The Kelayres Massacre

In 1934, depression-wracked Pennsylvania was at a political turning-point. Voters in the state elections could choose between a Republican party which had dominated the commonwealth for nearly forty years and Democrats who, trumpeting the virtues of the New Deal, represented themselves as architects of a new socio-economic order. In January, observers in both parties expected the Republicans to retain control. The ensuing political struggle was tumultuous. But for sheer drama, nothing matched the events of November 5 in the small mining village of Kelayres. That night in Kelayres, “politics” cost five men their lives and at least twenty more men, women, and children serious injury when an election-eve gathering of Democrats was ripped apart by gunfire.

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2 Philadelphia *Inquirer*, Jan. 28, 1934, 1A.

3 Beers and Bronner mention it. Aside from them, this incident has escaped the attention of professional historians.
Kelayres provides an incongruously tidy setting for mass violence. In appearance, it was and is a quiet, unadorned little place tangential to one of Pennsylvania's southernmost anthracite mining areas. Located in sparsely-populated Kline Township, tucked away in the extreme northeast corner of Schuylkill County, it was in 1934 an unincorporated village of some seven hundred people who had rarely done anything even to draw the attention of the county's two major newspapers. Only a mile or so northeast of the significantly larger town of McAdoo, Kelayres still seems isolated—possibly because it is positioned on a high, windswept plateau, partially surrounded by slag heaps. It was principally a laborers' village, neatly gridded with Center Street the north-south axis and Fourth Street its east-west counterpart. The violence of November 5 occurred around the intersection of those streets.4

Kelayres was one of three polling places in Kline Township. Both Republicans and Democrats were holding pre-election rallies there that night. The Republican affair was conducted in and around properties owned by Joe Bruno, a County Detective, Justice of the Peace, and acknowledged leader of the township's Republican forces for a generation. His two-story brick home was on the southeast corner of Fourth and Center Streets, with windows facing both streets. That intersection was in fact something of a Bruno residential enclave. Immediately south of the Joe Bruno home on Fourth Street was that of his son, James. Joe Bruno's nephew Paul lived on the northeast corner, on the top floor of a multifamily dwelling.

Directly behind (west of) the Joe Bruno home were a pool hall and a saloon, each of which he owned and rented out. Joe Bruno and other Republicans gathered in the pool hall for speeches at around 7:00 P.M. Afterwards, he and a number of family members and political associates, along with schoolteachers Cecilia Stracka, Eva Socker, and Julia Leshko, retired to his home to arrange watchers' credentials and other pre-election matters.5

4 The following account of the violence itself represents primarily the prosecution's case at the trial of Joseph Bruno for the murder of Frank Fiorella. It was, obviously, the prosecution's case that meshed with and was incorporated into what we will call the official version of the Kelayres massacre.

Official transcripts of that and subsequent trials of Joe Bruno and others involved in the massacre are not available. The Pottsville Republican, however, covered the first trial so extensively (evidently using the court stenographer's notes) that it supplies an acceptable substitute.

5 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 21, 1935, 6 (testimony of Albert Kafka, Anthony Studnick, William Chevinski, and Atty. Frank Bruno). Frank Bruno was one of Joe's nephews, a political associate, and at the same time a member of his defense team.
Several hundred Democrats from all over the township were conducting their own affair outdoors, under the slag heap at the western end of Center Street. This rally had been scouted by at least one automobile dispatched from the other side. The Democrats decided to return the visit and march up Center Street to the Fourth Street intersection.

That intersection was more than Bruno territory. The Immaculate Conception church was on the southeast corner. More significantly, the area was a commercial center and focal point of Democratic strength as well. The saloon Joe Bruno rented out had become a Democratic gathering place. The bottom floor of the building nephew Paul Bruno occupied was another democratic haunt, Saladago's drug store. Directly north of Saladago's on Fourth Street was Dan McAloose's residence, home of the leader of the Democratic forces. Directly across the street from Joe Bruno's home, on the northwest corner, stood the "Marko Building," a large structure which housed Payer's butcher shop and two families. One of them was the Fiorellas. Family patriarch Frank, sixty-five, had just switched his allegiance to the Democrats. His daughter Jennie had recently married Dan McAloose.  

The marchers were led by Joseph Cara and Carl Vacante, carrying an American flag. Behind them were a group of children, then automobiles and the rest of the crowd on foot. As the flag carriers and children rounded Center Street and headed south on Fourth, Arthur Bruno (another of the nephews) and Tony Orlando (a son-in-law) were facing Center Street in front of Joe Bruno's home. Orlando ran around the corner, crouched down, and began firing a pistol at the crowd. Some marchers had already reached James Bruno's home. James himself appeared on his lawn, shouting and firing more pistol shots.  

There were screams and cries of "I'm shot!" A few marchers began to scatter. Yet, in the dark and in the generally boisterous atmosphere, many marchers attributed the noise to fireworks and/or concluded the Brunos were simply trying to frighten the marchers away.  

Constable John Cordish and Michael (Larry) Bovanko, a blacksmith and former constable, tried to reform the march. But the real nature of what was

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6 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 21, 1935, 6 (testimony of Sam Fiorella).
8 Hazleton Standard-Speaker, Nov. 8, 1934 (testimony of Mary DeMaria at the original arraignment).
9 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 15, 1935, 10 (testimony of George Strank and John Zavalick).

happening became clear when Frank Fiorella's head was shattered by a shotgun blast as he stood in front of the Marko building, watching the affair.

Rifle and shotgun fire began to pour onto both Center and Fourth Streets from the second-story windows of the Joe Bruno home. John Galosky, thirty, a miner and amateur athlete, went to Fiorella's aid and was shot down immediately. Dominic Perna, thirty-seven, a leading Kelayres Democrat, was blown off his feet near Fiorella and Galosky, in front of an arc light. Edward Vespucci, an unemployed colliery worker and Democratic orator, was shot in the head and knelt behind the same arc light waiting for help. But most marchers at or near the intersection had scattered with the new and obviously serious volleys. Those who tried to help the fallen were driven away by repeated fire from the Bruno home. Andrew Kostishion, thirty-six, heard the firing in a car further west on Center Street and raced to the intersection to find his daughter. He was shot in the stomach and staggered to the back of the Marko building, muttering "Believe it or not, I'm shot." Jennie Tortanessi actually stood in front of the Bruno home and shouted at the gunmen in the Center Street window to stop.

Within the Bruno home, there was much noise and no light. Stracka, Socker, and Leshko were lying between two beds in a rear bedroom, screaming. Joe and Phil Bruno (Joe's brother, a Tax Collector and Coal and Iron Policeman at the Haddock colliery) kept firing from the Center Street window at anything that moved. Arthur and other Brunos used the Fourth Street window. John Lenyo, Daniel Steibler, Mrs. Charles Colemino (another of Fiorella's daughters), and several more were hit. This was not a brief, sudden spasm of gunfire. It was a deliberate slaughter, and it went on and on.

Many marchers had fled to Saladago's, where Cordish was trying to reach the state police by phone. John Saladago himself had been

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10 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 15, 1935, 10 (testimony of Sam Mascarelli and John Cordish).
11 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 18, 1935, 16 (testimony of James Riffin and John Saladago).
12 Tortanessi and Mascarelli placed Joe Bruno at the Center Street window. They were corroborating testimony Cecilia Stracka and others had provided at the original arraignment (Hazleton Standard-Speaker, Nov. 8, 1935). It was Stracka who first described where the various gunmen were located.
13 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 15, 1935 (testimony of John Cordish).
The Hazleton barracks was closest, but its commander referred Cordish to the Tamaqua barracks because Hazleton is in Luzerne, not Schuylkill, County.
riddled by sixty-seven shotgun pellets when firing from the Fourth Street window had first begun. Irene Condor, Mary Dvorak, and others had been wounded near the drugstore as well. Now fire was concentrated on it. Miner William Forke, thirty-five, was dragged in from the pavement in front, shot in the chest. As fire from the Fourth Street window intensified, people tried to flee to the McAloose house next door. Lucy and Angelina Palumbo, ages twelve and thirteen, were shot in the legs while ascending the McAloose steps. Mary Sacco was shot in flight; Jennie McAloose, shot on her own porch. Morris Bonafair was shot in the eye, and William Jacoby shot fourteen times at or near the McAloose house.¹⁵

There were other victims. But at last the shooting subsided. Victims were gathered up and taken by car to the Hazleton State Hospital. Fiorella, Perna, Galosky, Forke, and Kostishion were dead or dying. At least twenty more were wounded.

