THE MYTHICAL QUALITIES
OF MOLLY MAGUIRE

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The Schuylkill anthracite region underwent dramatic changes over
the two decades following 1860. The area shared with the nation
the traumatic experience of Civil War. Locally, the Irish Catholics came
of political age demanding a share in power. Labor unrest led to the
formation of the miners' first industry-wide union and bitter strikes.
Within the anthracite industry the entrepreneurial order gave way to
corporate oligopoly.

The most renowned local event of the era, the Molly Maguire
episode, exemplified the issues of Civil War politics, ethnic power, trade
unionism, and corporate control. Indeed, the issues are so entangled
with the event that they provide its interpretative framework. But the
ambiguity surrounding the episode is such that it permits the construc-
tion of a plausible justification for any stance on the issues as well as the
guilt or innocence of the Molly Maguires.

The potential of the Molly Maguire episode to lend credence to any
interpretative position provides the subject of this paper. Specifically, it
will describe and evaluate the various historical arguments. It will then
examine the utilization of those arguments to justify and explain a
particular social reality. In so doing, it will advance the thesis that the
real significance of the Molly Maguire episode lies in its mythical
qualities.

The notion that a secret Irish society operated in Schuylkill County
first circulated during the 1850s. Benjamin Bannan, the Whig editor of the *Miners Journal* complained that the majority Democratic Party was controlled by an Irish society which was the American branch of the terroristic Molly Maguires.¹

Events during the Civil War seemingly confirmed Bannan's equation of Irish Democrats with a secret, violence oriented society. In July 1862 John Kehoe, an Irishman and Anti-war Democrat, spit on the American flag during a political meeting. A mine foreman, F. W. Langdon, denounced Kehoe's actions. Later Langdon was found murdered and popular suspicion blamed Kehoe and/or a clandestine society for the crime.²

Opposition to the draft produced violence which was also blamed upon a secret organization. In August, 1863 a crowd of miners stopped a Harrisburg bound train loaded with conscripts and permitted those unwilling to be drafted to return home. To avoid open conflict within the crucial mining district the Federal government accepted bogus affidavits that Cass Township had fulfilled its quota of inductees with voluntary enlistments. The fact that Cass Township was heavily populated by Irish Catholics and a Democratic stronghold did not escape the notice of those who believed that a secret society controlled both groups.³

A crime wave unrelated to the anti-draft agitation contributed to the belief that Schuylkill County was under a reign of terror. Between 1863 and 1867 no fewer than 57 murders were committed in the area. Law enforcement agencies were unable to cope with the outbreak of crime. Whenever a suspect was arrested he produced a number of alibis which forced his release. The ease with which the alibis were produced convinced the District Attorney, Franklin B. Gowen, of the existence of a criminally oriented power elite in Schuylkill County.⁴

Several years later Gowen renewed his charge that a secret society of criminals operated within the County. As President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company, Gowen was called before a legislative committee to defend the actions of his company during the strike of 1871. Rather than defend the railroad, Gowen attacked the labor union, the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, as being controlled by criminal elements.⁵

In 1873 Gowen received an opportunity to substantiate his charges. A Pinkerton detective checking the honesty of Reading Railroad conductors reported overhearing a conversation in which the name "Molly Maguire" was mentioned. When the information was relayed to Gowen, he hired the agency to investigate the gang. The agency assigned an Irish Catholic, James McParlan, to the case.
McParlan spent more than a year in the anthracite regions. During that time he infiltrated the Molly Maguires which he identified as an inner ring of the Irish fraternal organization known as the Ancient Order of Hibernians. McParlan’s investigation resulted in the execution of twenty men, including John Kehoe. The executions destroyed the infamous Molly Maguires; those who were not arrested supposedly fled the area.6

The executions, however, did not end the saga of Molly Maguire. The episode has been subject to examination and re-interpretation as historians debated its meaning. All writers agree that the Molly Maguires were Irish. But they disagree over the role ethnicity played in the episode.

