessened due to a general recession. However, by the second year of the war, the coal industry underwent a boom time as a result of the government's wartime need for anthracite. As demand increased, so too did the wages of miners. In tight juxtaposition with wartime demand, wages for miners also rose. In Schuylkill County, laborers who made \$6 a week in the first year of the war,

⁷⁵ Munsell, *History of Schuylkill County*, 110.

made \$12 in 1862. Miners' wages rose from \$7.50 to \$18 per week and contract miners' wages went from \$12 to \$30 a week.⁷⁶

The Civil War also led to centralization of the lower coal region. Large coal companies in New York and Philadelphia took control of production and the Reading Railroad bought out smaller Schuylkill County railroads and took command of distribution.⁷⁷ In a way, the increased demand for coal and shift toward centralization during the war opened the door for men like Gowen to achieve a near monopoly of production and distribution of Schuylkill County coal. Much like urban tycoons such as J. P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, Franklin B. Gowen stood as a symbol the American industrial elite in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. He represented corporate power in an area that prided itself in small operation and inter-industrial competition.

Amidst this economic growth, ethnic and political unrest reared its ugly head. This was partially due to the influx of foreign laborers, mostly Irish, who arrived to fill the employment gaps made by enlistment and the following draft. Given the already deep-seated nativism in the region, this influx of Irish workers also dredged up fears of Democratic, antiwar sentiment. Irish immigrants were well known for their support of the Democratic party and despite a Republican victory in the 1860 election in Schuylkill County, the anthracite region remained a Democratic stronghold during the Civil War.⁷⁸ The Democratic Party relied on the Irish miners for support, but this backfired when party officials found their largest voter pool expressing widespread antagonism toward the war. The county-wide enthusiasm that existed in the first year of the war devolved into disenchantment by mid-1862. Authorities in Washington realized that they could

⁷⁶ Munsell, *A History of Schuylkill County*, 64.

⁷⁷ Grace Palladino, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840-68* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 132.

⁷⁸ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 83.

not maintain the needed amount of manpower with voluntary enlistment stimulated by cash bounties alone. President Lincoln and his cabinet concluded that the answer was conscription. In August 1862, Lincoln ordered a draft of 300,000 militiamen. How the country was to come up with the allotted amount of troops depended upon each state's chosen method.⁷⁹ In Pennsylvania, the state legislature called for a census of each household which allowed for a quota to be set for each county. County quotas could only be reduced if the county had previously produced substantial enlistments.

The Democratic resurgence in Schuylkill County was not a complete victory in that Benjamin Bannan and his newspaper still had strong control over Republicans with access to a network of political power “that extended through the state and national levels and could be supplemented by military force if necessary.”⁸⁰ The state mobilized national forces to suppress draft violence in Schuylkill County and created a precedent for future labor violence in the area. For example, Cass township, the most Irish township of Schuylkill County, became the center of “draft resistance, labor activism, and Molly Maguire activity during and immediately after the Civil War.”⁸¹

Enlistments in Schuylkill County fell below the expected quota. Bannan, the appointed local commissioner of the draft, commented, “All through the County these propagandists of mischief have secretly urged men not to go to fight in an abolition war.”⁸² When the list of conscripts was revealed, anti-war feelings exploded. Large mobs of men collectively made their

⁷⁹ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 87.

⁸⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 84.

⁸¹ Electoral Returns from William A. Gudelunas Jr. and William G. Shade, *Before the Molly Maguires: The Emergence of the Ethno-Religious Factor in the Politics of the Lower Anthracite Region, 1844-1872* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 81, 85, 133. As quoted in Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 84.

⁸² *MJ*, April 9, 1862.

way from coal patch to coal patch recruiting miners to join their ranks and quit work in the collieries. They were said to first have visited a liquor store in the town of Swatara, a part of Cass township, armed with guns, and held up the store owner. Leaving the “proprietor high and dry,” they drank liquor stolen from the store and after carousing about for a length of time, the men decided to stop a train filled with Union army recruits. “Those who want to go can,” Bannan’s *Miners’ Journal* quoted the mob leaders as saying, “but we will protect those who don’t.”⁸³

Benjamin Bannan informed Andrew Curtin, Republican governor of Pennsylvania, of the unruly mob incident in Cass township. The governor turned to the then Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton for aid. Stanton authorized the use of regular troops to enforce the draft in Schuylkill County. However, after his initial overzealous cry for help, Governor Curtin back pedaled. He felt that the draft resistance ran deeper than just simply collective antipathy for the war. “We all think that the resistance to draft is the first appearance of a conspiracy, and unless crushed at once, cannot say how far it may extend. We know there are 5,000 men in the league in three counties, and all work is interrupted by them. I do not wish to magnify, and hope I am not alarmed.”⁸⁴ Curtin realized that bringing Union troops into the fray would only increase the miners’ hatred of the war and the military and perhaps further provoke the rioters. But President Lincoln and Secretary Stanton worried about the implications of an insurrection and so they agreed to send the Anderson Cavalry led by General Wool to keep the draft running smoothly in Schuylkill County. Frustrated, Curtin telegraphed President Lincoln directly and expressed his fear that the cavalry would incense the demonstrators. Bannan also got involved in the situation,

⁸³ *MJ*, October 25, 1862.

⁸⁴ U.S. War Department, *War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series I, vol. XIX, part II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 479, quoted in Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 88.

writing that he desired “a peaceful solution of the problem, and he said that the draft could not be executed in Cass Township without bloody conflict with the Molly Maguires, and he could conceive of no method by which there could be given the appearance of executing the law.” The governor and draft officer Colonel McClure finally decided to get volunteers from other townships to enlist through Cass Township in order for the area to meet its quota without inciting more riots. As proof, Bannan presented affidavits executed before a justice of the peace in Harrisburg showing that the quota of Cass Township had been met. Neither Bannan, nor Colonel McClure asked where these affidavits came from. “The law appeared to be executed, although the affidavits were fictitious,” stated McClure. He continued, “it was an imperious necessity to avoid conflict between the Molly Maguires and the troops.” With that, the troops were ordered back to Pottsville.⁸⁵ Mine operators’ and local officials’ reliance on military might to put down local draft violence in the anthracite region set a precedent for the use of federal force in the future. After the war, rather than use that force to deal with draft resistance, it would instead be used to suppress laborers’ attempts to unionize.

Long opposed to secret, oath-bound societies, the Catholic Church made its voice heard in regards to draft resistance in Schuylkill County. On behalf of the Church, Bishop James Wood of the archdiocese of Philadelphia travelled to Pottsville in 1862 and urged compliance with the draft. On January 19, he issued a pastoral letter that condemned the “Buckshots” and the “Molly Maguires,” and declared that his letter should be read from the pulpit of every local Catholic church in the region.⁸⁶ This letter foreshadowed an excommunication that the soon-to-be archbishop would issue twelve years later. At the same time, the coal mining barons wielded

⁸⁵ Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1905), 549.

⁸⁶ Archbishop Wood’s Temporal letter, January 19, 1864, Archives of Philadelphia Archdiocese.

their economic power. Many military arrests were made in the name of draft resistance, but the underlying goal was more likely to get rid of the alleged Molly Maguires in their midst. A standing military presence proved so successful in preventing draft resistance that the government used it elsewhere where draft resistance was prevalent, most famously, in New York City in 1863. However, the operators did not predict the fact that the military presence inhibited mines from recruiting the employees needed to make up for the labor shortage.⁸⁷

While the Civil War triggered ethnic and political dissension, it also brought temporary social unity. The labor shortage gave workers leverage in labor disputes for the latter three years of the war. For example, miners of the Western Branch mine began to move towards more sophisticated means of advancing their economic interests. The Civil War saw the formation of regular labor organizations that used selective strikes as a central strategy. Miners established an infant union called the Union Benevolent Society in 1860 which stood as the prototype for the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, an association that would come to play an important role in labor unionism in Schuylkill County. In May 1862, 1,500 miners of the Heckscherville colliery went on strike to fight for a ten cent pay increase per wagon-load for miners and a twenty-five cent increase for laborers. The strikers also protested the high company store prices. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* pointed out the complications this strike had on the war effort. Anthracite fueled navy warships ordered to blockade the Confederate coast. "The affair is much more important than it first appears, from the fact that the supply of coal to the government will be stopped; and that, if the strikers succeed in their demands, the operators in that region may be compelled to pay higher rates than the government contracts will allow."⁸⁸ In 1864, a

⁸⁷ Bulik, *The Sons of Molly Maguire*, 222-223.

⁸⁸ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 1862.

“disinterested observer” wrote in to the *Miners’ Journal* surmising that the union was a disguise for the Molly Maguires. These radical union workers, the observer argued, strove to “prevent emigration from one colliery to another, to restrict the energy and industry for the respectable foreigner who refused to cooperate; to secure labor for themselves; to regulate the cost of labor; to dictate the price of mining; and to control the operations of each colliery.”⁸⁹

One month after the Heckscherville strike, in the midst of increased labor militancy, a violent crime occurred that defined the history of the Molly Maguires and Molly Maguireism forever. Foreman Frank Langdon attended a meeting in Audenreid, a town on the Schuylkill-Carbon County line, to plan the local Independence day celebration for that year. The tavern where the meeting took place was crowded with men who were drinking and expressing antigovernment sentiments. As Langdon walked home that night, men from the tavern attacked him with sticks and stones. After undergoing home treatment from his personal doctor, Langdon died the next day.⁹⁰ Most Molly Maguire historians have declared this incident to be the first murder committed by the Pennsylvania Mollies. However, Mark Bulik, the Molly’s most recent historian, refused to believe this theory and asserted that “it was clearly a drunken crime of opportunity, not cold, calculated murder.” He furthered his argument by denoting, “sticks and stones were not the weapons of choice for Molly assassins.”⁹¹ Years after the crime, the courts found John Kehoe guilty of the murder, even though his trial lacked credible witnesses and the prosecution presented contradicting evidence. However, Bulik focused on exonerating Kehoe, rather than using his evidence to also divorce the Langdon murder from the Molly Maguires.

⁸⁹ *MJ*, January 2, 1864.

⁹⁰ *Every Evening and Commercial* newspaper, Dec. 19, 1878.

⁹¹ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 171.

In his newspaper, Bannan continued to blame the draft violence on the Molly Maguires. By the end of 1862, it appeared some unidentified group of miners finally embraced the moniker. On December 5 of that year, a group of men seized an engine house at two Wolf Creek collieries. They left threatening notes illustrated with coffins and drawings of skull and crossbones—the first appearance of coffin notices, signed most poignantly, “Brave Sons of Molly.” The following day, four hundred employees went on strike and a settlement was reached on December 10.⁹² Bannan used Wolf Creek and other incidents like it as fodder to insinuate that the same men were responsible for the anti-conscription movements. As a result of Bannan’s constant depiction of linkages between the Molly Maguires, draft violence, and labor strikes, authorities no longer took the Pennsylvania Mollies lightly. Wolf Creek also set a precedent for the use of coffin notices during times of strike. For example, during the strike of February 1863, coffin notices were found at collieries threatening those who went back to work before certain superintendents were fired. Bulik argued that the coffin notices stood as evidence that the name Molly Maguire was embraced, adopted, and defended by the union and not just invented by Bannan.

It was clear that a group of militant elements made themselves known via public coffin notices and targeted acts of violence and vandalism, but what they called themselves prior to the spread of Molly Maguireism is difficult to confirm, assuming they referred to themselves by anything at all. On several occasions, in his reports, Pinkerton spy James McParlan who was hired by Gowen to infiltrate the Molly Maguires, cites conversations with alleged Mollies like Frank McAndrew and others who referred to themselves and their comrades as “sleepers.” On March 19, 1874, McParlan had a conversation with McAndrews about recruitment, in which McAndrews said that if things were “carried out right, the sleepers would be two hundred

⁹² *MJ*, March 14, 1863.

strong.”⁹³ Whether this was an embellishment on McParlan’s part was not clear, but historians have long established the fact that McParlan meticulously and faithfully wrote his reports every day during his investigation. Albeit biased, perhaps McParlan’s reports provided some insight into what these men actually called themselves.

From Civil War to Labor War

After the war, discontent and ethnic tensions increased. Mine operators sought to replace Irish workers with English and Welsh. Operators also planned to reduce wages steeply by twenty-five to thirty percent. This spurred a broad strike in late April 1865 across most collieries in Schuylkill County and Ashland.⁹⁴ Bannan cared less about the ethnic discrimination and more about the lack of military presence once the war ended. From the pages of his *Miners’ Journal* he wrote, “The Thugs...are commencing to inaugurate again in Schuylkill County a reign of terror,” and demanded a military presence be reinstated.⁹⁵ While Bannan spread fear and Molly Maguireism, the coal establishment made moves towards renewed military control. Otto Wilson Davis, the president of the New York and Schuylkill Railroad, wrote to Charles E. Smith, president of the Reading Railroad, to gain his support for the plan. Davis travelled to Washington to lobby for troops and returned successful, albeit by questionable means. When he gave the news to one of his top aides in the West Branch, he stated, “Am happy to inform you that the

⁹³ Pinkerton Detective Agency, *Molly Maguires Pinkerton Reports, 1874-1876*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection, March 19, 1874.

⁹⁴ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 236.

⁹⁵ *MJ*, May 20, 1865.

War Department has determined to send troops to Schuylkill County. How they were got and why must be kept still.”⁹⁶

The operators meant for the military presence to put a halt to the strike, but it only exacerbated the issue by instigating more violence. The violence was by no means limited to the strike and strikers, but “seemed to leach out of the mines into the mainstream of society, like the sulfur laden water from the collieries that tinted the rocks orange in the Schuylkill.”⁹⁷ General violence and murder ensued, proving that a general lawlessness existed in the Pennsylvania anthracite region aside from Molly Maguire activity. Most miners felt the marshal presence was simply a cover-up for the true intentions of the operators, which was to drive up the price of coal by cutting its supply. Clashes ensued such as the fight that broke out between Peter Monaghan, an Irish Union Army veteran, and Tom Barrett, a miner from Big Mine Run who was trying to keep away from authorities due to an assault charge. Barrett shot, but failed to kill Monaghan. Barrett was sentenced to brief jail time, but was later shot and killed while trying to escape.⁹⁸ One of many violent incidence, the Barrett-Monaghan brawl illustrates the generally, pervasive violence in the anthracite region that paralleled strike violence.

Another case included Patrick Close who was gunned down alongside his brother Michael in the Spring of 1865 after a drunken argument with a few other men over a chair-balancing trick in a Shenandoah tavern. Officials identified the shooters as James Brennan and John Delaney. Years later, when the Pinkerton spies had infiltrated the anthracite region, a witness claimed that the killers belonged to the Molly Maguires.⁹⁹ Whether Brennan and

⁹⁶ Davis to Smith, May 15, 1865, Heckscher Papers, vol 716.

⁹⁷ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 239.

⁹⁸ *MJ*, July 22, 1865; April 7, 1866.

⁹⁹ *MJ*, May 6, 1865; Pinkerton report dated October 15, 1873, in Molly Maguire Collection, Reading Railroad Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware.

Delaney were indeed Mollies is beside the point. What the Close case and accusation do show is that first, Schuylkill County developed into an inherently violent region where the gunslinging and lawlessness rivaled even that of the Wild West. This derived from a dangerous combination of ethnic, political, class, and labor tensions in addition to the isolated and rough nature of the coal industry, thus creating the perfect storm for groups like the Molly Maguires to emerge as a loud voice of dissent. Second, this violent atmosphere paved the way for Bannan to use his Molly Maguireism conspiracy theory to blame Mollies for the violent strikes and the accompanying disorder. The Civil War allowed Bannan to bend and shape Molly Maguireism into more than just an affront to his idealized vision of a labor utopia and Republican way of life; in his hands, Molly Maguireism became a fear-inducing mechanism and scapegoat for the constant post war strikes and, in turn, justification for a renewed military presence. Furthermore, the later speculation that Brennan and Delaney were Mollies anticipates railroad tycoon Franklin Gowen's later attempts to point to Molly Maguireism as the reason why unionism and collective action in Schuylkill County stood in the way of progress.

By as early as June 10, 1865, miners showed a willingness to go back to work as long as wages were only cut by ten to fifteen percent as opposed to the original twenty-five to thirty. Unfortunately, the *Miners' Journal* reported, the mine operators and the 202nd Pennsylvania volunteers did not budge.¹⁰⁰ Since the war was over and the labor shortage ceased, operators were less inclined to simply concede and settle labor disputes. The coal companies, more centralized and militarized in this postwar era, now had the muscle to evict union militants and crush strikes.¹⁰¹ As the strike evaporated and the army left the coal fields, the killings and

¹⁰⁰ *MJ*, June 10, 1865.

¹⁰¹ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 240.

violence increased. For example, David Muir, a mine official, was shot through the heart and stabbed three times on his way to work. Two weeks later, two other mine officials became victims of a new trend: highway robbery. William Pollock, a mine superintendent, and his son were held up while taking the payroll to Crow Hollow colliery; and as he drove his carriage from Mount Pleasant to Minersville, three Irishmen allegedly held up Percival Byerly. At Phoenix Park colliery, where the *Miners' Journal* first recorded the name Molly Maguire in an industrial dispute, the home of retired mine boss, Philip Whalen, was raided.¹⁰²

The absence of the military allowed the Molly Maguires to exact vengeance and settle their scores across the West Branch. Where the strike of 1865 and the Union Benevolent Association had failed the miners, the Mollies took action. The increased violence and Benjamin Bannan's cries to "address the reign of terrorism" by petitioning the Pennsylvania state legislature to create a homegrown military unit, led to the creation of the Coal and Iron Police.¹⁰³ The Coal and Iron Police functioned as a paramilitary force meant to replace the troops that were there during and immediately after the war. A few historians like Henry George drew a direct comparison between the Coal and Iron Police and feudalism in the Irish countryside:

The coal and iron police are suggestive of Ireland to anyone who has seen that unfortunate country while landlordism was yet in strength. Their functions on the coal estates are a combination of those performed for the Irish Landlords by the 'rent warner,' the 'process server,' the 'emergency man,' and the Royal Irish Constabulary. They are the spies, informers, collectors, writ servers, and guards of their employers, licensed always to carry arms and make arrests.¹⁰⁴

The Coal and Iron Police helped transform the Pennsylvania coal region into the Ireland many workers left behind. It had become a new Ireland workers left behind. In some ways, it had

¹⁰² Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 242-244; *MJ*, August 26, 1865; September 16, 1865; December 16, 1865; December 30, 1865; January 6, 1865; January 13, 1865.

¹⁰³ *MJ*, January 13, 1866.

¹⁰⁴ Henry George, "Labor in Pennsylvania II," *The North American Review* 143, no. 358 (September, 1886), 273.

become a new Ireland where the Irish and their fellow miners were again under the thumb of an oppressive landlord class.

