
The 'Deserted Parthenon': Class, Culture and the Carnegie Library of Homestead, 1898–1937

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"Like a deserted parthenon . . . so does the library stand deserted in the midst of more than 50,000 souls."

The Homestead Messenger, 6 May 1929

In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to the world outside the workplace in single industry communities. Their findings suggest a number of possibilities for reanalyzing working class attitudes and behavior in what is too often characterized as the feudal state of Industrial America. Consumerism, welfare capitalism and a host of cultural trends may have strengthened the economic controls of industrial capitalism. Yet within this more richly textured workers' world, there is often room for workers to adapt and respond to the prescribed industrial order and create, in the words of John Bodnar, "lives of their own."¹

In the historiography of Western Pennsylvania, the steel industry's alluring legacy of labor struggle has overshadowed examinations of the cultural life within steel towns. Monographs on strikes, union organizing and other shopfloor issues have extended arguments within labor history, but they have also tended to define and organize the larger social history of steel making communities around workplace events.² After the demise of iron and steel craft unions in the 1890s, for instance, Carnegie Steel and later U.S. Steel were presumed to enjoy unmitigated control in mill towns like Homestead, Braddock and Duquesne. Company controlled politics and company backed cultural institutions extended the industry's power outside the plant gates and reinforced iron-fisted management practices within U.S. Steel's "open shops" after 1900. Unions would not come until the late 1930s.³

No institution better represents the spirit of this company town motif during steel's "nonunion" years than the Carnegie Library.⁴ Although Andrew Carnegie would eventually donate close to thirty libraries to Pennsylvania communities, he reserved his first and most extensive "town hall" libraries for towns like Homestead where Carnegie Steel was the major employer. Following its dedication in 1898, the Carnegie Library of Homestead pursued a cultural course that catered to Homestead's industrial elite. In time, though, the library and its director, William F. Stevens, refocused the institution and created programs to supplant the popularity of saloons and streetcorners and provide "moral uplift." With few exceptions, Homestead's workers remained indifferent



to the library's structured approach to education and recreation. Instead, workers selectively used the library's facilities as they engaged in more informal leisure in their own neighborhoods. This article, then, will examine the creation and changing social agenda of the Carnegie Library of Homestead from 1898 to 1937. It will then evaluate the nature of workers' responses to the library's programs and the institution's intended role in their community.

DEDICATION: THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY AND THE LABOR CAPITAL CONTEXT OF THE 1890s

Andrew Carnegie began to build his steel empire in Homestead in 1883, the year he assumed ownership of the ailing Pittsburgh Bessemer Steel Company. For the next ten years, Carnegie and his steel managers worked feverishly to modernize the steel making process, cut costs and, ultimately, destroy the power of Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, the craft union that represented the plant's most skilled workers. Union men responded by negotiating for equitable contracts and, when necessary, confronting corporate power head on. One of the last and most widely publicized showdowns occurred in Homestead during the summer of 1892. After steelworkers refused to submit to Carnegie's new terms, which included the notorious "sliding scale," some 800 members of the Amalgamated were locked out of the plant. Another 2,000 nonunion steelworkers walked out in sympathy. The opening weeks of the now famous labor-capital battle were tenuous. After Henry Clay Frick dispatched some 300 Pinkerton detectives to "take the town," public opinion favored Homestead's steelworkers. In time, though, the union collapsed under the weight of exhausted rations, public criticism, allegations that its leadership had been infiltrated by anarchists, and the watchful presence of 8,000 national guardsmen encamped on a nearby hill.⁵

To complement his victory over the Amalgamated, Carnegie accelerated the industrial transformation of Homestead. The physical expansion of the Homestead Steel Works during the 1890s altered nearly everything that once was, including the borough's settlement patterns. Before 1890, for example, most of Homestead's population gravitated toward Lower Homestead or "the Ward," a six block area located between the river and the railroad tracks. For early steelworkers, this flat land next to the mill made the most sensible site for homes. With transportation limited, the Ward's level terrain and proximity to Carnegie Steel were preferable to the more distant, steep terrain of the hilltops above Eighth Avenue, the town's commercial district. Most residents expressed little desire, either, for residential segregation. Homestead was small and decentral-ized, its nascent steel and glass industries attracting a largely homogeneous skilled workforce of native born Americans and "older" immigrants from northern and western Europe.⁶

By the turn of the century, the reorganization and growth of Carnegie Steel



Lower Homestead as seen from the High Level Bridge, 1941.

With few exceptions, the sprawling mills of the Homestead Steel Works dominated river front property within the borough. As was true of other mill towns in the Pittsburgh district, Homestead's poorest housing clustered nearest the mills; middle class housing was more common on the Hilltops. Hence, relative affluence and social position was often measured by one's distance from the mills.

and the flood tide of new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe profoundly changed Homestead's social character. Employment opportunities that interested earlier immigrants attracted new ones; most of these new immigrants, derisively referred to as "hunkies," were forced by virtue of poverty and kinship ties to settle in the increasingly overcrowded districts nearest the smoke belching mills. Meanwhile, those who could afford it left Lower Homestead, pulled by the space, cleanliness and homogeneity of the Hilltops and pushed by hordes of "furriners." Other mill towns went through similar residential and demographic shifts. Older residential neighborhoods, often in the "flats," were abandoned to new immigrants; more affluent, generally Protestant families clamored for a home on the Hilltops. Topography and residence revealed much about social hierarchies after 1900.⁷

Other evidence underlined Homestead's split social personality. Boarding houses and immigrant courts crowded the narrow streets of the Ward; single family dwellings separated by well tended lawns were more common on the Hilltops. Skilled machinists, prosperous Eighth Avenue businessmen, and middle class professionals claimed real estate above the main street; unskilled and semi-skilled employees of Carnegie Steel dominated the area below the tracks.

By 1910, the industrial proletariat of the Ward was also emphatically Eastern European. Indeed, as older immigrants and Protestant skilled workers left, Slavic immigrants filled the void. After the Ward's last white Protestant congregation headed for the hills in 1914, a Russian Orthodox church reclaimed its building.⁸

At the same time, corporate elites and influence seeped into nearly every aspect of everyday life. Steel officials sat on the board of the local bank, the local borough council and the local real estate offices. Company-hired Coal and Iron Police patrolled both the mills and the borough's neighborhoods. Through occasional and well timed philanthropy, steel also contributed to the cultural life of Homestead, assisting struggling congregations in the construction of churches and parks. In 1901, Carnegie Steel even hatched a new political entity, incorporated as the borough of Munhall, on land held by the company's real estate arm since the big strike. Homestead's future, in short, was inextricably tied to the fortunes of the steel industry. Nearly everyone, from skilled steelworkers, to small businessmen, to parish priest, marched to its industrial beat.⁹

Within this context, the Carnegie Library formed the undisputed cultural centerpiece of Homestead. Ground was officially broken in 1896, but the library was anticipated years earlier, even before the Homestead strike. During the 1889 dedication ceremonies for the first Carnegie Library in Braddock, Carnegie had let on that he was "only too anxious" to repeat the performance across the river in Homestead. To borough residents, the promise would hardly have been regarded as a good omen. Even as early as 1888, it seemed clear that Carnegie's generosity was closely connected to victories over organized labor. The year before Carnegie underwrote the Braddock Library, managers of his Edgar Thomson Works waged a battle against the town's skilled steelworkers. After some struggle, Braddock steelworkers capitulated, accepted Carnegie's sliding scale of wages, and entered into a thoroughly binding "partnership." At the time of the Braddock dedication, Homestead's steelworkers had not accepted the same terms and insisted on working through old union contracts. Carnegie was therefore willing to delay the gift, reasoning that "our works at Homestead are not to us as our works at Edgar Thomson. Our men there are not partners." By 1892, "partnership" became an offer that Homestead steelworkers could no longer refuse. On August 1, 1898, Carnegie jubilantly bestowed his second library to the people of Homestead.¹⁰

Despite these extenuating circumstances, Carnegie's gift to Homestead was an exceedingly elaborate gesture. Through the auspices of the Carnegie Land Company, Carnegie reserved prime Hilltop real estate on the eastern boundary of the borough, only a few blocks above the Homestead Works. The library itself occupied an entire city block. On all four sides, company controlled real estate insulated the library from possible encroachment of either mill or working class housing from Homestead or Munhall. Above the library, and to the east, the grounds were surrounded by a string of superintendents' mansions, the largest

and the first of which was built in 1896. To the north, directly below, a handsomely manicured park shielded the library from the congestion and noise of Eighth Avenue, Homestead's busy commercial street, and southernmost boundary of the mill.¹¹

A steep set of steps ran from the northern edge of the library's property to the structure's main entrance. The dimensions of the three storied cultural fortress, built in Pompein brick and designed in French Renaissance style, measured 220 by 132 feet. A 20,000 volume library, flanked by two large reading rooms, occupied part of the first floor and anchored the center of the structure. The western wing contained a billiard hall and several club rooms. A 1,000 seat auditorium and music hall occupied the eastern wing. The "physical department" took up most of the remaining room. It included a 36' by 68' swimming pool, locker rooms and showers, four bowling alleys and, on the second floor, a basketball court, an exercise room and a running track. Each floor was, per Carnegie's wishes, lavishly adorned with marble, oak, and ivory.¹²

Courtesy of William J. Gaughan



Carnegie Library of Homestead, c. 1900.

