

## *Philadelphia's Fincher's Trades' Review: Labor, War, and History*

Philadelphia has always had a rich working-class tradition and it seems appropriate that it was home to one of the nation's largest and most progressive labor newspapers during the Civil War. Published by machinist Jonathan C. Fincher, the first issue of *Fincher's Trades' Review* appeared on June 6, 1863, and the paper continued to report on both labor and the war through 1866. The weekly, which cost subscribers two dollars a year, was headquartered at the corners of Fifth and Chestnut streets. In its first edition, Fincher declared that his paper was "An advocate of the Rights of the Producing Class" and much needed, as his readers deserved "A free, untrammelled, outspoken press." Fincher had "been wanting to rouse the workingmen to a full sense of the injustice done them."<sup>1</sup> Fincher's topics proclaimed the ideals of "The Self-Made Man" and "Fair Play," which workers demanded from their employers. Small wonder that the second edition of the *Trades' Review* had sections devoted to "Strikes," "Wages," and "Current Rates." Fincher protested that since government neglected "the real rights of labor," and in doing so forgot the underpinning that holds "the very principle of society" in place, his paper would articulate the mood of working men and women.<sup>2</sup>

*Fincher's Trades' Review* is a valuable source for studying not only the labor movement in the mid-nineteenth century but also other issues of the day. While known to labor historians, the paper has tended to be overlooked by Civil War scholars. Yet it was more than simply a labor voice, as it contained important information regarding the "news of the day," locally, nationally, and internationally and, due to the primacy of the American Civil War, it paid especial attention to that conflict. The *Trades' Review* published articles that dealt with wartime issues, from troop movements to suspicious government contracts. Articles drew readers' attention to the relationship between labor and the wartime economy. "The Struggle for Bread! The Up-heaving Masses in Motion! Workingmen's Movement!" headlined issues detailing a variety of labor organizations, movements, and demonstrations by tradesmen in the context of a wartime economy. In its pages, one can find both an extensive

<sup>1</sup> *Fincher's Trades' Review*, June 6, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> *Fincher's Trades' Review*, June 13, 20, 1863.

"Trades Union Directory" listing more than one hundred union meeting places devoted to various crafts, as well as articles on military activities, such as one detailing the "Rebel Raid in Pennsylvania," which foreshadowed the Battle at Gettysburg.<sup>3</sup>

Fincher pushed for the eight-hour work day for laborers and, though he did not support women working in trades dominated by men, he petitioned for higher pay for both teachers and seamstresses. "The excitement in relation to the Working-women's movement continues without abatement," he reported.<sup>4</sup> He covered mining strikes from England to Scranton but still devoted portions of the paper to the "Progress of the War."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for its readers, and a generation of historians later, the paper's last issue appeared not long after the war ended; yet Jonathan Fincher left a treasure trove waiting to be discovered by those interested in labor history and the Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Fincher's Trades' Review*, June 20, 1863. Some of the trades included cabinet makers, carvers, printers, painters, plasterers, tailors, upholsterers, assemblers, curriers, tin plate and sheet iron workers, axe-makers, bricklayers, boilermakers, garment cutters, bookbinders, shoemakers, cigar-makers, cabinet makers, cordwainers, chairmakers, engineers, stonecutters, brush-makers, shipwrights, seamen, glass blowers, gilders, harnessmakers, saddlers, trunk and bag makers. *Ibid.*, July 16, 1864.

<sup>4</sup> *Fincher's Trades' Review*, May 7, 1864.

<sup>5</sup> *Fincher's Trades' Review*, Apr. 23, May 14, 1864.

<sup>6</sup> There are gaps in the paper, but its last issue under this title appeared March 10, 1866. It continued under the name *National Trades' Review* until August 18, 1866. Unfortunately, this paper is hard to find. In Pennsylvania, hard copies can be found at East Stroudsburg University, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the University of Pittsburgh. The nearby Hagley Library in Delaware also holds copies. The paper has not yet been digitized.