When the state police arrived on the scene they found fourteen people in Joe Bruno’s home, including Joe, brother Phil, sons Alfred and James, nephews Arthur and Paul, Orlando, the schoolteachers, various Bruno spouses and other relatives, and schoolbus driver Tony Russo. In addition, they found a sizable arsenal: shotguns, handguns, an automatic rifle, and dynamite. They also found slot machines. The fourteen were arrested, either on suspicion of murder or as material witnesses. They had to be escorted through an angry crowd of hundreds threatening to dynamite the house and lynch the Brunos. Temporary barracks were set up in the basement of the Immaculate Conception church and in Joe Bruno’s home to maintain order. And the outside world began hearing its first accounts of the evening’s events in Kelayres.

The first disseminator of news was Ralph Bashore, Schuylkill County Democratic chairman. Through Harry Kalodner, a Philadelphia Record newsmen who happened to be on Democratic gubernatorial candidate George Earle’s campaign staff, Bashore channeled the Kelayres massacre into the media mill. On election day, John B. Kelly (Philadelphia County Democratic chairman) made repeated radio broadcasts describing a cold-blooded butchery of innocent Democrats by corrupt Republicans. The Scranton Times’s editorialist expressed the typical

¹⁵ Pottsville, Republican, Jan. 17, 1935, 10 (testimony corroborating that offered at the arraignment by Verna Saladago, William Sacco, John Stefanisko, Louis Aito, Tony Bonafair, Charles Grego, and others). See also the Pottsville Journal’s coverage of the arraignment, Nov. 8, 1934.
account when on election day he declared that “Northeastern Pennsyl-
vania last night was treated to the ultimate in Republican persuasiveness
when machine gunners (sic) operating in the interests of [Republican
gubernatorial candidate] ‘Wee Willie’ Schnader. . ..slew three un-
armed marchers in a Democratic parade.”

Desperately, Republicans tried to distance themselves from the
Kelayres events. Governor Pinchot, informed that “McAloose” was a
Celticized Sicilian name while the Brunos hailed from Cosenza, near
Naples, described the entire incident as “racial.” Republican news-
papers tried to disassociate the statewide GOP from the incident, re-
ferring vaguely to local “factionalism.” But the Democrats had
reached the public first.

One of the chief difficulties the Democrats had faced that year was
distinguishing themselves ideologically from their opponents, because
in general Pennsylvania’s Republicans had been rather progressive.
But since the shooting was apparently the work of local Republicans, it

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16 Bronner, 64. See also the Nov. 6, 7, and 8 editions of The New York Times; Wilmington
Journal; Philadelphia Record; Philadelphia Inquirer; and practically all Pennsylvania news-
papers. Not only the massacre but, especially, the mass funeral held for the victims on Nov. 9
was covered extensively, both within and outside Pennsylvania. The trials of the accused also
gained considerable attention, especially within Pennsylvania.

17 Pottsville Journal, Nov. 7, 1934, 1, 7.

18 The Pottsville Republican, in particular, went to considerable lengths to “clear the air” on the
Kelayres massacre. Eventually, they even found it necessary to counter a rumor that Bruno
Hauptman, of the Lindbergh kidnapping case, was somehow linked to Kelayres’ Brunos (Jan.
10, 1935).

19 Obviously, Pennsylvania’s Republican party had not been completely emptied of rear-
guard, laissez-faire types. The Mellons remained generally antagonistic, the Grundy and Vare
interests at best ambivalent in their orientations toward the newer political philosophy. Demo-
strations of the depth of conservatism within Republican ranks can be seen simply in the
difficulties Pinchot always had getting his legislative programs accepted by fellow Republicans.

But while Pennsylvania’s GOP was hardly a hotbed of flaming progressivism, a drift
leftward on the level of state leadership is evident. The Sproul administration (1919-1923)
would have to be described as progressive, Pinchot’s first administration (1923-1927) rather
more so (in legislative initiative if not in results). A shift rightward did occur under Governor
Fisher (1927-1931), but Pinchot’s re-election in 1931 marked an unmistakable turn back to
progressive thought and practice, instigated probably by the Depression. In addition to Fisher’s
replacement by Pinchot, the most obvious indicators of the strength of the liberal strain in
Pennsylvania’s GOP can probably be found in the principal contenders for the gubernatorial
nomination in 1934. Schnader, Shannon, and Margiotti were all liberal Republicans. With all
due allowance for the presence of die-hards, it seems difficult not to characterize Pennsylvania’s
Republicans as merging into a clearly, qualified liberalism by then.
provided Democrats grounds to contend that a moral, if not ideological, chasm separated the parties. Largely through the efforts of Democratic leaders, something like an “official” version of the event and its significance was already taking shape. By that account, the Kelayres massacre was simply Republican politics carried to its logical conclusion: a monstrous attack on the New Deal at the grassroots level.

Democrats swept the major state elections. The effect of the massacre on those triumphs cannot be gauged with precision, because a Democratic trend had been visible prior to Nov. 5. But Kelayres probably did have something to do with the margin of victory in at least some contests. Immediate electoral considerations aside, though, the victors wanted the whole world to know for future reference what the Kelayres massacre had been all about.

On November 9, an elaborate mass funeral for the five men killed was held, an event witnessed by national media representatives. Almost every state Democratic leader, from George Earle on down, was there. An estimated twenty thousand people watched as an enormous motorcade escorted the five hearses (where possible, all abreast) around McAdoo to the men’s final resting places in Kelayres and elsewhere. This dramatic affair conveyed the solidarity of those murdered, ethnically diverse but uniformly working-class, even in death. It also portrayed them as clients of the New Deal, senselessly slaughtered by its reactionary enemies. Lest there be any doubt, Democratic politicians made their point verbally. George Earle announced that “they died in the trenches of the New Deal,” and “wept copious tears” when visiting the bereaved families. The national news media bore the message to all

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20 Bronner, 64–66. It might be noted that when Joseph Guffey had switched his support from Al Smith to Roosevelt at the 1932 Chicago party convention he had been rewarded with complete control over federal patronage in Pennsylvania (Bronner, 44). This probably helped the Democratic slate considerably.

21 Candidate Schnader always believed that, at least in the gubernatorial race, Kelayres turned the tide. There is evidence that some traditionally Republican voters were influenced to vote Democratic (Bronner, 64–66).

22 In addition to national wire service representatives and reporters dispatched by specific newspapers, a Fox-movietone film crew was on hand to assemble a short feature (narrated by Lowell Thomas). A print on this film is in the possession of a family residing in Haddock, Pa., very near Kelayres. It includes scenes of Earle orating and victims convalescing, as well as extensive footage of the funeral procession itself.

23 The funeral really merits the attention of a cultural anthropologist. See coverage of it in the Hazleton Standard-Speaker, Pottsville Republican, and Pottsville Journal.
America. All that remained was allotting the appropriate punishment to the massacre's perpetrators.24

The "official" version of the Kelayres massacre is by no means without truth, but there are serious problems with it. The interpretation does not provide a comprehensive portrait of the incident itself, and tells us nothing of the immediate background.25 Furthermore, by its narrowly political interpretation of the events (i.e. an attack on the New Deal, the work of Republicans), this version may obfuscate the historical significance of the massacre. Kelayres was neither the only miners' village where Republicans held local office nor the only one where the Depression helped fuel Democratic party growth and, therefore, political friction. Understandably, Democratic party professionals working to win an election would emphasize politics. But historians have a responsibility to explicate the broader social and economic context in which the massacre occurred.

Providing that explanation, however, is a difficult task. Relevant data are extremely hard to acquire.26 Some available material must be handled with extreme care.27 The following study, therefore, can make no pretense to definitiveness, but in probing this incident anthracite-area historians might uncover issues and themes well worth consideration. The Kelayres massacre seems to reflect a substantive change in the

24 One hundred ten indictments were originally handed down. Joe, Phil, Arthur, Alfred, and James Bruno, and Tony Orlando, were all charged on various counts of various crimes. Trials and appeals dragged on for years, but most served time. Joe Bruno eventually received three life sentences. Only Paul Bruno was declared innocent of any wrongdoing.

25 In ways that will be made clear later in this article, materials brought to light through the legal process hardly constitute an unqualified affirmation of the official version of the massacre itself.

