IRONWORKERS' perceptions of issues involved in combining individual craft unions into one organization are not well-understood because articles, monographs, and theses have superficially examined nineteenth century ironworkers, their unions, and their leaders. General surveys briefly comment on the iron trades, usually by focusing on the Homestead Strike of 1892; they neglect explanations about the early years of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. Similarly, studies written during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about the Amalgamated outline the union's history in narratives that inadequately evaluate the conditions which fostered the amalgamation process.1

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In fact, few twentieth century researchers investigated these ironworkers and their early unions before David Brody's *Steelworkers in America* was published in 1960. Since then more researchers have written about these men, but they concentrate on neglected aspects of ironworkers' class experience, primarily in Pittsburgh's iron and steel mills. Although valuable, these studies still largely overlook a fundamental question: what were the ironworkers' perceptions of issues involved in amalgamation and how did their leaders' decisions lead to the formation of the Amalgamated Association?

This essay argues that the lack of cohesive organization among early ironworkers' unions forced workers to cope with economic issues overshadowed by craft rivalries. Secondly, it argues that union leaders adopted the concept of amalgamation as a solution to these perceived economic problems, and that they imposed their personal economic goals and social aspirations on other ironworkers while advocating its acceptance. Furthermore, this examination of the external constraints placed on union leaders and the internal negotiations by them to achieve amalgamation suggests parallels to contemporary union problems.


Over a 15-year period before 1873, skilled millmen organized three comprehensive unions with minimal success because their planning seldom went beyond immediate problems. With the onset of a five-year depression in 1873, however, officers of these unions realized that, singularly, each union was ineffectual. Their organizations’ strike histories demonstrated that the lack of cooperation between unions limited bargaining power while draining already depleted treasuries. Furthermore, leaders realized that one financially weak but united union improved its membership’s chances of achieving a better standard of living than the efforts of several separate floundering unions.

Millworkers’ unions, as well as the lifestyles of their members, evolved from the shared heritage of antipathy that manufacturers and workers felt towards each other. During the 1840s and 1850s, for example, unorganized millmen staged numerous minor strikes, mostly in Pittsburgh’s rolling mills, over wage reductions. The Pittsburgh iron industry’s first major strike began in late December 1849 and lasted until mid-May 1850. Unlike their response to previous strikes, iron manufacturers operated by importing laborers who worked for reduced wages. On February 18, 1850, violence erupted in Pittsburgh’s rolling mills. Although few people were injured, several arrests ended in costly fines and imprisonment; damage to the mills amounted to less than $500. While the iron manufacturers won the strike, and many discontented mill workers consequently migrated westward, the experience quickly taught ironworkers the necessity and value of their own labor organization.4

Throughout the 1850s, the iron industry experienced a decline of prices, a series of subsequent wage reductions accompanied by strikes, and a fresh susceptibility to unionism by workers. The depressed iron trades and workers’ unrest mirrored a larger industrial crisis which resulted from a sharp decline in grain prices that checked the expansion of agricultural, manufacturing, and transportation interests. Although this crisis peaked in 1857, the iron industry recovered slowly, particularly in Pennsylvania, and most mills remained idle through late 1857.

and early 1858. This lull intensified the disintegration of trust and cooperation between iron manufacturers and their employees.\(^5\)

The first ironworkers union in the United States reflected the labor lessons of the entire decade. On April 12, 1858, a few men who agreed on principles organized the Iron City Forge of the Sons of Vulcan, a small union of puddlers in Pittsburgh. This group sought to circumvent mill owners' hostility towards labor unions, a hostility long nurtured by a desire for a competitive edge against imported British iron. Overall, the union represented ironworkers' search for stability in a trade dependent upon the prosperity of other economic sectors.\(^6\)

The union lasted barely six months: fear of blacklisting caused the organization to disband. Mill owners shared lists of names of dismissed "troublemakers," men invariably involved in union activity, to prevent their employment throughout the trade. Manufacturers designed this "Black List" both to prevent the unionization of unorganized workers and to eradicate unions where they already existed. By disbanding, members protected themselves and their families. Although the Sons reorganized in late 1861 under the leadership of Miles S. Humphries, the union only regained its influence in the iron industry after the Civil War.\(^7\)

The war ended the recession of the late 1850s and ushered in an era of increased production and employment in the iron trades. In September 1862, the Sons of Vulcan organized a "national forge" in Pittsburgh. While forge membership increased, higher production and profit figures apparently convinced mill owners that the growing union would benefit rather than harm their interests. As a result, both manufacturers and mill workers became complacent. This feeling lasted until the end of the war, when iron manufacturers experienced curtailed demands and attempted to cut employment and wages in proportion to their lower profits.\(^8\) Consequently, Pittsburgh puddlers

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\(^5\) Clark, vol. 1: 1607–1860, chaps. 11-19; Robinson, chap. 1.