“King Coal” and the WBA

In 1866, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad chose Franklin B. Gowen as its Pottsville counsel. The railroad became so impressed with his ability that it invited him to Philadelphia to head up its legal department, and it's from there that Gowen began cultivating his monopoly. He observed that the railroad's dependence on anthracite traffic stood as its greatest strength as well as its greatest weakness. The majority of Reading's income derived from anthracite. Also, the Reading did not have a friendly relationship with other railroads that could link the Reading to the West. So, until the Reading could create a more profitable western connection, Gowen knew it would have to rely on its anthracite traffic. It was at this point, that he began to press his company into taking a greater interest in management of the coal trade. Anthracite coal remained a large source of fuel for heating homes and running factories in the eastern United States. However, at times, production increased more rapidly than demand which sent prices falling drastically.¹⁰⁵

In the midst of the post war crime wave and constant striking, another man saw a different avenue to restoring prosperity to the coal regions. John Siney, a thirty-nine year old Irishman, came to the United States in 1862 and began working in the mines. After a strike in 1867, Siney realized that in order to be successful, the miners needed an organization with a treasury. That summer, he united a few local unions from his home mining town of St. Clair into a Workingman's Benevolent Association in order to provide sick and death benefits for its

¹⁰⁵ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 10-13.

members. In the two decades following the Civil War trade union activity across the United States endeavored to organize workers in their own crafts in order to defend wages and work rules. In dialogue with intellectuals and reformers, they strove to act as the voice of the working class as a whole. In the coal regions of PA, the WBA attempted to open up channels of communication between Gowen and the workingmen toiling in the mines, but the union ultimately failed in this task. David Montgomery argued that most nineteenth century trade unions were unable to succeed in the latter task due to employers' resistance which was made too effective by technological changes, economic crises, and the arrival of new workers, meaning immigrants.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, in the particular case of the WBA, ethnic tensions between Irish and Welsh members as well as regionalism and the inability to bridge the gap between contract miners and laborers contributed to its later collapse.

Siney saw an opportunity to expand his fledgling union after the Pennsylvania state legislature passed a new law decreeing that after July 1, 1868, a work day should consist of eight instead of ten hours. With the passage of the eight-hour work day law in July of 1868, miners assumed that they would work for less hours with the same amount of pay. Predictably, the operators did not see eye to eye with their employees. When operators refused to grant them an eight-hour work day without a reduction in wages, the men took action. The miners of collieries near Ashland decided not to go to work on Monday morning and instead paraded from mine to mine, calling out their fellow workers along the way. Due to the inherent nature of the anthracite industry, a halt in production such as a strike proved beneficial to the market. After a month of work suspension, the price of coal increased and allowed operators to acquiesce to a ten percent wage increase for their employees. With that, the Eight-Hour Strike ended. John Siney's union

¹⁰⁶ Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, 4.

was one of several labor organizations that rose to power in in the United States the late 1860s as part of the eight-hour day movement. Recognizing the connection between exploitation and unfair wages for long hours, labor organizations like the Machinist's and Blacksmith's International Union and numerous Eight-hour Leagues struck in support of the eight-hour work day.¹⁰⁷ The perceived success of the strike made miners realize collective action could give them the rights they deserved and they became more enthusiastic about John Siney's new union. Eventually the WBA encompassed about thirty local unions and 30,000 members or four fifths of laborers in the Pennsylvania anthracite industry. Now more organized, the WBA's General Council took action and encouraged all mining to stop on May 10, 1869.¹⁰⁸

However, Siney was unable to achieve the industry wide unity needed for the strike to be a complete success. Nevertheless, the WBA made some headway in moving the operators towards collective bargaining. Siney convinced the owners of the Lehigh and Schuylkill regions to include a sliding wage scale in their wage agreements. A sliding scale was based on the price of coal. Wages would increase with coal prices and stay at an agreed upon minimum if prices fell. The agreements defined this as the "basis." Rates of pay at Lehigh were determined by what a ton sold for in Elizabethport, New Jersey. If coal priced at five dollars a ton, the miners' share was 57 1/2 cents. If the price rose, miners' wages increased fifteen percent and if they fell, they received the 57 1/2 basis. For Schuylkill, the wage agreement set the basis at three dollars a ton, based on prices out of Port Carbon. Wages would increase five percent with each jump of

¹⁰⁷ Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 193.

¹⁰⁸ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 16; Lens, *The Labor Wars*, 18.

twenty-five cents in coal prices.¹⁰⁹ This basis question would remain a point of contention for the next five years.

From his position in Philadelphia, Gowen kept a cautious eye on the rise of the WBA in the coal regions. The prolonged suspensions of work in the coal fields disrupted the railroad business and Gowen disagreed with the idea of the union controlling production and wages. He felt that if the price of coal fell to \$2.50 per ton, more could be sold and the Reading's production would increase. In January of 1870, the railroad board elected Franklin Gowen to replace an ailing Charles Smith as president. Gowen finally held the position he needed to justify intervening in the basis dispute.

As the WBA expanded its influence, the organization succeeded in blurring the lines of craft and national origin that had divided workers in the anthracite region for so long. As Kenny observed, the general absence of Molly activity after 1868 strongly demonstrated the success of this effort. So too did it explain a Molly resurgence after the dissolution of the WBA in 1875. The WBA and the Molly Maguires employed different strategies to achieve the same ends, making them separate organizations, but the fact that one influenced the other in such a manner demonstrates that to completely separate them diminishes the importance of each in the labor wars within the anthracite region. Miners rose above their differences through their belief in common goals most notably higher wages, welfare for sick and crippled miners, and safer working conditions.¹¹⁰

Mine workers faced a series of occupational hazards. Diseases like "miners' asthma" or "black lung disease" and a variety of other fatal pulmonary disorders caused by the constant

¹⁰⁹ Lens, *The Labor Wars*, 18.

¹¹⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 126.

inhalation of coal dust, powder, smoke, and underground gases plagued miners and their families. Thousands died from it, including John Siney in 1880.¹¹¹ Miners faced the even greater risk of injury or even death in their daily lives. A large fall of coal or rock could kill a man directly or indirectly by either blocking air passages or by hitting a pillar causing the mine roof to collapse. Workers also faced the threat of asphyxiation or explosions caused by the variety of gases that were constantly pumped into the mines from underground. Occupational accidents could kill one or two miners, others killed dozens. If a strata under a river collapsed, or if miners tapped into an unsuspected body of water, miners also faced possible death by drowning. The most lethal accidents involved fire and gas.¹¹²

Molly Maguireism even found its way into the politics of mine safety. Originally, operators placed the blame for any accident that occurred in the mines on the neglect of individual mine workers. By 1870, Molly Maguireism became so engrained in the coal mining community, that the operators blamed them exclusively. As Anthony Wallace emphasized, “all fires, floods, and accidents were liable to be classed as acts of terrorism committed by a hard core of radical miners, the Molly Maguires.” Every explosion or roof collapse was interpreted as industrial sabotage and attributed to the same heinous organization.¹¹³ The battle for mine safety came to a head with the passage of the Mine Safety Act of 1870. The act stood as an illustration of the power of collective action, and yet it was not a definitive victory for the labor movement, but a victory nonetheless. The act took a great amount of autonomy away from the miners and placed more power in the hands of the operators. Workers benefitted from having the

¹¹¹ Aurand, “The Anthracite Mine Workers, 1869-1897,” 323.

¹¹² Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 127.

¹¹³ Anthony Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster-Prone Industry* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 273.

responsibility of safety transferred onto the shoulders of their bosses, but the mines became more disciplined institutions where the miners no longer had as much control in the workplace.¹¹⁴

In the first years of its existence, the WBA claimed a series of victories. However, Siney soon found himself faced with a fundamental obstacle: Franklin B. Gowen's Reading Railroad. In order for Gowen to gain control of the lower coal region, the independent operators and the independent middlemen who controlled the marketing of coal in Philadelphia had to be driven out of business. Fighting on the side of organized labor, the WBA sought to control coal production and distribution. Their strategy involved limiting the amount of coal mined and sent to market which, in theory, would keep coal prices and wages high. Gowen, a railroad tycoon and master manipulator, instead claimed that corporate control of the industry would guarantee stable wages and prices. Furthermore, unlike Siney and the WBA, he believed the best way for the railroad to turn a profit was for the coal fields to send as much coal to the market as possible.¹¹⁵

Gowen's Battle: The Basis and the Years Leading Up to the Long Strike, 1870-1873

Schuylkill miners struck yet again in January of 1870. That December, the price of coal fell below three dollars a ton causing the operators to realize that the benefits of sliding wage scale did not go both ways. The operators suggested to the WBA that the sliding scale needed go down as well as up and therefore, the basis should be set at two dollars. The union refused, which led the operators to raise the basis to \$2.50, but under one condition: the regulation would not go into effect until that coming April. Dissatisfied, the miners struck. After four months of

¹¹⁴ Wallace, *St. Clair*, 296; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 130.

¹¹⁵ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 132.

expensive idleness, Welsh operator Benjamin B. Thomas conferenced with John Siney in the attempt to reach settlement. Thomas also reached out to Gowen to aid as mediator and Gowen agreed. After receiving instructions from the Anthracite Board of Trade, operators' organization, Gowen sat down with the executive committee of the WBA on July 22, 1870.

The union proposed an increase in wages from five percent to eight and half percent with each twenty-five cent increase in the price of coal. In return, the union agreed to the same rate of decrease as the price of coal fell below three dollars with a basis of two dollars. Gowen pointed out that the price of coal would not rise above \$2.50 for 1870, but he agreed to lower the price of freight which would allow the price of coal to rise at the mines. Known as the "Gowen Compromise," it was incorporated by the Board of Trade and stood as the first written contract between miners and operators in America.¹¹⁶ Initially, the "Gowen Compromise" was important for two reasons. First, it illustrated Gowen's master manipulation skills; his participation caused the workingmen to believe that the president of the Reading was on their side when in reality, he wanted nothing more than to bring down the union. Second, the compromise would eventually help Gowen and his railroad begin buying out independent operators as it set a precedent of a corporation dictating policy in the lower anthracite region.

However, the miners grew disillusioned with Gowen after the first pay day when they found their wages docked eight and a quarter percent. The formally enthusiastic miners now denounced the president of the Reading for their plight. One miner went to the Pottsville *Miners' Journal* with his testament:

We are positively assured that if coal fell in the market, when the compromise was made, that tolls [freight rates] were to correspond with the prices of coal and wages; but coal and wages are falling, while the prices of tolls are going up as

¹¹⁶ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 20-21.

rapidly as coal falls, all of which comes off the miners and laborers who produce the coal. This is not what we bargained for.¹¹⁷

The miners, unprepared for another strike, were forced to accept the wages that emerged from the 1870 settlement for 1871.

One of Gowen's first hurdles in his pursuit of a monopoly was the Pennsylvania state legislature. His law background allowed him to flirt his way around the railroad's state charter that barred the Reading from owning mining operations. In January of 1871, Gowen sought to create a front company for which he and crony lawmaker drew up a charter; in the fine print, the charter granted the Reading the right to own coal lands. Unfortunately for Gowen, he had made enemies in the state Senate rather quickly. Opponent Esias Billingsfelt investigated the front company and when he found out it was the Reading in disguise, the senator quickly shut down the provision. Undeterred, Gowen decided to buy coal lands under his own name. He attempted the front company ploy again, this time under the Laurel Improvement Coal Company.

This time, the Senate denied the provision by only three votes. However, after the Senate denied the provision for the Laurel Run Improvement Company, they adjourned, and when they reconvened, two of the nay sayers mysteriously disappeared and the third changed his vote. Bowen and the Reading had won. Senate Act No. 817 gave the Reading the power to purchase, sell, transport, and mine coal and iron "and for this purpose the said company shall have power to acquire from time to time by purchase, lease, or otherwise such lands as they may deem expedient." The act also allowed the president of the railroad and six directors under him to exercise corporate agency to purchase stock and lands from any other incorporated company in

¹¹⁷ *MJ*, October 4, 1870.

the state of Pennsylvania.¹¹⁸ Essentially, the Reading now had the legal means to crush the independent operators. The legislation also created a space for Gowen to infiltrate and manipulate the industry in ways that later allowed Pinkerton Detectives to take down the WBA, trade unionism, and the Molly Maguires from the inside.

A general suspension took place in January 1871 and the WBA demanded the minimum be set back to the 1869 basis of \$3.00 per ton. Gowen fought back by raising the freight rates so high that they were double the price of coal which resulted in the prevention of any wage negotiations between the WBA and the Board of Trade. On February 23, the operators' wage committee attempted to issue another compromise with the workers by agreeing to the terms set the previous November, but the operators themselves rejected this. The WBA also refused to acquiesce.¹¹⁹ The *Miners' Journal* of February 27, 1871, ran a story condemning the "tyranny and oppression" of the union leaders and called for martial law. "If any of these leaders should interfere in any way, arrest, try and punish them on the spot," Bannan demanded.¹²⁰ The WBA continued to hold out for the 1869 basis. Bannan accused the WBA of conspiracy and anarchy which demonstrated an important step in the evolution of Molly Maguireism in that its detractors such as Bannan gradually identified the movement with trade unionism.

Under the headline, "Tyranny in Schuylkill County," Bannan announced that "few people have an adequate conception of the tyranny which exists in Schuylkill County at the hands of the prominent leasers of the WBA...Men dare not work, and their families must starve. In the meetings of the Association, any man who would even attempt to complain or express an

¹¹⁸ Shlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 33-35; The Philadelphia Coal Exchange, "The Coal Monopoly: No. 817 An Act To Incorporate the Laurel Run Improvement Company," May 18, 1871, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia.

¹¹⁹ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 27-28; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 142-143.

¹²⁰ *MJ*, February 27, 1871.

independent opinion, would be hooted down and cowed into silence.” Bannan demanded an answer to the question, how much longer could society stand “this system of terrorism and tyranny?”¹²¹ Even though Bannan did not mention the name Molly Maguire, his mention of “terrorists” suggested that he believed there was a clear connection between the secret society and the WBA as, in his mind, they were run by the same “terrorists.” Gowen’s boost to the freight rates also brought the strike into the public eye. In the late nineteenth century increasing numbers of Americans were already troubled by the unrestricted growth of corporations and the idea of monopoly. By raising freight rates, Gowen demonstrated to the people the power that corporations could wield. The citizens of anthracite coal region petitioned the state legislature to put the coal-carriers in check. As a result of the exorbitant freight rates, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary was authorized to launch an investigation into the transportation companies to determine whether making freight rates so prohibitive put them in violation of their charters.¹²²

Gowen appeared before the Judiciary Committee of the Senate in March 1871. He immediately seized the spotlight by steering attention away from the transportation companies and focusing on the entire background of the strike. Gowen spoke about the WBA and how it was his goal to secure employment for all members and prevent the reduction in wages. Yet, he effectively blamed the union for the current state of the industry. He claimed that the WBA wanted increased wages with less work so that the miners could make more in seven or eight months than they did previously in the whole year. Moreover, he accused the WBA of forcing working men who were happy with their situation into idleness. Gowen pointed out that workers could not be paid the 1869 basis unless the price of coal increased. So the WBA suspended work

¹²¹ *MJ*, February 25, 1871.

¹²² Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 27-28; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 142-143.

until the prices reached an amount that provided them with an acceptable wage Gowen also expressed his opinion that the WBA's demands were unreasonable as they wanted both unchanging wages and to be given a percentage of the mine owner's profits. Gowen failed to mention that because miners could not work all year round, they needed a slightly higher wage to make up for the winter months in which they made little to no money and that wages were divided among miners and the laborers who worked directly under them. Also, the coal companies forced miners to submit to outlandish store prices and rent. So the wages they did make barely allowed them to break even. Clearly illustrating Montgomery's thesis that "trade union activists endeavored...to act as the voice of the working class as a whole in a dialogue with bourgeois intellectuals and reformers concerning the future of America's republican institutions," Gowen declared, "Those who labor with their hands should yield to those who labor with their minds."¹²³

Gowen further defended his actions by stating he acted solely to protect the colliery owners by doing away with the middle men and factors that controlled the outlet of predicted coal to be shipped. He claimed this would increase the operators' revenue because intermediate profits would be saved. He also dismissed the rumors and accusations by retailers that the Reading had created some kind of railroad syndicate to restrain trade by stating that he merely told his fellow railroad presidents what he was doing and they followed suit. Overall, he indicted the WBA for forcing men to stop working, forcing the poor to pay high prices for coal, and for ruining the iron industry. "The laboring classes have been reduced to starvation; the coal operators have been reduced to the verge of insolvency; the iron trade has been completely paralyzed; and, looking over the ruin and havoc they have made, the leader of this association

¹²³ Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 4.; Gowen, *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen Before the Judiciary Committee of the Senate of Pennsylvania*, 20.

[the WBA] see one other interest which they have not yet subdued.”¹²⁴ Then Gowen dramatically predicted that if the WBA continued on their course, it would mean the end of the coal trade in the state. “There can be no doubt that Pennsylvania will have to bid farewell to its great iron manufacturers, and be content to see other states that are free from the tyrannical rule of trade unions prosper in an industry, which, by proper care, she should have retained forever for herself,” he testified. Gowen so skillfully diverted the investigation away from the railroad, that the WBA became preoccupied with defending itself, instead of attacking the president. Gowen convinced the committee and in their final report they agreed that the legislature had no power to act and any further suit against the railroads would be considered interference.¹²⁵

Dovetailing with Gowen’s testimony in front of the Pennsylvania state legislature, Bannan responded to a publication in the *New York Herald* that asserted “the Molly Maguires do not belong to the WBA,” by retorting, “this is not true; they all belong, because they could not get any work whatever if they did not. There are but two classes in this Region - members of the WBA, or what they term ‘blacklegs.’” Since all miners belonged to the WBA, Bannan argued, so too did the Molly Maguires.¹²⁶ This was not completely true, as at least one fourth of the miners in the anthracite region did not belong to the union. By the same token, members of the secret society may have belonged to the WBA, but Bannan, like Gowen assumed the leadership of the union, who were strenuously opposed to violence, reflected the values of the rank and file, who presumably included some elements that supported more drastic and radical action.

With the railroad in one corner and the WBA in the other, the independent operators’ fate was sealed. Feeling the pressure, most sold out to the Reading, which had acquired 65,000 acres

¹²⁴ Gowen, *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen Before the Judiciary Committee of the Senate of Pennsylvania*, 29.

¹²⁵ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 29.

¹²⁶ *MJ*, March 11, 1871.

of coal lands by 1872. Some, like Benjamin B. Thomas, refused to go down without a fight. In their exchange of letters, Thomas explained that the retailers did not want to come under the company and they would not give up their rights to honorable competition and the laws of supply and demand. Gowen then informed Thomas that the Reading Railroad was simply acting in its best interests and that the railroad already had “a very large number of collieries of its own” and believed “that it could materially aid the owners of other good coal in disposing of their product at good prices.” He concluded that he “thought it proper to present to the owners of these collieries the opportunity of uniting their product with that of the company.” Thomas viewed this as an intrusion and proceeded to accuse Gowen of “bribery, fraud, and corruption.”¹²⁷ Thomas spoke not only for himself and his fellow independent operators, but also for many in the wider public who feared the concentration of power in corporate hands. The railroads eliminated the small operators and subjugated “the laboring man” in addition to encroaching upon individual enterprise and personal rights.”¹²⁸ Unfortunately, the objections of Thomas and the opposing operators he stood for, were in vain. Despite such protests, Gowen succeeded in controlling the coal retail trade in Philadelphia under the Reading Railroad.

The Reading Railroad’s, later renamed the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, embarked on a buying spree that left the company and its Laurel Run subsidiary \$75 million in debt.¹²⁹ The company required a continuous supply of coal to pay off this exorbitant debt and to guarantee that supply, the company needed to subjugate its workers. That meant destroying the two organizations that symbolized workers’ autonomy: the WBA and the Molly

¹²⁷ B. B. Thomas, *The Coal Monopoly: Correspondence Between B. B. Thomas President of the Thomas Coal Company, and F. B. Gowen President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Co.* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1873).