26 Kelayres was without borough status and, therefore, has no official records permitting reconstruction of its own history. Schuylkill County has no County Records Office. Such county records as have remained in storage (tax assessments, court dockets) are fragmentary. The Schuylkill County Historical Society's holdings consist largely of material on the history of Pottsville and material pertinent to the genealogies of prominent families in the county (although its newspaper microfilms are, of course, invaluable). The state police's file on the Kelayres massacre, including statements taken immediately after the event, was closed to the authors. So were the parish records of Kelayres' Immaculate Conception church.

27 In response to newspaper advertisements, a set of people from Kelayres or the immediate vicinity who knew something of the massacre and conditions in Kelayres generally during the period in question were kind enough to volunteer their time and information. The authors are deeply grateful for their help, and intend to respect their requests for anonymity. We refer to them only as L., M., D., R., S., and P.
very nature of social loyalties, group identifications, even of cultural values. There does seem to have been a passing of the old order in Kelayres, but the transformation was far deeper and more traumatic than merely a change in political parties.

The society and culture of the anthracite area’s lower classes had always been related to the functionings of the coal industry. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, when Pennsylvania’s anthracite fields were in the hands of family firms or relatively small, independent corporations, the industry suffered from a chronic malaise: recurrent overproduction and concomitant price drops. We can now recognize, however, that overproduction was symptomatic of a deeper dilemma. The extraction of anthracite coal required enormous capital investment and entailed heavy fixed operating and transport expenditures. The product’s profitability was largely contingent on the nature of the domestic fuel market, which fluctuated both seasonably and cyclically. Overproduction was the logical outcome of overinvestment, or entrepreneurs’ need to be prepared to meet intermittently high demand. Since the industry was, originally, highly diversified in its ownership structure and extremely competitive, crippling price drops were inevitable. The result was a very high business attrition rate until the 1870s.

Kline Township’s business history provided a splendid model of the spirit of enterprise, anthracite-style. Officially part of Rush Township until 1873, the area had been a land of small farmers and very small coal companies (German Pennsylvania Coal Co., Stoney Brook Coal Co.) in the 1850s and 1860s. In the 1870s a larger concern, the Lehigh and

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28 The anthracite coal industry drew a heavy amount of government attention. There is an enormous supply of state and federal reportage on its financial organization (especially during and immediately after major strikes), as well as a number of studies commissioned by universities or manufacturers’ associations within the industry itself. Harold Aurand’s excellent From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers (Philadelphia, 1971); Dan Rose’s Energy Transition and the Local Community (Philadelphia, 1981); and Clifton K. Yearley, Jr.’s Enterprise and Anthracite (Baltimore, 1961) all incorporate data contained in officially commissioned studies and in the Pennsylvania Bureau of Mines’ annual reports. We supplemented them with the works of Peter Roberts (an early sociologist specializing in anthracite economics and social life); Morris Ernst’s Anthracite Coal Industry Commission Report of 1937; and such company records as we were able to locate in developing our understanding of anthracite economics. Our treatment is, of course, a highly generalized one.
Wilkes-Barre Coal Co., absorbed most of those small holdings and the sizable Honeybrook colliery as well. But the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre triumph was short lived, because it was soon caught in a greater, industry-wide business reorganization.

In the 1870s, the railroads decided to gain control of the coal fields. Fearful of losing the anthracite trade entirely if the industry were not restructured, they bought land and acquired control of extraction companies all over anthracite country. The Lehigh Valley Railroad and the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad were particularly active. The latter formed an ancillary Coal and Iron Company to “rationalize” the anthracite industry. In Kline Township, the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Co. was in receivership to the Reading by 1877. In fact, by the 1880s the only important coal deposit in Kline Township the Reading did not control was that held by the still-independent Haddock colliery.

In the 1890s, railroad construction in the township infused the tiny village of Bunker Hill with a new population of workers. Mostly Italian, they would stay to work in the local Honeybrook, Silver Brook, and Haddock collieries. The village, later renamed “Kelayres,” grew with the coming of the Reading to Kline Township. Yet the economic health of the industry in which its men worked remained as precarious with the Reading on the scene as previously.

Establishing a quasi-pyramidal ownership and leadership structure for the industry, the carrying companies tried to solve the problem of declining prices by regulating production through a coal pool, a measure half-way between a purely competitive and an overtly monopolistic business system. Production quotas were assigned member corporations, each of which then assigned responsibility for delivering specified allotments of its corporate share to its sub-units, the extraction

29 Briefs of Title, Kline Township (courtesy Schuylkill County Historical Society)
31 Pottsville, *Journal*, Nov. 6, 1934, p. 1. That edition of the *Journal* carried a brief history of Kelayres. But most of it was on a page of the newspaper that had not been microfilmed. Recovery of either the original paper or the original microfilm was impossible.

Our material on Bunker Hill’s or Kelayres’ socio-economic composition is taken almost entirely from Kline Township’s tax assessment records. Individuals were assessed on the basis of occupation as well as property ownership.
companies. But the railroads were still formally in competition with each other. Quotas (and, in turn, sub-unit allotments) were assigned on the basis of perceived productive capacity. Knowing that their various corporate parents were struggling for the largest possible share of the pool's coal pie both immediately and in the future, managers of extraction companies expanded plant in order to demonstrate greater productive capacity. The pool could not stabilize either production or prices under those ground rules. The core problem of overinvestment within the industry was not solved but, if anything, worsened. Price fluctuations continued to bedevil it as a whole, and profit margins fluctuated accordingly.\(^{32}\)

The results of this continuing business tragedy fell most heavily on mine laborers—a large class of workers including miners, miners' helpers, blasters, drivers, breaker workers, and everyone else involved in the physical task of acquiring and processing hard coal.\(^{33}\) Wages, work-time, and working conditions were not uniformly poor.\(^{34}\)

\(^{32}\) Various sorts of pools were attempted over time. They had to deal with renegades in their own midst and with such anti-monopoly legislation as Harrisburg and Washington saw fit to pass and even enforce from time to time. The latter provided pressure to divest, the former, pressure to consolidate even further. Within the industry's organizational structure, the two pressures may have actually cancelled each other out, leaving it as dysfunctional as ever. Financial control of the anthracite industry was basically concentrated in a few hands (those of bankers and financiers as well as railway corporation directors) as late as the 1930s. But a detailed and comprehensive business history of the area from the coming of the railroads to the Depression has yet to be written. The lack of such a history hampers scholars working in the twentieth century and points to one problem this paper has been written in part to address: the dearth of analyses of anthracite life beyond the turn of the century.

\(^{33}\) Aurand's descriptions of the actual, physical processes of labor and the discrete components of the labor force in anthracite mining are probably unexcelled.

\(^{34}\) Rose and Aurand note that the eventual defeat of family firms by greater corporations could result in substantial benefits to workers (at least during appropriate phases of the national business cycle). With theoretically higher profit expectations, the large corporations could see some self-interest in quieting a turbulent labor force with wage increments, bonuses, looser social control (i.e., the abandonment of "company stores," "company houses," and "company doctors"), and even educational facilities—so long as workers remained nonunionized. Writing in 1904, Roberts believed such benefits would lead to greater accumulation by individual miners, which would in turn provide the "bootstraps" by which individuals among the newer immigrants or "Slavs" could attain, the level of civilized beings (Anthracite Coal Communities, New York, 1904).

Aurand, however, makes the important point that the major gains workers attained, even if only temporarily, were usually the result of pressures they themselves collectively brought to bear on management and rarely the result of corporate largesse or even corporate far-sightedness economically.
Rather, wages, work-time, and working conditions were never stable. Individual companies began cutting costs whenever profit margins dropped and, in such times, labor costs were the obvious places to shear. Anthracite mine workers were hardly the only group in America's labor force whose lives were characterized by economic instability. But it must be remembered that these men labored and tried to raise families within one of most physically hazardous workplaces in the world. In that context, unstable wages, work-time, and working conditions (especially safety measures) translated into personal insecurity with a special edge. Impelled by that special brand of anxiety, workers had been trying for generations, all across the coal fields, to "rationalize" their own lives by forming appropriate support-systems of their own. The people of Kelayres had migrated into an industrial environment that had already generated certain traditional patterns of social bonding among the lower classes.

