Brother Against Brother:
The Amalgamated and Sons of
Vulcan at the A.M. Byers
Company, 1907-1913

The history of iron workers after 1880 has been largely ignored by historians preoccupied with the transformation of workplace relations in the steel industry. The reason for this emphasis is clear. After the introduction of the Bessemer converter in the 1870s, iron's importance in the marketplace relative to steel declined. With this shift in the market, many of the folkways and work rules of the craftsmen who produced iron disappeared. The Carnegie mills set the standard for the new steel industry, forcing many iron firms to convert to steel or go out of business.

By the first years of the twentieth century skilled iron workers were jealously defending their remaining footholds in the iron mills. According to one estimate, the number of puddlers, perhaps the most highly skilled of the iron workers, dropped from 40,000 to 2,000, between 1885 and 1910, with no young men learning the trade to replace those who retired. The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers (AA), after devastating defeats at Homestead in 1892 and against United States Steel in 1901, seemed to have followed the path of the iron workers, retreating to the safety of the iron plants that still negotiated with it and powerless before the corporate strength of the big steel companies.

It is here that the iron workers' story ends for most historians. Indeed, David Brody's 1960 seminal work remains the definitive study of labor in the industry during the early part of this century. Focusing on the effect of the hard-driving cost efficiency of the steel barons, the book has little to say about skilled iron workers after

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1900. Likewise, subsequent studies have either concentrated on the steel workers, or discussed only nineteenth-century iron workers. This gap in the literature blurs some important continuities in worker adaptation to the maturing industrial economy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While their numbers had declined, skilled iron workers continued working in a host of tiny mills in and around Pittsburgh well into this century. As such, they acted as an important pocket of resistance to the growing power of corporate steel. Faced on all sides with the evidence of their declining importance in a world dominated by the steel industry, skilled iron workers seemed determined to cling to familiar folkways and patterns of community they could still control, most notably on the shop floor. In this sense, their experience may be instructive as to how skilled workers react when larger economic forces push them to the periphery of the industrial economy.

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5 Couvares, The Remaking of Pittsburgh, provides an excellent discussion of how workers in Pittsburgh lost influence both on the shop floor and in the community as steel came to dominate that city’s economy.

6 According to Richard Edwards, though the American economy is dominated by large
Workers at the A.M. Byers Company provide a particularly useful case for analyzing this adjustment process. By 1907, Byers was one of the largest single employers of puddlers in the United States, and members of its Southside Pittsburgh local were among the most active in the movement to re-establish exclusive craft-based unionism in the industry through creation of a new Sons of Vulcan. More importantly, the firm was the host and instigator of a crucial clash at one of its mills between the new union and the Amalgamated, and it led the successful effort to break the Sons in 1913. The confrontations, however, had less to do with management imperatives to restructure the workplace than with workers' efforts to maintain control over their craft.

In 1907, the company was still being influenced by the legacy of its founder, Alexander MacBurney Byers.\textsuperscript{8} An aggressive and per-
ceptive businessman, Byers nonetheless lacked the economizing spirit that helped transform the steel industry. Having entered the iron industry when he was very young, Byers began his career as a workman at a blast furnace and rapidly moved up to a supervisory position at a time when the iron industry was probably its most paternalistic.\(^9\) No doubt influenced by these experiences, he accepted the constraints of labor-intensive technology as intrinsic to the manufacture of iron and proceeded from this assumption to adopt shrewd entrepreneurial strategies to compete successfully in a hostile market. When Byers died in 1900, his sons continued a tight control of the firm. By maintaining a stable managerial corps familiar with the company's operations and inherent philosophy, they perpetuated their father's managerial style well into this century.\(^{10}\)

From the workers' viewpoint, the issue of control centered on unionism. Indeed, unionization among skilled workers traditionally has been an assertion of control through formalization of existing norms. According to David Montgomery, it constitutes the second level of development in the workers' struggle for control of production. In the first, the workers' superior knowledge of production gave them functional autonomy on the shop floor; completely self-directing, they hired, fired, and paid their helpers, without interference from the boss, while maintaining an informal moral code that limited output and upheld work rules against "hogging" work. In the second level