\(^7\) See Richard C. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, Labor's Untold Story, 3rd ed. (New York, 1972), 11 n. 5; Brody, Steelworkers, 80-82; Eleventh Souvenir, 4; McNeill, 272-73. For an example of later union action regarding blacklisting see MP, 6: Minute Book: Rollers, Roughers, Catchers, & Hookers Union, Grand Lodge (hereafter cited as MBGL), 6-9, Aug. 7-Sept. 6, 1873. These entries record the Roll Hands', Heaters', and — eventually — the Sons' fight against the Black List at the Springfield [Illinois] Iron Company during a strike over wage reductions.

struck in 1865 to maintain what had become high wages. Eight months later puddlers and the manufacturers agreed to a wage conference which established the tradition of a sliding scale of prices to serve as a basis for wages.9

Exact membership figures for the five years before the Sons’ first national convention in 1867 remain unknown because local and national official documents and statistics were unrecorded before 1867. In that year, 23 of the union’s 36 active locals reported 1,514 members.10 Two years later forges existed in 11 states. Delegates to the union’s 1869 national convention in Wheeling adopted a revised constitution and by-laws that defined the United Sons of Vulcan as a rigid craft union whose membership was open only to good, “practical workmen” — journeymen boilers and puddlers with good reputations — who acknowledged the authority of the National Forge. This definition remained vague but understood until 1875, when David Harris included several clarifying decisions about constitutional and by-law matters in his President’s Report to the annual convention. At that time membership was declared open to all practical boilers and puddlers — those competent to take charge of a furnace — with good character references.11

By their 1873 convention, membership in the Sons had grown to more than 3,300, the highest in any ironworkers’ union before 1876. During 1873 the union’s extensive and influential membership also won complete recognition from the American Iron and Steel Association. However, the Panic of 1873 provoked, roughly, an 18 percent drop in membership by January 1875 because the impoverished status of many subordinate forges caused by the Panic forced their closing.12

Struggles over wages and employment quotas occurred throughout the 1870s, particularly during the 1873-1878 depression. These struggles paralleled those in other industries. For example, wages of textile workers dropped 45 percent; railroad workers, 35 to 40 percent; furniture workers, 40 to 60 percent.13 The interdependence of Ameri-

9 Eleventh Souvenir, 4, 6; McNeill, 272-73; NLT, Aug. 1, 1874; Robinson, 14.
11 MP, 9: 5 [United Sons of Vulcan], Ritual, Opening, Initiatory, Installation, and Closing Ceremonies of the United Sons of Vulcan of the United States (Pittsburgh, 1875), and [United Sons of Vulcan], Initiatory. U.S. of V. Adopted in Convention at the City of Chicago, August 4, 1871 (Allegheny, Pa., 1875); Robinson, 22-23, 39; Vulcan Record, 16 (1875): 18.
12 McNeill, 276-77; Robinson, 13.
can industries, such as railroads to iron, and businessmen's failure to correctly judge markets led to the depression and subsequent unemployment.\textsuperscript{14}

Mill owners and ironworkers were especially hard-hit by the depression. Order cancellations for rails resulting from the end of railway expansion led to a sharp decline in pig iron and rail prices. However, after the first wave of the Panic of 1873, unlike many industries, more organizing efforts occurred in the mills. By the mid-1870s more than 4,200 skilled millmen were organized in three national ironworkers' unions: the earlier United Sons of Vulcan; the Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers and Roughers of the United States; and the Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union.\textsuperscript{15}

Like the puddlers, the finishing trades organized in the early 1860s.