Through the nineteenth-century, social life for such people had revolved around two central motifs: class solidarity and ethnic cohesion. Because each was called forth by inordinately intense personal insecurity, those fraternalisms have been portrayed by historians as inordinately strong. Much has been written about the conflict between the two.  

35 Class-based organization, spanning the entire anthracite in-

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35 First-hand observers of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century conditions seem to have stressed ethnicity. Some decried it as a maleficient solvent of working-class unity (see Frank J. Warne's *The Slay Invasion and the Mine Workers*, Philadelphia, 1904). Aurand, however, stresses the formation of class consciousness and class solidarity, which he argues emerged after Lattimer as unifying forces absorbing the old ethnic particularisms. Michael Novak, in *The Guns of Lattimer* (New York, 1978) emphasizes the fact that as older, English-speaking groups moved into better jobs around the colliery or out of the region entirely, they left the most poorly-rewarded element of the labor force fairly homogeneous ethnically (i.e., Slavic and, to some degree, Italian). Therefore, in his view class consciousness was preceded by and, in a sense, epiphenomenal to ethnic cohesion.

Roland Berthoff, in "The Social Order of the Anthracite Region, 1825-1902," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 89, (July 1965), 261-291 argues that because anthracite country had no residential "elite" seriously interested in providing social leadership for the area as a whole, it was left to fragment along class, ethnic, and regional lines, and no formulaic pattern of relationships among disparate groups ever arose at all. In his insistence that failure to recognize reciprocal rights and obligations among those groups created totally fragmented social order for the area, Berthoff is atypical. But in the importance he ascribes to those grouping themselves, he is very typical of the dominant concerns of anthracite-area historians.
industry, had been attempted as early as the 1860s. But it took the Lattimer massacre, one of the most terrifying incidents in American labor history, to bring large-scale unionization in the form of the United Mine Workers to anthracite country. Ethnocentrism (English, Welsh, German, Irish, Italian, Tyrolean, Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Jewish, Slovak, Slovene, Lithuanian) also fragmented the labor force. Upon arrival in the region, each group's tendency to value ethnic cohesion over other social loyalties was indeed real.

By the strike of 1902, the most serious labor disturbance Pennsylvania's anthracite industry ever witnessed, workers had learned that class and ethnic ties need not be incompatible. Historians, in their debates over the relative strength of each type of associational bond within the lower classes, may have lost sight of the fact that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, class and ethnic loyalties contributed components of a rather clearly delineated social world for lower-class individuals. Workplace and parish, fellow laborers and ethnic compatriots—these, along with kinship networks, provided a set of fraternals which the worker could balance.

That social world, resting on the twin pillars of class and ethnicity, was the one the residents of Kelayres inherited from the overall socio-economic evolution of anthracite country. For most, it was the only one within which the quest for security could be undertaken. We must understand that world in its entirety. For the Kelayres massacre seems to

36 Aurand, Rose, and Yearly underscore the fact that what the earliest workers' organizations (e.g., the W.B.A.) wanted was, ironically, entirely coterminous with the interests of management: control of prices (which they believed to be the prime determinants of wages) through control of production. But because they wanted to help impose regulation on the industry as a whole through the inclusion of organized labor in the decision-making process, the economic sense they made paled in management's eyes beside the ideological heresy they were perceived to represent.

37 This perspective on ethnicity (i.e., the ethnic community as self-constructed haven of security for individuals) is clear in the (undated, privately published) History of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Parish of McAdoo, Pa., by Stephen T. Florish (courtesy: American Catholic Historical Society, St. Charles' Seminary, Overbrook, Pa.). That particular parish was formed "from the bottom up," through the efforts of immigrants who wanted their own parish in order to provide a focal point for ethnic cohesion. The latter was explicitly intended to supply useful social contacts and to weed predatory elements out of the ethnic community. The trustee system was a major theme in the history of that parish because, given the point of forming it in the first place, its leaders wanted as much control as possible of the activities the church would sponsor.

38 In addition to Aurand and Novak, folklorist George Korson is probably the best-known professional interpreter of lower class social life in anthracite country.
have reflected its entire collapse, the passage of a whole way of life.

In order to understand that transformation, it is necessary to focus attention on a social element that is seldom scrutinized by anthracite historians: the indigenous petite bourgeoisie. Given the continuing economic travails of mining-country life, there had always been those within the lower classes who had concluded that, however the anthracite industry was organized, the worse place to occupy was the position of colliery worker.

Kelayres was never a “company town.” Housing provided by the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Co. was freely available for rental or purchase. The rest was newly constructed and privately held. The 1890s seem to have been a relatively good period for the workers of Kelayres. By 1897, the Elmira Building and Loan Association was established in the village, and part-ownership of the “shanties,” “single houses,” “double-frame houses,” and open lots was attainable by a rather large number of inhabitants. Prodigious saving and a deep desire for home ownership were old traditions among anthracite workers, especially the southern and southeastern European immigrants. Naturally, holdings of this sort would evaporate abruptly with the onset of hard times in the industry. What is rather surprising about Kelayres is the number of those who acquired property and used it for small-business purposes outside the anthracite industry.

Predominantly a laborers’ community, Kelayres (and, indeed, Kline Township) was nonetheless replete with “hotel keepers” (anyone renting a room); “restauraters” and “taavern keepers” (anyone serving food or drink, on any scale, for a price); “bottlers” (people engaged in the small but expanding business of bottling water and soda); “hall owners” (people offering the use of property for weddings, baptisms, and similar occasions); barbers; huckleberry vendors; and other types of merchants. Throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, a small but ambitious minority of Kelayres’ laborers tried to establish some economic function for themselves unconnected with colliery work. But in a single-industry region, this was a petite bourgeoisie with an obvious problem.

It was one thing to detach oneself from colliery work, but quite another to detach oneself from the anthracite economy. Since these

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39 Roberts describes this tradition in some detail (Anthracite Coal Communities), as does Novak (The Guns of Lattimer). Possession of a small plot of land was particularly important because it enabled the owner to grow his or her own vegetables, or even graze a goat or keep some poultry.
businesses’ revenues still came primarily from mine workers’ wages, their prosperity was contingent on that of the industry’s local branch. Their encasement within the anthracite-dominated economy imposed a real ceiling on the attainable ambitions of the local petite bourgeoisie. Kelayres was a “lower class” town, but within that loose category there were two basic elements: the larger was wage-earners, anxious to derive as much as possible from mine labor itself; the smaller was a petite bourgeoisie trapped in a situation where only a high degree of resourcefulness and entrepreneurial vision could gratify aspirations. Perhaps to the latter’s dismay, the two were yoked together. But the latter was the dynamic element, trying to break through the structural constraints imposed by the functionings of the anthracite economy. Frank Bruno succeeded.

Bruno came to the U.S. at the age of thirty. By the 1890s he had found his way from New York to Kelayres as part of the Lehigh Valley Railroad’s construction gang. In Kelayres he boarded with two Irish construction supervisors named Kelly and Ayres, after whom he renamed the village. The new name seems to have taken hold as Bruno’s own stature increased. After only three years as a miner he became a foreman, and he remained one for fifteen years. He became a school director almost as soon as Kelayres acquired a school of its own in the 1890s. By 1904, Frank Bruno had moved into small business with the purchase of a general store and then a cigar factory employing six. He moved even higher with the acquisition of a men’s clothing store in McAdoo. By then he was a staunch Republican—chairman, in fact, of Kline Township’s Republican committee. In 1899, President McKinley appointed him Postmaster of Kelayres.40

Frank Bruno’s remarkable success paralleled and probably abetted that of family members Peter, James, Lewis, and Anthony. They all began, like Frank, as common laborers. By 1897, James owned a bottling house; Anthony was a hotel keeper; Peter owned a hall. In their cases as well, business success went hand-in-hand with public service. By 1901, Peter was a fireman; by 1904, Lewis was a teacher and also held “money at interest.”41 By 1905, James and Anthony were real

41 The tax assessment records do not clarify whether holding “money at interest” meant being a direct lender or a bank depositor.
estate operators, buying and selling properties within Kelayres.

No other name in Kelayres was so closely associated with business success; no other family, so collectively visible in public life. As a unit, the Brunos were trying hard to burst through the structural constraints imposed on the local petite bourgeoisie. They did so well that three of Frank's nephews extended the family's good fortunes into the next generation. Philip was a Tax Collector; Joe, a School Director; Louis, School Principal. In the 1920s, they would achieve even greater prominence.