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\(^9\) Workers on the pre-Civil War iron plantations of Pennsylvania often signed individual contracts that included provisions that the iron master provide housing, garden plots, and hunting rights as a condition of employment. A highly individualistic relationship existed between the iron master and his workmen that tended to promote mutual understanding and respect and mitigated the possibility of worker protest. This attitude of mutual respect was one that Byers came to accept as the normal course of doing business in the iron industry. For a brief synopsis of labor relations in the early iron industry, see William A. Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840* (Harrisburg, 1955), 59-71; George Swetnam, "Labor-Management Relations in Pennsylvania's Steel Industry, 1800-1959," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 62 (October 1979), 321-24.

\(^{10}\) As late as 1923, the Byers family held almost absolute control of the firm. Poor's and Moody's, *Manual Consolidated—Industrial Section*, Part 2 (New York, 1923), noted that stock in the company was closely held and dividends were not made public. An examination of Poor's and Moody's *Manuals* suggests the relative stability of the upper-level management. See Poor's *Manual of Industrials and Public Utilities* (New York, 1912); and Poor's *Manual of Industrials* (New York, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1918). See also "Oldster into Alloys," *The Bulletin-Index*, December 19, 1940.
of development, union work rules signalled a shift from such spontaneous solidarity to deliberate collective action. Benson Soffer notes that one of the chief functions of unions for these men was to establish clear rules that would decrease competition between them.

Unionization in the nineteenth century came less as an expression of strength than as an effort to preserve established norms from the encroachments of management. The Amalgamated—a union of the United Sons of Vulcan (the puddlers' union); the Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers, and Roughers of the United States; and the Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union—was established in 1876 because of the increasingly tenuous position of the iron workers relative to the manufacturers. John Bennett has aptly pointed out that the AA was actually at its peak between 1876 and 1892, the height of technological change in the iron and steel industries. When it was founded, puddlers were already losing ground to the Bessemer converter, and new rolling processes were undercutting the roll hands. In sum, the changes in production between 1865 and 1895 reduced the number of workers per ton of metal rolled, made skill increasingly obsolete, and decreased the degree of control the remaining skilled operatives had over the ways work was performed. Skilled workers realized that in such an environment cooperation among the iron crafts was absolutely necessary, and they resorted to amalgamation in self-defense.

By the early part of this century, technology had forced the iron workers into the fringes of the industrial economy. Because the workers had carved out a niche for themselves in the smaller iron mills, their world had, on one level, become more secure. Puddlers could still dictate the terms of their employment as long as iron manufacturers remained dependent on their skill and the pool of skilled labor was declining.

11 Montgomery, "Worker Control in the 19th Century," 485-509; Montgomery, Workers' Control in America, chapter 1.
13 For more on the formation of the Amalgamated, see Jesse S. Robinson, The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (Baltimore, 1920); John A. Fitch, "Unionism in the Iron and Steel Industry," Political Science Quarterly 25 (March 1909), 57-79; Carroll Wright, "The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers," Quarterly Journal of Economics 7 (July 1893), 400-32; and Bennett, "Iron Workers."
Highly labor intensive, the industry required two puddlers for each furnace. Using their expertise and brawn to turn limestone, coke, and pig iron into wrought iron, they loaded the furnace with six hundred pounds of pig iron, periodically stirring the molten metal with an iron rod or “rabble,” and adding iron oxide to the mixture at the correct moment. As the furnace temperature reached 2,600 degrees Fahrenheit, the refining process climaxed; the men continued to agitate the metal while chemical reactions turned it into a “sponge ball” impregnated with iron silicate. Separating the mass into two or three balls of two or three hundred pounds each, the puddlers pulled the iron out of the furnace at welding heat and rushed it to the squeezers, which compressed it into a bloom that the muck rollers worked into flat slabs known as muck bar. These slabs were piled, reheated, and then rolled by the finishers to their desired form.\textsuperscript{14}