Early writers agreed with Bannan that the Molly Maguires were a secret society promoting Irish Catholic control over the region. F. P. Dewees, for example, depicted the Molly Maguires as a group of power crazed cutthroats.7 For more than a decade the band terrorized Schuylkill County with impunity. They secured immunity from prosecution by corrupting both the legal and political systems. Whenever a Molly was arrested “the ever-convenient ‘alibi’ was ready, and a verdict of ‘not guilty’ was compelled.”8 Should the alibis fail to save the accused, he would be granted a timely pardon.

Pardons were easily obtainable for the Mollies had corrupted the political system. Controlling the Irish-Catholic vote, they easily won local offices from which they looted the public treasury. Their control of such a sizeable block of votes enabled them to bargain with both parties on the state level. During the gubernatorial election of 1875, for example, John Kehoe and other Mollies supported the Republican incumbent, John F. Hartranft, in exchange for cash and a promise of pardons.9

Dewees also argues that the Mollies extended their control over the country by gaining influence in the miners’ first union. Indeed,

The control and management of the mines, the manner of their working, the right to discharge hands, were passing away from the owners, and were fast resting in not the “Labor Union” proper, but under the direction of the Molly Maguires.10

The combination of terror, political corruption, and union power contributed to the demise of the entrepreneurial order:

The overgrown power of the “Labor Union,” and the burdensome taxation imposed upon real estate through the influence of the
“Molly” organization, as well as a general feeling of insecurity as to life and property, made the surrender of individual operators to the policy of great coal mining and transporting companies of comparatively easy accomplishment.

Dewees, however, was not suggesting that the great corporations were behind the episode. He carefully noted, “The ‘Molly Maguire’ is an Irishman, or the son of an Irishman, professing the Roman Catholic faith.” An anonymously written county history published in 1881 closely parallels Dewees. The Munsell work concluded:

The ruffianism which prevailed here during many years under the name of Molly Maguireism was transplanted here from Ireland; but it never could have acquired the fearful character which it came to possess here had it not found a condition favorable to its development.

James Ford Rhodes explained the Molly Maguires in the same terms. Noting that the Mollies did not fit the usual criminal stereotype, he concluded:

The Irishman, steeped in crime, remained true to the sexual purity of his race. The characteristic failings of the Celts, as the ancient Romans called them, were intensified in their Irish descendants by the seven centuries of misgovernment of Ireland by England. Subject to tyranny at home, the Irishman, when he came to America, too often translated liberty into license and so ingrained was his habit of looking upon government as an enemy, that when he became the ruler of cities and stole the public funds, he was, from his point of view, only despoiling the old adversary with his traditional hostility to government. It was easy for him to become a Molly Maguire while the English, Scotch, and Welsh immigrants shrank from such a society with horror.

Other historians have accepted the issue of ethnic power as the primary motivation behind the Molly Maguire episode. But they refuse to accept the episode as an illustration of the brutish criminality of the Irish Catholic culture. Rather, they interpret the episode as an effort to stigmatize a subordinate socio-economic class who were beginning to experience upward mobility. The best known of the “Irish were innocent victims of prejudice” work is Charles A. McCarthy’s The Great Molly Maguire Hoax. As the titles implies, McCarthy dismissed the charges against the so-called Molly Maguires as “plain bunk.”
The second major interpretative school places the Molly Maguire episode within the context of labor-management relations. J. Walter Coleman argued that the exploitation of the miners and employer hostility to unions created an atmosphere in which "the development of secret (labor) organizations was to be expected."\(^9\) The Molly Maguires represented such a secret labor union.

Although Coleman considers the Mollies to be politically corrupt, he was careful to case the election of 1875 as part of the labor-management battle. The election, he noted, could be interpreted as an attempt of Franklin B. Gowen to "establish himself as an increasingly powerful figure in the region."\(^20\) Workers could not permit the President of the Reading Corporation to become the region's dominant political figure. After examining both the political and economic ramifications of the episode Coleman concluded that the Molly Maguires represented an episode in "the class and racial struggles which form a large part of the American scene."\(^22\) Coleman accepted the guilt of the Molly Maguires, but tempered his decision by observing that "responsibility for many of the violent deeds committed as a phase of labor disturbances is not to be fixed by earthly judges."\(^22\)