Economically, the 1920s were a turning point for anthracite country. Boosted by the war, the industry's production figures peaked from 1917 to 1920. The accoutrements of prosperity—radios, better housing, better clothing, even automobiles—were visible and attainable (although hardly standard for mine workers). By then, there had even been moves toward economic diversification. Textile mills had been established in Hazleton, Weatherly, and McAdoo. Mine laborers' incomes could be supplemented by those of their wives and daughters through mill work. But that supplemental income did not offset rising prices, with which mine wages had not kept pace.

Appearances were cruelly deceiving. The anthracite area's economy was as troubled as ever, now by an external threat. The major problem was serious competition for the domestic fuel market from soft coal and, especially, cheap heating oil. As hard coal consumption declined, so did production. The internal organization of the industry did not help much, and its ownership structure began to shift again. Workers attempted adjustments as well. The 1920s were a period of major strikes (1922, 1925) and labor unrest as U.M.W. members tried to stem the loss of their jobs and the decline of their real incomes.

In southern anthracite country, particularly, more restive sorts tried another tack. Gambling and prostitution, which had always existed in hard coal areas, flourished in the 1920s. Prohibition provided complementary outlets for small-scale entrepreneurs. Schuylkill County

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42 Rose, 82-83; Ernst, 2-8.
43 Ernst notes that there was some tendency in the 1920s for small-scale operators to reappear, that the degree of monopolization of the industry was declining. The small operators tended to pay below union scale. Ernst says this practice was to some degree condoned. While the great corporations employed as many men as possible for shorter periods of time apiece, small operators used fewer men but offered each more time (p. 9).
generally and Kline Township particularly seem to have been centers for these kinds of activities. This underground economy undoubtedly made money from all sorts of people. Illegal alcohol was consumed by people of all social levels and, if local oral tradition is at all reliable, affluent New Yorkers and Philadelphians were the really important customers for brothels and gambling dens.

The prevalence of vice in the area should not be misinterpreted. It was not a new phenomenon, and to some inhabitants it was not vice at all but an opportunity, one possible solution to a very old condition which was getting worse. The various vice operations were, at first, simply individualized ways of meeting individual households' security needs, attempts to supply something of market value in a situation where labor alone was becoming less valuable. Understood in this sense, the sheer scale of vice activities demonstrates the severity and commonness of the economic crisis. For in the 1920s, it had reached a point where a new perception of Kline Township's entire socio-economic landscape was possible.

Angry miner, frightened merchant, stealthy bootlegger: whatever their ethnic background, all were in a sense part of the same set. All were hard-coal people trying to deal with the old economic dilemmas the area had always presented its lower classes. Their common need was intensifying and, in the process, modifying their former differences. They might even be aggregated as a "market" for legal and financial security that the anthracite industry had, in this convulsive phase, generated. What happened in Kelayres, in fact, reflects precisely the fact that this unified "market"—crossing class, ethnic, and all other traditional social demarcation lines was perceivable and that those within it could be bonded into a new sort of social aggregation.

The Brunos perceived the new conditions and acted accordingly. By the late twenties they were in a position to supply that "security market" because they were the only element of the Kelayres or Kline Township petite bourgeoisie which had the resources to overcome the no-win situ-

44 Roberts notes the vice tradition in the area. After the Kelayres massacre, the Pottsville Republican reported that D. A. Roy Enterline announced an impending "crackdown on rackets," especially slot machines, "numbers" games, and gambling dens (Dec. 15, 1934, 1). One week later, the Republican reported that the "rackets" were as strong as ever, and quoted one participant in them as stating: "They don't dare close them. Somebody else will go to jail before we do if they try it" (Dec. 22, 1). We have testimony from L. and P., especially, on the extent of vice activities in the region.
ation confronting the rest. Their distinctiveness lies in the fact that they situated themselves in such a manner that, at least for a while, they could prosper precisely as the region’s own “security market” grew and as the anthracite industry slowly died. They turned the classic obstruction facing the local petite bourgeoisie—the weakness of the local market—on its head, and they profited by it. By the late 1920s, the new generation of Brunos had infiltrated so many major sources of money and had a hand on so many levers of power that they could amass enough to supply the security market, accruing substantial profits for themselves.

They began the 1920s as part of a rather affluent family of relatively sizable property-holders whose members had been assuming both business and civic responsibilities for some time. This process was simply extended. By 1914, Louis Bruno was one of the township’s two Justices of the Peace. Joe became the other one in 1917. They would retain those posts until 1932 and 1934, respectively. At the time, a Pennsylvania J.P. had summary jurisdiction in claims cases of various kinds wherein funds contested did not exceed a certain amount (usually $300), with allowance for jury trial when the amount contested exceeded that figure and under certain other exceptional circumstances. Areas of responsibility included labor and insurance contracts; actions for rent; attachment for debt; actions of trespass; personal injury; auto or property damage. The J.P.’s position, standing astride small-scale transactions and economic conflicts, was clearly a strategic one to monopolize in a place like Kline Township, and especially in Kelayres. As Tax Collector, Phil was responsible for collecting, among other things, the small tax based on township assessment which individuals had to pay prior to voting registration. Louis and Joe were both elected to the Board of Directors of Kelayres’ school district. Louis stayed principal for most of the 1920s. From 1924 to 1926, Joe was also “Investigator” for the district of the County Poor Board. He was thus tapped into the township’s poor relief system at a time when the number of relief applicants was ballooning. By 1931, Joe was a County


46 “History of County Poor District” by Wm. H. Powell, from Pottsville Republican, April 10-15, 1935. Prior to 1929, there were about five hundred families in the district receiving “outdoor relief” (store orders for food). By 1935, there were some fifteen hundred.
Detective. He, Louis, and Phil were all important Republican party figures. But it would be more than misleading to call the Brunos "politicians." Local offices were simply one set, albeit an integral or even the most important set, of activities in which they were involved. Phil was Coal and Iron Policeman at the Haddock colliery. Joe was on the Board of Directors of the First National Bank of McAdoo until it closed in 1927. He was Vice-President and Phil was one of the Directors of the Miners' Bank, which was formed afterwards. With repeal of prohibition, Joe was also an "agent" for "a beer concern." The family also owned and rented various properties in Kelayres itself.

The Bruno family as a unit represented a concentration of both political and financial resources enabling them to establish a network of dependencies broad enough to include laborers, miners, public-job seekers, relief applicants, mortgaged-property holders, small business people, debtors of almost any sort, and criminals. The Brunos were not politicians but practitioners of the "politics business," an important legal and financial service business in which local elective offices provided vital but by no means the only resource inputs. They were the petite bourgeois who had made it, by taking perhaps the only market avenue to prosperity offered in the anthracite-based local economy of the early twentieth century. And calling the socio-economic entity they constructed a political machine may be as misleading as calling the Brunos simple politicians. This family firm, from all accounts, simply transferred money (in the form of cash, loans, relief), jobs, legal assistance, and legal protection from a source to a recipient in such a manner as to benefit that recipient. For supplying security, the firm was rewarded with the political support and, sometimes, cash increments which enabled it to retain its supply of resources and stay in business. The ensuing web of dependencies—among laborers, grocers, or criminals and within the Italian, Slavic, or any other ethnic community—was, in turn, consolidated under Bruno leadership into the

47 Joseph H. Zerbey, History of Pottsville and Schuylkill County, Pa., re-published from Pottsville Evening Republican and Pottsville Morning Paper, III, 1092
48 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 7, 1935, 1, 10.
49 A strong degree of pro-Bruno feeling still exists in Kelayres R, S, and L retain warm feelings for the Brunos. P. notes that, when all the dust had cleared, no one in Kelayres ever launched any reprisals against them. Even D, who became an anti-Bruno activist, insists that he enjoyed cordial relations with Joe up until 1933
Bruno bloc, or faction, or, if we must, machine.

Most importantly, in building the bloc, the Brunos changed the entire social life of the locale. The bloc began as a sort of warp in the lower class social world. It came practically to define that world itself or at least to define power relations within it. As time passed and the "security market" the Brunos serviced expanded, relations with the Bruno faction became more important to the people of Kelayres than either class or ethnic associations. This was a special sort of "factionalism," one that actually starved out other, older loyalties. It certainly transcended "politics" in the formal, partisan sense entirely.