A well manicured park insulated Homestead's library, built on Carnegie Steel property in neighboring Munhall, from the intrusion of working class housing and the smoke belching mills below. Social workers later complained that the library's physical isolation limited access to workers and immigrants who lived in the crowded wards of Lower Homestead.

The elaborate physical design, though, was merely intended to facilitate Carnegie's master plan of moral uplift. Far from being content with mere philanthropy, Carnegie intended his library to add coherence to the unstructured world of working class leisure outside the factory gates. This "morality of self improvement" informed much of the programming that would be sponsored by the library in years to come. As in Braddock, Carnegie proposed a "framework" for the most efficient use of the library—a sort of effortless, cultural improvement plan. When used to full capacity, and under proper moral guidance, the library provided for the "moral, physical, and social well being of the working man."¹³

Carnegie used the dedication ceremony during the fall of 1898 to outline his three tiered program for the new library:

The Library, filled with the most precious legacy the past can bequeath to the present—a collection of good books. To educate the people of this community by supplying readable literature to the masses of the people, making provision for the student, encouraging societies formed for self culture, supplementing the work of the public schools.

The Club: How a man spends his time at work may be taken for granted, but how he spends his hours of recreation is really the key of [sic] his progress in all the virtues. To provide a place where one may occupy his time in systematic physical development, in amateur athletics, in healthful games and profitable intercourse.

Music Hall: Here you will have your entertainments and meetings for educational and philanthropic purposes. To contribute toward the ethical and moral spirit of the community by providing a meeting place for free musicals and entertainments, a suitable hall for public gatherings.

The best return to the giver is to make a proper and steady use of all which is sought here to place within their reach.¹⁴

Without incriminating himself in the matter, Carnegie also extended the library as a gesture of good will. "May it indeed be between capital and labor," Carnegie noted at one point in his speech, "an emblem of peace, reconciliation, mental confidence, harmony and union." John Bell, a worker whom Carnegie had chosen to represent the interests of labor, reiterated the point when he received the building on behalf of "one working man to thousands of others." Burgess Reid Kennedy followed with more eloquent support. The library was not only "a temple of education and knowledge" but also "another example that capital was engaged in dividing with their workmen the fruits of their labor." To reinforce the point, Carnegie reminded workers that Homestead's new "working-man's club" was not constructed at the expense of their wages ("our firm paid the highest earnings ever paid to labor").¹⁵

Carnegie's remarks received plaudits from Homestead's professional community and local Pittsburgh newspapers. Labor advocates, though, spoke harshly of what one historian would later call the mill town's "trojan horse." Eugene Debs, the Socialist candidate for President, urged workers not to accept "gifts from our slain comrades." Other noted that they would "sooner enter a building built with the dirty silver . . . received for betraying Christ than enter a Carnegie Library." Trade union journals joined in the denouncement and although no formal boycotts seemed to have been organized, the politicized rank and file expressed similar sentiments.¹⁶

The most consciously political workers, then, decried the library as a shameless bribe. But that was only part of the story. Others who could look past Carnegie's role in the strike regarded the library as an impractical institution that was hardly set up around workers' schedules. Even ten years after the dedication, and almost twenty years after the great strike, a good many workers had not followed the exhortation of John Bell or Reid Kennedy to accept the library as a good will gift between capital and labor. One Homestead steelworker noted the irony and concluded that although Carnegie claimed to build libraries for the "workingman," complained "what good are libraries to me, working practically eighteen hours a day?"¹⁷

A FORTRESS ON THE HILLTOPS: THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF HOMESTEAD

The early history of the Homestead Library Athletic Club (HLAC) suggests the upper-class orientation that characterized the first years of the library. During the late 1890s, the HLAC's championship football team earned a national reputation, largely through the efforts of A.C. Dinkey and W.E. Corey, general superintendents at the Homestead Steel Works. Dinkey and Corey used their own financial resources to recruit and extend stipends to young Ivy League grads willing to play on the circuit. A 24-year-old alumnus of Brown University served as captain of the 1900 championship team. Recent graduates of Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University filled out the roster. The club's baseball team was organized along similar lines, and for similar purposes. There were no steelworkers on either team.¹⁸

In other respects, too, the library comfortably served as country club to Homestead elites. The ornately furnished music hall, replete with the characteristic Carnegie pipe organ, offered a range of musical programs. Its most highly touted event, the "Grand Eisteddfod" sponsored by the Music and Literary Society of Homestead, was tailored almost exclusively to the tastes of the more affluent Methodist residents of upper Homestead. Andrew Carnegie, Charles Schwab, and other prominent members of Homestead's corporate elite underwrote the cost of the event, intended as a musical and literary celebration of Welsh literary and cultural traditions. Those same patrons awarded prizes for the

best compositions and musical scores submitted by contestants. At the first Eistedfodd in 1898, organizers awarded top prize in the poetry contest to John Bevan, of Carnegie, Pa., for his poem "The Carnegie Library and Its Donor."¹⁹

This section of the complex, intended to provide for the "moral and ethical nature of the community," understandably floundered among foreign born and working class audiences. Of the 32,000 who were reported to have attended the free organ recitals over the course of a single year, only 5,000 were counted as foreign born—at the same time that immigrants represented close to half the town's population. Lectures had an even more limited impact. Steelworkers admitted that "the library and lecture course are fine things for businessmen . . . but they are absolutely worthless, so far as the mill men are concerned." A few years later, the free lecture series was discontinued altogether.²⁰

Early programs conducted in the gymnasium of the Carnegie Library Club likewise attracted a narrow audience. Although the athletic department offered sessions for wrestling and basketball, three evenings each week were reserved for men's and women's sabre and foil fencing. The club geared another set of classes solely toward superintendents of the Homestead Steel Works. The library's director reinforced the point when he declared that the club is "not operated like a public institution, but is a private club, where there are strong social proclivities and a moral influence that is safe, sane and effective." Membership rates ensured this more "private" orientation. An adult membership, entitling holders to "all privileges of the club and education department," cost four dollars in 1908.²¹

Study and literary clubs intended to provide for "self culture" and "profitable intercourse" registered high marks only among the most educated. Ironically, Carnegie had envisioned this function of the library as the most important vehicle for cultivating the "mental" character of the working man. With a few exceptions, the clubs centered discussions around esoteric topics that were hardly accessible or of much interest to the average Homestead resident. In 1908, the library housed 25 organizations with a total membership of 750; the number of clubs continued to grow during the next two decades. Members were generally drawn from Homestead's professional, business and managerial class. Out of the approximately 1,000 members in 1910, the library's head administrator estimated that 100 "might be classed as working men." Even that figure seemed inflated.²²

The library's first permanent club, the Women's Club, typified the sorts of organizations that chose to meet in the library. Its 35 regular members included wives of local Protestant clergy, mill superintendents, and prominent Eighth Avenue businessmen, along with older settler families. Among its activities, the Women's Club dabbled in neighborhood-based philanthropy. In 1900, the club reported that it had taken over supervision of a local playground and donated a water fountain along Eighth Avenue. The Outlook Club, another early study

association, presented lectures on a wide range of literary and political subjects, but most of interest only to its largely managerial audience. Lectures on English poet Robert Browning and "Everyday Psychology" were supplemented by other discourse on "Gain as an Incentive to Progress" and "the Spirit of Speculation."²³

All of this becomes more understandable when one considers the structure of the library and the composition of its board of directors. The general superintendent of the Homestead Steel Works customarily served as director. Other board members were drawn from the town's professional, political and religious elite. They were typically white, male and Protestant. The one and only exception to this general rule was Rev. J.J. Bullion, the pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Roman Catholic Church. Bullion's appointment, however, owed much to his friendship with Charles Schwab, a parishioner (and influential patron) of St. Mary's, general superintendent of the Homestead Steel Works from 1893 to 1899, and well regarded philanthropist in his own right. Reverend Benjamin Wolf, pastor of the Homestead Methodist Episcopal Church, and zealous temperance advocate, more than balanced Bullion's token Catholic representation.²⁴

The evolving cultural tradition of the library was perhaps best represented by the career of William F. Stevens. As head librarian and superintendent from 1902 to 1942, Stevens administered all four departments of the Carnegie Library: education, music hall, physical culture, and the library itself. Like the board of directors which had appointed him, Stevens was closely aligned to the middle class Protestant world of Homestead's Hilltops. Stevens lived with his wife and children in a comfortable house on Eleventh Avenue, belonged to the Presbyterian Church of Homestead, and was cofounder of the Outlook club. Most importantly, though, Stevens regarded himself as the cultural protege of Andrew Carnegie. In both promotion and program, Stevens invoked the spirit of his library's founder, echoed Carnegie's belief in "self improvement," and wholeheartedly subscribed to Aristotle's prescriptions for human development. (The library's official logo was inscribed with "mentality, morality, vitality and sociality.") Within this rubric, social control and assimilation were givens.²⁵

Fortunately for historians, Stevens regarded himself as a strict empiricist. "Theory can only formulate a policy," Stevens wrote at one point, "fact, or experience, must prove it." Even as early as 1905, library evaluation was determined by actual use, not self congratulatory abstractions. Statistics published in annual reports revealed the institution's "effectiveness" by department. A typical report filed in 1909 included data on attendance for nearly every program offered over a twelve month period, as well as total book circulation. Stevens evaluated the athletic department through annual club membership and the use of individual facilities, including the number of baths taken over a twelve month period. Likewise, education department programs were assessed by the



William F. Stevens.