A heat, the time between when the furnace was first charged to the moment the iron was taken to the squeezer, required approximately two hours. Two puddlers, working five heats—i.e., between eight to ten hours a day depending on the iron—produced a ton and a half of metal in one day. Despite efforts to duplicate their motions with mechanical furnaces, researchers were unable to develop technological alternatives to replace the puddlers’ expertise. Unlike steel, wrought iron, a ferrous metal highly resistant to corrosion and fatigue, derived its special properties from a combination of metallurgical reactions and human skill. For manufacturers who viewed these conditions as a necessary consequence of production, respect for their employees’ work rules, whether expressed formally in union recognition or informally on the shop floor, was part of the accepted costs of production. Consequently, iron workers, by most accounts, enjoyed a far health-

ier work environment than their counterparts in steel. According to Henry McNally, a puddler and union leader at the A.M. Byers Company, “Men do not break down under it [the work] unless they do not take care of themselves. It is not at all unusual for a man to continue puddling until he is 60 years old.” Philip Gabig, a rougher at the same mill, explained this by noting that “because of the shorter working day and frequent spells, a man is able to keep at his work long after the time when he would be down and out, if he were a steel worker.” John Fitch, in his study of iron and steel workers in the Pittsburgh region, concurred. Though the air in the iron mills was “smoky and filled with dust” and “all the men” labored in a “great heat,” “the precautions they take against the weather and . . . the comparatively short working day interspersed with rests made iron workers significantly healthier than steel workers.”

As these comments suggest, iron workers knew that good health came from controlling the pace of work, and at companies like Byers, little had happened since the 1800s to challenge this control. The day-to-day concerns of managing the mill continued to fall to the first-line supervisors, who were often skilled operatives and unionists. All puddlers controlled their furnaces and determined who was hired.

Despite these continuities, things had changed too dramatically outside the workplace for puddlers to remain insulated. Indeed, the negotiation of scale agreements reminded them just how much control they had lost. With the advance of technology, puddlers lost status within the Amalgamated. Finishers, whose skills were transferable to the steel mills, came to control the union, framing sliding scales in their favor in the process.


16 Philip Gabig, interview with Fitch, March 26, 1908, “Fitch Field Notes.”

17 Fitch, Steel Workers, 37.


19 Iron workers were paid by the ton. The rate was set in negotiations between the union and manufacturers and fixed to the selling price of iron; every other month it was adjusted at a bi-monthly wage conference to reflect changes in market conditions. Thus the term sliding scale. Workers were subject to raises or cuts depending on the market price of iron, though a minimum rate guaranteed that wages would not fall below a certain point.
This loss of control is the key to understanding skilled worker adjustment to maturing industrial capitalism. Job security without the accompanying acknowledgment of craft identity meant little to the skilled laborer. According to Charles Sabel, technical prowess—not place in an officially defined hierarchy of jobs—is what counts for the skilled operative. For the craftsman, membership in a craft is like citizenship in a republic. Sabel argues that the craftsman is “a man proud of his fellowship with his companions whose skill he respects, a man hesitant to forego that fellowship for a place in a world whose values he mistrusts in so far as he understands them.”\(^{20}\) For this reason, as skilled workers slip down the skill hierarchy, they tend to cling, at least for a time, to their old sources of identity, even if it means staying aloof from their workmates.\(^{21}\)

During the late nineteenth century, the Amalgamated Association had been an important source of that identity for the puddlers. Iron masters like B.F. Jones could be forced, as he wrote in his diary in 1879, to concede contracts because they deemed “it is inexpedient to further resist the unjust demands of the Boilers [puddlers].”\(^{22}\) Puddlers could brag, as one did in 1882, that “thanks to the Amalgamated,” his employer did not unfairly profit from his labor.\(^{23}\)

As early as 1890, the beleaguered puddlers had begun to believe amalgamation was an error; talk of reviving the old Sons of Vulcan spread rapidly when the national union voted down an increase in the puddlers’ scale.\(^{24}\) A conflict between puddlers and finishers in 1904 and 1905 at the Clearfield, Pennsylvania, plant of the A.M.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 92. In a study of machinists in Bridgeport, Connecticut, between 1915 and 1919, Cecelia Bucki found a similar tendency. Many craftsmen, concerned with exclusivity and fearing that organization of the less skilled was a concession to employer attacks on skill, found it difficult to accept industrial unionism. As a result, where organization reinforced craft power, the skilled men acted alone. See Cecelia F. Bucki, “Dilution and Craft Tradition: Bridgeport, Connecticut, Munitions Workers, 1915-1919,” *Social Science History* 4 (Winter 1980), 105-24.