There is only one printed source on life in Kelayres during the Bruno era. Written under the pseudonym "Clyde Bernard," it was actually the work of Kelayres printer and sometime school teacher, Joseph Condor, who wrote it and distributed it locally. His study, entitled *Kelayres Political Massacre*, seems characterized by naivete and convoluted logic (to say nothing of a twisted plotline). He was of Slavic descent and, apparently, had barely mastered the English language. But if we approach him properly we find something special, and quite moving: an insight into the cultural shift behind the Kelayres massacre.

Condor's vision is that of a lower class, nineteenth-century anthracite-area moralist. He looked to class and ethnic bonds as the very definitions of morality, the sole emblems of moral order itself. Significantly, he begins his story by trying to describe a quasi-*gemeinschaft* way of life in Kelayres' pre-Bruno history.

Irish settlers were a peaceful and respected citizens, interested deeply in the progress and welfare of this community. Their ambitions were to uplift humanity of this industrial terra. . . .Thus the fine honest web of cooperation was continued in the town. . . .[D]uring the immigration period of the early 1900's, even Kelayres, was a 'melting pot' of foreign nationalities. Whether an individual was Irish, German, Italian, Slovak, Polish, Russian, or Magyar; if he feared not hard labor, he found no difficulty in securing a job at the colliery.

Of all the classes of people located in this community, only two were outstanding. One for her splendid cooperative spirit and the other for lack of cooperation. The first, the Italian class of people, who abided strictly by their native traditions. . . .

. . .The early Slavic Class, very sparse in number, were a less clannish people. Their personalities were easily discontented. . . .No friendly hand was extended to assist his unfortunate brother. . . .

50 Condor, 155-156. The first part of Condor's work consists of captioned photographs of the entire affair (massacre night, funeral, trials) gleaned from newspapers. This quotation opens his own, personal treatment.
Obviously, Condor is celebrating traditional communitarian norms and a moral order based on personal commitment to the traditionally valued groupings—at the workplace, within ethnic communities. It is not contradictory that Condor applauds both the melting pot and ethnic particularism. In fact, he deplores the Slavs’ lack of ethnic identification. What he really cares about is “the fine honest web of cooperation,” the “splendid cooperative spirit.” In his view those were the cultural fruits of the traditional associational patterns. Indeed, the great theme of the Kelayres massacre to him is *gemeinschaft* dismantled and the rise of unrestrained *homo economicus*.

. . . Jim, Peter and Frank Bruno, set sail for America. . . . In the year of 1885 they initiated themselves into this prosperous mining district. Their ostentatious mannerisms, adaptability, almost eloquent speech in comparison with the ignorant class existing in the locality brought them many laurels. . . . The position of colliery foreman appealed tremendously to the Bruno brothers. Foreigners though they were, they planned of accumulating wealth. A foreman position could produce that yeorn for wealth. Thus the job was theirs and a $10. graft donation was demanded for every laborer who sought a job at the colliery. . . . The successful swindling of Jim, Peter and Frank Bruno was an incentive for bigger and better things. Hence the correlating of politics with colliery jobs. . . .

Voters were paid with a quart of whiskey, a hunting dog, a pump gun, and up to one hundred dollars, depending as to the amount of votes. . . .

. . . For 27 years existed this dreadful plague of dictatorship. One’s liberty, property, family and even spouse was like a dangling pendulum. Any moment villains would draw their swords of dishonesty and slash the regular thread of ones existence.

. . . If you voted and favored especially with a batch of votes you were permitted to exist in the town. Woe, to the free thinker, his poor body was abused with beatings, threats and almost lynchings. . . .

Politics was not their only aim. They competed and undersold businessmen of all types. The year 1908 found them prosperous in saloon business, blueberry buying, pool rooms, slot machine and bootlegging liquor.  

Condor’s description of the Brunos’ activities is unverifiable. But when he speaks of the new light in which people in Kelayres viewed “the regular thread of ones existence,” he is referring to something real. The Brunos may or may not have been guilty of the specific crimes Condor describes. But they were indeed replacing the traditional social bonds where security had once been sought with a new, unashamedly naked cash nexus. In Kelayres, one’s security was indeed largely contingent on

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51 Condor, 157-160, 163.
the role one could or would play within that Bruno-based nexus, class or ethnic ties notwithstanding.

Condor elaborates on this point by describing what happened to those who disturbed that system in any way. He depicts the beating of a youth who pilfered Bruno liquor. He recounts the bullying of another who was caught playing slugs into Bruno slot machines (installed, according to Condor, all over the township.)\(^{52}\) These machines ("the heartless looking metallic contraption") were particularly significant, and gall- ing, to Condor.

At one of the Kelayres popular church festivals, Joe Bruno had the superb insolence to install his machines on the street concessions. Not even the fury of the priest, people, or police swayed this man’s nerve. If he were penalized in any manner his cash freed him of any obligation, social or legal.\(^{53}\)

Condor’s over-all point in describing these Bruno misdeeds seems clear. Moral values had been based on group affiliations which were themselves decomposing. As the strength of the old associations with- ered, there simply were no moral values, to say nothing of formal institutions, strong enough to restrain the Brunos. What that meant, in turn, was that Kelayres had lost the ability to restrain individual rapacity in the abstract.\(^{54}\)

If Condor were ringing these alarms when the "'Reign of Terror'" was in full sway, he had not been heeded. For many years, Bruno ac- tions which disgusted him did not much bother most people in Kelayres. It was a matter of citizens lacking not the ability to resist, but the will. Condor realized very acutely that his own moral vision had been lost by the community long ago, that Kelayres had abandoned the old ways. "The people of Kelayres are the ones who are responsible for giving Joe Bruno the honorary crown," he admitted; "they knew of the corrupted reign in the town, they had nothing in mind but to receive money from Bruno. . ."\(^{55}\)

Condor’s tract must be supplemented if the massacre is to be un- derstood. For, employing the perspective of traditional culture and

\(^{52}\) Condor, 160-162.

\(^{53}\) Condor, 163.

\(^{54}\) In addition to everything else, Condor goes to some lengths to portray Joe Bruno as a sexual predator (163-164).

\(^{55}\) Condor, 163.
morality, he was either unable or unwilling to explain exactly how and why opposition to the Brunos finally developed. His silence on this point is significant, for there are ample indications that opposition grew not through moral indignation but through cold, hard, personalized economic realities.

The Kelayres massacre was the result of tensions engendered by structural malfunctionings of the socio-economic entity the Brunos had created. To understand the degree of tension such malfunctions could generate, we must appreciate the sheer importance of the Bruno machine in Kelayres. For by the late 1920s and early 1930s, the entity the Brunos had been building for over twenty years was the commanding socio-economic "institution" in the place, practically unrivaled as the agency through which individuals could attain some measure of economic security or even advancement. By then, the union was hardly a beacon of hope. The dying anthracite industry's workers do not seem to have been high on the U.M.W. leadership's list of priorities, and without higher-level institutional commitment union activism in Kelayres was not about to yield substantive economic rewards. Further, individuals could not turn to ethnic support-networks for help. Perhaps in part because of the dynamics of Brunoism, which over time drained ethnic identification of meaning, those support-networks were either absent or ineffectual. The Brunos—or, rather, the politics business they owned—had become the only game in town.

56 John L. Lewis and his colleagues' resources and organizational energies were then deployed in other mining industries (e.g., soft coal) and in state and national politics. The U.M.W.'s Secretary-Treasurer, Thomas Kennedy, was in 1934 the Democrats' (successful) candidate for Lieutenant-Governor of Pennsylvania. Kennedy resided in Hazleton, only a few miles from Kelayres.

The case of D. is particularly interesting in this regard. A miner and union activist, D was also proprietor of a small corner store and, eventually, a Democratic party organizer.

57 In 1929 the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Co.'s properties (including, presumably, Honeybrook) were sold to the Glen Alden Coal Co., headquartered in Wilkes-Barre ("Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company Records," courtesy of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society of Wilkes-Barre). At other Glen Alden collieries, workers clashed violently with one another when the Anthracite Mine Workers Union tried to compete with the established U.M.W. local for worker support and company recognition. There was violence in Nanticoke, and fifteen were injured in a riot in Wilkes-Barre (Pottsville Republican, Jan 30 and 31, 1935). By way of contrast, in Kelayres there was no internecine working-class conflict, nor was management the ultimate focal point of antagonism. The politics business absorbed energies that elsewhere were channeled in other directions.
What happened, it seems, was that the Depression upset the relationship between the village (security market) and the Brunos (market suppliers). There was a kind of equilibrium point up to which the Brunos could profit from poor economic conditions by servicing the security market but beyond which demand for those services rose while the firm’s ability to supply them declined. The Depression was one challenge which the Brunos’ entrepreneurial skills, vision, and imagination simply could not meet.