As library superintendent from 1901 to 1941, William F. Stevens was a stoic crusader for the library's progressive mission. Stevens wholly subscribed to Andrew Carnegie's morality of self improvement and, after 1910, developed programs that he hoped would attract workers and immigrants to the library.

number of students enrolled per class and according to subject. Stevens calculated average attendance at the music hall by dividing annual attendance figures by the total number of events.²⁶

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Stevens' institution was subject to outside scrutiny in 1907. Beginning that year the Russell Sage Foundation launched a series of exhaustive investigations into industrial conditions in Pittsburgh's steel districts. Of the six volumes eventually published as the Pittsburgh Survey, at least two, Margaret Byington's *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (1910) and John Fitch's *The Steel Workers* (1911), culled significant field notes from Homestead. The crux of their research centered around empirical, or at least measurable qualities of life—family size and household budgets, wage scales and accident rates, and general

labor policies of U.S. Steel. Both investigations, though, speculated on the role of leisure and, inevitably, the library, in the lives of steelworkers and their families.²⁷

Through their reports, Byington and Fitch confirmed the idea that steelworkers, ten years after the fact, had not taken to the library. In a few instances, the investigators encountered a lingering resentment based on Carnegie's role in the steel strike of 1892. Fitch described what he characterized as "a great deal of prejudice against the gift of Mr. Carnegie on account of the several labor conflicts that have occurred in the mills formerly controlled by him." His interviews with individual steelworkers bore this out.²⁸

For most workers, however, logistics, not politics, kept the library from playing a significant role in their lives. According to Fitch, work conditions were the major villain. Laboring under Carnegie's exhausting regimen of industrial output prohibited workers from enjoying what the library had to offer. Hence the attitude of one steelworker, who announced "what use has a man who works twelve hours a day for a library, anyway?" This was regarded as typical. Byington repeated the sentiment when she characterized the library as "a philanthropy which provides opportunities for intellectual and social advancement while it withholds conditions which make it possible to take advantage of."²⁹

Another set of explanations blamed the library's "foreignness" and its tendency toward formal, centralized activities. Workers, especially foreign born, were befuddled by the library's alien procedures ("there are forms that must be gone through before the books can be secured"). Others, Survey investigators surmised, were intimidated by its exceedingly sober aura. "The fact that the building is on the hill away from their homes, and has an imposing entrance which makes the laborer hesitate to enter," Byington concluded, "... have doubtless acted as deterrent influences." Byington reasoned that the library could be "resold" through skillful marketing. She blamed the noticeably poor use of a set of Slavic books on "a lack of successful advertising"; she suspected "a number of the influential Slavs in Homestead did not know that these books were in the library."³⁰

The explanations supplied by Byington and Fitch seemed plausible enough, but in other respects, their reports were colored by the same assumptions that drove the library's programs: namely, a blind adherence to Protestant, middle class values. Neither social worker questioned the validity of what the library had to offer, only the work conditions that prevented steelworkers from being exposed to its influence. When, as on one occasion, steelworkers remarked that the library "did not interest them," Fitch dismissed the dismissal, and instead turned to working conditions: "they could not use it even if they wished to do so, for the hours are too long. . . ." Throughout the report, Fitch referred to the library's programs as "privileges" or "opportunities." So, too, with Byington, who surmised that the people "appreciate what the library . . . offers to them and

their children,” and “are very proud” of the philanthropy bestowed upon them; they just did not have the time or energy to indulge in high culture. Later, Byington made her own recommendations for improving the role of the library in the community—not revised programs, just more opportunities for steelworkers to reach them.³¹

The investigators’ insights, in short, may have been stunted by their own values. Although it remained to be fully developed, the Carnegie Library of Homestead embodied notions of self help and moral uplift that characterized the national progressive movement. An admittedly eclectic lot, turn of the century progressives were nonetheless bound together by their concerns for the social consequences of the evolving urban-industrial order, and their common origins in a largely Protestant, native-born middle class. A handful of reformers advocated grass roots efforts to dismantle economic monopolies and restore power to the “common folk.” Most, however, accepted the social and economic arrangements that had characterized industrial “progress” to that point and sought only to rationally order social change and infuse capitalism with a degree of social responsibility. Experts in social work, education and city planning, and institutions like playgrounds, settlement houses and libraries seemed best prepared to navigate the proper course.³²

Such prescriptions for reform enjoyed mixed results. Progressives succeeded in pushing through electoral reform and child labor laws, establishing regulatory agencies and playgrounds, and attracting attention to conditions in city slums. Other programs, though, proved difficult to apply to the harsher economic realities of industrial life. Efforts to uplift the urban masses through citizenship classes, personal hygiene programs and temperance campaigns were greeted with indifference and suspicion by immigrants and workers. On this count, progressives seemed only partially conscious of the cultural divide that separated them from their subjects.³³ The history of the Carnegie Library after 1900 appeared fated to confirm this last point.

BRINGING THE LIBRARY TO THE PEOPLE: WILLIAM F. STEVENS AND THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF HOMESTEAD, 1910-1919

William F. Stevens became convinced by 1910 that the Carnegie library had only partially fulfilled the mission set forth by its founder and patron. Unless the library’s stewards expanded its appeal, the institution would forever remain on the periphery of Homestead’s cultural world. For the next two decades, the use of the library by “the working man” became a central concern for Stevens and his small army of librarians, athletic directors, and music teachers. Putting Carnegie’s master plan and progressive social thought into action proved to be another matter.

Annual reports and special publications and events provided Stevens with

the most regular opportunity to promulgate the library's extended mission. The theme of one of the library's annual staff meetings, "to what extent and how can the library take the place of the saloon," set the tone for much of the library's work. In another publication, entitled "The Use of the Library by the Working Man," Stevens composed an imaginary dialogue between a representative of the Carnegie Library and a curious outsider. The librarian stressed the importance of shaping programs that would appeal to workers, no matter how banal or "unlibrary-like" they might seem. If workers showed a natural interest in "sociality," as they indeed did in Homestead, it was important that the library do its best to follow that passion. Other programs might then take the worker further and engage him in "more profitable intercourse."³⁴

One idea was to take common working-class pastimes and place them in a more morally sanitary environment. Hence, Stevens promoted the strengths of an athletic club with "a wholesome entrance" and "a billiard room where he [the working man] may indulge in sound and well regulated play." Members were invited to enjoy the club's six billiard and four pool tables—as long as they observed certain guidelines. Players were prohibited from "loud talking, singing, whistling . . . striking matches on the walls . . . or marking tables with chalk." The management also spelled out its interest in encouraging "all scientific games and games of skill, and to eliminate all games of chance." Gambling was strictly forbidden.³⁵

Other programs were likewise intended to soothe the savage beast. This was especially true of programs geared to Homestead's youth. Playgrounds administered through the library during summer months were thought to undercut the "gang spirit" inherent in the second generation of millworkers; during the winter months, free movies in the music hall had the same effect. In 1909, the athletic department offered three sets of classes for children: boys, girls and "working boys" gymnastics. All sessions were "conducted to piano music." The library's athletic directors were also instructed to keep a close watch over the bowling alleys. In 1908, Stevens could report "12,000 games bowled by the working man alone." As with the library's pool hall, the basement bowling alley had the added attraction of a central location far enough away from other working class vices. In one annual report, Stevens underscored its value by suggesting that "the wife who has a husband who bowls always knows where to find him." In the use of the physical department, Stevens maintained separate data on employees and nonemployees.³⁶

Ideally, workers lured to the library for a game of bowling or pool would gravitate to other more useful programs. Reading was the most obvious route to self culture and, after about 1909 or so, book circulation enjoyed a dramatic rise. But as Stevens himself admitted, circulation alone was an unreliable measure of success in "mental culture." Books could be checked out without having been read or, conversely, a single book may have been thoroughly enjoyed by many

different minds. Stevens therefore preselected books he presumed of interest to the working man, and set them aside on a section of shelves labeled "mill books for mill men." Most books were grouped around technical subjects with obvious practical applications for advanced steel work. Here, Stevens could give the men what they needed and keep closer tabs on use.³⁷