\textsuperscript{15} For background information about these unions see Eleventh Souvenir and McNeill, chap. 11, generally; and the following specific sources. On the Sons of Vulcan: MP, 9: 5, materials related to the United Sons of Vulcan; Vulcan Record, 1 (1867)-16 (1876). On the Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers and Roughers: Miscellaneous documents including correspondence from 1874-1876, Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers and Roughers, U.S. Mss. 14A, Box 1, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter cited as Heaters mss., item); MP, 2: 4 [Associated Brotherhood of Heaters, Rollers and Roughers of the United States,] Report of the Proceedings of the National Grand Lodge of the Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers and Roughers of the United States. The Third Annual Session Held at Covington, Ky., July 7th, 8th & 9th, 1874 (Springfield, Ill., 1874); Associated Brotherhood of Heaters, Rollers and Roughers, Report of Proceedings and Financial Condition of the National Lodge of the Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers and Roughers of the United States, for the year Ending July 10th, 1876 (Springfield, 1876) (hereafter all published Heaters' proceedings are cited as Heaters, Proceedings, year: page). On the Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union: Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union, Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the U.S. of the Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union, at the Annual Session held at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Commencing Aug. 1, 1876 (Columbus, 1876); Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union, Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Iron and Steel Roll Hands Union of the United States, Composed of Rollers, Roughers, Catchers, Hookers, Buggymen and Cold Straighteners, held at Columbus, O., April 4, 1874 (Columbus, 1874); MP, 6: Cash Book: Grand Lodge Cash Book for the Rollers, Roughers, Catchers, & Hookers Union of the United States (hereafter cited as CBGL); MP, 6: Minute Book: Rollers, Heaters & Catchers Union, Lodge No. 11, Columbus, Ohio, July 14, 1873-April 28, 1876 (hereafter cited as MBCL); MBGL; MP, 9: 6, partial manuscript from the 1874 Roll Hands' convention clasped together with additional union papers; [National Union of Rollers, Roughers, Catchers and Hookers of the United States], Proceedings of the National Convention of the Rollers', Catchers' and Hookers' Union. Held at Springfield, Illinois, June 2d-6th, 1873 (Springfield, 1873) (hereafter all published Roll Hands' proceedings are cited as Roll Hands, Proceedings, year: page).
Most of these obscure, short-lived local unions originated in New York state, although heaters attempted to form a national organization during the summer of 1865. No national ‘finishers’ organization existed before August 1872, when Chicago rail-mill heaters, having already established their own local union, inaugurated one. This union, the Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, modelled its constitution and by-laws on those of the Sons. After a year of growth, the union changed its name to the Associated Brotherhood of Iron and Steel Heaters, Rollers, and Roughers of the United States, to represent its membership more accurately.

The heaters’ union was never particularly strong, lacking both income and membership. The onset of the depression in 1873 severely affected membership. Initiations and membership admittance by travelling card fluctuated with the economic conditions of individual mill communities. Lodges consequently made erratic revenue payments to the union’s Grand Lodge. Officers were unsalaried, occasionally receiving some reimbursement for their services, and the union’s income rarely exceeded $500. By 1876 only 412 members in 14 lodges

16 Robinson, 14-15.
17 By 1873 membership was extended to include rollers and roughers. McNeill, 277-78; Robinson, 15, 22.
could claim good standing; the estimated total membership, including defunct lodges, was 953 men in 33 lodges.  

The third major union of the Reconstruction era — the National Union of Rollers, Roughers, Catchers and Hookers of the United States — also began in Chicago. Roll hands in the North Chicago Mills formed a local lodge in 1870 that inspired finishers in other mill areas to unionize. By early June 1873 a national organization of finishers not eligible for membership in the heaters' union met in Springfield, Illinois. The rollers' Grand Lodge supervised a national network of 15 subordinate lodges comprised of 473 men. During their four-day convention the following year, representatives from 12 lodges shortened the union's name to the Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union. This change reflected the extension of union membership to all "practical" workers, at least 18 years of age, with good character references, who "work around the rolls" in any mill.

In most respects the Roll Hands clearly copied the other two mill-workers' unions. Its constitution and by-laws, like the Heaters', imitated the United Sons of Vulcan. Like its brother unions, the Roll Hands also adhered to guarded rituals similar to secret societies and fraternal groups. Unlike the other two unions, however, the Roll Hands apparently suffered less internal dissension over finances and never issued an official publication.

Still, there was some dissension, and all three unions shared this common denominator, caused by economic problems. Erratic payment of dues and assessments to these unions' national bodies created most of the problems. Fluctuating revenues of these organizations reflected employment patterns determined by the prosperity of the iron and steel industry: strikes and otherwise idle mills meant unemployment, while the threat of blacklisting existed for those still employed. In turn, budgetary problems generated internal dissensions. Such discord resulted from the inability of national leaders to provide locals with adequate financial support during strikes and shut-downs.}

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18 Heater's Proceedings, 1874: especially 15-18, 20-21, 24; Heater's Proceedings, 1876: 3, 11-12, 14-15; McNeill, 278-79; Robinson, 16.
20 MBGL; CBGL; MP, 9: 6, 1874 mss.; Robinson, 22.
only verbal support, they gradually lost the respect and loyalty of their subordinate groups.\textsuperscript{21}

Except for officers, members of locals remained fairly ignorant of the overall condition of their respective unions. Correspondence between national officers and subordinate organizations was slow and inefficient, usually addressing only one issue in each letter. Most union men consequently received accurate accounts about union decisions and internal dissension only at annual conventions.