¹²⁸ B. B. Thomas, *The Coal Monopoly*, 7.

¹²⁹ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 127.

Maguires. In his book, *St. Clair*, Anthony Wallace aptly described Franklin B. Gowen as “one of the great architects of industrial capitalism in America.”¹³⁰ The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad’s rise under Gowen provided an opportunity for a resurgence of the Molly Maguires in the 1870s. Gowen viewed the Molly Maguires, unionism, and the small operators as fundamental obstacles to his lofty goal of a monopoly over coal production and transportation in eastern Pennsylvania. Gowen transformed the Philadelphia and Reading from the shipper of coal to its main producer in the Schuylkill field.

By the eve of the Panic of 1873, Gowen successfully did away with the small scale operators and their retailers, paving the way for the Reading to take control of production and distribution of coal in the Schuylkill coal fields. His manipulation of freight rates and purchasing of coal lands drove out the independent operators and he effectively eliminated the retailers in Philadelphia by marketing, producing, and transporting his own coal. Gowen slowly replaced the WBA as chief arbiter of labor relations in the coal fields and in so doing, deeply undermined the union by insisting that the railroad and not the workers should control coal production. Furthermore, by repeatedly connecting the WBA to Molly Maguireism, Gowen and Bannan raised the specter of Molly Maguireism ideal to a new level. The Molly Maguires went from simply operating beside trade unionism to clashing with it head on.

Between 1857 and 1873, Molly Maguireism became a part of several facets of anthracite and Schuylkill County history. Using his *Miners’ Journal* as a mouthpiece, Benjamin Bannan first linked Molly Maguireism to the large numbers of Irish laborers in the coal fields. A staunch Republican and advocate of an entrepreneurial labor class, Bannan viewed the Irish as a threat to

¹³⁰ Wallace, *St. Clair*, 411.

his Republican values and his ideal labor utopia in which a laborer strove to improve his conditions in the hopes that he too could own property and become a small operator. The Molly Maguireism created by Bannan was one connected to undesirable Irish Catholicism, to Democratic conspiracies, to violence, and finally, to trade unionism more generally. This was not to say that Benjamin Bannan also created or made up the Molly Maguires themselves to stigmatize trade unionism. By 1862, an unidentified group embraced the name Molly Maguire as proven by coffin notices that began to pop up in the collieries during times of strike or after an act of vandalization, assault, or murder. The idea that a group as large as the AOH or the WBA did not have some radical elements was certainly possible. What they called themselves before embracing Molly Maguires is still just speculation. And yet, Bannan, with Gowen, created and spread a powerful idea, an image that would transcend the actual members themselves and the anthracite region. Because of these two men, the concept of Molly Maguireism became synonymous with Civil War draft violence, general violence and vandalization in the anthracite region, and trade unionism.

The American Civil War was a pivotal five years for Molly Maguireism and the coal industry as a whole. Note only was it during the war when an anonymous group first identified themselves Mollies, but Molly Maguireism also became a scapegoat for the consistent draft violence and general violence in the coal fields. Finally, by the end of the war, Molly Maguireism started to become interchangeable with trade unionism as miners established the short-lived Union Benevolent Association. The coal industry boomed during the war, but ethnic and political tensions ran high as operators began to take federal action against striking workers. The constant striking during the Civil War also illustrated the fact that miners and laborers began

to form a sort of class consciousness that bled into the postwar years and that informed the formation of the WBA.

The WBA grew from meagre beginnings, from simply providing miners with death and sick benefits to Siney's dream of an industry-wide trade union that rocked the coal industry. For the first time in the anthracite region's history, miners united into a single, well-organized union despite different craft and ethnic backgrounds. On a greater level, the WBA represented a movement away from the direct violent action of the unions of the 1840s and 1850s and towards organized strikes and negotiations. The WBA of St. Clair stood as the last in a series of attempts by local labor unions in the anthracite region in the 1860s. Unlike its preceding unions, which tended to last only a few months and claim membership in only one town or county, the WBA lasted for seven years and its membership spanned multiple counties.

Kevin Kenny argued that the formation of the WBA demonstrated a shift towards full-fledged trade unionism, and something distinctly different and separate from Molly Maguireism. Molly Maguireism and fully developed trade unionism, he explained, represented different modes of organization and protest.¹³¹ However, Kenny's attempt to completely separate Molly Maguireism is complicated by two factors. First, Kenny separated the union from Molly Maguireism in order to depict the creation of the WBA as a step towards progressivism and a modern definition of unionism in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. But, it was the very start and stop nature of unionism in the anthracite region that created Molly Maguireism. Second, as the preceding chapters demonstrate, the eventual dissolution of the WBA led to and represented the last step in the evolution of Molly Maguireism. Gowen used Molly Maguireism to convince retailers and mine owners that unionism stood in the way of capitalism and presented himself as

¹³¹ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 111.

the industry's savior against the evils of unionism and Molly Maguireism. The Mollies and the WBA are not unrelated, for the Molly Maguires and groups like them emerged out of the failure of unionism to give the miners the rights they deserved.

CHAPTER 4

LABOR SPIES AND THE LONG STRIKE

Allan Pinkerton was born in Glasgow, Scotland on August 25, 1819. Pinkerton came to the United States in 1842 and settled in a Scottish enclave about forty miles outside of Chicago, Illinois. In 1855, he opened a private detective agency where he specialized in spying on railroad conductors and other employees. In 1861, Pinkerton moved to Philadelphia along with five of his operatives to supervise railroad protection services for the Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad. While on this assignment, Pinkerton discovered a plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln in Baltimore as he was on his way to his inaugural in Washington. With this on his resume, General George B. McClellan hired Pinkerton and his agents to do detective work for the Union army, a position in which he served from May 1861 to November 1862 when both he and McClellan lost their jobs.¹³²

Pinkerton used the money he earned during the war to expand his agency nationally, opening offices in New York and Philadelphia. The Reading Railroad employed Pinkerton in 1863 and again in 1870 to spy on its conductors. So it was no surprise that Gowen turned to Pinkerton in 1873 to take care of a more pressing matter. As of 1873, the newly established Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company had defeated the majority of the independent operators. However, Gowen still had two other obstacles with which to contend: the WBA and the Molly Maguires. Rumors of a rejuvenation of Molly activity placed the WBA on Gowen's back burner. In the early months of 1873, Schuylkill County mine superintendents were threatened and beaten, several railroad cars were derailed, and there were several incidents of

¹³² Frank Morn, *The Eye Never Sleeps: A History of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1982), 19-33.

arson.¹³³ Pinkerton, whose attention was now turned to social disorder and general crime within the railroad and mining industry, suddenly and unknowingly became a third major player in the spread and evolution of Molly Maguireism.

Enter Detective James McParlan

Gowen called a meeting with Pinkerton in October of 1873 to talk about the Molly Maguires and the threat they represented to the mining industry and, in turn, his monopoly. In their meeting, Pinkerton reports that Gowen referred to Molly Maguireism as an infestation and a “noxious weed” of “foreign birth” that had a grip upon all parts of the country in which anthracite is consumed. Pinkerton’s report must be taken with a grain of salt as he wrote it almost immediately after the showcase Molly executions over three years later when twenty Mollies, including John Kehoe, would be hanged by the state. He clearly wanted to appeal to people who still suffered under the fear of Molly Maguireism and still remembered the trials and executions vividly. Throughout his recollection, Pinkerton presents Gowen as a man of the people whose only motive was justice and the protection of the people in the anthracite region. In turn, he represents himself as simply Gowen’s willful servant.

Pinkerton published a pamphlet in 1873 in which he stated, “The profession of the Detective is a high and honorable calling. Few professions excel it. He is an officer of justice, and must himself be pure and above reproach.” Pinkerton further divulges that a detective sometimes had to employ deceptive and covert means in order to do his job: “It cannot be too strongly impressed upon Detectives that secrecy is the prime condition of success in all their operations.” According to Pinkerton, a detective had to become an actor of sorts and, as an actor,

¹³³ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 145.

he sometimes had to play the part of a criminal. “It frequently becomes necessary for the Detective, when brought into contact with Criminals, to pretend to be a Criminal.”¹³⁴

In their meeting, Gowen expressed a desire to hire an undercover detective from the Pinkerton agency and Allan Pinkerton set to work to find the perfect agent for infiltrating the Molly Maguires, one of Ulster Catholic origins who would blend in and who possessed an intimate knowledge of the region’s violent peasant secret societies.¹³⁵ Pinkerton chose James McParlan in October of 1873 to investigate the Molly Maguires with the intention to take them down from the inside. He was described as “medium height, a slim build but a wire figure, well knit together; clear hazel eye; hair of an auburn color...with a beard and mustache...there was no mistaking McParlan’s place of nativity, even had not his slight accent betrayed his Celtic origin.”¹³⁶

Shortly after his meeting with Gowen, on October 8, 1873, Pinkerton ordered McParlan to draw up a report on secret societies in Ireland. On the 27th, McParlan left Philadelphia for Pottsville where he spent the next two and a half years gathering evidence against the Molly Maguires under the alias James McKenna. Once in Pottsville, McParlan spent most of his time at Pat Dormer’s saloon where he started hearing stories about the Molly Maguires concentrated in Giradville, Shenandoah, and Mahanoy City. He decided to make his way to Shenandoah where he “played the part of Irish laborer.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency, *General Principles of Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency* (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1873), 6-10 as quoted in Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 153-154.

¹³⁵ Allan Pinkerton, *The Molly Maguires: and the Detectives* (1877; repr., G. W. Dillingham Co.: New York, 1887), 13-18.

¹³⁶ Samuel T. Wiley, *Biography and Portrait Encyclopedia of Schuylkill Co.* (Philadelphia: Henry W. Ruoff, Rush, West and Company, 1893).

¹³⁷ Historical Society of Pennsylvania, reports of James McParlan, January 26, 1874-May 4, 1874.

McParlan's policing of the Molly Maguires produced one of the only extant documents on the Mollies aside from Alan Pinkerton's semi-fictional book, published about a century after the showcase trials of 1876 and 1878. Because they based their analysis of Molly Maguires on McParlan's reports, early historians of the Mollies arrived at similar conclusions: They either echoed McParlan's, Gowen's, and Bannan's portrayal of the Molly Maguires as an evil organization fixed on destroying the coal industry, or they characterized the Molly Maguires as a fiction fabricated by the railroad or the operators in order to invoke fear and suppress unionism. As McParlan's movements have been thoroughly described and analyzed by previous historical works, he will only make brief appearances throughout this paper.¹³⁸

The Panic of 1873 and "Labor Spies"

While McParlan began his battle against the Molly Maguires, another battle raged at the union level. The year 1873 began a nationwide deflationary crisis that lasted until 1897, and which generated constant conflict over wages and costs of production.¹³⁹ The depression spelled disaster for labor. Historians have estimated that by 1877, one-fifth of the nation's workingmen were unemployed, two-fifths worked no more than six or seven months out of the year, and only one-fifth worked regularly. Of those with regular work, wages dropped an average of fifty percent. Urban industries suffered the most under the weight of the depression. In New York City, about 90,000 laborers lost their homes. Demonstrations by the unemployed were a common occurrence in Chicago and New York. When a group of unemployed paraded in New York to demand a public works program, they were assaulted by police. In Chicago, 20,000 unemployed

¹³⁸ For more detail on McParlan's movements in the coal region, see Dewees, *The Molly Maguires*; Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*; Alan Pinkerton, *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives*; or Anthony Bimba, *The Molly Maguires*.

¹³⁹ Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 4.

workers rallied in the streets in the early winter of 1873-1874 to demand “bread for the needy, clothing for the naked and houses for the homeless.”¹⁴⁰

The Pennsylvania coal fields also saw a rise in crime with the onset of the depression. A general lawlessness characterized by prostitution, assaults, and bar brawls were common, many of which resulted in deaths. Such crimes brought back a name that had been relatively silenced since the rise of the WBA in 1868: the Molly Maguires. Local newspapers blamed the Mollies for the increase in criminal activity, which illustrating how the mining community began to consider them a scapegoat for all negative occurrences in the coal fields. The rural and relatively isolated nature of the coal industry did not go untouched by the depression, but normal labor activities did not come to a complete halt as in other parts of the United States. In 1873, Franklin B. Gowen consolidated the management of his Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company by calling a secret meeting of all the anthracite railroad tycoons. In this meeting, the men agreed upon a fixed price of coal at \$5.00 a ton and divided the market. The Reading received the bulk at 27.85 percent of the total; the Hudson, 18.37; Jersey Central, 16.15; Lehigh, 15.98; Lackawanna, 13.80; and the Pennsylvania Coal Company 9.85.¹⁴¹ At this point in history, anti-trust laws were not enforced. Ironically, while Gowen sought a collective solution to protect railroad barons from the economic downturn, he condemned similar collective strategies utilized by his employees.

That October, John Siney stepped down as president of the WBA to pursue a promotion as president of a burgeoning miners’ union which embraced both anthracite miners in central and eastern Pennsylvania as well as bituminous coal miners in western Pennsylvania and Ohio. The

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Rayback, *A History of American Labor* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 129-130.

¹⁴¹ Lens, *The Labor Wars*, 21.

Miners' National Association promoted arbitration versus strikes as the preferred way to govern relationships between employers and workers. By 1875, the union achieved 35,000 members and secured a standard wage rate in the Tuscarawas Valley in Ohio¹⁴² Siney's partner John F. Walsh assumed leadership of the WBA, or the Miners' and Laborers' Benevolent Association (M&LBA), as it was renamed. However, Siney's departure and the nationwide depression dealt the M&LBA a major blow from which it never recovered.

The basis had yet to be determined as of January 1874. That December, the *Miners' Journal* reported the M&LBA represented by John Siney, William Morgan, Jeremiah Carroll, Thomas Taylor, and James Brennan met with representatives from the railroad: Franklin Gowen, George Johns, Daniel Miller, William Kendrick, George Cole, William Breneiser, and Theodore Garretson. The report presented the meeting as if two opposing sides were coming together to do battle with the M&LBA, unionism, and workingmen on one side and Franklin B. Gowen, the Anthracite Board of Trade, operators, and capitalism on the other. The two parties met in the office of the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company in Philadelphia, already giving an unfair advantage to the railroad tycoons as it was in their own domain. The leaders of the M&LBA wanted to secure the basis wage of 1873. They also wanted to adhere to the 1873 basis prices of coal per ton with no deduction for contract work—\$2.75 per ton for day work and \$2.50 per ton for contract work. Furthermore, individual operators objected to the monthly prices of coal per ton proposed by the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company. Since neither party could agree on anything, they set a future meeting for January 8th of 1874. Always the

¹⁴² Lens, *The Labor Wars*, 21; Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, 131.

supporter of the entrepreneurial and competitive market culture of labor, Bannan did little to suppress his bias in favor of the operators in the article.¹⁴³

Many historians have presented Gowen and his company as an evil monolith hell bent on destroying unionism and profiting from the oppression of the operators and workingmen. No matter his motivations, Gowen's strategies resulted in an increase in the production of coal by about one million tons and the rise of the railway as the largest transporter of anthracite coal. For the week of January 7, 1874, 52,431 tons of coal had been transported by rail as opposed to a meagre 723 tons by canal. The *Miner's Journal* reported that this was 29,283 more tons than the prior week. In 1872, 18,400,320 tons came out of Port Carbon and in 1873, the anthracite region produced 19,243,774 tons.¹⁴⁴ Initially the increase in production and transport appeared as if it would benefit everyone, but later this increase created a glut in the market that decreased wages to a rate that led to one of the longest strikes in anthracite history.

Whether Gowen sought to force a strike in order to raise prices and cut production, as the *New York Tribune* charged, or to "corner" the market, as the *Commercial Advertiser* accused, is not certain. Of course, Gowen outright denied both claims as preposterous. What is certain is that Gowen desired to annihilate unionism in the coal industry.¹⁴⁵ Again, Gowen turned to Alan Pinkerton for this task and paid him royally for it. In response, Pinkerton infiltrated the M&LBA with dozens of spies, most notably P. M. Cummings who became an official of the union and a close associate of Siney's.¹⁴⁶ Gowen surmised that in order to succeed, he needed to bring the union down from the inside.

¹⁴³ *MJ*, January 7, 1874.

¹⁴⁴ *MJ*, January 7, 1874.

¹⁴⁵ *New York Tribune*, December 10, 1874; *Commercial Advertiser*; *MJ*, January 23, 1874.

¹⁴⁶ Lens, *The Labor Wars*, 22.

On January 8, the M&LBA and the P&R met again to discuss the basis for 1874. Gowen's proposal was twofold. First, he submitted that the basis stay the same except if the price of coal declined lower than \$2.50 per ton out of Port Carbon. Wages would then decline by one percent for every three cent decline in the price below \$2.50 until \$2.25 was reached. Therefore, \$2.25 would be the basis according to this proposal. Second, Gowen put forward that the monthly prices at Port Carbon were to be determined as they were in 1873 which left workers with just a hope and a prayer that prices would not dip below \$2.50. Union leaders, however, were unwilling to budge on their insistence of the continuation of the 1873 basis. They believed Gowen made this proposition to force them into suspension of work and, unsurprisingly, the union unanimously rejected it. Workers wondered why the operators were so weak as to allow Gowen to dictate to them as opposed to conducting their business amongst themselves. In a letter to the editor, an anonymous miner was of the opinion that Gowen was nothing more than an interference in what could otherwise be harmonious bargaining between the operators and workers. Since Gowen represented the railroad and not the coal industry, workers and operators had no business listening to his advice and proposals, the miner wrote. Workingmen considered Gowen an outsider.¹⁴⁷

For the next six months, the Philadelphia and Reading collieries produced a steady flow of anthracite into Philadelphia's retailers while Gowen solicited the remaining independent coal operators, convincing them to form a new association called the Schuylkill Coal Exchange with the aim of restricting the tonnage shipped to the Philadelphia trade in order to increase the price of coal. In late November, Gowen announced that the Reading possessed enough coal to last until that spring and ordered its collieries to close. Then he targeted the remaining operators who

¹⁴⁷ *MJ*, January 8, 1874; January 12, 1874; January 13, 1874.

had not become members of the Coal Exchange. He threatened them, stating that the coal retailers could not receive their coal after December 1, 1874 and if they could not find their own markets, he would shut them down.¹⁴⁸

Rumors of an impending strike began to circulate and on January 11th, 1874, the M&LBA, who had just adopted the constitution of the newly founded National Miners' Union, decided to suspend work until the price of coal increased. Union leaders threatened to eject all workers from the union who returned to work for an operator who did not agree to the 1873 basis. The strike lasted most of the month until the operators agreed to uphold the basis for 1873 and restored the wage reductions. This victory was bitter sweet as the strike left the union movement weak and fractious. The Hazleton area experienced renewed ethnic animosity as German-American miners left the union to create their own German-speaking organization. P. M. Cummings, Pinkerton's agent, also reported that the St. Clair district's treasury was nearly bare and they failed to send a representative to the National Labor Union's meeting in New York. Finally, insubordination in the Northumberland County branch caused the union board to expel six of its eight districts.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Gowen kept a cautious eye on the M&LBA through Cummings. Gowen charged Cummings with the task of collecting incriminating information on the union, but according to his early reports, agent Cummings proved unsuccessful. Amidst the district meeting discussions of by-laws and committee work, he could find no evidence that the union desired to employ violence. The Pinkertons also failed to find evidence connecting the M&LBA to the Molly Maguires, yet Gowen still considered the union a threat to his desire to singularly control

¹⁴⁸ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 86; Benjamin Franklin to Franklin B. Gowen, March 27, 1874, Molly Maguire Folder, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

the production and transportation of coal. However, in order to truly complete his destruction of organized labor, Gowen believed that he had to exterminate the Molly Maguires as well. Both organizations stood in the way of Gowen's campaign to impose order and stability in the lower anthracite region. He believed that by destroying one, the other would also fall.¹⁵⁰

On December 1, 1874, thirty-one operators suspended work and the two other major companies, the Lehigh and Wyoming, followed the Reading's lead. However, while the workers remained unconcerned about the suspension, it was the subsequent wage cuts that caused them to push back. Lehigh operators decided on a fifteen percent reduction in contract rates and a ten percent reduction in general wages. In turn, the Schuylkill reduced their contract rates by twenty percent and their general wages by ten.¹⁵¹

Schuylkill and Lehigh miners called a strike, but it was a weak uprising at best. The mines in these two areas had ceased production already and other counties such as Dauphin and Northumberland refused the call to strike and remained at work. Miners in Lackawanna County decided "by secret ballot" not to strike.¹⁵² The M&LBA strike thus stood on a fragile foundation. Recognizing that his fledgling union was crumbling, John Siney completed his abandonment of the M&LBA through a letter in the *Miners' Journal* in which he stated that MNA and the M&LBA were not related so as not to taint the MNA by association. In addition, many individual miners' adamantly declared they were not members of the M&LBA and the collieries at which they were employed, such as the Henry Clay and Hickory Ridge colliery, were working at the 1874 basis prices. Now effectively isolated, the M&LBA decided to go to war.