Classes offered through the library's night school and education department were intended to supplement those same categories of presumed occupational aspiration. From 1902 to 1918, a regular adult membership in the library club covered the tuition for night school courses. The department's half dozen faculty members taught semester long courses on mechanical drawing, "common branches" (reading, writing and arithmetic), "higher branches" (algebra, chemistry, Latin), a handful of commercial subjects and "foreign-English." By 1912, Stevens reported that the "usefulness" of the education department had increased by 358% since 1902. Courses in mechanical drawing enjoyed the largest enrollments, perhaps because such training inevitably opened job opportunities. In 1914, the *Homestead Messenger* reported that Professor Andrew Soderberg's eight recent graduates would join other students "who are filling important positions in the mill." Indeed, Stevens estimated that regular attendance at night school in general "adds \$150 to the earning power of each student."³⁸

Despite the optimistic reports and practical pedagogy, programs designed for workers were not as popular as Stevens supposed. Observers, for instance, noted that mill town libraries had difficulty enticing workers to charge out books, even when external "stations" made reading more convenient. At one point, librarians placed a series of technical books in company offices; in neighboring West Homestead, Stevens set up a station inside the Mesta Machine Works. The books were removed after eight months. "Overwork and adjacent pool rooms," observed one, "were opposing factors too great to overcome." Indeed, it took a rare sort of initiative to work through a twelve hour day and then attend night school. Echoing the sentiments of John Fitch, another observer noted that "twelve hour shifts do not leave much desire in a man to improve his mind, or even to use his mind in his diversions." Stevens himself admitted that library attendance had picked up in 1914 only "on account of the hard times."³⁹

There was also the matter of relevance. Another steelworker declared that "we want the time with our families and for recreation," an important consideration not factored into the self improvement formula. Others may have wondered exactly what good most courses would do them. Certificates in metallurgy or mechanical drawing were fine for some, but most employees of Carnegie Steel were likely to remain in low-skill jobs, regardless of training. Along with the shortage of skilled labor positions, the Homestead Steel Works' personnel policy protected the best jobs for the native born and discriminated against blacks and ethnics, especially "hunkies." Albert Reid, for example, migrated to Homestead from the rural south and planned to work as a mechanic. Because he was black,

he was forced to work as a common laborer. Likewise, Eastern Europeans were expected to fill out the hottest, dirtiest and least skilled positions in the plants, often as laborers or open hearth workers. The library may have engaged in occupational uplift, but the steel works depended on and promoted a steady stream of minimally trained immigrant mill hands.⁴⁰

Such evidence suggests that nearly all efforts to bring the library to the "working man" were compounded by the fact that most workers were immigrants.⁴¹ As late as 1919, 71% of the employees at Carnegie Steel's Homestead Works were foreign born. Of that percentage, nearly three-fourths were classified as "Slavs" or immigrants from Eastern Europe. (This percentage of foreign born in the workforce was roughly the same in Homestead at large.) On this score, Stevens and his associates appeared sincerely befuddled. At the time of the Pittsburgh Survey, Stevens reported that a collection of Lithuanian books and a set of Catholic writers were "very well used." By 1917, the library had added to its "foreign" collection with books in Russian, Slovak, Polish, Bohemian, Magyar, French and Italian. Earlier, Stevens had taken the Survey's advice and brought the library to the people through a "station" in the "foreign ward." Apparently the results were not encouraging. Not long thereafter, Stevens publicly remarked that "it can hardly be expected that the library will have a marked influence on the 'grown ups' among the foreigners."⁴²

"Self culture" clubs seemed to offer one entree to the immigrant community below the tracks. Traditionally, such organizations, although intended to be opened to all, appealed only to a select Protestant, middle class membership. Still, by the 1910s, the library's annual reports revealed a handful of immigrant based "self culture" clubs. Three of the 30 literary and study clubs that met in the library during 1912 were run by and for immigrants. Twelve percent of all study club members were foreign born, a proportion well below their percentage in Homestead's population at large, but nevertheless encouraging. Unfortunately, immigrant self culture clubs could hardly be considered expressions of spontaneous ethnic consciousness. Like native born organizations, most reflected an upper class membership and unmistakable signs of corporate influence. It was not uncommon, for example, for the burgess of Homestead and the assistant director of the library to chaperone meetings of the Hungarian Self Culture Club. Other groups, like the Slovak Citizens Club (40 members, 56 books), the Greek Catholic Drama Club (25 members) and the Slovak Civic Association, simply seemed to mimic Anglo-American organizations.⁴³

Addressing the needs of foreign workers was compounded by the fact that most programs were clearly intended to "Americanize" that element—a fact which workers interpreted as an inconvenience in the very least, an insult at worst. English language classes, for example, never enjoyed even a mild endorsement from Homestead's immigrants. Few foreign born workers signed up for the courses, even after Carnegie Steel offered to remit tuition cost upon

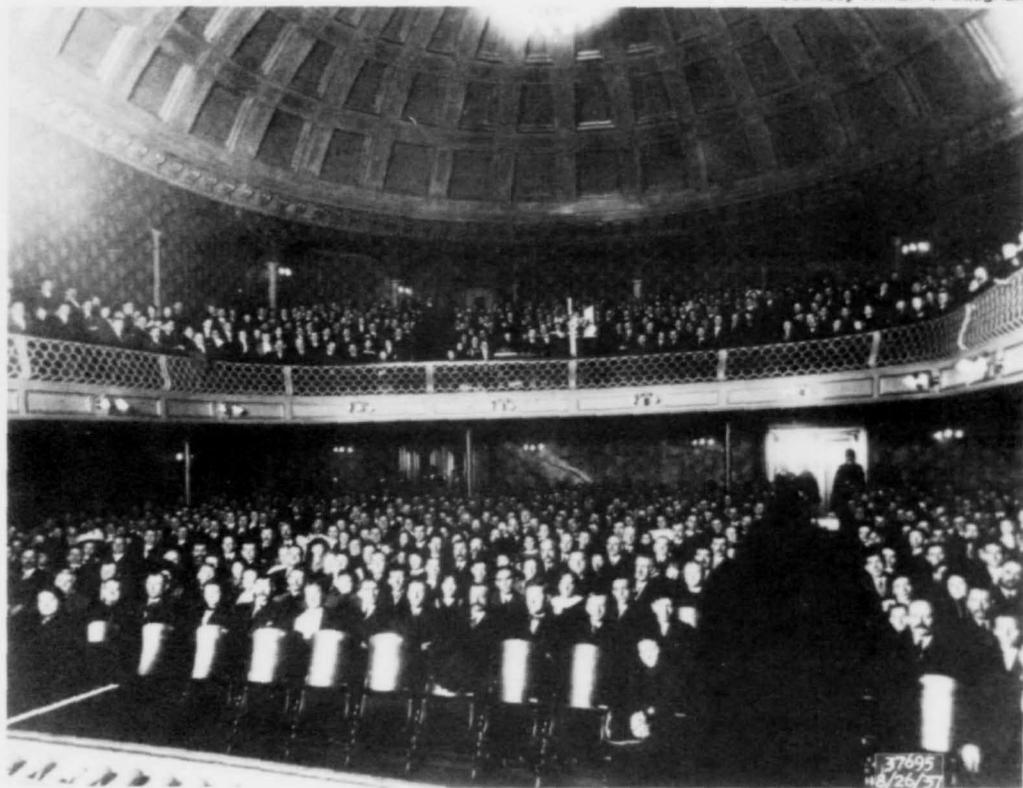
graduation. Between 1910 and 1915, enrollment in Mrs. Rose's "foreign-English" class peaked at about 40 students, well below what one might have expected. In 1917, the library's education department eliminated the classes altogether. An observer from nearby Braddock noted that the "appeal of the foreigners at the library for a resumption of . . . the language class is pitiable indeed." The Carnegie Library continued to promote its other night classes and marked the end of each term with commemoration speeches on "efficiency" by mill managers and diplomas granted by the resident Methodist preacher.⁴⁴

The same implicit efforts to Americanize shaped the form and content of other library functions. During the 1910s, the music hall received some use from immigrants for special events and celebrations. Stevens was tickled, and concluded that music was "after all, the only universal language." In 1914, Homestead's Polish immigrants celebrated their homeland's temporary independence from Russia with a parade from St. Anthony's Church, in Lower Homestead, to the Carnegie Music Hall. Shortly before World War I, the Carnegie Library hosted similar meetings for the spate of Eastern European nationalities that clustered in the Ward. Such events often evolved into well orchestrated pep talks, generally presided over by mill management and local machine bosses. This was especially true during the war, when a series of nationalist rallies became occasions for encouraging citizenship and pro-war sentiment.⁴⁵

Significantly, during this early period, one part of the library did flourish, largely through the patronage of the working class constituency below the tracks: the athletic department. It was here, according to Stevens, that the library experienced unqualified success. Use of the gymnasium and swimming pool climbed steadily over the first two decades of the twentieth century. Even the normally lukewarm *Homestead Messenger* praised its popularity. The swimming pool in particular was "never more popular than at the present." "From 10 AM to 10 PM there is a steady stream of patrons winding its way to the pool for a 'splash.'" In characteristic fashion, Stevens calculated use of the "physical culture" department down to the last member.⁴⁶

To Stevens, such data meant everything, since it suggested a rousing endorsement of the progressive ideal that buoyed the institution. The athletic department made up for the infrequent use of other library facilities like the classrooms and music hall. Swimming, for example, supplied "vitality," "sociality," and "morality." "Talk about social center," Stevens remarked in 1913, "217 boys in the pool at the same time cannot be excelled for concentrated sociability." Such talk was almost always followed by more statistics on "well regulated" play provided through structured gymnastics classes and youth and adult sports leagues.⁴⁷

Even the baths supplied through the natatorium, again dutifully calculated down to the last shower, carried moral import. In 1914, Stevens estimated that the 78,526 baths taken that year required the service of 8 employees, 10,000,000



Music hall, Carnegie Library of Homestead, c. 1910.