Anthony Bimba exonerated the Molly Maguires.\(^23\) According to his Marxian concept the Molly Maguires were proletarian mine workers being exploited by the bourgeois. The depression of 1873 and the "Long Strike" of 1875 intensified the natural animosities between the two classes.\(^24\) In the midst of this class strife John Kehoe emerged as a "fearless leader of miners" who attempted to use the Ancient Order of Hibernians as the focal point for rallying the oppressed.\(^25\)

Kehoe, Bimba argues, was so important a labor leader that the mine owners realized their final exploitation of the miners depended upon his destruction. To accomplish this terrible deed the capitalists invented the term Molly Maguire as a scape goat for real and imaginary crimes. The arrest and execution of Kehoe and his comrades for these crimes was nothing more than the "legalized wholesale murder of labor leaders."\(^26\)

A third interpretative school argues that the corporation manipulated the episode to its own advantage. Marvin W. Schlegel, for example, assumes that the Mollies did in fact exist, did exert political pressure and was a terroristic organization which deserved its final fate. But that fate was conditioned by the needs of the subject of his biography, Franklin B. Gowen.\(^27\)

According to Schlegel, Gowen was ahead of his time. He brought needed capital to Schuylkill County to produce "more and cheaper coal" to the benefit of his company, the miners and society in general.\(^28\)
ruler of the Reading opposed "unrestricted economic warfare" and formed the "first American cartel" to establish order in the marketplace.\textsuperscript{29}

The Molly Maguires threatened Gowen's economic designs as well as his efforts to establish social order and stability in the anthracite region. Gowen's destruction of the Mollies was therefore justified. Schlegel did not approve of Gowen's specific methods and admitted that in prosecuting the Mollies he pushed justice to "its farthest limits and beyond,"\textsuperscript{30} But those efforts were justifiable for the men convicted were truly "bloodstained."\textsuperscript{31} Schlegel concedes that John Kehoe may have been innocent of the 1862 murder for which he was executed in 1878, but felt that Kehoe was certainly guilty of other capital crimes.

Clifton K. Yearley, Jr. accepted the notion that the Molly Maguire episode was only part of the larger drama of corporate take-over and Gowen's efforts to create a monopoly over the anthracite industry.\textsuperscript{32}

Gowen, according to Yearley, considered economic individualism as ruinous and embarked upon a policy to make the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company supreme in Schuylkill County. The miners' union, the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, presented a major obstacle to this grandiose scheme and, therefore, had to be eliminated.

Gowen spent over $4,000,000 in destroying the union during the Long Strike of 1875.\textsuperscript{33} Not content with economic victory, he "used Molly Maguire charges" to bring labor unionism into disrepute.\textsuperscript{34} The Molly Maguire, Yearley concluded, were only convenient scapegoats:

Despite the millions of dollars spend by Franklin B. Gowen, president of the Philadelphia and Reading, to create the image of the Molly Maguires which once was so readily accepted and to link the union with a tightly knit terrorist band, there is not a shred of evidence to support it.\textsuperscript{35}

The final interpretative school cast the Molly Maguire episode as a victory for individuals. Wayne A. Broehl, Jr. provides the foremost example of this school of thought. In a sense Broehl attempted a synthesis for he wrote that the episode entailed a labor-management squabble intensified by ethnic, religious, and personal tensions.\textsuperscript{36} But he concluded:

Given all the economic, ethnic, religious and political dimensions, the Molly Maguire saga was, finally, a personal story. Personnel success: Gowen's, McParlan's, Pinkerton's. Personal failures: Siney's, Kehoe's, and others. Personal virtues: weaknesses: drink-
ing, hating, informing, killing. The deepest of human passions were involved here: these passions finally determined the story.\textsuperscript{37}

After dismissing the charges of Irish criminality, Charles McCarthy depicts the episode as one of personality. To McCarthy the Molly Maguires was nothing more than a part of Gowen’s “insane desire to murder Kehoe.”\textsuperscript{38}

Gowen wanted to destroy Kehoe because he had taken on a heroic image to his fellow countrymen. More importantly, Kehoe wielded considerable political influence and fought Gowen’s attempts to dominate both the county and the state. Kehoe, for example, opposed Gowen’s candidate, Cyrus Pershing, for President Judge of Schuylkill County. In 1875, Kehoe again opposed Pershing’s bid for governor and threw his support behind John Hartranft.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, McCarthy argues that Hartranft would have been defeated had it not been for Kehoe’s support.\textsuperscript{40} His political ambitions frustrated a second time, Gowen decided “to get” Kehoe.