¹⁵⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 156; Historical Society of Pennsylvania, report of Benjamin Franklin to Franklin B. Gowen on the Work of Detective Cummings, March 27, 1874.

¹⁵¹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 88-89; Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 63; *MJ*, January 4, 1875.

¹⁵² *Sunbury American*, April 16, 1875.

The Long Strike

The M&LBA and the Reading Railroad waged its final battle in the anthracite fields during the “Long Strike” beginning in January 1875. In the aftermath of the depression, most trade unions had all but ceased their activities under the weight of misery and unemployment. Despite this, the M&LBA continued its mission to become a bargaining agent for the miners of the anthracite region and in turn, a beacon of hope for trade unionism.

Workingmen’s hope that the strike would become industry-wide gained ground as the strike spread throughout the region. By February, miners in Wilkes Barre struck and later men from Columbia County and Centralia joined them. Backed by the Philadelphia coal merchants, the M&LBA petitioned the Pennsylvania legislature to conduct an investigation into the Reading’s monopolistic practices and acquisition of large amounts of coal lands in hopes of strengthening their offensive against the corporation. The legislature buckled under the pressure and appointed a committee to probe the railroad. During this skirmish, Gowen pointed out that other anthracite carrying companies had the right to own coal land and so the Reading had to own coal land as well for self-protection. Gowen also played to the committee’s loyalty to the state of Pennsylvania by noting that the Reading did not expand beyond the state boundaries. The legislature would not dare vote against the only native anthracite railroad in favor of others which served New York and New Jersey. Therefore, the committee crumbled under the pressure and concluded that it was not their place, but the courts’ to determine the legality of the Reading owning coal land.¹⁵³

By March 1875, the union’s hold on the operators began to weaken. One last glimmer of hope emerged when Schuylkill County miners allied with a railroad union called the Mechanics

¹⁵³ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 90.

and Workingmen's Benevolent Association. The Reading lowered railroad workers' wages in the fall of 1874 and in response, railroad workers had planned to strike when the coal dispute ended. Gowen learned of this and fired the leaders of the M&WBA. Feeling their hands had been forced, the union struck and held a joint meeting with the Schuylkill M&LBA on March 13. Unfortunately, the alliance had no real practical effect as the M&WBA represented shop employees who had no real pull in the railroad industry. However, the merger boosted morale with the miners' union; they were not alone in the fight against monopoly.¹⁵⁴ At the height of the strike, unions from New York and Philadelphia contributed money to the treasury of the miners' union "to aid in strengthening the Pennsylvania collieries in their battle with the operators."¹⁵⁵

Gowen responded by increasing the power of the Coal and Iron Police whose duty was to guard strikebreakers. As the strike intensified, the police paraded through the streets of Schuylkill County seeking striker activity that turned violent. Demonstrating that the strike did not have the backing of the entire industry, some miners and their families were grateful for the paramilitary presence.¹⁵⁶ Unable to unleash their frustration on the president of the railroad directly, strikers resorted to sidetracking engines, setting fire to cars loaded with coal, and burning breakers and other buildings. Against John Welsh's wishes, the miners played right into Gowen's hands. Welsh desperately offered to withdraw the basis system of wages and agree to any arrangement the operators were willing to make, but the Reading and Schuylkill Coal Exchange refused to concede, marking the beginning of the end for the union. The M&LBA's treasuries depleted rapidly; the union was not capable of affording a long strike. The Coal Exchange refused to meet with the M&LBA and the union failed to obtain Gowen's attention.

¹⁵⁴ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 91.

¹⁵⁵ *Sunbury American*, April 16, 1875.

¹⁵⁶ *Sunbury American*, April 16, 1875.

Even with total collapse on the horizon, the M&LBA did not go down without a fight. A group of radical workers still refused to return to work. Most of the protest erupted between Shenandoah and Mahanoy City, Molly Maguire country. Men paraded from Shenandoah to the West Shenandoah colliery and attempted to convince the miners there to discontinue work, but the Coal and Iron Police led by Pinkerton agent Robert Linden brought the march to a halt. James McParlan was one of the demonstrators. The militants changed course to Mahanoy City, collecting followers as they went. Once they reached their destination, the crowd, which grew to thousands strong, only stopped when the sheriff's men fired shots into the mob. Defeated, the miners returned to Shenandoah and all collieries reopened the next day, June 4.¹⁵⁷

Robert Ramsey, Benjamin Bannan's successor at the *Miners' Journal*, viewed this outbreak of violence as an opportunity to continue the journal's legacy as an anti-Irish, anti-union newspaper. Ramsey attacked the mine workers and the WBA calling the strike anarchy and praising the arrival of the military and the Coal and Iron Police by stating, "Let the leaders of these riots be hunted down and arrested." If "the ruffians" of northern Schuylkill County "will learn tolerance only by being shot down, it is better to shoot them down than to let them shoot others." Ramsey further referred to the rioters as "villains" and "scoundrels" connected with the "Irish element" whom he blamed for running the strike.¹⁵⁸ Like Bannan, Ramsey lumped Siney and Welsh into one group with Irish mine workers and the Molly Maguires. In the last months of the strike, the union leaders lost control over some of their members who preferred direct, violent action over organized, collective action sanctioned by the union. Molly Maguireism was the violent, enforcing arm of trade unionism in 1875, though they employed a different strategy than

¹⁵⁷ Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading*, 72-73; *MJ*, June 11, 1875.

¹⁵⁸ *MJ*, June 11, 1875.

that of the M&LBA Ramsey, however, failed to see these distinctions as he blamed the Irishmen who founded the WBA back in 1868, even though Siney had not been a part of the organization for some time.¹⁵⁹

Union leaders quickly responded by vehemently denouncing any link to “such associations.” The *Pottsville Workingman*, the union newspaper, backpedaled and admitted the union leaders had lost control over the rank and file and those who “have committed acts of violence against those who have broken through the rules which the workingmen have deemed necessary to the protection of their interests.”¹⁶⁰ This thoroughly defined Molly Maguireism: direct, retributive, collective action against any who infringed upon a vision of what they viewed to be just and moral. The leaders of the M&LBA went out of their way to dissociate themselves with these tactics; however, that did not mean they can be completely separated from Molly Maguireism as one simply emerged out of the other’s failings.

In a meeting on June 8, 1875, union leaders announced that they would make an appeal to Franklin B. Gowen for a settlement. Gowen rejected any possibility of a compromise on the premise that as president of a railroad, he was not a member of the Coal Exchange and was therefore not authorized to meet with the union over the topic of wages. He also denied the M&LBA the right to “interfere in any manner determining the price of coal.”¹⁶¹ Desperate, the union leaders turned their efforts toward members of the Coal Exchange with the aim to compromise on a less severe wage cut than the proposal from January. Union leaders proposed a meeting on June 12 with Shenandoah operators to discuss terms, but were met with an empty room. Finally, on June 14, 1875, the Executive Board of the M&LBA admitted defeat. The

¹⁵⁹ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 179.

¹⁶⁰ *Pottsville Workingman*, June 19, 1875.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Franklin B. Gowen to John F. Welsh, June 9, 1875, published in *MJ*, June 10, 1875.

leaders declared that they only returned to work “under protest” due to “the keen pangs of hunger” that had force the men “into a reluctant acceptance of terms which, under other circumstances, they could never have been induced to accept.”¹⁶² Reduced to near starvation, the miners returned to work at a twenty percent cut in wages on June 14, 1875.¹⁶³ This set them back to basis wages from 1874, which is what the operators wanted all along. The rates of coal and its transport also decreased in the aftermath of the strike. Freight rates on lump, steamboat, and broken coal were ten percent less than coal transported by canal.¹⁶⁴

The End of Unionism?

By the end of June 1875, most collieries in Schuylkill County were open at full capacity. After the Long Strike the M&LBA completely collapsed, unable to keep the disintegrating organization intact. Miners were given the chance to sign a collective contract reflecting new terms, maintaining at least the principle of negotiation. Most of its members affiliated themselves with the National Miners’ Union until it gave way to the Knights of Labor in 1876. Labor relations returned to what they were before the existence of the M&LBA in that men returned to work under terms settled by their individual employers. Workingmen were forced to return to a wage 26.5 percent below the 1869 level. Wages continued to fall eventually reaching their lowest point in 1877 at fifty-four percent below the 1869 level.¹⁶⁵ Gowen and his railroad had effectively muscled organized unionism out of the anthracite region. Historian

¹⁶² Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 180; *MJ*, June 17, 1875; *Pottsville Workingman*, June 19, 1875.

¹⁶³ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 92-93; Rayback, *History of American Labor*, 132.

¹⁶⁴ *The Carbon Advocate*, June 5, 1875.

¹⁶⁵ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 180; Chris Evans, *History of the United Mine Workers of America from the Year 1860 to 1890*, vol 1 (Indianapolis: n.p., n.d.), 36.

Harold Aurand argued that in a way, the M&LBA killed itself by underestimating the true weakness of the mining industry. He pointed out that by seeking to improve the wage scale through preservation of the basis scale, the union leaders assumed the problem with coal mining was overproduction when in reality, the weakness was over-investment. Unsatisfactory earnings resulted from low wages and irregular employment. Regulation of production through strikes temporarily raised wages, but it also enforced unemployment.¹⁶⁶

During the Long Strike, the miners did succeed in controlling the production of coal albeit briefly. *The Sunbury American* re-reported the *Miners' Journal's* coal report which stated that by April of 1875, during the strike, the total coal produced in all the Pennsylvania regions totaled 3,019,092 since January of that year; this was 910,258 tons less than the year before at that time. The decrease in the supply of anthracite alone was 972,375 tons.¹⁶⁷ The *Carbon Advocate* reported that the week the strike ended, the anthracite region produced 305,313 tons and 4,719,324 tons of anthracite coal were produced statewide for the year up until the month of June. This illustrated a 1,808,897-ton decrease from the previous year when 6,528,200 tons were produced statewide. As the graph below demonstrates, during the week of June 5, the last week of the strike, only 25,517 tons of anthracite was produced, which was 73,015 tons less than during the same week the year before; similarly, in the six months leading up to the end of the strike, anthracite coal production had been reduced from the same six months during the previous year by 1,059,793 tons. This short-lived control proved that the miners had some modicum of success in their battle against the coal monopoly.

¹⁶⁶ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 93.

¹⁶⁷ *MJ*, April 1875 as quoted in the *Sunbury American*, April 16, 1875.

Table 1.1 Anthracite coal production in Pennsylvania before and after the Long Strike

| Colliery | Anthracite produced for the week of June 5, 1875 (in tons) | Anthracite produced for the year up to June 1875 (in tons) |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Wyoming | 14,149 | 450,351 |
| Hazleton | 5,344 | 212,424 |
| Upper Lehigh | | 341 |
| Beaver Meadow | 412 | 56,696 |
| Mahanoy | 5,362 | 99,333 |
| Mauch Chunk | | 2,193 |
| North Easton | 248 | 17,743 |
| Total | 25,517 | 839,085 |
| Totals from 1874 | 98,532 | 1,898,879 |
| Decrease | 73,015 | 1,059,793 |

Source: Data from the Carbon Advocate, June 5, 1875.

The M&LBA showed increasing weakness from 1873 onward with the resignation of its founder, loss of membership, growing ethnic tensions, and more continuing economic depression. Out of the latter half of the strike emerged an attitude of working men versus strike leaders. Many sources noted that union leaders ordered workingmen to strike, but many regretted doing so and wished to return to work. “The men struck, as ordered, but many of them repented their action before very long and asked to be taken back into the company’s service, while those who held out longest were disgusted to find on applying for work that the leaders of the strike were among the first to beg the company’s favor,” the *Sunbury American* observed. “The rank and file are anxious to go to work, but the leaders still have influence enough to prevent it.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ *Sunbury American*, April 23, 1875.

The union's internal differences clearly contributed to its disintegration. Many workers deserted during the strike and went back to work against union leader orders and ethnic animosity was prevalent.¹⁶⁹ These were common characteristics of trade labor unions during the Civil War and Reconstruction period and, as Montgomery pointed out, such internal divisions explains in part why they failed so often.

And yet, during and after the strike, rumors spread that the Molly Maguires were at large again. Franklin B. Gowen and Ramsey, the new editor of the *Miners' Journal*, systematically took advantage of these rumors and increasingly identified the miners' union with the secret society throughout the first half of 1875. Despite the union leaders' efforts to condemn violence, near the end of the Long Strike they lost control of some of the rank and file who took more violent measures to achieve union goals. One of the most influential institutions in the lives of Irish Americans, the Catholic Church, responded by rising up as a condemnatory voice against the Mollies, causing a critical cultural conflict among the Irish. This internal struggle amongst the Irish developed alongside a broader struggle over the social and economic future of the anthracite region.¹⁷⁰ The condemnation of the Mollies by the union and the Catholic Church helped deepen the influence of Molly Maguireism in the anthracite community.

Most Schuylkill County historians categorized the WBA (or the M&LBA, as it was later called) as a failure because it was all but destroyed by the Long Strike. The Long Strike was indeed a factor in the destabilization of the union, but other internal weaknesses existed. Siney

¹⁶⁹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 64.

¹⁷⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 158; For more on the position of the Catholic Church, see Kenny, "The Molly Maguires and the Catholic Church," *Labor History* 36 (Summer 1995): 27-76; James Edmund Roohan, *American Catholics and the Social Question: 1865-1900* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 161-184.

never quite forged the unity he needed to assure the union's optimum strength. He fell short of inspiring the southern coal fields to join the northern ones. The WBA also tried and failed to lobby for the passage of laws to improve miners' livelihood. In 1873, the union persuaded a state representative from Schuylkill County to introduce a bill to protect miner wages, but it died in committee. Two years later, the union, in conjunction with the Miners' National Association, succeeded in aiding the passage of a law that enabled miners to hire their own weigh master only to have the operators strip this away after the WBA lost the Long Strike.¹⁷¹ However, as is characteristic of American labor history, it is not always the tangible gains that define whether a movement succeeded. In many cases the triumphs of the labor wars were metaphysical, transcending the modern definition of success. The WBA was one such movement.

John Siney established the WBA in 1868 and in just one year his fledgling union organized eighty-five percent of anthracite miners in Pennsylvania. By 1869, it forced operators and mine owners to recognize the union as a bargaining agent, grant a minimum wage, and a sliding scale of wages. At its strongest, the union gained higher wages, it sparked comradeship among the mine workers, and, most notably, left a legacy of an underdog union fighting for the rights of the workingmen against all odds.¹⁷² The WBA participated in, arguably, some of the earliest uses of formal arbitration in America.¹⁷³ Even after its virtual destruction, anthracite workers continued to collectively confront labor issues. Despite occupational challenges from laborers, operators maintained control relatively unchallenged for more than twenty years after the demise of the WBA.

¹⁷¹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 94.

¹⁷² Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 95.

¹⁷³ Perry Blatz, *Democratic Miners: Work and Labor Relations in the Anthracite Coal Industry, 1875-1925* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 38.

By this time, the Pinkertons successfully infiltrated the WBA as well as the AOH with their newest inductee, James McParlan, or James McKenna as the members knew him. The year 1875 saw both the most successful attempt at unionism and its downfall in the anthracite region since the Civil War. In its wake, the Molly Maguires reemerged from the shadows. The WBA had created a space for a new generation of Irish miners to build an industrial consciousness and to achieve their goals through collective action and allowed the mine workers to overcome their ethnic and craft differences. Molly Maguireism did not need to exist if this outlet prevailed. However, the Long Strike took away what the miners perceived as their last chance for the operators and the railroad to recognize them as an organized bargaining agent. The perceived failure of unionism and more specifically the WBA acted as the main catalyst for renewed Molly violence and the organization's more radical leadership was the vehicle that allowed it to happen. Moreover, the Molly Maguires grew discontented with the internal weaknesses that troubled the WBA and the less successful mining unions before it. Retributive justice proved much more efficient in the lawless environment of the anthracite region.

CHAPTER 5

THE SECOND WAVE: THE REEMERGENCE AND DEMISE OF THE MOLLY MAGUIRES, 1874-1878

Molly Maguireism existed alongside unionism in the anthracite region from the beginning and the concentration of violence attributed to the Molly Maguires ebbed and flowed with union progress. When union development was at its weakest, during the Civil War era and immediately following the Long Strike, the incidence of Molly violence increased. The victimology changed as peasant consciousness faded away and workingman consciousness developed, but the tradition of retributive justice remained. Molly Maguireism continued to permeate the region and the coal industry even during and after the showcase Molly trials and executions from 1876 to 1878 and was further exacerbated by media outlets like the *Miners' Journal* and by Franklin Gowen and the Pinkertons.

The Two Wave Theory

Molly Maguire activity can be organized into two distinct, but connected concentrations interrupted only by the success of the WBA. The rudimentary efforts to establish unions of the 1840s and 1850s paved the way for Civil War era Molly Maguireism, albeit with more violence. Workers' failed efforts to unionize in addition to draft resistance during the war resulted in the first wave which centered in and around Cass and Branch Townships in southern Schuylkill County. An area with a large Irish majority, Cass and Branch Townships became centers of draft violence and hotbeds for Molly Maguireism in the 1860s.¹⁷⁴ Victims of the first wave consisted of mine owners and superintendents, arguably legitimate targets in the eyes of the Molly

¹⁷⁴ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 53-57.