For example, recurring economic problems in the Sons of Vulcan generated intense debate at conventions. In 1867, a confrontation arose between Barney McGinty, the union's national secretary, and conventioners over compensation for his services. A heated debate closed with McGinty's resignation and the postponement of its acceptance while both sides sought a compromise. Likewise, by 1868 petty jealousies and the burden of subordinate forges' back dues demoralized the Sons, reducing total membership by 50 percent; at their convention in Buffalo, the treasury of the Grand Forge showed an $800 deficit.\textsuperscript{22}

The heaters' union also struggled with internal dissension throughout its brief existence and its leaders used conventions as forums for grievances. At its 1874 convention in Covington, Kentucky, Thomas Jones told delegates: "... [the year (July 1873 to July 1874)] has been almost a continual fight in one place or other, either on the wage question or something else, and in some cases there has been considerable suffering brought on by Brothers themselves."\textsuperscript{23} The problems Jones alluded to resulted from the winter and spring strike against wage reductions at the North Chicago Rolling Mill by members of Vulcan Lodge No. 1, St. Louis, and Friendship Lodge No. 1, North Chicago. Initially, arbitration resulted in a temporary agreement and further negotiations.\textsuperscript{24} However, during this time six members of

\textsuperscript{21} David Montgomery demonstrates that strike funds and other forms of mutual aid only stabilized and strengthened in the 1880s. David Montgomery, Workers' Control in America: Studies in the history of work, technology, and labor struggles (Cambridge, 1979), 18-25. For examples of economically based dissension in one union see Heaters mss., correspondence, 1874-1876; Heaters, Proceedings, 1874: 10-17.

\textsuperscript{22} McNeill, 274; Robinson, 13; Vulcan Record, 1 (1867): 17-18; Vulcan Record, 2 (1868): 11; Vulcan Record, 4 (1869): 6.

\textsuperscript{23} Heaters, Proceedings, 1874: 10.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 10-13. It is not completely clear why St. Louis members struck. The most reasonable hypothesis is that they struck because the North Chicago mill resolved to "cut loose from all other mills in regards to prices" and establish a scale of prices drawn from the scale for rails made in St. Louis.
Vulcan Lodge charged Jones with embezzlement of union funds. Later, men in Friendship Lodge accused Jones and 22 other heaters of "selling out" by signing the company's iron-clad contract. Jones partially resolved both incidents and excused his actions as expedient.²⁵

Some leaders believed that official publications would resolve communication problems and curtail disputes about finances. They argued that official publications would inform members about union activities while reducing the extensive correspondence which inundated union officers.²⁶ Although the Roll Hands' never published their own paper and the Heaters' merely endorsed the Workingman's Advocate,²⁷ delegates to the 1867 Sons of Vulcan convention in Pittsburgh voted to

Ironworkers in late 1800s, believed to be moulders in a foundry. (Courtesy Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University)

²⁵ Ibid., 14-17.
²⁶ Heaters, Proceedings, 1874: 26; Vulcan Record, 1 (1867): 10, 13-14; Vulcan Record, 12 (1873): 22-23, 43, 54; Vulcan Record, 14 (1874): 11-12, 20-21, 34, 53.
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support Pittsburgh’s *Daily and Weekly Advocate* as the union’s official paper and to publish their own periodical, the *Vulcan Record.*

The leaders of all three unions encouraged members to read trade and daily papers for information about union difficulties, trade conditions, and adverse public opinion generated by manufacturers’ propaganda.

Ironworkers believed that manufacturers encouraged negative propaganda in the press. The ironworkers’ unions labelled the industry’s weekly, *American Manufacturer and Iron World*, as especially biased. In 1874, for example, the paper described union organizers as “fre-

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28 *Vulcan Record*, 1 (1867): 10, 13-14. The *Vulcan Record* was meant to be similar to the journal of the molders’ union.

29 The dissemination of anti-union propaganda by employers and by the press spurred the growth of public fear of unions during Reconstruction. For one union reaction see *Vulcan Record*, 14 (1874): 43. The spread of this anti-union sentiment, however, was more prevalent in large urban areas than in small communities. Gutman argues that the homogeniety of small communities generated workers’ support. Gutman: 357-70. For later urban attitudes see Henry B. Leonard, “Ethnic Cleavage and Industrial Conflict in Late 19th Century America: The Cleveland Rolling Mill Company Strikes of 1882 and 1885,” *Labor History* 20 (Fall 1979): 524-48.
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quently and most generally idle, cunning fellows, who lead a lazy life at the expense of the hard working and credulous laborer.”