McCarthy’s summaries of Kehoe and Gowen succinctly describe his theories. He describes Kehoe as:

a soft spoken man of law and order; highly honor, respected and loved by all who knew him, John J. Kehoe died with a prayer on his lips, an ave for friends and persecutors alike. He was murdered to satisfy the jealous whim of one man. Kehoe is revered in death for his valorous stand against his traducers and for his many kind deeds.\textsuperscript{41}

Gowen, however, is portrayed as:

The miserable Gowen, a disciple of the devil and Kehoe’s chief assassin, hated and despised by everybody, even his own family, decided his personal fate when his crazed mind caused him to raise his bloodstained hand and to shoot himself to death, a suicide.\textsuperscript{42}

Each of the schools of thought concerning the Molly Maguire episode falters at a critical point upon examination. The thesis that the Molly Maguires simply verified the grim, stupid, criminality of the Irish Catholics must be dismissed as an example of bigotry.

The view of the Molly Maguire episode as an outgrowth of labor protest does deserve comment if only to demonstrate its incredulity. It would be absurd to argue that violence was unknown in Schuylkill County between 1863 and 1875 or that the instances of violence did not increase during the Long Strike of ’75. But it is equally foolhardy to suggest that the violence represented a class war. Franklin B. Gowen’s
published list of outrages accompanying the strike is, at best, a collection of trivia reflecting the venting of personal frustrations. It contains, for example, 22 instances of unfulfilled threats against scabs; 10 incidents of loaded coal cars either being dumped or set rolling; 4 cases of passing trains being stoned; and 7 small fires of suspicious origin.\(^4\) Even the murders ascribed to the Molly Maguires were supposedly motivated by personal grudges rather than a plan to overthrow capital. There were few occasions of mob action or pitched battles between union forces and the police or militia during the strike. In short, Schuylkill was not the Harlan County of the 1870's.

The Workingmen's Benevolent Association denounced the individual recourse to violence.\(^4\) Nor was the condemnation of violence an official posture behind which the union encouraged illegal acts. Area civic leaders applauded the efforts of the W.B.A. to restrain its members.\(^4\) Even James McParlan attributed the increased violence in 1875 to the decline of the union when he reported to his superior, "Now you can see yourself how this is, and what I predicted—at the time of the suspension—that if the Union would fail there would be rough times." "There was very little killing whilst Union stood, but now it is quite the reverse."\(^4\)\(^6\)

Superficially, the early efforts to establish a linkage between the Molly Maguires and the W.B.A. supports the perception that the episode was an anti-union plot. But why would Gowen launch a conspiracy to destroy a union which appeared to be on the verge of collapse?

When Gowen hired the Pinkertons to investigate the Molly Maguires in 1873 the union had been seriously weakened by internal discord. For two consecutive years it gladly accepted offers to extend a rather poor contract with the mine operators. In the Scranton area only 200 men could be mustered for the union's annual parade and the Wilkes-Barre district was unable to hold a parade. In Schuylkill County the miners talked about a strike for higher prices, but the tension between them and their laborers was so great that the miners felt they would not be supported if they struck.\(^4\)\(^7\)

Gowen could not have anticipated in 1873 that the weakened union would mount a troublesome strike during the following year in Schuylkill County. After the futile strike of 1874, Gowen did decide to crush the W.B.A. But he did so in the open economic war of the Long Strike.\(^4\)\(^8\)

It is quite possible, of course, that Gowen accompanied his preparations for economic warfare with an intrigue to frame labor leaders for
murder. Three other Pinkerton detectives, William McCowan, P. M. Cummings, and "W.R.H.", entered the coal fields after November, 1874 and infiltrated the union. Two of the detectives, Cummings and McCowan, succeeded in having themselves elected officers in their local branches. Certainly these men were in a better position to manufacture the necessary evidence to frame labor leaders than McParlan who operated outside the union.