Maguires and part of a loosely organized pattern of resistance to employers and state authorities in the context of the wartime emergency.¹⁷⁵ Wartime overproduction of anthracite coal led to mass shutdowns of the collieries of Northern Schuylkill County. In the fall of 1866, the New York and Schuylkill Coal Company shut down their Forestville mine for a few weeks and continued to talk about further shutdowns for financial reasons. The company needed to pay a mortgage and the price of coal continued to fall forcing the coal company to eventually close all mines except for the Black Heath in Cass Township. By June 1866, bankruptcy forced the New York and Schuylkill to cease operations altogether and sell all its assets. As a result, many miners migrated to the middle coal fields to towns like Girardville, Shenandoah, and Mahanoy City in the Northern part of Schuylkill County.¹⁷⁶ Several men who became Molly leaders in the first half of the 1870s were a fraction of those miners who were driven out of Cass Township after the Civil War. Patrick Tully left for the middle coal fields in the fall of 1865 as result of blacklisting and so too did Michael Lawler, a deserting draftee, in January of 1868. Other future leaders of the AOH including Pat Hester and Barney Dolan also found their way to the middle coal fields.¹⁷⁷

In an attempt to explain the demise of the first wave of Molly activity, historians have also pointed to a cultural clash between Irish immigrants trying to recreate the Irish peasant way of life in the mine patches of Schuylkill County and second-generation Irish-Americans

¹⁷⁵ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 188-189.

¹⁷⁶ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 248.

¹⁷⁷ [T. G. Town], *Commonwealth v. Patrick Hester, Patric Tully, and Peter McHugh, 1877, Tried and Convicted of the Murder of Alexander Rae. Argument of Hon. F. W. Hughes, for Commonwealth* (Philadelphia: G. V. Town & Son, Printers, 1877), 440-441, 444-445; list of the members of the AOH, Molly Maguire Collection, Reading Rail Road Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Del.; [R. A. West], *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. John Kehoe, et al...for Aggravated Assault and Battery with Intent to Kill William M. Thomas..., August 8, 1876...Stenographically reported by R. A. West* (Pottsville: Miners' Journal Book and Job Rooms, 1876), 95-96.

attempting to assimilate. The younger generation of Irish-American miners turned their back on the more violent peasant mind-set that the Molly Maguires represented. In a way, the Molly Maguires turned their backs on West Branch as they fled wartime military occupation, postwar purges of union militants, and unemployment. This new generation viewed unionism, namely the WBA as a vehicle through which they could incorporate into American culture. Mark Bulik wrote:

Their language was English, not Irish. Their music was the regimen of a band, not a freewheeling fiddle. Their hero was not a mythical Irishwoman, but a very real neighbor, John Welsh, a Civil War veteran who had taken a leading role in the union, which saw as one of its prime responsibilities the elevation of the miners' intellectual life.¹⁷⁸

Inter-cultural clashes also formed between Irish immigrants from County Kilkenny, Ireland and Irish mine workers who hailed from north-central and northwestern Ireland. "Kilkennyman" was another name for "experienced mine worker" and in turn, placed the interethnic feud into the larger context of the labor conflict that plagued the anthracite region as a whole. Kilkenny was known for its anthracite mines, so many Kilkenny immigrants arrived with experience and skills. These skills allowed them to assimilate faster and more quickly claim the labor hierarchy. These skilled miners may have pushed the less desired unskilled laborers out of West Branch. This marked a poignant transition from "shovel wielding peasant to American industrial worker," with the Molly Maguires at the center of this transition.¹⁷⁹ Only with the end of the Long Strike and the subsequent demise of the WBA was new life breathed into the Molly Maguire movement.

¹⁷⁸ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 260.

¹⁷⁹ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 262-264.

The post-Long Strike Molly Maguire violence still resembled the methodology and traditions of the Civil War violence and, in turn, the agrarian violence in Ireland. Of the sixteen men assassinated between 1862 and 1875, only one was a mine owner. Agrarian violence in Ireland rarely targeted the land owner and instead victimized land agents, middlemen, small farmers, and figures of local authority. Land owners as well as mine owners were mostly absentees and rarely seen, therefore it proved easier to go after those with whom the perpetrators had regular contact: mine superintendents, local officials, and people from their own social background who treated them unjustly.¹⁸⁰ The American Mollies certainly drew on the traditions of retributive justice and methodology of their ancestors, but their struggle was their own and not a continuation of the agrarian struggle in Ireland. This was made more evident through the second wave of Molly Maguire activity in the 1870s.

Molly Maguireism of the 1870s was a very specific type of retributive justice, unique to the labor relations that developed out of the destruction of unionism and the Long Strike. There was a notably the higher concentration of assassinations immediately after the Long Strike as compared to the relatively more scattered assassinations in the years before and during the strike. The apparent dormancy of Molly Maguire activity between 1868 and 1873 when the WBA was firmly established sparked the debate among historians over the question of whether they existed at all, or if, at the time of the showcase trials and executions in the late 1870s, they had all but disappeared from the area. Indeed, the victimology during the second wave reflected the increased ethnic and labor tensions revitalized by the fall of the WBA. Welsh gang members, miners, mine superintendents, and public officials all felt the wrath of Molly Maguireism, but the strategy of revenge remained the same. Some participants in the Molly Maguire violence were

¹⁸⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 187.

not fighting for social justice in the broad sense of the term, but more for individual grievances. However, this did not take away from the importance of what Molly Maguireism achieved. The violence bore either a direct or indirect connection to labor relations—directly in the murders of mine officials and more indirectly in the assassination of public officials and Welsh gang members. Furthermore, the killing of Welsh gang members reflected interethnic conflicts and ethnic discrimination patterns in the workplace.¹⁸¹

The two wave thesis aptly demonstrates that the highest concentrations of Molly Maguire activity occurred when the WBA did not exist and again when the union failed. Therefore, not only did Molly Maguireism affect unionism, but unionism also affected Molly ideology. An examination of the two waves of Molly Maguire violence also explains the migration of miners from northern Schuylkill County to the middle coal fields and how the causes helped form the motivations of Molly Maguire leadership in the 1870s. They sought revenge for the blacklisting and unemployment forced upon them by the operators during the first wave.

Violence was conducted against the Molly Maguires as well as by them. This did not just occur after the Long Strike, but began with the use of military force to put down draft violence during the Civil War. Other examples included the general ethnic warfare between Welsh and Irish gangs, police power directed at the private sector (i.e. the Coal and Iron Police), the deployment of militia to put down labor disputes, the formation of vigilante committees in Schuylkill County, and ultimately action by the state in the form of execution by hanging.¹⁸² The struggle between these legal and extralegal forms of social justice that occurred in the anthracite

¹⁸¹ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 185.

¹⁸² Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 186.

region allowed for Molly Maguireism to replace unionism and redefined and molded Molly Maguireism into a more formidable force that refused to die at the end of a rope.

The Informer: The Great Molly Maguire Trials, 1876-1879

The most concentrated amount of violence attributed to the Molly Maguires occurred between October 1874 and September 1875. In just a short span of two months, the Molly Maguires were blamed for six murders: Benjamin Yost, a Tamaqua policeman, was shot on July 5, 1875; Thomas Gwyther, a Girardville justice was killed that August; Gomer James, a Welshman who was acquitted of the murder of an AOH member, Edward Cosgrove, was killed in revenge; Mine boss Thomas Sanger was killed on September 3 along with his friend and miner William Uren; John P. Jones, a Welsh mine superintendent, was killed the same day in Lansford, Carbon County. During the ‘Great Molly Maguire Trials’ starting in 1876, the men who would be charged for these murders became vehicles for railroad and coal baron Franklin Gowen to link Molly Maguirism with labor unionism.

Historians have debated McParlan’s role in the Sanger, Uren, and Jones murders. By the time of the Yost assassination, McParlan had achieved a firm foothold within the Molly Maguires as he had helped oust Michael “Muff” Lawlor as Shenandoah body master of the AOH and replace him with Frank McAndrews. McAndrews could not read or write and quickly appointed McParlan secretary of the Shenandoah lodge just three months after he had been inducted into the AOH that April of 1874.¹⁸³ Historians have debated James McParlan’s role in the latter three murders listed above. James McParlan was born in 1844 in County Armagh in Ulster province. He worked in a linen warehouse in Belfast and a chemical factory in Durham,

¹⁸³ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 273, 277.

England before he emigrated to America in 1867. He found employment in the grocer trade in New York and later moved on to odd jobs in the Great Lakes region. Dewees described him as:

A man about five fee eight or nine inches in height, rather slightly built, but muscular; is of fair complexion, with dark chestnut hair, regular features, a broad, full forehead, and gray eyes. His general dress is a plain black suit; he wears glasses, and presents a gentlemanly appearance...He is an Irishman in feeling and sympathy as well as in race and resents quickly any unjust attack upon his countrymen, his religion, or his native land.¹⁸⁴

After working for a short time as a “preventative policeman” for a small detective agency in Chicago, McParlan joined the Pinkerton National Detective Agency in 1871.¹⁸⁵ His Irish background allowed him to convincingly infiltrate the Mollies and the AOH in 1874 when they inducted him into the organization.

McParlan going by the alias James McKenna, spent two years in Schuylkill County collecting evidence against the Mollies while working at the Indian Ridge Shaft at Shenandoah. The Shenandoah chapter of the AOH initiated McParlan on April 14, 1874, after which he meticulously reported to his handler in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin, that he observed and participated in the planning of several Molly killings. McParlan detailed one such instance on Thursday, April 30, 1874:

After taking a drink and looking around they quietly and singly dropped out the back way either up stairs in a bed room or down into the cellar so that any stranger in the saloon would never suspect a mutiny being on the [unknown word]. That when there is a “job” to be done (man to be beaten or murdered) the question or matter is never brought up in open Lodge, but the Body Master receives the grievance and complaint and appoints the man or men privately and secretly notifies them of what they are required to do and thus the “job” is done and the very members of the Lodge are never made aware of the transaction...

¹⁸⁴ Dewees, *The Molly Maguires*, 79.

¹⁸⁵ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 155; Dewees, *The Molly Maguires*, 79-83.

The report further explained that this methodology enabled members to create reasonable doubt and “always prove an alibi.”¹⁸⁶

Contemporaries like Dewees and Pinkerton put McParlan on a pedestal. He represented the hero, a force of good who helped defeat the evil Molly Maguires. Dewees depended strongly on McParlan’s testimonies during the showcase trials of 1876 and presented it as irrefutable fact. He was convinced that McParlan had conducted due diligence and that everything he did, or did not do, was for the sake of collecting evidence to bring down “the terrorism which the Molly Maguires had inspired,” and from which he barely escaped.¹⁸⁷

By the 1920s and 1930s, historians began to question the existence of the Molly Maguires. They surmised that Gowen and the railroad created the organization as a fear tactic to destroy unionism in the anthracite industry. Anthony Bimba wrote his history within this context. Bimba argued the Pinkerton detectives acted as vehicles through which Gowen abolished the WBA and made the conspiracy of the Molly Maguires more convincing. He referred to the Pinkerton detectives as “labor spies” and “provocateurs” marking the first time a historian described McParlan as an agent provocateur, an agitator who purposely provokes crime. Bimba was not completely wrong in his classification as the Pinkerton agency was known for dispatching its men to spy on workingmen and prevent strikes.¹⁸⁸ Bimba chipped away at the pedestal that historians like Dewees had constructed by concluding that McParlan functioned as another cog in the evil Railroad machine and that he was a provocateur only to the extent that he would rather get an innocent man convicted than testify to save him.¹⁸⁹ Bimba challenged

¹⁸⁶ Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Society Collection Molly Maguires*, April 30, 1874.

¹⁸⁷ Dewees, *The Molly Maguires*, 174.

¹⁸⁸ Robert Dunn, *Spying on Workers*, International Pamphlets, 1932.

¹⁸⁹ More on the trial of Daniel Dougherty, Bimba, *The Molly Maguires*, 84-85.

McParlan's hero status stating that he became a hero only after he took the witness stand during the Molly Maguire trials.¹⁹⁰

The categorization of McParlan as an agent provocateur dominated Molly Maguire historiography until Wayne G. Broehl began to question its validity. Broehl re-examined McParlan's testimony during the trials in an attempt to redefine McParlan's role through the use of his own words as well as to interpret the intention of the defense. The Molly defense attorneys tried to implicate McParlan on the grounds that he became the de facto body master of the Shenandoah lodge and thus responsible for planning and executing at least three killings during his tenure:

Q. Did you fix a time for that meeting and tell them where you would meet them.

Recollect now that you were the chief man; you are body master from this time out?

A. [McParlan] That may be your impression, but I did not even fix the time. I had not the authority even for that.

Q. Yes, you had. You too us in your examination-in-chief that Kehoe told you to go and call a meeting?

A. [McParlan] I told you...that Kehoe told me to go home and notify they members.

Q. Yes, that is it?

A. [McParlan] Well, notifying the members and calling a meeting are not altogether the same thing. I had not the authority to call a meeting.¹⁹¹

The defense continued to attack McParlan for neglecting to notify Captain Linden even after he knew about the planned Sanger-Uren and Jones killings.

Broehl's contemporary, Harold Aurand, agreed that it was uncertain as to whether McParlan and his colleagues functioned as labor spies in order to establish a connection between the WBA and the Molly Maguires. Aurand also hypothesized that the agent provocateur argument originated with the relentless efforts of the defense during the trials. Aurand recognized the trials and McParlan's investigation served a larger purpose and McParlan was

¹⁹⁰ Bimba, *The Molly Maguires*, 80.

¹⁹¹ For the full cross examination see [E. D. York], *Commonwealth vs. Kehoe*, 58.

simply a player in Franklin B. Gowen's larger war against unionism. The Pinkerton detective's testimony helped make the trial about an entire group instead of just a few offenders. Aurand pointed out that other terror groups like the Modocs or the "Chain Gang" existed in the coal fields, but Gowen ordered Pinkerton, and in turn, McParlan to focus on just the Mollies. The Molly Maguires were different in that they held wider notoriety than these other groups. Gowen sought to identify the union as a secret terrorist group and Aurand argued that arrests and conviction of the organization's members vindicated Gowen's failure in his previous position as district attorney of Schuylkill County.¹⁹²

The trials reflected Gowen's need to support his claim that the same secret society was to blame for both crime waves before and after the Long Strike. Aurand concluded that Gowen used the trials to prove the WBA and the secret society were one and the same in order to bring unionism to a screeching halt in the coal fields. The Molly Maguire story became more about Gowen's personal success rather than a fight of good against evil. Even larger, it symbolized a new order - a society dominated by corporations.¹⁹³

Kevin Kenny steered McParlan's historiography in a different direction. He sought to not only chip away at McParlan's historical pedestal, but to knock it down entirely. Kenny felt that McParlan's exploits have been exaggerated by past historians. However, he seemed to somewhat agree with Aurand that McParlan was just a player in Gowen's monopoly game. The Molly Maguires threatened Gowen's campaign to impose order and stability to the lower anthracite region. Kenny admitted that McParlan may have been an agent provocateur, but his most important role was that of informer. Molly Maguireism's most defining characteristic was

¹⁹² Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 101-108.

¹⁹³ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 109-110.

secrecy which meant that turning informer and betraying one's colleagues became a capital offense. Informers held a very ignoble place in Irish history. In rural Ireland, informers received the most severe punishment: beating, mutilation, or death.¹⁹⁴

The most recent Molly Maguire historian, Mark Bulik, back-pedaled on Kenny's arguments and rehashed the possibility of McParlan as an agent provocateur. He emphasized three points. First, the Molly murders had been reduced to a little more than a memory when McParlan arrived in the northern coal fields. Second, within months of McParlan being inducted into the AOH, many Hibernian leaders who had kept the violence in check were removed. Finally, these leaders were replaced by men more willing to spill blood. Bulik contended that even if McParlan was not an agent provocateur, he certainly was an agent of change who, in the effort to elevate himself in the AOH, created a "domino effect that contributed to the violence."¹⁹⁵ Bulik believed the key lied in McParlan's relationship with Frank McAndrew. Bulik sought to rebuild McParlan's historical pedestal somewhat by insinuating that the Pinkertons succeeded in breaking up the Molly Maguires.¹⁹⁶ By focusing on McParlan's role in the Mollies' demise, Bulik failed to give Gowen the credit that other historians had before him.

Historians, therefore, have portrayed McParlan in varied, often contradictory terms: as a hero, an agent provocateur, an overrated pawn in Franklin B. Gowen's vendetta against the Molly Maguires, or perhaps something in between. The representation of the Molly Maguires as inherently evil Irishmen brought to justice by the heroic exploits of James McParlan and Allan Pinkerton's detectives dominated pamphlets, newspapers, and local histories at the time (i.e. Dewees and Pinkerton's book). Whether McParlan truly acted as agent provocateur still remains

¹⁹⁴ Beames, *Peasants and Power*, 166-167.

¹⁹⁵ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire* 272.

¹⁹⁶ Bulik *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 271-275, 288.

unproven. The fact that the second wave of intense Molly Maguire violence occurred shortly after McParlan's arrival in Schuylkill County, and that McParlan clearly knew about at least three of them, and may have participated in at least one, is compelling. However, nowhere in his reports or his testimony does he explicitly admit he was actively involved. Did he lie in his reports or perjure himself on the witness stand? Analysis of the evidence did not make this certain as many other factors were at play to bring about a second wave of Molly violence.

The collapse of the WBA dispossessed miners of their main vehicle for bargaining collectively and fighting for better wages and working conditions in an organized and relatively peaceful manner; as a result, the AOH leadership could no longer contain the violence and frustration of the rank and file. John Kehoe and Frank McAndrews replaced men who up until that point kept retributive justice in check. Historians contended McParlan had something to do with this shift in leadership. Whether he directly instigated the change or his ambitions as a labor spy had adverse effects is unknown. What is certain is that his testimony at the trials would make him a central protagonist in future histories of the Molly Maguires. And yet, historians have perhaps focused too much on the agent provocateur debate and on McParlan's exploits to bring down the Molly Maguires from the inside. And they have paid far too little attention to what he was hired to do in the first place and the effects it had on the evolution of Molly Maguireism and unionism, as well as the role of McParlan served in Gowen's larger plans.

Throughout his time as President of the Reading and Philadelphia Railroad, Gowen presented himself as a champion of labor and masked his desire for a monopoly as a mission to eliminate the middle men and lower the cost of coal for the masses. When Gowen met with Pinkerton in October of 1873, he referred to the Molly Maguires as an infestation and a "noxious

weed.”¹⁹⁷ Gowen constantly utilized Molly Maguireism to justify taking control of coal production. In July of 1875, the Reading and Philadelphia underwent one of several state led investigations that occurred during Gowen’s tenure. This particular investigation called into question the detention of cars, short weights, unfair distribution of cars, and conspiracy to control production.¹⁹⁸ The railroad became part of the rise of the company state as it maintained the prices it wanted through pooling combinations with other corporations.

Gowen supplemented his economic might with muscle from the Coal and Iron Police and the undercover Pinkerton detectives. Further, the Reading and Philadelphia railroad gained influence over state politics and the governor. By 1876, as Wallace writes,

the Reading system...held and unchallenged, near-perfect monopoly of the Schuylkill coal trade. It produced most of the coal in its own collieries, carried all of it on its own railroads or its own canal, delivered it at Port Richmond to its own wharves, ships, and dealers.¹⁹⁹

The power wielded by the railroad came to bear in front of the state legislature in an investigation in July 1875 where Gowen, defending himself and his company, quickly deflected the committee’s attention away from the corporation and onto Molly Maguireism.²⁰⁰ During his testimony at the investigation, Gowen, after first illustrating the patriotic and altruistic designs of his company in the first half of his testimony, attacked unionism using Molly Maguireism as a scapegoat. A skillful manipulator, Gowen presented himself as a labor rights activist stating, “I stand here as the champion of the rights of labor - as the advocate of those who desire to

¹⁹⁷ Allen Pinkerton, *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives*, Ch. 1.