The paper also interpreted any union violence or intimidating action as characteristic of all unions. Furthermore, it blamed unions for domestic tragedies linked to general economic stress. “[That a Brooklyn] mother, crazed by the refusal of the father to work in opposition to the wishes of the Union, killed her three children is but legitimate result of Unionism.”

The *American Manufacturer and Iron World’s* comprehensive editorial position on the early union movement claimed that trade unions were tyrannical suppressors of individual rights. Unions made capricious and restrictive demands which, in turn, created unemployment and hard times for all working men. Joseph Weeks, the editor, stated:

> We are opposed to Trades Unions as they exist at present, not because they protect labor, but because they exercise a tyranny over that portion of labor that does not choose to surrender itself to these Unions that is most oppressive. In its worst hours capital never has that disregard for the rights of individuals that Unions have. When it has been shown most tyrannical its methods have been mild compared with those used by Unions towards their fellow workmen who would not yield their individuality, their right of deciding what wages they would ask, and on what terms they would labor. When Unions protect labor, not unionism [emphasis in original]; when they watch carefully the interests of the laborer, not the unionist, then many of the objections that now are urged against them will have no weight.

> In a word, . . . Unionism, except to those who are unionists, is utter and despotic selfishness. It is simply and only a method of mutual protection, and cannot even claim the dignity of representing a class, but only a portion. Though that portion may be a large majority of a class, so long as it opposes one individual of the class, it is no better than those it condemns. . . . When Unions will rise to the position of demanding [each workman’s] right to make what terms he pleases, then and not until then will they command respect and sympathy.

> We confess, however, that we have little hopes of any such a consummation, short of an entire breaking up of the Unions, and their reorganization upon an entirely new basis, and it is for this reason that we hope to see Unionism defeated in the struggle that is in progress.

Other editorials claimed that these unreasonable demands for union recognition and respectable wages prevented an Anglo-American pre-eminence in international trade and commerce.

Ironworkers believed that such claims threatened their entire way of life. Two months after the *American Manufacturer and Iron World*
formally issued its editorial position, members of the Roll Hands' Columbus, Ohio, lodge expressed the increasingly popular opinion that iron manufacturers sought to institute industrial feudalism. In an August 1874 resolution, the lodge declared:

Whereas; the recent alarming onsloughts made upon the ironworkers of the United States by the Ironmasters Association, to curtail their rights & privileges, also to reduce them to a state of semi pauperism; and Whereas; to [compete] with the Aggression of combined Capital requires a thorough unification of labor, Resolved: that [the lodge], give Countenance and support to any Movement that has as its object the Amelioration of the Masses, and places every Confidence in the committee now appointed by different unions to consumate, if possible, the Consolidation of the Boilers, Heaters, & Roll Hands, Unions.  

Ironworkers were beginning to view amalgamation as their only viable recourse.

Generally, the Roll Hands led the amalgamation movement after 1873. Both national and local union leaders recognized that weak bargaining positions during strikes resulted from the continuation of work by men in non-striking unions. Union men suffered on both sides: strikers from unemployment, non-strikers from paying strike fund assessments. John Fultz, treasurer of the Roll Hands' national lodge, succinctly stated the pro-amalgamation argument in July 1874: "[The parties] could gain their ends much quicker in Case of a strike, and it would make the tax much lighter which in itself was quite an [objection], in the Minds of Many of our Men."  

Fultz's comment reminded officers that strike assessments generated as much resentment as solidarity. Assessments, therefore, were one practical and important consideration which favored the amalgamation of ironworkers' unions.

The inability to provide strike benefits, along with inefficient communications, plagued all three unions. While local lodges and forges controlled strike activity, they usually were powerless to legalize a strike and could seldom provide adequate relief funds. Unless sanctioned by the union's central governing body, defense funds usually consisted of voluntary contributions from other subordinate locals and private organizations. In 1874, for example, the Roll Hands' endorsed mutual aid, and their annual convention's Committee on Reports advocated action requiring lodges to aid other subordinate lodges involved in sanctioned strikes. The union's 1874 constitution and by-

34 MBCL, 142-43.
35 Ibid., 131.
laws reflected these ideas by setting up a protective fund. This fund levied a per capita tax of 10 cents per month and provided for additional assessments, if necessary.\textsuperscript{36}

Deteriorating trade conditions, however, often kept union members from contributing to defense funds or paying additional national strike assessments. This problem convinced some ironworkers that local forges and lodges should have greater control over declaring legal strikes and determining strike benefits. The Sons of Vulcan, for example, vacillated between a national and district system of strike relief throughout its existence.\textsuperscript{37} This policy created significant repercussions. First, subordinate forges often failed to meet deadlines for the payment of semi-annual dues and fees, thus impeding the central organization’s budget. Secondly, national and local leaders blamed each other for the union’s difficulties. As a result, the Sons slipped into greater debt and approached bankruptcy during 1868 and 1869. At their 1868 convention, the Sons decided to give individual forges greater control over declaring a legal strike and determining strike benefits.\textsuperscript{38} However, as economic conditions worsened again in the early 1870s, despite claims of union strength and expansion by the Sons’ new president, John O. Edwards,\textsuperscript{39} their policy reverted to the discretion of national leaders; the Heaters’ and Roll Hands’ followed the Sons’ example.