The number of jobs the Brunos could dispense was always limited. Any helpfulness Phil had possessed at the Haddock colliery was certainly reduced by the early 1930s. As Joe’s own sons, nephews, and other relatives attained their maturity, he made the business error of handing out too many of the best jobs (at the bank, in the school) to them, too few elsewhere. More serious, probably, was the decline and fall of the Miners’ Bank by 1932. Condor is explicit on the role of mortgages within the machine: “Three fourths of the homes in Kelayres were mortgages, and Joe Bruno loaned the money to practically all those people.” Jennie Tortanessi, one of the most colorful protagonists on massacre night, was one of those who had felt the effects of the bank’s failing health in the form of foreclosure.

Property was used for small business purposes in Kelayres; so when Joe Bruno was forced to increase his own revenues by applying pressure to property-holders (either through the bank, as J.P., or as personal landlord), dangerous reactions could develop. In the Depression, small businessmen in Kelayres had to extend a great deal of credit. When their own costs rose through Joe’s actions, credit for patrons naturally contracted. The repercussions are easily imagined: ill-will against the Brunos could filter into every echelon of village society. On the night of the massacre the American flag was carried by Carl Vacante and Joseph Cara. Vacante was a barber. Cara held an interest in one of the many “small breakers” which dotted the area at the time. Some time earlier, Cara had come to Joe for “legal assistance” in settling a fire insurance claim on the breaker. Joe’s fee, however, led Cara to initiate legal action against him. What Cara’s employees and/or associates thought of Joe

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58 Condor lists the various Brunos employed as teachers, truant officers, bank clerks, in the post office, on the school Board, etc. (171-172).
59 Condor, 166.
60 Pottsville Republican, Feb. 2, 1935.
61 Pottsville Republican, Feb. 1, 1935.
is unrecorded. But it was Cara's son, Tony, who rented from Joe the saloon behind Joe's home. The rent Joe charged Tony is unknown, but it is scarcely surprising that by 1934 both Tony and his customers were confirmed anti-Brunoites. A.J. Payer, of Payer's butcher shop in the Marko building, became a Bruno antagonist as well. So did John Saladago, of Saladago's drug store. Tensions seem to have been pulsing through the village's little commercial community, located at the intersection of Fourth and Center Streets.

It might be recalled, as well, that Joe was a County Detective by 1931. The phenomenon of bootlegging coal (miners' illegally extracting coal from unused mines, processing and trucking it to market themselves or through middlemen) was growing as the Depression worsened. The practice was condoned by nearly everyone. But Joe was in special need of funds to plug up fissures in the machine. To extort money from bootleggers would have been short-sighted and counter-productive. But Louis, the acknowledged "brains" of the family, died in an auto accident in 1932 (Arthur Bruno had been appointed J.P. in his place). Possibly, Joe simply lacked Louis' acumen.

Opposition to the Brunos was building prior to 1933. Condor's silence about this suggests that the pre-1933 opposition was socially quite varied and based on the sorts of considerations Condor either did not understand or would not admit: pragmatic and individualized

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62 Condor, 172.
63 Bootlegging coal is a fascinating phenomenon meriting much more attention. On the surface, it seems a case of workers simply "expropriating the expropriators," a form of class action which would have pleased Karl Marx himself. But class cohesion was not maintained—the bootleggers divided among themselves. Some sold their coal to operators of "little breakers," who then processed and marketed it by truck. That coal, professionally processed, was of high quality. Its presence on the market harmed the salability of coal delivered by miners who had to both extract and process it themselves. There was actually a riot among bootleggers in Hecksherville (Pottsville Journal, Nov. 22, 1934). As divisions among them deepened, the Reading began dynamiting bootleggers' workings, and bootleggers responded by threatening to flood Reading-held mines (Pottsville Journal, Nov. 23, 1934). Whatever pressures drove bootleggers apart, the phenomenon may reflect the importance of the spirit of enterprise in all social ranks in anthracite country by the time of the Depression.
64 Ernst discusses bootlegging extensively, describing Schuylkill County as its center and noting the lack of concern over its legality among the population (and clergy).
65 An admitted bootlegger, D. does not recall any interference from the Brunos. P., however, suspects the Brunos were extorting.
66 The discussion of the sources of pre-1933 opposition is based on conversations with all our respondents in Kelayres.
economic motives, far removed from any core moral antagonism to the machine's *modus operandi*, unrelated to any attempt to recapture Kelayres' pre-Bruno *zeitgeist*.

What Condor did focus on was the school board election of 1933. The school board's behavior under Bruno control was what he knew best. He claimed that the Brunos had been using the school bus to transport beer throughout Prohibition; that they charged exorbitant rates to bus some children to Hazleton; that they profited unwholesomely by supplying the bus with gas and by housing it for a fee in a garage they owned; that they squandered money on repairs just to benefit supporters; and that, worst of all, they extorted "kickback" money from teachers for jobs and had blocked teacher unionization when Eva Socker, Julia Leshko, and Cecilia Stracka had tried to organize but dropped the fight in order to be rehired.67 These issues had annoyed few besides Condor and a handful of fellow teachers prior to 1933. But by then, there was something else involved in the school board's activities that interested the people of Kelayres.

The village's old wooden school burned down in 1932. When construction of a new, larger one began, with building contracts to be handed out and the prospects of maintenance work and school-supply markets stretching far into the future, opposition to the Brunos crystallized around the coming school board election. Indeed, the school board election and its aftermath, more than any other single factor, pushed the entire situation into a violently confrontational atmosphere.

The opposition was spearheaded by the McAloose family, a rather well-to-do and quite accomplished group who were old antagonists of the Brunos.68 Their resistance had previously been ineffectual. But times had changed. By 1933 there was plenty of anti-Bruno sentiment around. The school board election provided an opportunity to mobilize it. The opposition tried, originally, to organize as Republicans.69 Only

67 Condor, 166, 167, 172-173, 176-79.
68 The McAloose family history is very difficult to trace in Kline Township's tax assessment records because there were so many variations on the spelling of the name ("Macaluso," "MacAloose," "McAloose," and others). However they rose to prominence, family patriarch John managed to educate his sons well. Carl was a dentist, Louis and Joseph were doctors. Dan, the youngest, was at the time of the massacre "retired," having lost a leg in 1931. We were told (by S.) that the McAlooses had held either part-ownership or managerial-level positions in a breaker at Buck Run, but we have been able to confirm neither that nor any other information on how they rose economically.
69 Pottsville Republican, Jan. 7, 1935, 1, 10; Jan. 10, 1935, 1; confirmed by D.
when that proved impossible did they turn to the Democratic party. Perhaps for the first time, Joe was faced with a serious threat.

As the campaign got underway, Bruno opponents found their Assessor reluctant to assess them. Condor, characteristically, cried despairingly: “Fred Smarkonich was Township Assessor at the time and he went against his own class of people to favor the Brunos.” Without assessment, the Tax Collector had no assigned poll tax to collect, and without a receipt for that tax payment people could not register to vote. A protest was organized in Pottsville. Outdoor meetings, often on the McAloose porch right across the street from Joe Bruno’s home, were held weekly. They were raucous, no-holds-barred affairs, and they served their purpose well.

By the time of the election, the anti-Brunoites were strong enough to oust Joe Bruno as School Board President, an astounding defeat for a man who was used to winning elections by overwhelming margins. But Joe, wisely or not, decided not to yield easily that particular component of his firm’s resource supply. After impounding the ballots (as J.P.), Joe brought a demand for a recount to Schuylkill County court. According to Condor, election inspector George Rushnock lied by claiming the ballots had not been altered, “in spite of the fact that he took an oath on the ‘BIBLE.’” Legally or illegally, Joe won the battle. But the war was far from over.