A lavishly designed music hall occupied the Carnegie Library's western wing. Stevens and other library staff hoped to attract Homestead workers to its free organ recitals and revues. Blacks, though, were barred from the facility, and foreign born workers generally chose more informal settings to celebrate Old World traditions. The few rallies that attracted large crowds during the early years were often orchestrated by mill superintendents and local politicians.

gallons of water, 3,000 pounds of soap and 1,000 towels. The expense was well worth it. "When it comes to cleaning up the town," Stevens concluded later, "no single agency has anything on the Carnegie Library Club." In another report, he declared the 41½ bath per member average to be "an indication of very good culture." Stevens used the data to deflect criticism that poor housing and unsanitary conditions in the Ward contributed to an especially high typhoid rate in Homestead borough. The information also seemed to confirm what other progressives had discovered about the social and moral benefits of public hygiene.⁴⁸

Despite such rhetoric, those who entered and used the library did not necessarily absorb the message. Residents of Lower Homestead used the swimming pool not out of an interest in vitality or morality, but simply to bathe; few of the homes in the First and Second Wards were equipped with such facilities. Margaret Byington confirmed that the library's considerable obstacles

“have not stood in [the immigrants’ way in the use of such practical things as baths.” Likewise, workers’ participation in recreation programs simply attested to the growing national popularity of competitive sports.⁴⁹

THE DESERTED PARTHENON: RESPONDING TO THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF HOMESTEAD, 1919–1937

Much to Stevens’ chagrin, the walls of working class culture did not fall under the weight of the campaign to bring the library to the people. Membership, according to reports filed throughout the 1920s, dropped off considerably, even before the Depression placed annual fees out of reach. Community leaders were befuddled. “There may be some motives in folks not patronizing the library, but so far we’ve failed to discern it,” the *Messenger* noted in one editorial. “Few people use the library. Hundreds more should make use of this beautiful building. And so it goes . . .” The paper again editorialized in 1929 that “like a deserted parthenon . . . so does the library stand deserted in the midst of more than 50,000 souls.” Facilities, according to the paper, were simply neglected. “There is a shell of a library,” the messenger concluded, “of what might be had A whisper reverberates in empty corridors.”⁵⁰

The library did not fare much better during the early years of the Depression, when book circulation dropped steadily from 113,000 in 1929, to 89,000 in 1932, to 77,598 in 1934—at the same time that income, furnished by the steel company, remained constant, and the number of books increased. One newspaper writer described what he thought may have been a “lack of financial support,” but he more importantly reprimanded locals for misunderstanding the library’s real value and potential. “Is the intelligence of the people of the Homestead district so low plane that they figure they do not need a library?” “A town without a library,” another observer concluded, “is in the category of a town without a bank and a newspaper.”⁵¹

Other less partial observers, like sociologist Philip Klein, confirmed the dilemma. During the late 1930s, Klein undertook what might have been considered an addendum to the work of the Pittsburgh Survey team thirty years earlier. Despite harsh economic circumstances, mill town residents at least partially benefitted from the hospitality of the New Deal. Franklin Roosevelt and his supporters brought both short term relief from the Depression, and long term work-place reforms. Still, Klein’s investigation revealed that some reforms failed to meet their intended need. The extensive Carnegie Library system provided “the most widespread and substantial year round leisure time . . . for persons of all ages.” But he noted it was not always so accessible. Like other public facilities, most mill towns libraries were “more accessible to the better districts than to the poorer ones.” In addition, most, including the Homestead library (“in Munhall”) “are approached by steep ascents.” This was confirmed by other Homestead

residents who remembered that it was often difficult to use the library unless one was a resident of Munhall.⁵²

As in an earlier period, though, the library's stagnation was less a function of low morale or poor access than a different vision of its ultimate usefulness. While book circulation, club meetings, lectures, or recitals may have indeed declined, the library remained valued as a physical recreation center. A report filed during the Depression concluded this library program to be one "for which resources have not kept pace with demand." Annual reports during the twenties and thirties revealed that the "department of physical culture shows a gain in nearly every instance where figures are reported." When some activities experienced a poor showing, like the "relapse" in the use of the bowling alleys, the library quickly dropped prices in an effort to retain workers. By the twenties, Stevens and other steel officials seemed content to play their strong hand, reasoning it was better that workers came for the gymnasium than not come at all.⁵³

The missionary work of Carnegie Steel's Welfare Department indirectly bolstered the library's use here. The department, begun sometime during 1913, served as an extended personnel office for the Homestead Works. Its directors oversaw a range of programs, including playgrounds, visiting nurses and home garden programs, intended to encourage a loyal and content workforce. By 1914, the Welfare Department moved into structured recreation as well, organizing employee basketball leagues in the library's gymnasium during the winter months and administering other sports leagues from its offices in the library. It was not until 1919, however, that the department expanded, thanks largely to the reaction aroused by the AFL organized steel strike that fall. Steel officials renewed their resolve to "Americanize" the "hunkies" who participated in the walkout. Welfare Department employees organized summertime baseball leagues in an effort to keep workers off street corners and out of saloons. The new energy accrued to the library's benefit. "Library officials are looking forward to a big indoor season," the *Homestead Messenger* observed in 1919; "it is probable that the Steel Works will conduct leagues in basketball, bowling, and billiards and will make use of the library club." Over the next year, attendance in the library's welfare rooms soared, from 368 in 1919 to 7,670 in 1920.⁵⁴

Curiously, though, the impact of the Welfare Department was not as substantial as library officials had hoped. While the department managed to bring workers in for big events (music hall use doubled, from 56 events to 111 events), the club membership actually declined by 200. By 1924, only five years after its big push, the department's programs attracted fewer and fewer workers. A few years after that, on the eve of the Great Depression, the Works' general superintendent announced that the welfare work "had been severely curtailed." At the same time, Stevens reported heavy use in the music hall from "what is commonly called foreigners." Attendance at religious and secular events spon-

sored by immigrants totaled 8,240; in contrast, events sponsored by the wavering welfare department drew only 1,500. In short, workers managed to pick and choose from the library's vast number of programs without feeling beholden to its cultural mission.⁵⁵

In other ways, too, Homestead residents selectively revised the library to conform to other working class traditions. During the 1920s, amateur boxing matches, once proscribed to the back rooms of the Ward, were held in the library's gymnasium; boxing had been one of the sports promoted through Carnegie Steel's Welfare Department. When Homestead's own middleweight contender, Ray "the Scotch Wop" Pryel, returned to his home town after World War I, he trained at the Homestead Library's athletic club. Special evenings at the library revolved around a full slate of prizefighting bouts. During April of 1921, the Carnegie Library Club hosted a "smoker" featuring four local bouts, including the main event match between Pryel and Frankie Wilson, a black boxer. McCormack's Melody Five from neighboring Duquesne treated the audience to live entertainment between matches.⁵⁶

* * *

Workers could afford to discriminate when it came to using the Carnegie Library. Indeed, although it went unnoticed by Stevens and others, workers had formed their own self culture societies near their homes below the tracks, often in a conscious effort to keep the working man's club near church, home and family. More than a half dozen fraternal lodges, supplying educational as well as social services to their ethnic constituency, lined Fifth Avenue in Lower Homestead. Some, like the Slovak American Literary Society, used the library until they got on their own feet. By 1912, the club had established its own headquarters in a rented house along Fifth Avenue in Lower Homestead. Others, like the Turner and Sokol Halls, evolved into versatile community centers; during the week, they might sponsor sporting matches, and on weekends, ethnic music festivals. Still others, like the Rusin Hall, were reserved almost exclusively for ethnic rituals like wedding receptions.⁵⁷