\textsuperscript{36} MP, 9: 6, 1874 mss.; Roll Hands, Constitution, art. X, secs. 1-4 (1874). For examples of different degrees of need arising from strikes see MBGL, 2-3 (Columbus [Ohio] Strike, 1873), 9-11 (Carondolet [Missouri] Strike, 1873), and 23-24 (New Albany [Indiana] Strike, 1874, a non-sanctioned strike). Also see McNeill, 280, for the Carondolet Strike. The strike most thoroughly documented in the Roll Hands’ official records took place in Johnstown, Pa., in 1874. See (1) MP, 9: 6, 1874 mss., lists the members in good standing for Keystone Lodge through Mar. 1874; (2) CBGL, 2: July 16, 1874, “The strike of the members of Keystone Lodge, No. 19, Johnstown, Pa., ended in the defeat of the strikers”; (3) MBGL, 130: July 22, 1874, “Communicated Johnstown surrender to all lodges”; Roll Hands, Proceedings, 1876: 5-7, 11-15. Also see Bennett for a detailed discussion of the lodge and community.

\textsuperscript{37} For an example see the Proceedings of the Troy (1873) and Youngstown (1874) conventions. Vulcan Record, 12 (1873): particularly 86-88; Vulcan Record, 14 (1874): particularly 79-80.

\textsuperscript{38} Vulcan Record, 2 (1868): 8, 13-14; Vulcan Record, 4 (1869): 6.

\textsuperscript{39} At the Buffalo convention Edwards stated: “The organization is stronger and in a better working condition to-day than it was two years and a half ago.” Vulcan Record, 2 (1868): 25. The following year, in his Grand Master’s Report to the convention in Wheeling, Edwards optimistically stated: “. . . although the organization is not equal in numerical strength to the summer of 1867, . . . it has grown . . . and has a more hopeful appearance than one year ago.” Vulcan Record, 4 (1869): 8.
The Sons, Heaters, and Roll Hands usually honored each other's sanctioned strikes, despite the often sensitive problem of conflicting jurisdictional rights between the unions. Although the Sons narrowly defined their membership qualifications, both finishers' unions broadly defined membership, to organize as many mill workers as possible. However, by definition and purpose the roll hands' union was less exclusive than the heaters'; it was more democratic and admitted finishers regardless of their wage classification.  

Although they generally cooperated about strike issues, each union prized its autonomy regarding other legislative matters. Their independence thus usually prevented each other from gaining significant power in any one mill. The Roll Hands, for example, opposed any affiliation with other organizations in 1873. During its first convention, that year, the union established an anti-confederation position. An initial motion that the union "have nothing to do with the Heaters' or Puddlers' union" was narrowly defeated. The subsequent motion carried: "That no roller go to the heaters' union, but let us [authorize] both grand bodies to assist each other in a legal strike or any dispute that may arise." 41 This aversion towards consolidation and cooperation was reversed quietly during 1874 for two reasons. First, conditions in the iron and steel industry weakened the Roll Hands' isolationist position. Secondly, the union's newly elected president and secretary, David Plant and William Martin, 42 were thoroughly convinced about the value of amalgamation. They converted others to the idea.

More than any other two national officers of the ironworkers' unions, Plant and Martin agitated for unification of the three unions. As president, David Plant travelled to and addressed the heaters' and puddlers' national conventions, as well as the Roll Hands' subordinate lodges, about amalgamation. As secretary, William Martin correspond-
ed with the national and subordinate organizations of all three unions, and often hosted meetings of pro-amalgamation mill workers from the Columbus (Ohio) Rolling Mill in his own home. In fact, Martin's personality and organizational skills won the respect of both co-workers and management, enhancing his leadership. Samuel Thomas, general manager of the Columbus mill in the mid-1870s, claimed that Martin was "manly, upright, sober, honest, and fair" as a worker and as a mediator, "discussing and regulating all matters arising between workmen and our Company."