\(^{22}\) B.F. Jones, “Diary, 1875-1901,” Jones and Laughlin Corporation Historical Miscellanea, 1871-1953, 73:1, AIS.


Byers Company represented the difficult issues facing all puddlers. In early July 1904, the puddlers of the AA local, Hyde City #46, went on strike, demanding a base rate comparable to the scale agreement signed at the Byers Pittsburgh plant and vowing to stay out until it was granted. The finishers in the lodge, who were governed by the higher western (primarily Pittsburgh) scale, failed to support the puddlers, shattering worker unity and nearly destroying organization at Clearfield. In January 1905 the puddlers, with the finishers' approval, voted overwhelmingly to withdraw from Hyde City #46 and form Pride of Clearfield #47, consisting exclusively of workers in the puddling department.\(^{25}\)

For the puddlers at Clearfield, as elsewhere, an amalgamated craft union was no guarantee of worker solidarity. Since the skilled workers' primary loyalties were to craft, unionization that failed to defend craft interest was meaningless. Having lost control of the Amalgamated, the puddlers could not trust a rival craft to advance their interests—any more than the finishers could have expected the puddlers to defend theirs. Finishers had no stake in supporting puddler demands for higher wages at Clearfield or anywhere else. Indeed, given conditions, such support would have disadvantaged them. The finishers, even as iron workers, had become indirect beneficiaries of the economic forces that made steel supreme in the late nineteenth century.

Not surprisingly, then, when John Weigant, president of Wayne Lodge #55, tried to collect an assessment levied by the AA for strike benefits, many of the puddlers were unwilling to give another dollar to the union, citing their recent disappointment with the bi-monthly wage settlement as only the latest instance of the organization's neglect of the puddlers' interest. An off-handed remark—that if the puddlers did not like the Amalgamated as it existed they should get an organization they could support—brought Weigant an inundation of requests that he appoint a committee to secure a hall and advertise a special puddlers' meeting in Pittsburgh.\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) For more on these incidents, see Hyde City Lodge Reports, *Amalgamated Journal*, July, 14, 28, September 1, 1904; January 26, 1905. See also Pride of Clearfield #47 Lodge Report, *Amalgamated Journal*, March 30, 1905.

\(^{26}\) Michael McCune, Secretary Treasurer of the Sons of Vulcan, to *National Labor Tribune*, *National Labor Tribune*, August 15, 1907.
On the evening of February 24, 1907, between four and seven hundred puddlers gathered to discuss their grievances and consider withdrawing from the AA. Among the concerns raised at the meeting was an old and familiar issue, the control that finishers had over the Amalgamated. According to the puddlers, the finishers, as steel workers, framed scale agreements in their favor and consistently ignored the iron workers. Puddlers applauded those speakers who argued that the only way the boilers could insure their interest was through formation of a new independent body open exclusively to puddlers, scrappers, muck rollers, and helpers. In a telling speech that seemed to reflect the sentiments of many in the audience, Weigant noted:

> It is not the intent of the puddlers to make battle with the old association. It is a battle of self-protection and not one to tear down but a fight to build up the fallen fortunes of a class who were placed on the toboggan several years ago and are still going down. It is up to the puddler to legislate for himself and the present is the most auspicious time in the history of iron and steel in the United States.²⁷

By almost unanimous vote the men decided to create a new Sons of Vulcan, taking the name of the old pre-Amalgamated puddlers’ union for “sentimental reasons.” Several committees were established to lay the groundwork for the new union, and officers were elected to run a temporary organization until a constitution and by-laws could be drafted.²⁸

The puddlers’ rhetoric was particularly revealing. They were careful to make explicit distinction between their own interests as iron workers and those of the finishers, who as steel workers were different from the men in the muck mill or puddling department. That most of the finishers worked in the same iron mills with them was irrelevant to the rebel unionists; so, too, was the fact that confrontations between AA and Sons more often involved clashes between Amalgamated and Vulcan puddlers than puddlers and finishers. In their eyes, the revitalization of the Sons was clearly an effort to protect the craft from further decline. Such behavior, as Sabel has suggested, typified craftsmen aware of their lost status.