Boxing and wrestling, by far the two most popular sports held in Turner and Sokol Halls, were likewise tied closely to the working class, ethnic tastes of Lower Homestead. Sokol Hall, for instance, promoted wrestling matches around ethnic rivalries—quite the opposite of Stevens' "homogenization" goal. A typical match in 1919 pitted P. Zelinskas, "the Lithuanian Giant," against Joe Alvina, an Italian wrestler. Likewise, most boxing matches were sponsored by independent athletic clubs, like the Republican Club and Capital Club, both with ties to unsavory political machines. Bouts were generally scheduled on bi-monthly mill pay days, both to insure sell out crowds, and substantial betting on the hometown favorite. More than 1,000 fans packed Turner Hall on March 1, 1919, to witness local favorite Ray Pryel against Red Walsh of New Orleans; "today

being pay day," the *Messenger* noted, "most of the choice seats . . . will be disposed of." The following day, the paper reported that the hall had been fined "for liquor violations." Countless more paychecks were squandered on Homestead's notorious underground economy.⁵⁸

Workers' efforts to keep recreation and leisure in their own neighborhoods, and on their own terms, conformed to a well established tradition. Sometimes, it was simply a matter of convenience. At other times, it meant cultural control. The schism in Homestead's largest Slovak church revolved around a debate over the church's physical, and therefore social location. Around 1908, several members of St. Michael's Church, then located on Fourth Avenue in Lower Homestead, persuaded the parish priest to relocate the church to Hilltop real estate near the Carnegie Library. Roughly half the congregation, most of whom had migrated to parts of Munhall, favored the move; the other half, proud residents of Lower Homestead, resisted. When the church was finally dismantled and rebuilt near the library, Homestead parishioners left St. Michael's for good. A few years later, those parishioners raised enough money to purchase an abandoned Methodist church in Lower Homestead. A few years after that, the Pittsburgh Roman Catholic Diocese officially recognized the new congregation of St. Anne's on Fourth Avenue.⁵⁹

Other cultural issues proved even more divisive. Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, headquartered in the First Methodist Episcopal Church on the Hilltops, fought to rid Lower Homestead of saloons and illegal liquor sales. In one pamphlet, the WCTU identified some 64 "darks spots," the majority clustered in the Second Ward, and estimated that saloon owners controlled over 40% of the real estate below the tracks. Perhaps following the same course as Stevens' librarians, the WCTU dispatched missionaries to the narrow, overcrowded streets of Lower Homestead, in a sincere effort to reform the masses. Lower Homestead resisted Hilltop reformers, though, and defended its right to be moderately intemperate, even during prohibition. With the passage of the Volstead Act, many saloons located in the Ward went underground. Others turned to moonshine. By the 1920s, one resident recalled, "nearly everyone had their own still." As long as votes were cast in their proper place, Homestead's machine bosses looked the other way.⁶⁰

Temperance formed just part of the campaign to rid Lower Homestead of what Hilltop residents considered its "corrosive elements." Gambling, in the form of numbers betting or pool hall playing, proliferated, and by its very nature represented the antithesis of the library's emphasis on "scientific games." Sixth Avenue, the street that ran parallel to the railroad tracks, hosted a number of notorious gambling dens. Professional gamblers were rumored to have come from near and far to participate in high stakes gambling at clubs like the "Hustler's Rest." Most pool halls were likewise equipped with a "back room" for card gambling. Protestant clergy often led the charge to clean up numbers

writing. In 1923, the *Homestead Messenger* wondered aloud "how many cellars and second floors in Homestead are fitted out for gambling places."⁶¹

Protestant clergy and muckraking journalists led the call for a "moral cleanup." To residents of Lower Homestead, however, playing numbers, like selling moonshine, was a necessary sideline. A half penny bet through the neighborhood numbers bookie, often a grocer or saloon keeper, could double a millworkers' weekly earnings. Martin Duffy echoed the sentiments of many Homestead steelworkers when he noted that "... a man didn't take his pay home, he took it down to a gambling place to triple it. Sometimes he went home without anything. But what he did have in his pockets wouldn't have amounted to much anyway." Gambling was not limited to adult males, either. Another Homestead resident remembered that her own mother played "the list" for a half penny. "At that time it was alright," she observed. "They would come to your house to pick up numbers." The same woman recalled "little old women in babushkas" filing into a local smoke shop to put down a cent or two.⁶²

Such cultural distance, then, discouraged workers from embracing the library's programs at the same time that it protected and encouraged more "home grown" approaches to leisure and culture. When workers did make use of library resources during the 1920s and 1930s, programs reflected more worker participation and direction than was evident during an earlier period. The nature of the Homestead Library Athletic Club suggests the transformation of the library's role throughout the 1930s, even in the face of dramatic financial cutbacks. The HLAC had supported a championship amateur football team in 1900. During the 1920s, the club earned a national reputation through its swimming team. Under the leadership of Jack Scarry, the superintendent of the library's physical department, members of the women's swim team swam in the 1928 and 1932 summer Olympics.

Although the team used the library's pool for training, Carnegie Steel refused to underwrite the group's trip to Los Angeles in 1932. Team members instead looked to a Depression plagued community for financial support. Anna Mae Gorman, a young woman from City Farm Lane in Lower Homestead, was one of the four women who swam with the Homestead Team during the 1932 Olympics. Gorman recalled raising funds on a door-to-door basis. After the team returned victorious to Homestead, the steel company eagerly sought to claim the team for its own. One of its first moves, along with helping to organize a community welcome, was to insist that the library be called by its proper name, the Carnegie Library, rather than the vernacularized Homestead Library. By altering the library's name to refer to location rather than stewardship, the community had almost unconsciously made a statement about its own perceptions of what the library meant.⁶³

An even more poignant expression of self-organization and "adaptive reuse" of the Carnegie Library was the "Depression University." Six unemployed

workers from Whitaker, a neighboring borough, conceived the idea for a free, non-credit "university" sometime in 1932. By the fall of that year, Rev. H.M. Eagleson of the Whitaker Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to serve as dean, and turned the church into a makeshift classroom. Area residents with the equivalent of a high school diploma were invited to register for non-credit courses on a range of subjects. As the popularity of the courses increased, James Lose, general superintendent of the Homestead Works, invited the students to relocate classes to five large classrooms in the Carnegie Library. By January of 1933, over 345 students had registered for the college's second "semester."⁶⁴

The Depression University, which continued through 1935, contrasted sharply with previous campaigns to educate Homestead's foreign and working class elements. Courses, for instance, were chosen by the students through a popular vote before the term. In contrast to the dry regimen of industrial subjects offered through the old night school, students registered for courses on public speaking, civics, economics, electrical engineering, philosophy, English literature and composition, and accounting. The most popular course among men was business law; among women, shorthand, child training and Spanish. Students received instruction from volunteer college graduates rather than mill-appointed faculty. Furthermore, students raised funds for textbooks—the only expense—through benefit plays and textbooks; the only contribution from the steel company was the building. Even William Stevens, admitted that "what these students lose in professional and often impractical direction, they gain in selecting their studies from the standpoint of their own interest."⁶⁵

* * *

In 1937, Feeney Busarello, a representative for the newly formed Steelworkers Organizing Committee, became the first labor leader to speak in the Carnegie Library of Homestead.⁶⁶ Such a speaker would have been unthinkable during an earlier period. But Busarello's appearance at the music hall was not as spectacular as he may have thought. Indeed, Homestead's workers had been preparing the road to the library for some time. Shortly after its dedication, skilled workers openly criticized the implications of Carnegie's philanthropy. During the next forty years, immigrant and unskilled workers generally shunned the library's steady diet of structured education and leisure, though for different reasons. Workers and immigrants selectively participated in certain aspects of the library, like the athletic department or, more often, preferred the variety of recreation and leisure activities available more informally near their own homes in Lower Homestead. In so doing, immigrants questioned, if not always consciously, the cultural order prescribed by Homestead's economic and cultural elite, and mitigated efforts to establish cultural hegemony.

Between 1892 and 1937, Homestead steelworkers were denied economic autonomy. Issues of cultural autonomy and control, though, were hardly as

settled. Between 1898 and 1940, Homestead residents rejected one kind of culture and, in the process, may have defined their own. The fact that the library failed to extend the control it intended qualifies the picture of corporate hegemony and industrial feudalism that has often characterized descriptions of the industrial experience in Western Pennsylvania.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Pennsylvania Historical Association meeting in October, 1989. The author would like to acknowledge Paul Roberts and the article's referees for their helpful suggestions.

1. John Bodnar, Roger Simon and Michael Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1940* (Urbana, Illinois, 1982) and Bodnar, *Workers' World: Kinship, Community, and Protest in an Industrial Society, 1900-1940* (Baltimore, 1982). Some of the more recent studies of leisure and industrialization include Roy Rosenszweig's *"Eight Hours For What We Will": Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York, 1983) and Liz Cohen's "Learning to Live in the Welfare State: Industrial Workers in Chicago between the Wars, 1919-1939." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1987). Cohen's work is especially instructive, since she argues that "social and cultural lives fundamentally shaped [workers] political orientations. . . . Where workers turned for help in good and bad times, how they reacted to their employers' 'welfare capitalist' schemes, whether they were enticed by the new chain store, motion picture place and the radio or preferred the comfort of long standing ethnic associations—all of these are important questions in analyzing how workers politics evolved." See also John Kasson's *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1978). By focusing on the evolution of Coney Island, Kasson provides an interesting, concise description of the grass roots transformation of "genteel" leisure to more popular "plebian" forms of entertainment.