Both Plant and Martin began their union careers as members of the Columbus, Ohio, lodge of the Iron and Steel Roll Hands' Union. This lodge began and actively promoted efforts to combine the three ironworkers' unions. In Fall 1873 roll hands, heaters, and puddlers in the Columbus mill formed their own amalgamated association. Its purpose was to practice the theoretical principles of confederation in settling disputes. At the same time, these three groups of millworkers maintained memberships in their respective national organizations.

43 McNeill, 281-82; Heaters mss., 1874 convention; Heaters, Proceedings, 1874: 9, 22-23, which should be read in conjunction with MBGL, 26-27, 130-31, 136-37, for a few examples of this correspondence.

44 On his retirement from the Amalgamated in 1890, Martin reminisced about his early role in the unionization of ironworkers as that of a host to "a small coterie of friends who met at times, in my own humble home in Columbus, Ohio, in 1874, where a temporary amalgamation of all iron and steel workers was formed." NLT, Oct. 11, 1890.

45 See MP, 9: 4, recommendations from Kirk Brothers & Co., New Yard Iron Works, Workington, Cumberland, England, Aug. 21, 1866, and Sept. 12, 1868; MP, 11: 6, Samuel Thomas to Martin, Aug. 23, 1878; MP, 9: 3, Raymund Bauer to Martin, Aug. 20, 1890. Samuel Thomas was president of the East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia Railroad by 1883, and of the Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville Railroad by the early 1890s. First employed by Thomas at the Columbus Rolling Mill in 1873, Martin was still regarded as a friend in 1898. See MP, 5: 2, Martin to William McCullough, Nov. 3, 1893; MP, 9: 2, Samuel Thomas to William McKinley, June 15, 1898; MP, 11: 6, Samuel Thomas to Martin, Oct. 10, 1883. Thomas remarked in 1878, "I have so long relied on [Martin's] council and judgement that I am at a loss to know how to get along without him." MP, 11: 6, Samuel Thomas to Martin, Aug. 23, 1878. Thomas also regretted not seeing Martin while in New York in 1883: "I should have enjoyed a long walk with you about labor matters." MP, 11: 6, Samuel Thomas to Martin, Oct. 10, 1883. Also see Montgomery, Workers' Control, 12-15.

46 This amalgamation lasted until 1876; unfortunately little more is known about it. Eleventh Souvenir, 8; Heaters mss., letters, William Wells to Benjamin Spangler, Feb. 22, 1875, Spangler to Wells, Feb. 27, 1875, Spangler to Adam Schada, Feb. 29, 1875, Schada to Spangler, Mar. 9, 1875; NLT, Oct. 11, 1890. For other examples of regional amalgamations see NLT: Dec. 26, 1874 (Louisville, Ky.-New Albany, Ind.), Apr. 10, 1875 (Catasaquoa, Pa.), May 1, 1875 (Greencastle, Ind.).
By early Summer 1874, national leaders of the Sons, Heaters, and Roll Hands acknowledged the need for amalgamation. The rationale — improving their members' social and economic status through mutual aid and job security — was already written into each union's constitution. A resolution passed by delegates at the Sons' 1867 convention stated principles embraced by all three ironworkers' unions:

... In upholding and advancing the principles of our organization, we positively affirm that we have no disposition to deteriorate the just claims of capital, but through its instrumentalities to elevate the moral, intellectual and social condition of the members of our craft; and demand through the simplicity of justice, that our arduous toil shall be remunerated, and labor elevated to its proper position.

Leaders reasoned that at best, amalgamation of their three unions would improve the economic position of ironworkers; at worst, it would insure the status quo.

At their 1874 convention the Roll Hands voted 2 to 1 in favor of amalgamation. During the next two years David Plant and William Martin worked with officers in the heaters' and puddlers' unions to organize a joint committee on amalgamation. While presenting his annual report at the 1874 convention, Heaters' president Thomas Jones asked delegates to consider the "advisability" of amalgamating with the Roll Hands: "I hope you will give the subject due consideration, and that we may all be endowed with wisdom while here legislating for the good of the order." At a later evening session, Plant addressed a small group of delegates and convinced them to unanimously endorse both amalgamation and forming a three-man committee about the issue. Plant then notified David Harris, president of the United Sons of Vulcan, about the Heaters' decision. At their August convention in Youngstown the Sons agreed to amalgamation and the committee, but failed to make any appointments.

The three unions' national and subordinate organizations continued their negotiations about amalgamating throughout the fall and winter.

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47 Heaters, Proceedings, 1874: 18; Roll Hands, Constitution, art. 1 (1874); Vulcan Record, 1 (1867): 14. No manuscript or printed copy of the Heaters' constitution exists. The conclusion that the amalgamation rationale was also in their constitution is based on evidence in the union's convention proceedings and official correspondence.