²⁷ Quoted in National Labor Tribune, February 28, 1907.
²⁸ National Labor Tribune, February 28, 1907. Such rifts within the Amalgamated were not uncommon: see Robinson, Amalgamated Association, chapter 3.
Ironically, technology was, for the first time in many years, on their side. With companies dependent on them for production, the skilled men could, as they had in the nineteenth century, dictate terms of their employment through a union of their choosing. Despite the Amalgamated’s warnings that rival unionism gave manufacturers an excuse to introduce an open shop, the Sons successfully won a scale granting them a "substantial" raise in nearly every mill in which they established a forge. While the increase was dependent on the final agreements between the Amalgamated conferees and the Western Bar Association (the manufacturers’ trade association), the scale represented a significant victory for the fledgling organization. That the scales were the same was irrelevant to the puddlers. They were negotiating with the manufacturers through a union that they as iron workers controlled. At A.M. Byers, the company deferred to the preference of the men at each of their plants, signing agreements with the Amalgamated at Clearfield and the Sons on the Southside.

The Association did not officially acknowledge the new organization, so it was common for AA men to go to work as soon as their scale was signed. This allowed manufacturers to resist the Sons’ demands for recognition. In two instances, AA president P.J. McArdle and other Amalgamated officials filled the place of striking Vulcans with AA men.

While such incidents increased tensions at other companies experiencing dual unionism, workers at Byers avoided intramural clashes, perhaps because the rival unionists were not contending for control of the same plant. When minor antagonisms occurred, they usually involved men from outside the mill. The Amalgamated Journal re-

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29 See, for example, Amalgamated Journal, March 28, 1907.
30 The AA eventually won a 10 percent increase in August. For more on the Amalgamated and Sons perceptions of the Vulcan scale agreement, see Amalgamated Journal, July 11, 1907; National Labor Tribune, July 4, 1907.
31 No doubt the Clearfield puddlers stayed with the AA because it had recently won a significant wage increase for them there, making them the highest-paid men in the so-called Eastern District. See Amalgamated Journal, July 5, 1906 to December 20, 1906; "Signed Scales," Amalgamated Journal, July 18, 1907; National Labor Tribune, July 1906; Pittsburgh Post, July 1906; Pittsburgh Gazette Times, July 1906; Pittsburgh Press, July to August 1906; Pittsburgh Leader, July 1906.
32 For more on these incidents, see National Labor Tribune, August 8, 1907; June 17, 1909.
ported that Sons coming to the Clearfield, Pennsylvania, mill were refused work when they would not join Pride of Clearfield #47, the Amalgamated puddlers' lodge; the journal agent observed that the AA had the same right to restrict employment as the Vulcans did in the western mills. Similarly, members of Byers Southside forge, Iron City #5, discriminated against Amalgamated men in Pittsburgh. Controlling the furnaces at both mills, puddlers could easily dictate who was hired; responding to mill committee proddings, they insured that only men in "good standing" found jobs.

Labor relations at the Byers mills remained cordial despite the upheaval among the rank and file. Even during a national depression from late 1907 to early 1908, the company continued to work steadily, and both the Amalgamated and Vulcan locals prospered. Attendance at lodge meetings, a frequent source of concern among many AA lodge officials, was fairly good, and journal agents for both locals were fond of noting their good fortune at being employed. Indeed, men who could not find employment in other plants flocked to Clearfield from other areas.