The anti-Brunoites were now part of a larger group, the state Democratic party, which could and did keep the school board issue alive. They decided to contest the results in a public forum, where they could bring various other charges against the Brunos as well. When Joe heard that the court had granted an electoral contest, to be held in a Fire Hall in McAdoo, he tried to defuse the issue by resigning. But when he clumsily named his son Fred as pro tempore President pending resolu-

70 Condor, 169

71 The Pottsville Republican reported “There was no attempt to confine language to accepted standards for public speaking” and that “amateur nights were held when all men and women were invited to take the stump and try their oratory talents and vividness of expression” (Jan 7, 1935, 10) Edward Vespucci was most probably among the new orators the anti-Brunoites recruited in those days. The bullets that lodged in his brain on Nov 5, however, made speech of any sort nearly impossible for him for the rest of his life. R describes threats of castration, lynching and dynamiting at those meetings

72 Condor, pp 174
tion of the issue in the courts, his opponents redoubled their determination to fight.

The contest was held, but the Schuylkill County court was still deliberating the evidence of Bruno malfeasance offered in McAdoo when the school year began in September, 1934. Anti-Brunoites had been simmering almost a whole year, watching the school go up. When constructed, the building was actually named “BRUNO SCHOOL.” The opposition decided on direct action, and Kelayres began to snap.

With complete disregard for legal process, anti-Brunoites simply occupied the school for the first four days of the school year. Violent clashes between Bruno and anti-Bruno school employees ensued. Joe succeeded in getting an injunction against his foes, preventing them from interfering with the operation of the school until the court case was settled. But the court’s deliberations dragged on, and Bruno teachers were forcibly turned back so often that the school remained closed until November.73 In the interim, matters got worse.

Frustrated in the courts, their last hope for success in what was to them the vitally important local politics business, anti-Brunoites chose either to initiate or reciprocate a turn toward open violence. During that interim period, theBrunos were all but barricaded in their own homes. Bruno women had to arm themselves with clubs to attend church. There was talk of tar and feathers. Bomb threats were made. People went armed. Fights in and around the school became common.74

What Joseph Condor did not mention—perhaps because by then the group with which he was affiliated could be charged with thuggism as easily as their enemies—was that a climate of violence, fed by both sides, had engulfed Kelayres long before massacre night. It simply reached a breaking point on Nov. 5. There was, really, too much at stake in this seemingly inconsequential school board election in this

73 Pottsville Journal, Nov. 18, 1934, 10. The “Bruno school board” had been recognized as the legal one at the recount (hence, the validity of the injunction). Apparently, what was still tied up in the courts was the outcome of the charges that had been brought in McAdoo. Until the massacre, this entire affair had not been deemed worthy of attention in Pottsville press circles. Only afterwards did they treat it, and then only sketchily. Its legal aspects are difficult to clarify for want of court records.

74 R., S. and P. all emphasize the degree of violence directed against the Brunos prior to massacre night. Even D. and M., who were Democratic party organizers, concede that their side was plagued with “hotheads.” Larry Bovanko, in particular, was described to us as a “hothead” and a “bully.”
isolated little coal town. In fact, the real tragedy of Kelayres may be that so much could be at stake in such an election in the first place.

If, in light of all this, we take another look at the night of November 5, we can see the massacre in a broader perspective. People from all over the township were in Kelayres that night. Some were undoubtedly there as ideologically committed Democrats, genuine New Dealers. But Kelayres' own party leaders directed the proceedings, and they were interested in Earle and Roosevelt only to the degree that a statewide Democratic victory meant an indirect blow against the Bruno faction. The defense strategy at Joe Bruno's first trial consisted of assertions that others within the house did the firing and that the firing itself was provoked. His attorneys contended that the marchers did not constitute a parade but a mob, intent on destroying Bruno lives and property. It was alleged that the marchers came armed with clubs, that rocks had been thrown, that Larry Bovanko fired the first shots, and that Frank Fiorella was actually killed by a shotgun blast fired from the McAloose porch. It is probably true that some Democrats' mood that night was not entirely festive. Actually, Joe Bruno requested state police assis-

75 See the Pottsville Republican, Jan 22-25, 1935. Like the prosecution, the defense had entire sets of witnesses swearing to each phase of its version of the story. Frank Nilo, Clementine Stancato, Antonette Bruno, Anthony Studnick, William Chevinski, Mr and Mrs Frank Bruno, Mary McAloone, Albert Kafka, Angelina Forke. Paul Krammes offered a particularly detailed description of the crowd's menacing character.

76 One of the prosecution's problems was its use of a young girl named Betty Luchetta. At the arraignment, Luchetta had been used to corroborate Cecilia Strack's description of the placement of various people within Joe Bruno's house during the shooting (during some point in which, she left). But Luchetta was in the Bruno house in the first place because she had been injured by Democratic stoning. She embarrassed the prosecution by changing her description of what she saw within the Bruno house, yet remaining adamant that she herself had been stoned.

The defense's case was weakened by the fact that nearly all friendly witnesses were political associates and/or relatives of the Brunos. The defense noted, however, that nearly all the prosecution's witnesses were political opponents of the Brunos. Each side alleged that its witnesses had been physically intimidated and/or offered bribes. Each side claimed the others' witnesses trial testimony violated statements given to the state police immediately after the massacre.

That trial was filled with oddities, and really deserves a whole separate treatment. The state wanted a conviction for first-degree murder. The prosecution's summation went so far as directly to suggest that any other result would be anti-American (there was much use of the riddled American flag). The judge's charge to the jury was the longest in the history of Schuylkill County and seemed to demand a first-degree murder conviction. Yet the jury found itself able to find Joe Bruno guilty only of manslaughter. He was given a life sentence (and, later, two more for involvement in other victims' deaths).
tance on Nov. 5 before anyone else did. He had been requesting it for weeks, because Kelayres had long been a tinderbox. The Brunos (including Joe) almost certainly did the shooting and killing. They "snapped" most completely and most inexcusably. But it was the internal dissolution of an entire community and the atmosphere of violence engendered that formented the Kelayres massacre. This is why the "official" version of the event is inadequate. In denying the complexity of the matter, in neglecting the pressures on all involved, it ignores the real problems the people of Kelayres faced and even, in a sense, their humanity.

Demythologizing the Kelayres massacre itself is relatively easy. But this project was undertaken only as a first step in expanding our understanding of that odd and volatile corner of Pennsylvania in which the event occurred. The major issue raised is the nature of social bonding within the lower classes of anthracite country in the early twentieth century.

In the nineteenth century, economic conditions helped create distinct patterns of social life for such people. Class and ethnic associations had provided, in a sense, boundaries for the social world within which lower-class individuals sought the security that the anthracite industry never provided. As the entire industry deteriorated during the twen-

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77 Pottsville Republican, Jan 25, 1935, 14 (testimony of Hazleton switchboard operator) This witness was among the few at the trial with no personal ties to either side.
78 It might be noted that, after the Bruno trial, the Democrats won their court case and took control of the school board. Larry Bovanko became a school bus driver and a constable. In the latter capacity, he tried to close a saloon operated by Paul Saladago with "undue force" and was himself jailed.
Condor, perhaps aware that no firm moral order was to be recovered via the divided local Democrats, looked to higher authorities. But they appeared no more capable of sustaining one than elements within Kelayres itself. On Dec. 18, 1936, Joe Bruno escaped from prison. Much of Condor's tract is one long shriek of rage at the comfort Joe had allegedly enjoyed in prison, and the ease of his escape. Bruno was recaptured in New York.
79 Not only could neither class nor ethnic ties stay in tact under those pressures, but even family bonds were riven. Carl Vacante sided with the Democrats, but Joseph ("Jiggs") Vacante was a Brunoite election-board member. Angelina Forke was a sister of Brunoite Tony Orlando, sister-in-law of victim William Forke. Another of Orlando's sisters was married to Tony Cara.
tieth century, class and ethnic loyalties might have intensified. But what happened in Kelayres demonstrates that the exact opposite could occur. New sorts of associational networks (in this case, the Bruno and anti-Bruno "factions") could replace the old, even rendering class and ethnic solidarity functionally obsolete.

The Kelayres massacre suggests that the loss of nineteenth-century social loyalties was not simple historical entropy, that active solvents were at work. Representatives of the local *petite bourgeoisie*, impelled by pressures of their own, may have played a major role in the transformation.

The anthracite country's twentieth-century evolution has not received sufficient attention from historians in order to determine whether the forces operating were crucial only to Kelayres or spread throughout the area. Surely, the dissolution of the old patterns of social life—and, more important, the emergence of new patterns to replace them—are as compelling concerns as the original construction of class and ethnic cohesiveness in the more distant past.

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