Yet, it was McParlan who broke the case and the men arrested as a result of his investigation were unlikely candidates for labor frame-up. Not one was a ranking officer of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association! John Kehoe may have been gifted with "a special insight into the miner's struggle," but he exercised it in his saloon, not in the mines or at the bargaining table. It would seem reasonable to assume that a conspiracy to destroy the union would have included its officers in the frame-up. It would have been simply more convincing to demonstrate that an inner circle of criminals directed the W.B.A., the labor union, instead of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an Irish fraternal society, if one wished to discredit organized labor!

The perception of the Molly Maguire episode as a personal vendetta also falters on the problem of the selection of the victim. According to this view Kehoe was marked for execution because he frustrated Gowen's attempt to seize political control of Schuylkill County. As a tavern keeper, Kehoe was in a position to build a political following; he was High Constable of Girardville. Moreover, as County Delegate for the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Kehoe had ample opportunity to extend his political influence beyond the confines of his home village. But at the county level Kehoe was only a secondary leader; Bernard Reilly and John W. Ryon were the undisputed political bosses of the Irish-Catholics in Schuylkill County during the period.

The political argument assumes that Kehoe helped to reelect Republican John Hartranft to the governor's chair in 1875. He allegedly managed this by swinging normally Democratic Irish Catholics to vote for Hartranft instead of Cyrus Pershing, his Democratic rival. The fact that Pershing was then President Judge of Schuylkill County and later presided over Kehoe's murder trial has made the episode legendary.

A look at the actual vote in the county tends to bring some questioning of these assumptions. For example, Pershing carried the county by 1,338 votes! This could hardly constitute a "sell-out" since some other Democrats did not fare as well county wide. The Democrats swept all the races on the 1875 ballot in Schuylkill County. The other victory margins were 1296, 2887, 1453, 223, 283, 338, 1028.
Kehoe's political power should have been most evident in the areas near Girardville where his tavern was located. The voting districts closest to this area (which had heavy Irish Catholic populations) would have been Shenandoah, Gilberton and West Mahanoy Township. The results in these areas indicate that the Democratic vote was held down only slightly.

**TABLE 1**

**Pershing-Hartranft Race in Areas Near Girardville (1875)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Pershing—Hartranft</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girardville</td>
<td>175 (46.2%) 203 (53.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilberton</td>
<td>205 (62.5%) 123 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenandoah</td>
<td>473 (56.7%) 361 (43.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Mahanoy Twp.</td>
<td>91 (43.1%) 120 (56.9%)</td>
</tr>
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It must however be noted that Pershing carried two of these four districts alleged to have been Molly and Kehoe baliwicks. Judge Pershing also ran about as well as the rest of his ticket in all of these voting precincts. There simply was no substantial evidence of ticket splitting to injure him specifically. Hartranft in fact received fewer votes than all but one other Republican candidate in Kehoe's home town of Girardville! He tallied 203 votes in Girardville. The other Republicans garnered totals of 245, 227, 241, 231, 223, 260 and 186.

The available evidence appears to suggest that Kehoe and/or the Molly Maguires did cost the Democrats (not specifically Pershing) some support in "north of the mountain" voting districts of Schuylkill County. However, these defections were not fatal to the party in Schuylkill County alone. It is therefore illogical to assume Kehoe "won reelection" for John F. Hartranft statewide. Perhaps this is why Governor Hartranft "turned his back" on Kehoe when a pardon was sought in 1878.

It has been suggested, however, that the selection of Kehoe was symbolic—that as a successful Irishman, Kehoe would provide a convenient example to convince the Irish to be content with their proper station in life. Kehoe was a tavern owner, usually the first and precarious step into the middle class in the anthracite regions. But he could hardly be considered a representative of the upwardly mobile Irish. The Irish community in Schuylkill County numbered one Congressman, James A. Reilly, and a nationally renowned labor leader, John Siney, as well as several prosperous merchants and professionals.
among its membership. In other words, there were larger Irish fish than John Kehoe to fry in Schuylkill County if one wanted to stigmatize the ethnic group with a frame-up. The theory that the Molly Maguires were innocent victims of a conspiracy cannot convincingly answer the question, "Why Kehoe?"