On the Southside, prosperity was equally attractive to unemployed Sons. Lodge officials reminded the members of Iron City #5 that having worked continuously since the scale was signed, the members were the only Vulcans to derive full benefit from the last scale increase. With a membership increase of 75 percent (from 100 to 175) between November 1907 and May 1908, Iron City became the "Banner Lodge of the Sons of Vulcan." Nor was full employment the only good thing about working at Byers. According to one report, when the company signed the union scale, "The brothers of Iron City No. 5 . . . had a good time at the expense of the firm. On Saturday

33 Pride of Clearfield #47 Lodge Report, Amalgamated Journal, August 8, 1907. In addition to the preceding report, Clearfield's anti-Vulcan activities are documented in Pride of Clearfield #47 Lodge Report, Amalgamated Journal, July 25, 1907; Anonymous Letter from Clearfield Rank and Filer, Amalgamated Journal, August 8, 1907; Pride of Clearfield #47 Lodge Report, Amalgamated Journal, November 28, 1907; National Labor Tribune, August 1, 1907.

34 National Labor Tribune, January 9, 1908.

35 Lodge Reports for Hyde City #46 and Pride of Clearfield #47, Amalgamated Journal, September 1907 to May 1908.

36 National Labor Tribune, November 1907 to May 1908.
[August 15, 1908] after they had their agreement signed, the firm furnished the wherewith [for] the boys to jubilate on.\textsuperscript{37}

With such management acceptance, the Sons had successfully restored some semblance of the old puddlers' empire. This became apparent for the finishers when the company broke ground for a new puddle mill in Girard, Ohio. The mill, reputed to be the largest puddling plant in the United States, went into production in late January 1909.\textsuperscript{38} Within the week, a Vulcan lodge was organized.\textsuperscript{39} Shortly thereafter, the finishers established an AA local, made up primarily of members of Hyde City #46. Following the Byers Company to Girard after the shutdown of the Clearfield plant,\textsuperscript{40} the men were told by the plant manager that all employees of the finishing department affiliated with the Amalgamated could consider themselves fired. The AA quickly declared a strike at the plant, beginning a three-month siege at Girard.

In early June, rumors began circulating that scabs would be brought in from the Pittsburgh area. On June 22, before the Amalgamated men could react, the company successfully moved the first full crews of strike breakers into a stockade built around the mill. In days, the plant resumed operations. The finishers maintained their resistance, picketing about the stockade and convincing some scabs to return home. Protected by armed guards, the strike breakers continued to arrive, and by early August, the company claimed victory. The stockade was vacated; scabs, still protected by special police, moved to a boarding house just outside the plant's high board fence. On August 20, the walkout officially ended. All the old men returned to work, and the company announced its intention to pay the scale but not recognize the AA. The Sons had continued to work throughout the conflict, though some admitted they did not enjoy laboring alongside

\textsuperscript{37} The practice of Byers providing the men with money to celebrate a signed scale is mentioned twice during this period. See \textit{National Labor Tribune}, July 11, 1907, and August 20, 1908.

\textsuperscript{38} For more on the new mill opening, see \textit{National Labor Tribune}, May 7, 1908; \textit{Amalgamated Journal}, January 28, 1908.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{National Labor Tribune}, February 4, 1909.

\textsuperscript{40} Byers discontinued operations at Clearfield on April 27, 1908. For more on the closing of the Clearfield plant, see Hyde City #46 and Pride of Clearfield #47 Lodge Reports and Mill Reports, \textit{Amalgamated Journal}, April 30, 1908 to January 7, 1909.
scabs. Honoring their contract, much as Amalgamated men had done when Vulcans struck elsewhere, the puddlers felt no obligation towards their fellows in the finishing department.\textsuperscript{41}

Byers continued to recognize the Sons at its two plants; more significantly, it signed the 1909 Vulcan scale, which for the first time was higher than the Amalgamated’s agreement with the Western Bar Association.\textsuperscript{42} Aware of the problems at other plants, management no doubt viewed the direct confrontation between the Amalgamated and Sons at the same mill as an unacceptable threat to labor harmony and production. For Byers management, cordial labor relations were a significant by-product of its dependence on a highly skilled work force. Unlike the steel industry, it could not adopt the labor cost-cutting measures that usually accompanied union busting. To make itself acceptable to the small pool of skilled puddlers, it had to accept a worker-controlled shop floor in the muck mill and the Sons at the bargaining table. Indeed, the puddlers’ strategic position in the production process relative to the finishers probably influenced the decision to continue negotiating with the Sons instead of the AA.