¹⁹⁸ Franklin B. Gowen, *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen, Esq.; Before the Joint Committee of the Legislature of Pennsylvania, Appointed to Inquire into the Affairs of the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, and the Reading Railroad, July 29th and 30th, 1875* (Philadelphia: Press of Helfenstein, Lewis and Greene, 1875).

¹⁹⁹ Wallace, *St. Clair*, 425.

²⁰⁰ Gowen, *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen, Esq.; Before the Joint Committee of the Legislature of Pennsylvania*; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 182.

work and who have been prevented from doing so.” He blamed the Molly Maguires for causing unnecessary unrest in the mines, claiming that, before they were on the scene, miners were satisfied with wages and hours and working peaceably. Gowen then produced a ten page “List of Outrages in Schuylkill and Shamokin Region, from December 13, 1874 to July 15, 1875” as well as his collection of coffin notices that were posted around the Schuylkill collieries from the same period. He argued that these pieces of evidence showed existence of an effort to “intimidate the workingmen themselves from going to work.”²⁰¹ With that, Gowen convinced the state legislature that the labor union and the Molly Maguires appeared as one. As the WBA collapsed, he needed more evidence in order to convince the masses and destroy his final perceived obstacle, Molly Maguireism.

James McParlan’s exploits have been well documented in the historiography, but always in the context of his role in the Molly Maguire saga. McParlan clearly knew about the Sanger killing at least the morning of August 31, 1875 when Mike Doyle confessed his plans to the operative. He did not notify Benjamin Franklin until September 2, after the murder of Sanger and Uren took place. He also failed to act after the plan to kill Jones came to light. However, reports revealed that the Pinkertons knew of the plan in advance. On July 31, McParlan reported that “the Summit Hill assassination has been postponed.” And a later report read, “Jones is the boss who will be assassinated, but it has been postponed until the last of the month, and after the Molly Maguire convention which is to be held at Tamaqua, on the 25th inst.”²⁰² McParlan’s lack of action in order to accumulate evidence reflected the strength of Gowen’s desire to bring the Molly Maguires to justice.

²⁰¹ Gowen, *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen, Esq.; Before the Joint Committee of the Legislature of Pennsylvania*, 76-77, 99-109.

²⁰² Reports of Captain Linden on July 31 and August 5, 1875.

The Molly Maguire trials that began in January 1876 were an example of one of the most blatant acts of injustice in Pennsylvania history. Private policemen arrested the defendants and the prosecution convicted them on the evidence of a detective accused of being an agent provocateur and informers who wanted to save their own skin. Most of the prosecuting attorneys worked for the railroads and mining companies, including Franklin B. Gowen and Charles Albright. Gowen was the star prosecutor in Pottsville and Charles Albright, the scourge of the Buckshots and Mollies during the Civil War, was now lawyer for the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company. Francis Hughes, a Schuylkill County Democratic leader during the war, had become a lawyer for the Reading Company, and he, too, served on the prosecution. Judge Pershing, the Democratic candidate for governor in 1875, and a political enemy of John Kehoe's, presided over many of the trials, including Kehoe's. As Aurand aptly put it: "The Molly Maguire investigation and trials marked one of the most astounding surrenders of sovereignty in American history. A private corporation initiated the investigation through a private detective agency, a private police force arrested the supposed offenders, and coal company attorneys prosecuted - the state provide only the courtroom and hangman."²⁰³

The idea of McParlan as an agent provocateur was not realized until the defense painstakingly attempted to implicate him as such and the question was raised repeatedly during several of the trials including the Yost trial, the Jones trial, and the Thomas conspiracy trial. In the Sanger-Uren murder trial the defense asked McParlan why he made no effort to save the men's lives, to which he responded, "in doing so, I ran the danger of losing my life." He continued:

²⁰³ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 213; quote from Aurand, "The Anthracite Mine Workers, 1869-1897," 57.

I devised every plan I could to telegraph Captain Linden, or telegraph the Agency to find out whether Captain Linden was in Shenandoah - of course he was not, I did not know it then...If I could have found Linden, and he had got his men stationed there, the probabilities are that the boss' life might have been saved, but those things were impossible.²⁰⁴

Again, during the Jones case, when asked why he did not save Jones' life he bluntly stated, "My reason was that I was afraid of being assassinated myself."²⁰⁵ The defense remained unswayed by McParlan's claim that he was unable to inform authorities or save any of the victims for fear of his safety. As the defense argued:

He did not answer that question as an intelligent and candid man would have answered, but he answered it in a manner that clearly shows he designed to evade all questions as to the motives which prompted him upon that occasion. If, then, it would amount to nothing to catch them in the act, with McParlan's lips sealed, unless they were caught after the murder was committed, then the arrangement McParlan swears to about catching parties in the act, was to let them kill their man first, and then arrest them afterwards. This would seem too inhuman to become the subject of a contract, and I do not believe such was the intention.²⁰⁶

The local papers added to the speculation. During the Yost trial, the *Pottsville Workingman* made the point that the amount of violent crime appeared much less in the seven years before McParlan arrived in the coal fields than after, when eight murders occurred under his watch. The newspaper questioned McParlan's role and whether he was sent to instigate these violent crimes or simply gather evidence.²⁰⁷

When it came to the Jones assassination, McParlan made no effort to contact Captain Linden. The defense accused him of being an accessory before the fact. McParlan rebutted, "Jones had been notified and was on his guard." McParlan notified his handler Benjamin

²⁰⁴ Cf. Broehl, *The Molly Maguires* 235; [Allen, Lane, & Scott], *The Evidence in the Case of Dennis Donnelly, 1877* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott, 1877), 174-175.

²⁰⁵ *MJ*, May 11, 1876.

²⁰⁶ [E. D. York], *Commonwealth vs. Kehoe*, 211.

²⁰⁷ *Pottsville Workingman*, May 27, 1876.

Franklin of the anticipated murder on July 17 and Franklin sent agents to guard Jones' home and workplace during the day. McParlan reasoned that he could not notify Tamaqua police because Pinkerton placed him under strict orders to only answer to Franklin or Linden and if he would have informed anyone else, his cover would have been blown and his life in danger.²⁰⁸

The trials offered McParlan more notoriety than he deserved and historians perpetuated this long after they ended. In reality, he was a hired detective turned informer whose gathered evidence and testimony served a more complex purpose. The prosecution's case relied heavily on the informers' testimony. McParlan also was not the only informer to take the witness stand. Jimmy Kerrigan, whose wife denounced him as a turncoat, called him "a dirty little rat" from the witness stand and refused to visit him in prison, also took the stand.²⁰⁹ In addition to Kerrigan, at least nine other Mollies turned on their brothers and testified for the prosecution. Daniel Kelly freely admitted he was an accessory in the murder of Alexander Rea and gave Captain Linden a lengthy confession to save his own skin; Frank McHugh turned state's evidence in the Thomas conspiracy case; Patrick Butler in the Gomer James conspiracy case; Michael Lawler in the Sanger-Uren case; Charles Mulhearn and John J. Slattery in the Major conspiracy case; and Cornelius T. McHugh in the Morgan Powell case. After the mass executions in 1877, Dennis Cannon turned informer and received formal pardon in exchange for testifying against Dennis Donnelly in November 1877. James

²⁰⁸ Reading Railroad's Molly Maguire Papers, Linden's reports, September 2, 1875; Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 236.

²⁰⁹ *Pottsville Evening Chronicle*, May 17, 1876.

McDonnell, who was sentenced to death, helped convict Martin Bergin of the murder of Patrick Burns, but failed to get his own sentence commuted.²¹⁰

If not for men like Jimmy Kerrigan and Daniel Kelly (aka “Kelly the Bum”), McParlan’s testimony would have been thrown out. The defense questioned the validity of evidence provided by the informers repeatedly and argued that McParlan’s testimony should be discounted on the grounds that he instigated several of the Molly Maguire crimes. This argument proved formidable given the complicity of the other informers. Fortunately for the detective, the jury believed his version of events and the defense failed to persuade them otherwise.²¹¹

When he took the stand for the first time in May 1876, McParlan presented the AOH and the Molly Maguires as one and the same. Through the trials he revealed the inner workings of the secret society and helped to establish Molly Maguireism as a widespread conspiracy; in the process, he elevated himself as a detective. McParlan described his early movements in the anthracite region, his initiation into the Shenandoah Hibernians, the system of passwords and grips, the organizational network, and the trading of “jobs” between the different branches on a reciprocal basis. McParlan’s detailed accounts during the Thomas, Yost, and Munley trials along with the prosecution’s rousing speeches on the Molly Maguire conspiracy further solidified its truth with the jurors and the community.

McParlan’s revelations also made good press. National and local newspapers reported the trials with hysterical zeal. For example, the *Miners’ Journal* denounced the Molly Maguires as “lawless wretches” who in pursuit of their “diabolical crimes” had thrown aside

²¹⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 230.

²¹¹ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 299-300.

all restraint, all respect of the law and for the opinion of mankind...and given themselves up to the unrestrained indulgence of their own passions.”²¹² The *Shenandoah Herald* referred to the Mollies as “scum” and warned that “the time was close at hand” when they would be “swept from the face of the earth.”²¹³ The *Herald* also announced, “Death to all ‘Mollies’ is the cry from one end of the coal region to the other, and never let it be silent until the devilish order is irretrievably dismembers and its members scattered.” For the Molly Maguires, “murder was but child’s play, arson but a pleasure, and wickedness of all kinds but the natural outpourings of vile and devilish hearts.”²¹⁴ More metropolitan newspapers also showed no mercy. “When the inner history of the Mollie Maguires shall have been written, it will embody the harrowing details of a conspiracy such as the world has rarely known,” the *Philadelphia Inquirer* proclaimed on May 20, 1876. “This history has been making itself through years of lawlessness, bloodshed, plundering general anarchy.”²¹⁵ In much the same vein, the *New York Times* announced:

the revelations of the doings of the Mollie Maguires...uncover a state of brutish ignorance and superstition which one might think could not exist in this Republic. The Pennsylvania authorities owe it to civilization to exterminate this noxious growth, now that its roots have been discovered.²¹⁶

Franklin B. Gowen gave some of his most theatrical speeches on the conspiracy during these trials. He drew heavily on W. Steuert Trench’s *Realities of Irish Life* and claimed the AOH existed for the sake of crime, profit, and power. “The purpose was to make the business of mining coal in this country a terror and a fear; to secure for the leading men in this society

²¹² *MJ*, May 19, 1876.

²¹³ *Shenandoah Herald*, May 8, 1876.

²¹⁴ *Shenandoah Herald*, May 25, 1876.

²¹⁵ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 20, 1876.

²¹⁶ *New York Times*, May 14, 1876.

profitable positions, and the control of ...every colliery.” Left unchecked, the society would infiltrate all corners of the anthracite region. It only had “five or six hundred” members in Schuylkill County, but, Gowen asserted, it would have been twenty or thirty thousand had they succeeded in their mission of infiltration of the coal industry.²¹⁷ Gowen also imparted his powers of manipulation and theatrics upon the point that mere membership in the AOH proved evidence of guilt by association. For example, in the Yost trial, he asserted that “every member of that organization is, not only in a court of conscience, but in the eyes of the law, guilty of every murder as an accessory before the fact and liable to be convicted and hanged by the neck until he is dead.”²¹⁸

At the outset, Gowen sought to use the trials as a platform to convince the anthracite community as well as the court that the Molly Maguires essentially were the WBA and the AOH. However, the prosecution failed to build a convincing case that the secret society was somehow strong enough to be behind both organizations. By the time of the trials, the trade union had effectively collapsed; its collapse resulted in an increase in Molly violence as opposed to the society’s disappearance. So the prosecutors took a different route and put forth the theory that the AOH actually was the Molly Maguires, but under a different name. This incriminated any Irishman who claimed membership in the AOH and the organization’s reputation suffered tremendously.²¹⁹ The only way Gowen could ultimately eliminate Molly Maguireism from the anthracite region was to prove it was a part of something greater, more material and visible in the region. McParlan’s testimony as well as that of the other informers,

²¹⁷ Franklin B. Gowen, *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen in the Case of the Commonwealth v. Munley, 1877, for the Murder of Thomas Sanger* (Pottsville: Chronicle Book and Job Rooms, 1876); *Report of the Case of the Commonwealth v. Kehoe et al...for Aggravated Assault and Battery with intent to kill William M. Thomas*; Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 312; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 235.

²¹⁸ *MJ*, May 17, 1876.

²¹⁹ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 233.

forced the trials to take a new turn. Now the AOH, an international ethnic fraternal organization, members of which were accused of terrorizing the coal regions during the Civil War, was on trial.

The great Molly Maguire trials, which ended in August 1878, allowed the coal establishment to finally take back control over coal production and snuff out the idea of unionism, retributive justice, or any other voice that cried out on behalf of the miners and laborers in the anthracite region. When the railroad wrapped up the cases pertaining to the second wave of Molly violence, they moved on to older cases from the first wave during the Civil War era, sometimes because new evidence emerged, other times because the cases offered a convenient excuse to hang an inconvenient Irishman.²²⁰ John Kehoe's trial, the very last of the great Molly trials described in the first chapter of this thesis, fell into this category. In the minds of the prosecution team and the jurors, Kehoe's conviction directly linked the secret society active during the Civil War to the conspiracy the coal companies uncovered after the war.²²¹

Locally, the trials ostracized the Molly Maguires from the two crucial components of their immigrant, working-class community: the trade union movement and the Catholic Church. As the trials progressed, the union leaders increasingly condemned the Molly Maguires and vigorously dissociated the union from the secret organization. During the trials, John Siney openly expressed the essential differences between trade unionism and Molly Maguireism. He published a letter in the *Philadelphia Times* on May 26, 1876 in an attempt to denounce the secret society and separate it from the miners' union and the mass of ordinary

²²⁰ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 282.

²²¹ Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers*, 107.

Irish workers. He pointed out that the union had always been, “an open organization without either signs, grip, or password.” Siney insisted that most Catholics condemned secret societies as the church taught and shunned the Molly Maguires.²²² Archbishop James Frederic Wood of Philadelphia issued the formal excommunication of the Molly Maguires, published in the *New York Times* on December 23, 1875 in response to the infamous events at Wiggins Patch. In August 1875, Alan Pinkerton resorted to desperate measures in order to bring the Molly Maguires to justice. His agents drew up a list of names, addresses, and ranking in the AOH of suspected Mollies involved in the murder of Benjamin Yost and his wife and addressed the list to “The Vigilance Committee of the Anthracite Coal Region.” On that list, amongst others, were names of the members of two families, the O’Donnells and the McAllisters. Both families resided in Wiggins Patch, a small mining patch near Mahanoy City. Three family members were also named as the assassins in the Sanger and Uren killings. On December 10, 1875, thirty masked men broke into the O’Donnell and McAllister house and indiscriminately slaughtered most of their family; some managed to escape including alleged Mollies, James O’Donnell and Charles McAllister.²²³ By the time of the trials, the Molly Maguires had become pariahs of union leaders and the Catholic Church.²²⁴

Prior to the trials, Gowen attempted to connect unionism and the Molly Maguires and create an anti-labor attitude in the coal region. During the trials, the procedure and publicity surrounding them sought to present the Mollies as a criminal conspiracy opposed to the true interests of labor. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* made the distinction that, “Siney’s organization

²²² John Siney, letter to *Philadelphia Times*, May 26, 1876, quoted in Edward Pinkowski, *John Siney, The Miners’ Martyr* (Philadelphia: Sunshine Press, 1963), 213-14.

²²³ For more on the events in Wiggins Patch and theories about who was responsible, see *Shenandoah Herald*, December 10, 11, 1875; *Pottsville Evening Chronicle*, December 10, 11, 1875; *MJ*, December 10, 11, 1875; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 206-212.

²²⁴ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 240.

made the fight on capital, while the Mollie Maguires made war on labor.” The *Pottsville Workingman* supported this opinion: “the best conservator of the peace that ever existed in the country, was the miners’ Union.” There was few “bad and restless characters” in Schuylkill County, “but these men were mainly not Union men, not even in sympathy with labor or its trials.”²²⁵

This idea that Molly Maguireism amounted to a criminal conspiracy against labor influenced contemporary historians who perpetuated it as historic truth. More accurately, these “bad and restless characters” fought for the workingmen’s cause just with more violent means. The Molly Maguires cannot be dissociated with labor activism as it deprives them of any motive other than revenge and blood lust. Most of their victims were mine officials who were killed as part of a larger struggle to regulate conditions of life and labor in the mines on an individual and local as well as collective and regional level. More specific evidence can be gleaned from the coffin notices posted in the collieries during both waves of Molly Maguire violence. Some coffin notices were sent to individuals and meant to threaten them directly. Mollies posted other notices in the collieries for all miners to see, discouraging them from returning to work while a strike was underway until the operators met all the miners’ demands. The men blamed for posting these notices clearly were in sympathy with the trials of labor, albeit via more drastic measures.

The trials were crucial to the history of labor relations in the region. First, they separated the Molly Maguires and the WBA specifically, but forever linked Molly Maguireism to labor and unionism. Gowen effectively used Molly Maguireism and the fear it produced to remove the last obstacle standing in the way of his monopoly over the anthracite

²²⁵ *Pottsville Workingman*, May 27, 1876.

mines. The trials allowed him to prove his theory that the Molly Maguires were part of a larger labor, Irish, and political conspiracy and to convince the Schuylkill community to be anti-labor and anti-Molly Maguire through fear. Through the evidence presented by McParlan and the other informers, Gowen's career-long theory became reality. However, the trials failed to tie the murders to specific incidences of union activity. They also failed to link the AOH and the WBA. However, the "Great Molly Maguire Trials" did succeed in turning the AOH, a well-known, international secret society into the Molly Maguires. Despite the incredible nature of this claim, the prosecution and Gowen convinced the jurors and the press of the connection, thus putting the entire order on trial.

Second, the "Great Molly Maguire Trials" transformed a localized secret society into a national spectacle. Through the trials, Molly Maguireism spread outside of the anthracite region and connected the labor struggles of the anthracite industry in Schuylkill and Carbon counties to the larger labor wars occurring in more metropolitan areas like Philadelphia and New York in the 1870s. Some workers outside the anthracite region criticized the outcome of the trials. The week of Kehoe's conviction, workingmen in New York, for example, denounced the press as a patsy of the mine owners and condemned the prosecution of the Irish miners. The headline in the *Miners' Journal* read, "New York Workingmen Making Asses of Themselves." In Philadelphia, workers met in protest of the Mollies' conviction and concluded that, "the people were fast drifting into a condition where revolution would be necessary" to defend their rights against monopoly.²²⁶ Even though publicity and hostility surrounded the trials locally, workingmen in more metropolitan areas who discovered the Mollies' plight empathized with their struggle and were vocal in their support.

²²⁶ *MJ*, January 19, 1877; *New York Times*, February 13, 1877; Bulik, *Sons of the Molly Maguires*, 283.