It should not be surprising that the Molly Maguire episode lent itself to disagreement. It is, at best, ambiguous. Indeed, the only statements that can be made about the episode with any certainty are:

1. Numerous murders were perpetrated in Schuylkill County between 1861 and 1875.
2. The Philadelphia and Reading Companies financed a private investigation into a reputed secret criminal society.
3. As a result of that investigation twenty men were executed for allegedly committing some of those murders.

Every other statement about the episode is tainted with suspicion. It is impossible to conclusively determine whether McParlan’s role was either that of an agent provocateur or that of a passive collector of information. The number of murders dramatically increased after he entered the coal fields. However, his entrance coincided with a major institutional breakdown which removed restraints from individuals while increasing their frustrations. Even if the role of agent provocateur is assumed, it cannot be established whether McParlan was acting on orders as part of a conspiracy or merely advancing his own ambitions.⁵⁹

Neither the guilt nor the innocence of the indicted men can be irrevocably demonstrated. The validity of both McParlan’s and his collaborators testimony is suspect. McParlan’s later behavior in the Haywood case undermines his credence in the Molly Maguire episode.⁶⁰ The personal characteristics and the positions of his collaborators weaken their testimony. A self-confessed perjurer and others seeking immunity are hardly creditable witnesses when placed in the context of the Haywood case.

Conversely, there is no concrete evidence supporting the innocence of the reputed Mollies. It cannot be assumed, for example, that McParlan used the same tactics in his investigation of the Molly Maguires that he employed in the Haywood case. All of the convicted proclaimed their innocence, but rarely does one build a defense by admitting guilt. Successful perjury trials combined with the well established tendency to easily procure “iron clad alibis” in Schuylkill County criminal cases to weaken the testimony of the defense witnesses.⁶¹

The aurora of supposition surrounding the Molly Maguire episode
permits the assignment of motives and roles according to a predetermined scheme. By drawing logical inferences from circumstantial evidence and ignoring potentially embarrassing questions, it is possible to build a myth to explain or justify a particular social reality.

The myth of Molly Maguire verified a contemporary view of Irish-Catholics. But, more importantly, the image of Molly Maguire as an outgrowth of foreign ignorance was transferable to other ethnic groups. Subsequent waves of Eastern and Southern European immigrants were greeted with the hostility and contempt once reserved for the Irish. The regional memory of Molly Maguire gave credence to the charges of criminality and political corruption levied against the new immigrants. A "what happened once, could easily happen again" mentality underscored the acceptance of rumors of black hand societies and ethnic groups selling their votes as a bloc to the highest bidder.

The myth of Molly Maguire as an attempt to get the Irish served the needs of that ethnic group in several ways. By recounting the exploitation of the Irish mine workers by absentee landlords dominated by the Philadelphia and Reading—a corporation controlled by the English banking house of McCalmont Brothers and administered by an Irish Protestant—the myth provided a continuation of the Irish national experience and thereby reaffirmed ethnic identity while placing the realities of industrialization within an understandable context. The perception of the episode as a "putting down" of the Irish served as an explanation as why they, as a group, enjoyed a lower upward mobility rate than other ethnic groups in the region. Finally, the myth freed successful Irish-Catholics from any stigma which they may have felt the episode attached to them.

The myth that Molly Maguire was the enforcer for the Working-men's Benevolent Association confirmed a long held suspicion that a permanent working class presented a danger to the Republic. From this perception the episode demonstrated how easily a gang of cutthroats or a demagogue could seize control of the workers. The myth simultaneously rendered the ensuing class war understandable while justifying the employment of violence against strikers. The Pennsylvania State Legislature, for example, condoned the shooting of strikers in Scranton during the 1877 strike by noting "many of the Molly Maguires, driven out of Schuylkill County... gathered in and about that city."