Such incidents convinced the Vulcans of their power, and, in 1910, the Sons’ convention drafted a scale, approved by the sublodges, calling for a seventy-five cent per ton increase over the previous year’s rate and maintaining the twenty-five cent differential over the AA’s scale won a year before. Under the Vulcan constitution, the union’s conference committees had no discretionary powers when presenting the scale to the manufacturers. Despite requests by the owners to negotiate the scale, committeemen held firm that they could do nothing without a referendum of the membership, conceding only to submit a request to the sublodges for power to negotiate the footnotes which governed working conditions. A stalemate resulted when manufacturers, persisting in their demand that the wage request be reconsidered in light of conditions in the western bar market, refused to discuss a raise proportionate to the 1909 hike.

The Sons consequently struck and stayed out nearly three months.

\textsuperscript{41} For more on the strike, see Girard #64 Lodge Reports, Amalgamated Journal, May 20 to August 5, 1909; National Labor Tribune, May 20, 1909 to August 26, 1909.

\textsuperscript{42} The Sons received twenty-five cents per ton more than the Amalgamated puddlers: see National Labor Tribune, July 29, 1909.
The Vulcan leadership and rank-and-file maintained an uncompromising defiance, asserting confidently that their monopoly on skill made them indispensible to their employers. Having organized the few men who still followed the puddling trade into the Sons, the western puddlers asserted their willingness to take up new jobs if a settlement was not reached in their favor; assured that if they quit the manufacturers could find no one trained in the craft to replace them, many men felt they had nothing to lose by holding out for their price. Some even held it as a matter of principle not to work for the Amalgamated scale. In a telling comment, one puddler from Lockhart Iron and Steel of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, wrote, “We left the Amalgamated Association because we thought we should have something better than the organization was giving us, and if the Amalgamated Association set a price of even $10 a ton for puddling, we would naturally think we ought to have $11.”

At work in the strike were two of the principles that helped establish the Sons: a sense of the power their skill gave them relative to the manufacturer, and the moral imperative of their struggle with the Amalgamated.

Compromise became especially difficult and nearly proved disastrous in the strike. Several manufacturers began working “on conditions” pending a settlement, or without a signed scale, paying the Amalgamated rates. At least two firms hired AA men and signed that union’s scale. The remaining members of the manufacturers’ negotiating team, including A.M. Byers, persisted in attempts to convince the Sons’ scale committee to submit the issue to the sublodges. These members argued that they had been exceptionally fair and were willing to concede anything reasonable but could not be expected to compete in the same market with mills that signed a scale twenty-five cents lower than the one the Sons demanded. By the time the Sons’ leadership submitted the issue to the membership, rumor was strong that even these manufacturers had reached the limit of their patience and were ready to recognize the Amalgamated and accept its scale. Before such a confrontation could occur, however, the two sides reached a compromise, setting the Vulcan rate twenty-five cents higher than the Amalgamated. The new rate was a conces-

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sion to the Sons’ pride but allowed the price on which the rate was based to be seven dollars lower than the AA’s.44

After two years of relative labor peace, the Sons struck again in 1913, this time demanding a seven dollar flat rate regardless of the selling price of iron. Long accustomed to paying according to a sliding scale fixed to the selling price of iron, the manufacturers balked at the proposal, arguing that with the recently passed Underwood-Simmons Tariff,45 the market was sure to decline and put them at an unfair disadvantage unless the men set their flat rate lower or accepted a sliding scale. Once again, the Vulcan leadership stuck doggedly to its demands, believing, as in 1910, that the Sons could dictate a settlement. After three mills broke ranks in late July to sign the scale, both sides stubbornly settled into a stand-off reminiscent of their last confrontation.