Out of the trials, Franklin Gowen, and by proxy James McParlan and the Pinkerton Detective Agency, emerged as the heroes, while the Molly Maguires, the AOH, and labor were stigmatized as villains and enemies. Newspapers, pamphlets, and historians perpetuated these historical profiles and rigorously questioned them. McParlan in particular was not as important as some historians presented him. He was one of several Pinkerton detectives hired by Gowen to gather evidence against unionism and the Molly Maguires. The great trials made McParlan a notable figure in the Molly Maguire saga, but his testimony and evidence would have been less meaningful without other secret society members turning informer. By investigating the role of McParlan as an undercover Pinkerton detective and his role during the trials, one can glean an understanding of Gowen's motives and what effect the rise of the corporate monopoly had on unionism in the anthracite region.

As industrial consciousness replaced peasant consciousness, the WBA (and later the M&LBA) became a space for collective bargaining and ethnic unity. Its rise and success rendered the Molly Maguire's style of resistance unnecessary. The fact that the frequency of Molly Maguire activity coincided with the rise and fall of the WBA confirmed that the secret society was not just a group of thugs who vandalized and murdered because it was in their Irish nature to do so. Clearly Irish miners and laborers preferred the opportunity of collective action that the WBA offered or the killings would have continued during the life of the union. When the WBA fell, the Molly Maguires came out of dormancy. They recognized Gowen and his growing monopoly and its suppression of unionism as a threat to their rights as workers and their new found way of collective bargaining. The decrease in Molly violence after 1868 cannot be understood outside the context of the rise (and subsequent fall) of the WBA;

therefore, Molly Maguireism cannot be completely divorced from unionism in the anthracite region.

The failings and ultimate collapse of the WBA was just one factor in bringing about the second wave of Molly Maguire activity. More radical leadership breathed new life into the Molly Maguire cause as John Kehoe took Barney Dolan's place as AOH body master of Schuylkill County and lead delegate, and Frank McAndrew as body master of Shenandoah. Whether James McParlan had anything to do with the shift has been debated by historians with no definitive conclusion. However, by unscrupulously gathering evidence for the railroad company, he certainly was an agent of change within the Molly Maguires who unscrupulously gathered evidence for the railroad company.

By February 1877, the highly publicized trials resulted in the conviction of all the leading suspects; the jury sent fifteen men to death row in Pottsville, Bloomsburg, and Mauch Chunk.²²⁷ On April 16, John Kehoe, "King of the Mollies," was also found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to hang. However, the struggle did not end at sentencing. Three of the cases, Carroll's, Campbell's, and Duffy's went to the Supreme Court at which the lower courts' rulings were enforced. Friends and family of the condemned sent in a stream of letters to the Pennsylvania Pardons Board asking for mercy, but all were in vain. The first ten condemned men were scheduled for execution on June 21, 1877, six at Pottsville and four at Mauch Chunk.²²⁸ Gowen and the anthracite community hoped that the Molly Maguires were broken and their executions would motivate a more formidable form of law and order in the coal fields. However, as Dewees pointed out, a lingering feeling of fear that members of the

²²⁷ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 244.

²²⁸ Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 335, 337.

order who did not suffer conviction would seek vengeance on those who had wronged their compatriots remained in the coal region. Dewees believed that the lives of the informers like McParlan and Kerrigan were in danger and that even though the organization was broken, others were still at large.²²⁹ This observation provided insight into the influence of Molly Maguireism after the trials and executions. The alleged leading members of the organization may have died, but their legacy, their ideals, and the fear they induced endured and continued to evolve.

²²⁹ Dewees, *The Molly Maguires*, 354-55.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THE EXECUTIONS OF 1877-1879 AND THE MYTHICAL LEGACY OF MOLLY MAGUIREISM

In 1834, the Pennsylvania legislature abolished public executions and required hangings to occur within the privacy of the jail walls. Despite the writ of privacy, the Molly Maguire executions were public spectacles where a few hundred citizens were granted the privilege of attending, while thousands more congregated outside the jail walls. The drama was exacerbated by the armed troops and policemen who kept guard and paraded the streets of Pottsville and Mauch Chunk. Also, advances in printing technology made newspapers less expensive, allowing for these private events to be published in vivid detail for a wider audience than ever before. Every aspect of the Molly Maguire executions was exhaustively reported in the press, popular pamphlets, and histories throughout the United States. Poignantly, it was arranged for the first ten executions to take place on a single day, June 21, 1877, known locally as Black Thursday. Several newspapers marked the day as one where the majesty of the law had been vindicated. The executions, like the trials, proclaimed triumph of order over anarchy and reinforced the notion that the Molly Maguires represented a great criminal conspiracy.²³⁰ The discourse and ritual that accompanied the executions further solidified the myth of the Molly Maguires and redefined Molly Maguireism.

²³⁰ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 246; For articles on the “vindication” of “the outraged majesty of the law” see *Miners’ Journal*, February 3, July 3, 1876; *Shenandoah Herald*, June 21, 1877; *MJ*, June 22, 1877; *New York Sun*, June 22, 1877.

Black Thursday

In the days leading up to the executions, the citizens of the anthracite region were inundated with the machinations of preparation. People could see the extra police in the streets, hear the sounds of the gallows being constructed in the prison yard as they walked by the walls, and read the newspapers filled with maps of the prisons, sketches of gallows, and detailed histories of the crimes of the Molly Maguire crimes.²³¹ The jails constructed special gallows that could hang multiple men at once. The elaborate structures, as one pamphlet described, were designed to “prevent a protraction of the horrible affair by hanging six murderers at once.”²³² The *Miners’ Journal* reported, “The scaffold is in place and ready for its ghastly work. It was viewed yesterday afternoon by 500 and 600 people... Viewed in the pale light of the moon last night and with the full knowledge of the work it is designed to do today, it was an object to chill the blood of the observer and to bring home to him a realization of what this day will bring forth.”²³³

The four Mauch Chunk prisoners were executed first. At four o’clock in the morning, four Catholic priests arrived at the prison to hear their confessions and administer last communion; those in attendance were Father Bunce of Mauch Chunk, Father McIlhone of Lawrytown, Father Heinan of East Mauch Chunk, and Father Wynne of Summit Hill. People arrived by the train load from other parts of the country to gather outside the prison walls.

²³¹ *New York Sun*, June 22, 1877; *MJ*, June 18, 21, 22, 23, 1877; *Shenandoah Herald*, June 15, 16, 22, 23, 1877.

²³² [Barclay & Co.], *The Lives and Crimes of the Mollie Maguires. A Full Account* (Philadelphia: Barclay & Co., 1877), 38-39.

²³³ *MJ*, June 21, 1877.

Those authorized within the walls to bear witness included twenty-four jurors, eight deputies, fifty journalists, and seventy local citizens privileged with entry permits.²³⁴

The four Mollies were paraded out to the gallows at 10:26 a.m., with Alexander Campbell in the lead. As Alexander Campbell approached the gallows, he clasped his crucifix in his hand and as he approached the rope, Father Bruce prayed for his condemned soul. Michael Doyle was the second Molly Maguire to ascend the gallows. He took his place next to Campbell. When asked if he had anything to say, Campbell asked for God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of his enemies. According to the *Miners' Journal*, "Doyle's words were inaudible, therefore, there was no direct quotation, "Doyle hung his head and said something that no one but those on the gallows caught." The *Journal* speculated that the substance of Doyle's words was that he openly regretted joining a secret society against the teachings of the church. John Donahue and Edward Kelly had similar lamentations.²³⁵

On June 22 and 23, the *Miners' Journal* reported the first executions in Carbon County in vivid detail. Once in their places, all four men knelt and received last rights and prayers for the dying. After having been absolved of their sins, steel manacles were placed on their hands and feet, ropes around their necks, and white hoods over their heads. "The prisoners were praying earnestly when at a quarter of eleven o'clock the drop was sprung and in an instant four figures were twisting and spinning around inside the four posts of the gibbet."²³⁶ While Doyle and Campbell died instantly, Donahue and Kelly suffered immensely. Donahue "struggled for about thirty seconds, rattling his manacles by the rapid motions of his hands

²³⁴ *New York Times*, June 22, 1877.

²³⁵ *MJ*, June 23, 1877.

²³⁶ *MJ*, June 23, 1877.

and feet.”²³⁷ Kelly, “drew his hands up on his left side” and “he also threw his fee forward slightly, but for the balance of the time hung quietly.” Within two minutes, “the men hung motionless, the four white caps appearing just above the place where the traps had rested.”²³⁸ The *Miners’ Journal* and the *New York Herald* further reported that the hanging rendered the men unconscious, but it took six minutes for Donahue to die, eleven minutes for Kelly, Doyle after thirteen, and Campbell after fifteen. The sheriffs cut the men down and placed them in coffins measured for them days before and Coal and Iron Police were dispatched to the burial places of each of the men. Thus ended the Mauch Chunk executions.²³⁹

Simultaneously, six alleged Molly Maguires were executed in Pottsville. The men executed were Thomas Duffy, James Carroll, James Roarity, Hugh McGehan, James Boyle and Thomas Munley. The crowd in attendance was vast. Spectators flooded the jail green as well as the areas around the outside of the jail. About two hundred people had the privilege of witnessing the executions directly, but, as the *Miners’ Journal* reported, “The hills around the jail were full of those whose curiosity had led them thither.” Schuylkill County mine workers ignored the Philadelphia & Reading Coal and Iron Company’s order to stay at work that day and traveled to Pottsville to catch a glimpse of the proceedings.²⁴⁰

Despite the fact that the scaffold was specially constructed to hang all six prisoners at once, it was decided to hang the men in pairs, presumably to intensify and extend the theatrics: At 11:10 a.m., James Boyle and Hugh McGehan, James Carroll and James Roarity

²³⁷ *New York Times*, June 22, 1877.

²³⁸ *MJ*, June 22, 23, 1877.

²³⁹ *MJ*, June 23, 1877; *New York Herald*, June 22, 1877.

²⁴⁰ *MJ*, June 22, 1877.

at 12:21 p.m., and Thomas Duffy and Thomas Munley at 1:20 p.m.²⁴¹ After the bodies were cut down, the guards allowed a crowd of spectators to flood into the yard and inspect the scaffold. The *Miners' Journal* estimated that three thousand people visited the prison yard that afternoon.²⁴² The bodies of the executed men were placed in ice boxes and transported to their respective places of burial. Ironically, the Reading Railroad provided special trains to transport the bodies and carry relatives and friends. All ten men were buried in Catholic cemeteries even though Bishop Wood had excommunicated them for their crimes only two years earlier.²⁴³

The most notable funeral proceedings were that of Alexander Campbell. Family and friends held a boisterous wake conducted in the Irish language and featuring the Gaelic practice of “keening,” a custom in which mourners lamented vocally over the body of the deceased. Keening would also involve physical movements such as rocking, kneeling, or clapping. The newspaperman who reported on the wake stated that all present immediately switched to Irish once they realized his presence. Campbell’s wake was a small event that provided some insight into the closed culture embodied by Molly Maguireism, from which outsiders were excluded.²⁴⁴ Black Thursday symbolized the first step towards an attempt to tame Molly Maguireism. Indeed, Molly Maguireism changed form after the executions; it became myth.

²⁴¹ *New York Times*, June 22, 1877.

²⁴² *MJ*, June 22, 1877.

²⁴³ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 256.

²⁴⁴ for more on Alexander Campbell’s wake, *New York Sun*, June 23, 1877; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 256.

The Sons of Molly Maguire: The Myth

The term *mythology* is defined here as one theorist so aptly put it, “a process of conveying meaning that denies history and creates a static world, closed to the possibility of change; and related to this, a belief in essential, timeless categories of human nature, like goodness and badness.”²⁴⁵ The history of the Molly Maguires has, until rather recently, been a mythology, a reality devoid of history. Historians have been reluctant to place the Molly Maguires in social and historical context, instead preserving their story in static categories of good and evil.²⁴⁶ This myth created a circular discourse in which the Molly Maguires were Irish and by definition savage thugs who killed for the sake of it and proof of this barbarism lied in the simple fact that they committed these crimes. The Molly Maguire trials and subsequent executions were more than a question of enforcing a specific vision of justice. They also contributed to the development of the Molly Maguire myth and endurance of Molly Maguireism.

During the trials and executions, Molly Maguireism strengthened in its association with labor activism as well as a more radical alternative to the failings and discouragement of collective bargaining and unionism. The press, like the *Miners' Journal*, contemporary pamphlets, and histories placed Molly Maguireism into a world of Irish barbarism where the Mollies committed their crimes without legitimate motives. Three prevalent themes dominated Molly rhetoric printed in the 1870s and 1880s: hyperbole, the inherent depravity of criminals, and a struggle between order and disorder. For example, before their arrests, the newspaper claimed, the Molly Maguires “dominated and terrorized the entire coal regions in

²⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (1957; repr., New York: The Noonday Press, 1990), last chapter.

²⁴⁶ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 257; Barthes, *Mythologies*, last chapter.

this section of the commonwealth.” The *Journal* used words like “rabid dogs,” “blood-thirsty,” “obdurate and fiendish,” and unfit for “freedom” to describe the Molly Maguires in an article published on June 22, 1877.²⁴⁷ The prosecution and Gowen used the trials to create a massive conspiracy which the newspapers helped perpetuate well into the executions. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the Molly Maguires were “the most relentless combination of assassins that had been known in American history.” The *Philadelphia Ledger* praised Black Thursday as “a day of deliverance from as awful a despotism of banded murderers as the world has ever seen in any age.”²⁴⁸

The hyperbole and sensationalism created by the newspapers, pamphlets, and prosecution lawyers soon became historical “facts.” Munsell’s *History of Schuylkill County*, published in 1881 concluded that, “the history of this country does not record another instance in which, by the ordinary processes of law, so great, and so wide-spread and so dangerous an evil has been destroyed - so malignant a social cancer safely extirpated.”²⁴⁹ Munsell also extensively quoted Dewees as the leading authority on the typical Molly Maguires. Dewees’s description of the ideal Molly Maguire precisely illustrated the myth:

The Mollie Maguire of the coal region comes into existence without cause or pretense of cause in the past or present history of this country. Standing the equal before the law of any man or set of men in the land, his rights guarded and even his prejudices respected, he becomes with fiendish malice and in cold blood in incendiary and assassin; a curse to the land that has welcomed him with open arms, and a blot, a stain and a disgrace upon the character of his countrymen and the name of the land of his nativity.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 258; *MJ*, June 22, 1877.

²⁴⁸ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 22, 1877; *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, June 21, 1877.

²⁴⁹ Munsell, *History of Schuylkill County*, 106.

²⁵⁰ Dewees, *The Molly Maguires*, 13.

To portray the Mollies as subhuman and intrinsically depraved dispensed with the need for a historical explanation of how they originated and why they acted as they did. The *New York Herald* described Kehoe, the alleged “King of the Mollies,” as such:

In fiction such a character would be regarded as not only unnatural but impossible...A more terrible monster is not known in all the annals of crime, and it would require the pen of De Quincey to depict his murders in all their shocking, cold blooded and startling reality.²⁵¹

To the chagrin of the Reading Coal and Iron Company, the mass hangings succeeded in actually bolstering the labor movement in the anthracite region instead of extinguishing it. Henry Pleasants reported the day before the hangings, “There is a general uneasiness at all the collieries where there are Irish workmen. There will be little or no work tomorrow.” A week later, he wrote, “They blame our company for the hanging of innocent men and their hatred for our company is very great at present.” Pleasants' concerns were substantiated when from June 20 to June 27, strikes crippled the Elmwood, Ellengowen, Knickerbocker, Mahanoy City, North Mahanoy, and Shenandoah collieries.²⁵²

The renewed labor battles came to a head during the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. The miners of Summit Hill, Alexander Campbell's hometown, contributed by parading through the streets, carrying bread on polls. It was meant as a symbol that hearkened back to the agrarian riots against landlords in the Ulster borderlands, and poignantly illustrated the general atmosphere amongst the Irish miners during the strike and the executions of their countrymen.²⁵³ What the *New York Times* called, “The Working Men's War,” the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 spread from Baltimore to Scranton, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and San Francisco in one of the

²⁵¹ *New York Herald*, June 19, 1877.

²⁵² June 20; June 27, 1877, Pleasants to George deB Keim, Reading Anthracite Papers, Pottsville, Pa.

²⁵³ Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America: A People's History of the Post-Reconstruction Era*, vol. 6 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), 175; Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 284.

bloodiest class conflicts the nation has ever known. Molly Maguireism reared its head in Scranton on August 2 when a group of vigilantes killed two Irishmen after opening fire on a crowd of strikers. Efforts to arrest the shooters were obstructed by the National Guard, which embraced the vigilantes into their unit. Newspapers and state officials justified the killings by accusing the victims of being “filled with the spirit of Molly Maguire” and suggested that they may have been actual Mollies.²⁵⁴

Black Thursday was the climax of the railroad and coal companies’ campaign to eradicate the Molly Maguires; that campaign continued on for another two years with five more trials and ten more executions. By June 13, 1878 with the execution of Dennis Donnelly, the newspapers started to lose interest in the Molly Maguires. The *Miners’ Journal* reported it under the headline, “Hanging No Longer Attractive.”²⁵⁵ However, on the eve of the Kehoe case, the fickle press followed every twist and turn as he fought to save his life. John Kehoe was hanged in Pottsville prison yard in front of 150 people. Outside the walls, a crowd of several hundred, “most of them by their appearance, miners and colliery laborers,” stood and “gazed in blank curiosity at the walls.”²⁵⁶ The drop fell at 10:27. The attendant physicians pronounced death by strangulation twelve minutes later. Kehoe’s body was taken home to Girardville for a wake before being buried in Tamaqua next to his sister-in-law, Ellen McAllister O’Donnell, murdered in Wiggans Patch two years earlier.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ *New York Times*, August 3, 9, 1877, September 9, 1877; *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Railroad Riots of July 1877*, Pennsylvania General Assembly, Harrisburg, Pa, 30; Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 284.

²⁵⁵ *MJ*, June 14 1878.

²⁵⁶ *Philadelphia Press*, December 19, 1878; *MJ*, January 15, 1878.

²⁵⁷ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 274.

“The Dawn of a New Era”

The people of the anthracite region wanted John Kehoe’s death to bring with it the death of Molly Maguireism. The *Miners’ Journal* called it, “the dawn of a new era...Up to yesterday Mollie Maguireism in this region was but scotched. Yesterday it was killed.”²⁵⁸ However, before the *Miners’ Journal’s* new era could be realized, four more executions took place. Finally, by October 1879, twenty Irishmen were in the grave and the Reading seemed to have finally obtained a firm grasp on the anthracite industry. It gained a monopoly on the production of coal in the lower anthracite region, suppressed the miners’ union, and exterminated the leadership of the local Hibernian societies.²⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the Reading’s triumph proved to be a Pyrrhic one, and Franklin B. Gowen the tragic hero.

By 1880, Gowen, unable to pay off the loans he took out to buy coal land, found himself drowning in debt. The Reading went into receivership and Gowen was forced out as president the following year. He failed to regain his previous reputation and success and finally gave up on December 13, 1889. In what amounts to a sort of poetic justice, he secluded himself in his Washington hotel room and killed himself, twenty-seven years to the day when strikers invaded Phoenix Park shouting a name: Molly Maguire.²⁶⁰

The battle between the Molly Maguires and the Reading Coal and Iron Company was lost, but the war between unionism and big business was not over. The mythology of the Molly Maguires and their ideals and tradition rooted itself deep within the coal fields and patches of Schuylkill County and beyond. With the eradication of the trade union and the Molly Maguires, the men and women of the anthracite region sought out alternatives to improve the conditions in

²⁵⁸ *MJ*, December 20, 1878.

²⁵⁹ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 286.