2. The best and most recent example of this pattern in labor/steel historiography is Paul F. Clark, Peter Gottlieb and Donald Kennedy,

eds., *Forging a Union of Steel: Philip Murray, SWOC and the United Steelworkers* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987). Its editors have arranged a stimulating set of interpretive essays on the meaning of unionization and its social and political impact on workers' lives. Still, they provide little if any analysis of the social arrangements outside the workplace and within the mill towns. Even those works that claim to offer a reinterpretation of community power structures proceed from a series of questionable assumptions about social arrangements, most based on the notion that shopfloor struggles between labor and management simply spilled out into the neighborhoods. See Eric Davin, "The Littlest New Deal: SWOC Takes Power in Steeltown" (seminar paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1989). An interesting, more integrative analysis is Paul Krause's "The Road to Homestead" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1988). Krause offers a complex, social portrait of Homestead and its steelworkers during the workers' republic that preceded the strike of 1892 and demonstrates that work and leisure were intimately connected. Unfortunately, Krause's study does not stretch beyond the 1892 battle, when the emergence of Carnegie and U.S. Steel introduced a very different set of social arrangements.

3. The notion of steel towns as company towns was first established through the Pittsburgh Survey's seminal study of industrial conditions in 1910. Since then, historians have only partially qualified this dismal picture of corporate control. Even the most prominent historian of steel and steel towns, David Brody, suggests that the social structure of mill towns after the mid-1890s complemented the "stability" of industrial power. Other studies have only reinforced the point, implying that steelworkers

were not redeemed until the CIO organizing drives of the 1930s and the emergence of the Democratic Party during the same period ushered in a new era of social relations. For a handful of examples, see Davin, "Littlest New Deal"; George Powers, *Monongahela Valley: Cradle of Steel Unionism* (East Chicago, Indiana, 1972); and Anne Marie Draham, "Unlikely Allies Fight for Unionization: Homestead, Pennsylvania, 1933-1946" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1984).

The implication that workers fell under the lion's paw both within and outside the workplace is attractive but the conclusions depend on a sharp dichotomy between "workers" and "managers." For a reinterpretation of the company town motif in mill town historiography, see Curtis Miner, "Mill Towns, the 'Underworld Fraternity,' and the Working Man: Reconsidering Local Politics and Corruption within the Industrial Suburb, Homestead, Pennsylvania, 1921-1937" (Paper delivered at the Social Science History Association, Chicago, November, 1988). Another exception to the general rule is Frances Couvares' description of the library in *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany, New York, 1984). To Couvares' credit, the ubiquitous Carnegie library becomes neither symbol nor political gambit, but part of the more complex world of upper middle class reform and, later, welfare capitalism. Unfortunately, though, Couvares does not describe the library with much sensitivity to its relationship to the mill town world. *Remaking of Pittsburgh*, pp. 112, 115-116.

4. Andrew Carnegie donated libraries to 29 Pennsylvania communities. Libraries bequeathed to the steel towns of Braddock (1889), Homestead (1898), Carnegie (1899), and Duquesne (1904) came with sizable endowments and extensive recreational facilities.

For decades, discussion of Carnegie's libraries has been dominated by biographers interested in exploring the steel titan's colorful second career as philanthropist. Among the more notable studies are Joseph Frazier Wall's *Andrew Carnegie* (Pittsburgh, 1989, reprint); Harold Livesay's *Andrew Carnegie and the Rise of Big Business* (Boston, 1975); and George

Swetnam and Helene Smith's *The Carnegie That Nobody Knows* (Pittsburgh, 1989).

More recent work by labor and social historians has broadened the analytical context. Paul Krause has examined the dedication of the Braddock Free Library, Carnegie's first, with an eye to both older and newer questions. His study yields a provocative reinterpretation of the Carnegie "paradox" and a lucid analysis of the labor-capital battles that shaped the nature of Carnegie's "gift" to the working man. See Krause, "Patronage and Philanthropy in Industrial America: Andrew Carnegie and the Free Library in Braddock, Pa.," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 72 (April, 1988), pp. 127-147. In "Wages versus the Library: The National Labor Tribune and Carnegie Library Philanthropy, 1876-1908" (seminar paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1989), David Rosenberg documents what is perhaps more obvious: that the library was not a simple act of charity, but a gift with strings attached, and that national labor leaders did not care for it. A second paper by the same author is more useful, since it successfully distinguishes between "types" and periods of Carnegie philanthropy. Curiously, Rosenberg discovers that Pennsylvania did not lead the country in the number of Carnegie-donated libraries, even though Carnegie built his industrial empire there. Pennsylvania did, of course lay claim to the most endowed and extensive community libraries, all built in Carnegie Steel mill towns. See Rosenberg, "The Functions of Philanthropy: Early Carnegie Libraries; Control and Consolidation" (seminar paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1988). Unfortunately, neither Krause or Rosenberg analyzes reactions to the Braddock and Homestead libraries after their dedications.

5. For the most recent and thorough analysis of the Homestead Strike of 1892, see Krause, "Road to Homestead." Arthur Burgoyne's *The Homestead Strike of 1892* (Pittsburgh, 1893) is a lively, contemporary account of the characters and events tied to the lockout.

6. Byington, *Homestead*, pp. 4-6; Krause, "Road to Homestead."

7. "The Second Ward," Margaret Byington observed in 1907, "has largely been abandoned

to the newer immigrants." This social and cultural polarization in Homestead was repeated in countless Monongahela Valley mill towns. Thomas Bell's 1941 *Out of this Furnace* (Pittsburgh, 1976, reprint), a novel about three generations of Slovak steelworkers in Braddock, is the best literary account of this immigrant life. Scholarly accounts can be found in David Brody, *Steelworkers in America*; Frank H. Serene, "Immigrant Steelworkers in the Monongahela Valley: Their Communities and the Development of a Labor Class Consciousness" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1979); and Byington's *Homestead*, p. 167.

8. *Homestead Messenger*, 31 January 1914. Byington's study of Homestead's living conditions supplies the most descriptive picture of Lower Homestead. Like other progressive reformers, Byington saw overcrowding and poverty but also was keenly aware of the Eastern European enclave below Eighth Avenue, the town's main commercial street. She devotes nearly four chapters to the Slavic imprint on Lower Homestead, pp. 131-171.

9. Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, pp. 112-125; John Fitch, 1911 *The Steelworkers* (Pittsburgh, 1989, reprint), pp. 223-231.

10. Krause, "Philanthropy and Patronage," pp. 140-141.

11. Sanborn Insurance Map, Homestead and Vicinity, 1926.

12. Fitch, *Steel Workers*, p. 202; Pamphlet, "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Carnegie Library of Homestead, 1898-1948" (Homestead, 1948).

13. Decades of public and scholarly debate on the "meaning" of Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy have concentrated on the supposed paradox of Carnegie's career. Carnegie's belief that industrialists were obligated to provide for workers' "mental and moral well being" justified his attempts to structure and control the world of leisure through his library system. See Krause, "Patronage and Philanthropy," pp. 128-131.

14. Andrew Carnegie, "The Dedication," 5 November 1898, Library Files, Carnegie Library of Homestead (hereafter, CLH). Carnegie engineered philanthropy with as much vigor and scrupulous attention to detail as he managed

his mills. The lineup of speakers included a steelworker and an impressive array of community leaders.

15. Carnegie, "The Dedication"; "Reid Kennedy's Speech," Library Files, CLH.

16. Rosenberg, "Wages versus the Library," pp. 21-25; Krause, "Philanthropy and Patronage," p. 143.

17. Research notes, John Fitch *Steel Workers*, as cited in Krause, "Philanthropy and Patronage," p. 143.

18. Program, "Homestead L.A.C. vs. D.C. & A.C., Exposition Park, November 6, 1900" (in the author's possession).

19. Program, "Homestead Eisteddfod," 1898, Library Files, CLH.

20. Annual Report, 1908; Fitch, p. 204; Annual Report, 1913, Library Files, CLH.

21. Carnegie Library Club Program, 1909; Carnegie Library Club Program, 1908, Library Files, CLH; "A Life and Living" (Library Annual Report, 1915), Library Files, CLH.