The real break in the situation came at the beginning of October, when the A.M. Byers Company announced it would run its Girard plant as an open shop regardless of union scale. Having noted the announcement, a “Girard member” wrote to the National Labor Tribune that he was sorry to see open shop operations but blamed the national officers for not heeding his advice of several months before. At that time he had called on them to reconvene the convention or have a referendum on the subject, arguing that “It seems to a good many puddlers here [at Girard] that the scale asked by the United Sons of Vulcan is out of all reason.” Since “the manufacturers the past year have treated us [right],” he continued, “it is up to us to return the complement[sic].”46 By the end of the month, the Southside mill was declared an open shop as well; within days, Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company followed the Byers lead.

While the strike lingered until the following January, the Southside mill was working near capacity by early December. At Girard, puddlers brought in from Pittsburgh to restart the furnaces broke the last resistance to the open shop. When the sublodges passed a referendum

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44 For more on the strike, see National Labor Tribune, June 30 to September 29, 1910.
45 The Underwood-Simmons Tariff considerably decreased duties on imports and placed such items as iron and steel on or near a free list.
46 Letter from “Son of Vulcan,” National Labor Tribune, July 10, 1913; Letter from Girard Member, National Labor Tribune, October 2, 1913.
officially ending the strike, Byers and Youngstown Sheet and Tube had already eliminated the Sons as a viable labor organization and implemented their own sliding scales.\textsuperscript{47}

The demise of the Sons came more from the obstinacy of the union leadership than the anti-unionism of the manufacturers. Convinced they could dictate settlements as had their forebears in the first Sons of Vulcan, workers ignored the fact that their union no longer held monopoly over their craft. With the work force weakened by divisions between the Sons and the Amalgamated, manufacturers could more easily resist what they perceived to be unfair demands from their employees than they could at the height of the puddlers' strength in the 1870s and 1880s.

The puddlers were right in their estimation that they wielded considerable power in the iron industry. Their skill gave them an important weapon against those who negotiated with them, as was clearly evident in the daily operations of the mill and the initial successes of the Sons. Even when the firms ran non-union, they had to concede to the predominant standard of the industry in order to attract competent workers. Between 1917 and 1919, the only years for which comparative data exist, Byers paid the union rate. According to the \textit{Iron Age}, since establishing the open shop, Byers consistently paid the union scale or "considerably higher." The company's dependence on skilled men made it conform to union standards even when it refused to recognize the union.\textsuperscript{48}

Building on this knowledge, the puddlers attempted to re-create a style of unionism appropriate to an earlier time—in many of their memories, the only type of unionism they knew to be successful. The skilled workers' tendency to cling to established sources of craft identity blinded them to realities that made an exact re-creation impossible. The Sons made compromise difficult by turning a conflict of craft interest between puddlers and finishers into a more fundamental defense of their rights as iron workers. With union brother turned against union brother at a time when worker unity was crucial

\textsuperscript{47} For more on the strike, see \textit{National Labor Tribune}, July 3, 1913 to January 22, 1914.
\textsuperscript{48} For more on the scale and its implementation at Byers, see \textit{Iron Age}, May 24, June 7, 21, 1907; "Convention Reports," \textit{Amalgamated Journal}, May 10, 1917; Girard \#85 Lodge Reports, \textit{Amalgamated Journal}, June 1917 to July 1919.
to the survival of any labor organization, the outcome seemed inevi-
table. When given an alternative, manufacturers would not long
tolerate worker demands they considered unreasonable.

The experience of these skilled iron workers, while shedding light
on a largely overlooked part of the history of iron and steel workers
in this century, also provides clues to how skilled workers may have
dealt with transformations in the economy that undermined their
supremacy within an industry. Puddlers faced challenges that were
no less real than those confronting other iron workers, but they were
far less tangible. Unlike the finishers, who knew that the manufacturer
was responsible if they were locked out or did not receive their rate
in scale negotiations, puddlers had been pushed to the fringe of the
industrial economy by unseen economic forces. With no clear target
for their anger, and lacking any real sense of cross-craft unity, the
puddlers readily singled out the finishers as the enemy because they
were the most obvious symbols of new economic realities. Indeed,
what the puddlers did fit a pattern described by Sabel. When con-
fronted with an uncertain future, they turned to what they knew
best—the sources of their craft identity.

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