²⁶⁰ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 287.

which they lived and worked. John Siney formed the “Greenback” or Independent political party and served on its executive committee. The Greenback party ran on a third party ticket with an anti-corporation, pro-labor platform. Siney also chaired an “anti-monopoly” convention in September of 1875 which successfully joined Greenback and anti-monopoly forces into one labor movement. Greenback clubs formed in parts of the anthracite region and the movement gained so much momentum that in the 1877 state elections, the “Greenback-Labor” ticket won ten percent of the vote in the anthracite region. The next year, several party members won seats in the state legislature, including former WBA leader, John F. Welsh.²⁶¹

Irish nationalism also found its way into the anthracite region in the wake of unionism and the Molly Maguires. For example, Clan-na-Gael, an Irish republican organization, helped to fill the vacuum. A successor to the Fenian Brotherhood, Clan-na-Gael represented extreme right wing Irish-American nationalism that believed in the use of armed force to achieve a republic in Ireland. Due to the extreme nature, secrecy, and association of Clan-na-Gael with the AOH, with the trials and executions fresh in the minds of the anthracite community, Clan-na-Gael became quickly associated with Molly Maguireism.²⁶²

Another popular alternative was the Land League in the early 1880s led by Patrick Ford. The Land League was one of the first ethnic nationalist groups that combined Irish nationalism and labor radicalism instead of viewing them as conflicting. Ford made it his mission to see to the fate of the anthracite mine workers and gained major support by the early 1880s. The fact that the Land League harmonized the labor movement with Irish nationalism forced board

²⁶¹ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 280; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York: Knopf, 1967), ch. 11.

²⁶² Broehl, *The Molly Maguires*, 323; James P. Rodechko, “Irish-American Society in the Pennsylvania Anthracite Region: 1870-1880,” in John E. Bodnar, ed. *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania* (Lewisburg, 1973), 29; Kenny, 280.

members like Terrance Powderly, who later became head of the Knights of Labor, to spend a great deal of time denying accusations that these organizations were merely a cover up for the Molly Maguires.²⁶³ The Knights of Labor, which emerged parallel to the Land League in the anthracite region, also came under attack as being the Molly Maguires under a new name because of the Knights of Labor's secrecy and rapid expansion in the region after the collapse of the WBA in 1875.

The Knights of Labor temporarily filled the vacuum left by the WBA, but some miners still searched for a more satisfactory substitute. In the late 1870s, mine workers created the Miners' and Laborers' Amalgamated Association (M&LAA) with a revival of an industrial miners' union and with the WBA model in mind. The M&LAA ultimately failed, but thirteen years later, the first United Mine Workers (UMW) union lodge in Schuylkill County was organized in Forestville. The UMW flourished in the coal fields, eventually inviting new Eastern European immigrants into the fold. Originally, mine operators brought Eastern European immigrant workers into the mines in the 1870s and 1880s to offset Irish industrial militancy and they were met with much disdain from the Irish workers. Ironically, the new immigrants' willingness to take on the coal companies came to match, and sometimes surpass, that of the Irish. On September 10, 1897, three hundred Slavic strikers marched on a colliery in Lattimer, Luzerne County. One hundred and fifty sheriff's deputies opened fire on the strikers and killed at least nineteen of the miners and wounded thirty-two more.²⁶⁴ The coal companies' long-standing efforts to keep workers separated by ethnicity had come to an end.

²⁶³ Eric Foner, "The Land League and Irish America," in Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 170-74; Kenny, 281.

²⁶⁴ Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 176, 224, 230-34. Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 292-93.

By 1900, the UMW had achieved much success in uniting workers of all nationalities and prepared for an epic showdown with the coal monopoly in 1902. In the true tradition of Molly Maguireism, 140,000 workers ceased work and marched out of the coal pits. The Pennsylvania National Guard was dispatched to the anthracite region to supplement the Coal and Iron Police along with private detectives and deputies. Echoes from the past continued when on August 4, union leader William Purcell was assassinated supposedly by a deputy who then fled the scene. On September 3, a dynamite blast exploded a Coal Castle man's home because he continued to work during the strike. The strike succeeded in shutting down the industry for five months and ended with a pay raise and a shorter day for the miners.²⁶⁵

The UMW was a short lived victory for the miners. During World War I, consumers turned to other fuel sources as the coal industry could no longer meet the demand. The Great Depression brought further devastation as coal mines closed and put hundreds out of work. Unemployed miners resorted to digging into mountain sides, opening illegal mines on coal company land, and bootlegging coal. When the Coal and Iron Police attempted to shut down their operations, the bootleggers unionized and fought back. Minersville, now dominated by Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Russians, emerged at the center of this militancy. The town contributed a large number of leaders to labor movements in the anthracite fields and "always raised more money and sent more people to rallies and marches than other, comparable communities."²⁶⁶ This militancy, and the continuing influence of immigrant peasant solidarity in an industrial setting, was part of long legacy of labor activism associated with the Molly Maguires in the Pennsylvania anthracite region.

²⁶⁵ *New York Evening World*, August 5, 1902; Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 293.

²⁶⁶ Miller and Sharpless, *Kingdom of Coal*, 319-20.

However, the fact that labor's opposition associated all of these organizations formed to support labor after the executions with Molly Maguireism also speaks to Gowen's legacy too. The work he did to condemn the Mollies as ruthless barbarians cast a long shadow, stigmatizing labor for decades after the Long Strike and trials. Gowen effectively succeeded in getting people to view labor activism as a form of terrorism.

The coal monopoly continued its decline and bootleggers thrived as sixty-five percent of illegal mining took place on Reading Coal and Iron lands; later, they formed their own union. Yet, the state government refused to intervene for fear of bloodshed or mass starvation. During their reign of power, the corporations made many enemies and once the crisis hit, no one was willing to defend them. Governor George Earle made his opinion known that the companies had brought the decline on themselves. "They brought these people into the coal region, let them build their homes and churches, and then closed down the mines to concentrate their operations so that they could make bigger profits. They made millions of dollars from labor of these men who are now unemployed. They can't let them starve."²⁶⁷ Between four and six million tons of anthracite were being stolen annually by 1935 and sold at a large discount. As a result, the coal companies lost about \$32 million a year. The coal companies were forced to close more mines to cut their losses which created more bootleg miners in a cruel, descending spiral.²⁶⁸ The Reading Coal Company finally declared bankruptcy in February 1937; the most powerful of the Molly Maguire antagonists had fallen.

Interpretation of the Molly Maguires has always been a source of contention amongst historians, but none, taken alone, gives the whole picture. The Molly Maguires filled a range of

²⁶⁷ *New York Times*, November 18, December 20, 1936.

²⁶⁸ *New York Times*, January 13, 1935; Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 295.

roles dictated by the ebb and flow of the labor movement as manifested in the Pennsylvania anthracite region: a politically active fraternal order, a predecessor to trade unionism, and an ideal that filled the vacuum that failed unionism left behind. For the Mollies, murder was politics by other means. Draft resistance and labor activism were strategies for defending the Irish and mining community exploited by the draft and mine operators and later Franklin B. Gowen and the coal monopoly. The American Molly Maguires grew organically out of the world of American war and industry and the atmosphere created in the coal fields. They drew from the peasant traditions of the agrarian societies in Ireland and adapted them to create their own movement and class consciousness. The widespread use of “Molly Maguire” indicated the reluctance of men like Bannan, Gowen, the operators, the Pinkertons, and other nativist Americans to accept the idea that Irish immigrants could possess class consciousness, let alone an industrial worker mindset.

Molly Maguireism, a clandestine force which acted alongside the unions during the Civil War and after, helped the labor movement succeed where predecessors had failed. The WBA and the Union Benevolent Association before it, raised the living standards of anthracite workers. The WBA showed miners and laborers the benefit of collective bargaining as their wages rose to a level unheard of in the industry’s history as well as the limitations and perils of secret society anonymity.²⁶⁹

The peasant solidarity at the heart of the Molly Maguires became the industrial solidarity that served as the foundation of the WBA and later the United Mine Workers. Guns and coffin notices of the Mollies were done away with in favor of collective bargaining and open methods of unionism. Rather than die in the prison yards of Mauch Chunk and Pottsville as Franklin

²⁶⁹ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 299.

Gowen had hoped, the Molly Maguire's legacy encouraged further movements, and in doing so, transcended time and location. The Molly Maguireism ideal consisted of a deep seated conviction that the deck is stacked against the little guy and that corporations operate by their own laws, manipulate public institutions, and coerce their opponents in pursuit of profit. It also upheld the belief that collective violence and retributive justice were justifiable albeit illegal ways to help even the odds. This mindset was far from universal. The Mollies made up a small subset of the region's Irish immigrants.²⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Jack Kehoe illustrated the Molly Maguire worldview during an interview in his prison cell before his execution:

Mr. Gowen had scarcely gotten warm in his seat as president of a carrying company before his idea of empire began to take shape. Knowing the profits of coal mining...he determined to monopolize the mining as well as the carrying of coal. So he organized the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company under a bogus charter, 'yanked' through the Pennsylvania Legislature under a concealed name, which gave unlimited powers to the company to do everything almost.²⁷¹

Even though the trade union and the Molly Maguires differed in strategy, they fought for justice and workplace improvement at an individual and local level. There is no evidence that the Molly Maguires saw their struggle as part of a greater regional or national conflict between social classes, yet they fought to defend a particular vision of what was just in labor relations. By contrast, the WBA possessed a coherent organizational structure, a collective social vision, and a well-developed theory of labor relations. It consciously understood the wider implications of its attempt to represent the members of one social class in their dealings with another and gained recognition for labor as a part of industrial society. The WBA condemned the Molly Maguires and denounced their violence as a deviation from the proper goals of the labor

²⁷⁰ Bulik, *Sons of Molly Maguire*, 291.

²⁷¹ [Barclay & Co.], *The Life and Execution of Jack Kehoe* (Philadelphia: Barclay and Co., 1878), 63-64.

movement.²⁷² The contrasts between the Molly Maguires and the WBA were irrefutable and to systematically identify them as one and the same, as Gowen as some historians have done, is also inaccurate. However, to separate the Molly Maguires and trade unionism entirely does not precisely capture the complexities of their relationship to one another and to labor activism in the 1860s and 1870s.

The term “Molly Maguire” referred to a real sustained, but sporadic pattern of Irish violence in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania that unquestionably existed.²⁷³ But it also became synonymous with and a scapegoat for many of the socioeconomic and political ills that plagued the anthracite region in the 1860s and 1870s. Moreover, it offered men like Benjamin Bannan a convenient explanation for the contradictions that existed within the industry and that served as an affront to the free labor ideology he so coveted. As unionism began to take hold, the term “Molly Maguire” expanded to refer to all forms of labor activism against the rise of the corporation and monopoly. Molly Maguireism extended the demonization of the Irish onto organized labor in general.

Much of the history on the Molly Maguires was rewritten in the 1970s when a movement was organized in Schuylkill County to obtain a posthumous pardon for Molly Maguire “King” John Kehoe. At the head of the movement was his granddaughter and great grandson who owned Wayne Hotel in Girardville (previously John Kehoe’s tavern, the Hibernia House). On September 6, 1978, Pennsylvania Governor Milton J. Shapp issued a statement in favor of the Molly Maguires. He announced, “In an era of shortened work weeks and paid vacations, it is impossible for us to imagine the plight of the nineteenth century miners in

²⁷² Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 286.

²⁷³ Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 285.

Pennsylvania's anthracite region." Shapp further argued that Kehoe's popularity among the Irish workers struck fear in Franklin Gowen and led to the controversial trials and executions. He concluded that the whole affair was a miscarriage of justice: "but we can be proud of the men known as the Molly Maguires because they defiantly faced allegations which attempted to make trade unionism a criminal conspiracy." Governor Shapp, joined with the family of John Kehoe and the Labor History Society, turned the Molly Maguires into martyrs. On January 12, Governor Shapp signed the posthumous pardon for John Kehoe that was presented by the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons. On June 21, 1980, exactly 103 years after Black Thursday, the Commonwealth created a plaque in honor of the Molly Maguires and placed at Schuylkill County Prison.²⁷⁴ The plaque reads:

Here in this Schuylkill County prison yard on June 21, 1877, the largest mass execution in Pennsylvania took place with the hanging of six alleged "Molly Maguire" leaders. That same day, four other alleged "Mollies" were hanged at Mauch Chunk in Carbon County. Between 1877 and 1879, twenty alleged "Mollies" were hanged in Bloomsburg, Columbia County, Mauch Chunk, Carbon County and Pottsville, Schuylkill County. One hundred and one years following the hanging of Jack Kehoe, December 18, 1878, in this Schuylkill County Prison, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted posthumous pardon to Kehoe, reflecting the judgment of many historians that the trials and executions were part of a repression directed against the fledgling mineworkers' union of that historic period.

Until the 1970s, the Molly Maguires continued to hold an air of shame and fear. However, as demonstrated by Governor Shapp's pardon, there has been a relatively recent revival of pride in Molly Maguirism. Today, in various towns in the coal region of Pennsylvania "Molly Maguire Days" celebrate Irish pride, and the legacy of the secret society and retributive justice. One hundred years too late, the Mollies were finally publicly exonerated. Even though

²⁷⁴ Historical Society of Schuylkill County, Molly Maguire Collection, John Kehoe File, M 170.18 MI, letter of Governor Milton J. Shapp, September 6, 1978; Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, 284.

the Molly Maguires died at the end of a rope, their legacy continues to live on in the hearts and minds of their ancestors and fellow Irish-Pennsylvanians.

We must not forget that the American labor wars and the battles and skirmishes in between were violent, bloody, and filled with bitterness, illegality, deception, immorality, and conflict. They were not always the friendly and orderly steps towards progress that some historians have portrayed them to be. These aspects of labor history must be understood in order to fully understand our present. The Molly Maguires committed violent and illegal activities in response to the deception and immorality of Franklin B. Gowen, the Pinkertons, and the Reading Coal and Iron Company, and because of this, played a crucial role in the union movement and in securing the rights of workingmen.

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VITA

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Education

Master of Arts – History, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, May, 2017
 Bachelor of Arts – History and Archaeology, Millersville University, Millersville, PA,
 May 2012

Relevant Coursework

Old Dominion University

HIST 600: Method and Theory
 HIST 595: Museum Studies
 HIST 695: Transnational History of the 20th Century
 HIST 695: Melting Pot: US Immigration of the 19th and 20th Century
 HIST 695: America's Civil War
 HIST 602: American Revolution and Historical Memory
 HIST 650: Ancient Rome: Text and Archaeology
 HIST 660: Fascism in Europe
 HIST 650: Ancient Rome: Text and Artifact
 HIST 698: Thesis
 HIST 699: Thesis

Millersville University

Archaeology Field School - Wiesenthal Site, Lancaster, PA
 Archaeology Lab Methods
 Archaeology Senior Seminar
 Archaeology Method and Theory
 Historic Preservation and Cultural Resource Management
 History of Anthropological Method and Theory
 Physical Anthropology
 Cultural Anthropology
 Ethnographic Methods
 Collapse of Civilizations
 Colonial Pennsylvania German Society
 Craft of History
 World War II
 History of Pennsylvania

The New Nation
 Colonial Latin America
 Civil War and Reconstruction
 Crusades
 History of Medicine

Academic Projects and Papers

“Black Gold: Molly Maguireism, Unionism, and the Anthracite Labor Wars, 1860-1880”, Masters’ Thesis, defended December 2016

“‘Pray for His Repentance’: The Catholic Church and the Molly Maguires, 1860 - 1878”, History Departmental Honors, Spring 2012

Archeology Field School - The Weisenthal Site, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Fall 2011
 Conducted shovel test pits. Exhumed artifacts through excavation. Cleaned and catalogued artifacts in a customized database. Analyzed artifacts from a site unit. Performed stratigraphic and depositional mapping.

“Weisenthal Site Report”, Millersville University Archeological Field School, Fall 2011 (Co-author)

“The Irish Immigrants of Philadelphia: Ethnic Bonds”, History of PA Term Paper, Fall 2010

“Lambda Chi Fraternity: Why College Males Join Fraternities, the Mystery of Ritual, and the Permanence of Brotherhood”, Ethnographic Methods Project, Fall 2009

“The Molly Maguires: Justice Well Deserved”, Craft of History Term Paper, Fall 2008

Professional Service

Graduate/Research Assistant, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, Aug 2014 - May 2015
 Co-operatively conducted extensive archival research to aid the Virginia Opera in a large project. Worked with department professors to research for a World War I 100th anniversary project. Assisted professors in classroom administration.

Teachers’ Assistant, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, Jan - May 2014
 Assisted Dr. Elizabeth Zanoni in teaching an undergraduate level American history course. Graded quizzes, exams, and papers.

Archivist’s Assistant, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, Aug 2013 - Jan 2014
 Worked with archivists to provide aid to students and patrons in their research. Processed new archival collections. Digitized historical documents.

Archeology Intern, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA Jun - Aug 2013
 Excavated the Market Square site in Colonial Williamsburg under Andy Edwards. Conducted wall profiles. Plotted geographic points.

Archeology Field Tech for A. D. Marble and Company, A. D. Marble and Company, Conshohocken, PA, Jul - Aug 2012
 Excavated a Phase III in Slabtown, Pa (P1334A). Archeological Field Tech.

Volunteer at Schaeffer Farm Archeology Site, Schaeffer Farmstead, Schaefferstown, Pa, Jun 2012
 Excavated shovel test pits. Conducted wall profiles of shovel test pits and various units. Cleaned and bagged artifacts.

Archeology Lab Supervisor, Millersville University Archeology Lab, Millersville, PA, Jan 2012 - May 2012

Independently reviewed field school students’ work for proper cataloguing. Analyzed artifacts and cross-

mended ceramics from Kast Ruin Site in Southampton Parish, Bermuda. Photographed artifacts from Kast Ruin Site.

Archeology Lab Assistant, Millersville University Archeology Lab, Millersville, PA, August 2011 - May 2012

Independently reviewed field school students' work for proper cataloguing. Analyzed artifacts and cross-mending ceramics from Kast Ruin Site in Southampton Parish, Bermuda.

Archivist Intern, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, PA, Summer 2010

Assisted Pennsylvania State archivists in helping patrons conducting research. Maintained the collection and PILOT database. Reviewed films from the State Department of Health and Welfare to be stored and preserved. Cleaned and mended muster out rolls from Pennsylvania regiments in the Civil War.

Archivist's Assistant, Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Millersville, PA, Oct 2010 - May 2012

Worked with archivists to provide aid to students and patrons in their research. Assisted archivists in the effort to digitize historical documents, including various documents important to the university, city of Millersville, and county of Lancaster. Scanned rare books.

Research Assistant, Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Millersville, Pa, Nov 2010- Sept 2011

Worked under Dr. Ronald Frankum of the history department at Millersville University. Aided in research on the Vietnam War. Organized research material. Edited portions of his new publication on the Vietnam War.

Organizations

President - Phi Alpha Theta, Historical Honors Society, Millersville University Chapter, Fall 2011 - Spring 2012

Treasurer - Phi Alpha Theta, Historical Honors Society, Millersville University Chapter, Fall 2010 - Spring 2011

Staff writer - The Snapper, Millersville University newspaper, 2009-2010

Fundraising Chairperson - Habitat for Humanity, 2009-2010

Honors and Awards

Harriet W. '69 and Burl Fisher Endowed Scholarship in History - Spring 2015

References

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