22. Byington, p. 68; W.F. Stevens, "Self Culture Societies," Library Files, CLH.

23. Stevens, "The Literary and Self Culture Clubs," nd, Library Files, CLH.

24. Carnegie Library Club Program, 1908; *Library News*, Volume 1, (March, 1900); Stevens, "The Library as a Social Center," Library Files, CLH; Bulletin, *One Hundredth Anniversary of St. Mary Magdalene's Church* 18 May 1900 (Archives, Pittsburgh Roman Catholic Diocese). From all accounts, Charles Schwab was an extremely popular general superintendent. His religious affiliation and reputation for generosity (Schwab donated a technical arts school to the borough in 1904) no doubt kept him in good standing with Homestead's Roman Catholic majority.

25. "The state requires a homogeneous population," Stevens wrote at one point, "and recognizes that education is the necessary factor in acquiring it." Even more revealing were Stevens' attitudes toward organized leisure: "There is little need of anxiety about people when they are busy, but there is an absolute necessity for a place of recreation when idle." Homestead City Directory, 1925; *Homestead*

- Messenger*, 19 October 1917, 31 July 1942; Annual Report, 1912, 1913, Library Files, CLH.
26. Stevens, "The Library as Social Center," 1912, Library Files; Annual Report, 1909, Library Files, CLH.
27. The University of Pittsburgh Press has recently reprinted three of the Survey's original six volumes. See John T. McClymer's "The Pittsburgh Survey: Forging an Ideology in the Steel District," *Pennsylvania History*, 14 (April 1971), pp. 169-186, for a discussion of the Survey's implicit interest in progressive criticism and reform.
28. Fitch, *Steel Workers*, p. 204.
29. Byington, *Homestead*, p. 178.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.
31. Fitch, *Steel Workers*, p. 203, 205. Margaret Byington proposed something akin to a cultural outpost in the working class wards: "... if the library is really to reach the foreign population culturally it must not wait for them to come to it; it should go to them. A simple reading room opening into the courts where the people live, where they could drop in after the day's work, find newspapers and books in their own tongue and where the Americanized Slav could reach his newly arrived brethren, would become an important center of influence." Stevens apparently took her up on the idea, and started a "missionary" in the foreign quarters of Homestead. Unfortunately, it did not meet with much success. Byington, *Homestead*, p. 167.
32. Arthur S. Link's and Richard L. McCormick's *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, Illinois, 1983) supplies a helpful synthesis and description of the various threads within the progressive movement. Robert Wiebe's *The Search for Order* (1967) focuses more sharply on Progressives as members of a new professional middle class.
33. See Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978) and Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917* (1962).
34. *Homestead Messenger*, 9 May 1919; Stevens, "The Use of the Library by the Working Man," nd, Library Files, CLH.
35. Stevens, "The Use of the Library by the Working Man"; Carnegie Library Club Program, 1903, Library Files, CLH.
36. *Homestead Messenger*, 21 April 1914; Program, Carnegie Library Club, 1909, Library Files, CLH; Stevens, "The Use of the Library by the Working Man"; Annual Report, 1913, Library Files, CLH.
37. Annual Report, 1909; Pamphlet, "Mill Books for Mill Men," 1905, Library Files, CLH.
38. *Homestead Messenger*, 23 February 1912; Pamphlet, "Why a Library?" 1913, Library Files, CLH. Along with his teaching duties, Soderberg worked as an engineer at Carnegie Steel.
39. Frances James Olcott, *The Public Library: A Social Force in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1910), p. 12; Annual Report, 1915, Library Files, CLH.
40. Olcott, *Public Library*, p. 12; Interview with Albert Reid, Homestead Album Project, Archives of Industrial Society, Pittsburgh (hereafter AIS); Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, pp. 105-111; Miner, *Homestead: The Story of a Steel Town, 1860-1945* (Pittsburgh, 1989), pp. 17-19.
41. During the first half of the twentieth century, blacks made up an increasingly significant proportion of Homestead's workforce, from 4.6 percent in 1910 to 16.2 percent in 1930. As both immigrants (from the rural South) and steelworkers, those who settled in working class wards were undoubtedly subject to corporate welfare programs. Unfortunately, northern Jim Crow barred black workers from membership in the Carnegie Library and prevented them from sharing in the natatorium, club rooms and other library programs. Carnegie Steel contracted out black welfare work to organizations like the Urban League which presumably set up "separate but equal" recreation, health and education programs. For a more extensive treatment of blacks and welfare capitalism in Western Pennsylvania steel towns, see Peter Gottlieb's *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930* (Urbana, Illinois, 1986), pp. 190-194; Dennis Dickerson's *Out of The Crucible: Black Steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania* (Albany, New York, 1986), pp. 101-117; and Rob Ruck's *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana, Illinois, 1987), p. 28.

42. Nationality Report, Carnegie Steel Company, 1919; Annual Report, 1908; "Bulletin of the Carnegie Library of Homestead," July 1917, Vol. 3, n. 8., CLH.
43. Annual Report, 1913, Library Files, CLH; Serene, "Immigrant Steelworkers," p. 139.
44. Annual Reports, 1912, 1913; Serene, p. 139; "Bulletin of the Carnegie Library of Homestead," July 1917; *Homestead Messenger*, 5 May 1913. Private charity groups had underwritten these programs until about 1914, at which time administration of English classes was subsumed under the Welfare Department of Carnegie Steel. The company's pedagogical goals were utilitarian and self interested: to teach workers enough English to avoid danger in the workplace, but not enough that they would become susceptible to the message of American labor organizers.
45. Serene, "Immigrant Steelworkers," pp. 139, 153-154.
46. Annual Report, 1924, Library Files, CLH; *Homestead Messenger*, 5 August 1924; Annual Report, 1908, Library Files, CLH.
47. Annual Report, 1912, Library Files, CLH.
48. Annual Report, 1914, Library Files, CLH; "Bulletin of the Carnegie Library of Homestead," July 1918-June 1921, Vol. 3, n. 9; Annual Report, 1913, Library Files, CLH. In his 1912 report, Stevens suggested that the percent increase in the number of baths over the previous year was enough "to refute the calumnious remarks of the Pittsburgh Press" that Homestead had not provided for its poorest residents.
49. Interview with James Baptie, Homestead Project, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (hereafter HSWP); Byington, *Homestead*, p. 167.
50. Annual Report, 1924; *Homestead Messenger*, 6 May 1929, 26 October 1921.
51. Philip Klein, *A Social Study of Pittsburgh* (New York, 1938), p. 862; *Homestead Messenger*, 6 May 1929.
52. Klein, pp. 60, 861; Interview with Vee Harvey, Homestead Project, HSWP.
53. Annual Report, 1924, Library Files, CLH.
54. Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons*; Serene, "Immigrant Steelworkers," pp. 114-124; Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Urbana, Illinois, 1987); *Homestead Messenger*, 5 August 1919; Annual Report, 1924, Library Files, CLH.
55. "Bulletin of the CLH," July 1921; *Homestead Messenger*, 19 May 1929; Annual Report, 1924.
56. Annual Report, 1924 ("Room A had been occupied by the Welfare Department for a boxing room"); *Homestead Messenger*, 28 January 1919, 30 April 1921. Homestead's leisure "boom" was no doubt helped along by the adoption of the eight hour day in the steel industry in 1923. For the first time since the early 1890s, steelworkers could enjoy hours of leisure time. Aside from steady use of the gymnasium, though, it appears that the Homestead Library reaped few benefits from the turn of events.
57. Miner, *Story of a Steel Town*, pp. 48-53. Fraternal halls were important centers for political and labor activity. In 1921, for example, the Slovak American Literary Club helped elect the first Slovak American to Homestead borough council. Later, when CIO organizers came to town, they rallied support within the ethnic and social clubs along Fifth Avenue in Lower Homestead. See Draham, "Unlikely Allies," p. 28.
58. *Homestead Messenger*, 17 July 1919, 18 February 1919, 27 February 1919, 1 March 1919.
59. Miner, "Mill Towns," pp. 6-7.
60. Pamphlet, Women's Christian Temperance Union, nd (William J. Gaughan Collection, Pittsburgh); *Homestead Messenger*, 6 June 1923; Interview with Catherine O'Connor, Homestead Album Project, AIS. Saloons and moonshine were important from both an economic and cultural standpoint. In the midst of overcrowded tenements and corporate repression, saloons offered safeguarded respite and companionship. Saloon ownership, a popular small business in Homestead, was also a faster route to middle class status than mill work. For most families "below the tracks," selling moonshine "on the side" supplemented meager incomes.

Readers interested in more discussion of this important topic should consult Roy Rosenzweig's description of "saloon culture" in nineteenth century Worcester, Massachusetts. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*, pp. 53-64.

61. *Homestead Messenger*, 6 June 1923.

62. Interview with Martin Duffy, Marian Irwin, Homestead Album Project, AIS.

63. Interview with Anna Mae Gorman Lindberg, Homestead Project, HSWP.

64. *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, 24 January 1933.

65. Stevens, "The Depression University," *Library Journal*, 15 April 1933.

66. Interview with Feeney Busarello, United Steel Workers of America Oral History Project, Labor Archives, Pennsylvania State University.