The same myth justified the corporation's attack upon the social and political autonomy of the community. The Molly Maguires reputedly overawed local authority by violence, political corruption, and perjured testimony. Only the corporation, the Philadelphia and Reading, had the resources to break their sinister grip. By casting the corporation as the
champion of law and order and the community as prone to corruption, the myth provided a rationale for the corporate take-over.67

But the myth not only served the interests of capital; it provided labor with a creditable method of protest. Absenteeism and sabotage were not readily available instruments of protest to the mine worker. The anthracite industry rarely worked more than half a year. Miners owned their own tools and other forms of sabotage carried great personal risks. A coffin notice, however, could, thanks to Molly Maguire, strike fear in the heart of any foreman or superintendent and therefore permitted the individual mine worker to protest in a meaningful manner. The fear generated by a coffin notice also could be employed to intimidate scabs.68

The myth of Molly Maguire as an innocent victim of an antilabor conspiracy provided organized labor with a set of martyrs while freeing it from any stigma that the episode may have attached to trade unionism. But it also served the needs of an educated elite. For progressive historians the myth substantiated suspicions about the corporation. Marxists also found in it a documentation for their interpretation of American labor history.

The vagueness of many “facts” surrounding the Molly Maguire period will forever permit the era great “historical elasticity.” Many schools of thought can use “Molly Maguire” to justify their ideological positions or validify a particular belief. The greatest benefit of this situation may be the continuing interest in an episode which might have otherwise passed into historical oblivion.

NOTES
7. Dewees op. cit.
8. Ibid., 29.
9. Ibid., 225–226.
10. Ibid., 34.
11. Ibid., 34–35.
12. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 98.
18. Ibid., 150.
20. Ibid., 68.
21. Ibid., 175.
22. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 57.
25. Ibid., 110.
26. Ibid., 123.
28. Ibid., 289.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 290.
31. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 210–211.
34. Ibid., 186.
35. Ibid., 185.
36. Broehl op. cit.
37. Ibid., 362.
38. McCarthy op. cit.
39. Ibid., 149.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 151.
42. Ibid.
44. Shamokin Herald, April 5, 1875, 2.
45. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary General, Report of the Committee on the Judiciary General of the Senate of Pennsylvania in Relation to the Coal Difficulties with Accompanying Testimony, Legislative Documents, 1871.
46. Quoted by Broehl, 234.
47. Miners' Journal (Pottsville), January 20, 1873. Shamokin Herald, January 16, 1873,
3. *Shenandoah Herald*, December 5, 1872, 2; January 16, 1873, 2; May 29, 1873, 2. *Record of the Times* (Wilkes-Barre), August 6, 1873.

48. Committee on the Judiciary General, 1087.

49. Benjamin Franklin to Franklin B. Gowen, November 25, 1874, Molly Maguire MSS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.


51. Broehl, 176.


53. Kehoe never attained an office above that of “High Constable” of Girardville, a small mining town. His bid for a county-wide nomination was rejected by the Schuylkill County Democratic Party’s 1872 convention. See the *Pottsville Miners’ Journal*, August 8, 1872. Kehoe’s grandson, John McDonald, served in the Pennsylvania Legislature in the 1950’s, and his great-grandson, Joe Wayne, is currently the Democratic county chairman of Schuylkill County. The political successes of his descendants would help his legend attain even greater posthumous proportions.

54. Voting returns were gathered from the *Shenandoah Herald* and/or the *Pottsville Miners’ Journal*. The editions of November, 1875 were the most helpful.

55. *Shenandoah Herald*, November 5, 1875.

56. Pershing did do better in Irish districts outside the Girardville area. For example, North Cass Township, the scene of many alleged Molly Maguire incidents, gave him a 116 to 14 vote victory (89.2% to 10.8%).

57. The *Shenandoah Herald* felt that the county Democratic Party organization “slighted” the Girardville area. This attitude could not have helped Pershing and, perhaps better explains his defeat in the area. See the *Shenandoah Herald*, September 15, 1875.

58. Mine workers usually entered the middle class as either tavern owners or grocers.

59. It is interesting to note that the Pinkerton Agency did not suppress evidence of its advocacy of vigilantism prior to the Wiggans Patch massacre. See Broehl, 245-248.

60. McParlan “cracked” the murder of Frank Steunenberg by having Harry Orchard testify that he was part of an inner circle of murderers in the Western Federation of Miners headed by William Haywood.

61. See Dewees, 344–345; Broehl, 106.

62. Most issues of the local papers carried derogatory articles concerning the new immigrants between 1880 and 1900.


64. Impressions from the responses of people of Irish-Catholic background in our research.


68. Coffin notes circulated during the 1900 strike.