48 Vulcan Record, 1 (1867): 14.


of 1874 and 1875. In April 1875, the Heaters' and Roll Hands' national leaders issued a joint circular to their subordinate lodges suggesting that the financially troubled unions cancel their national conventions in favor of a meeting of the amalgamation committees. A joint conference of the unions' representatives met in Indianapolis in August 1875.

The four-day meeting began August 3, 1875, and a committee formulated a constitution and by-laws for a new national organization. The committee writing the constitution made slow progress since some representatives held conservative views about amalgamation and advised a cautious approach to it. William Martin, who served as secretary both for the meeting and the constitution committee, felt that this conservatism wasted time. After several sessions, which Martin claimed made "little or no headway," the committee eventually produced a unanimously adopted constitution. When the Indianapolis meeting closed August 7, a resolution postponed the printing of the proceedings and adopted constitution until further news arrived from the Sons of Vulcan.

While the Heaters' and Roll Hands' joint committee met, the Sons held their annual convention in Philadelphia. David Harris, the outgoing president, noted the "strong and bitter antipathies between mill

51 MBGL, loose materials, "Circular to the Heaters and Roll Hands of the United States," Apr. 20, 1875. Also see Heaters mss., correspondence, 1874-1875; NLT, Feb. 13, 1875.

52 Roll Hands, Proceedings, 1876: 8-9. Representatives to the joint conference were: John Schreyer, Richard Sullivan, Benjamin Spangler, Edward George, and Isaiah Whitehead for the Heaters; John B. Kelly, David Plant, William Martin—elected secretary, John Fultz, John Boyd, and Alexander McDonald for the Roll Hands. John Hasely, a non-committee member but resident of Indianapolis whose union affiliation is unknown, was chosen to chair the four-day meeting in order to avoid the possibility of tie voting. Martin described two committee members, John Kelly and Richard Sullivan, as "very obstinate and conservative in their views." MP, 11: 4, Martin to Melissa Martin, Aug. 5, 1875.

53 Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, Constitution, By-Laws and Rules of Order of the National and Subordinate Lodges of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers; together with the Proceedings of Joint Committee. Adopted at Pittsburgh, Pa., commencing Dec. 7, 1875 (Columbus, 1876): 3 (hereafter cited as: AA, Constitution, page or part, year); [Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers], Manuscript draft of the 1875 Amalgamated Association Constitution, Hutzler Collection, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore; Heaters mss., letter, Adam Schada to Benjamin Spangler, Aug. 18, 1875; Heaters, Proceedings, 1876: 6; Roll Hands, Proceedings, 1876: 9. Martin later sold the manuscript of the Indianapolis conference and the first constitution to The Johns Hopkins University through George Barnett. MP, 10: 9, Martin to George E. Barnett, Nov. 15, 1905.
trades" which resulted from the lack of reciprocal support during strikes and lockouts. He warned delegates that mill workers would never “realize a complete emancipation from the domination of monopolists” without uniting:

No great movement in behalf of the workingman’s rights can ever permanently succeed without the united efforts of those whose rights are to be upheld. . . . [And] we should not underrate the power and subtlety of wealth and the innumerable advantages the condition of society give capitalists over men who toil for bread, especially those in an isolated condition, such as we are now.

Harris’s plea for amalgamation was endorsed both by specific committees and by the convention’s delegates.

The newly elected president of the Sons, Joseph Bishop, wrote to the Heaters’ and Roll Hands’ joint amalgamation committee and guaranteed the endorsement of amalgamation by the Sons. Shortly thereafter, the joint amalgamation committee issued a second circular. This September circular reinforced the joint committee’s resolution against immediate publication of the drafted constitution and by-laws and called for another joint meeting about amalgamation, which would include puddlers, to be held in Pittsburgh in early December.

The five-day conference involved 11 representatives from the three ironworkers’ unions and had a dual purpose. The meeting’s first objective was to create an amalgamated organization from all three unions. Its second goal was to finalize a constitution and by-laws acceptable to all the representatives which would be published and distributed to their respective subordinate organizations for ratification.

The representatives successfully completed both goals. After the first day’s review of the work completed by the Indianapolis Conference, representatives concluded that a sub-committee would more...
quickly frame a constitution. Joseph Bishop, the elected chairman of the meeting, consequently appointed a five-man sub-committee to draft a constitution. Their presented work was revised during the next three days until all 11 representatives voted for its adoption. The committee ordered this revised constitution printed as a circular and sent to the subordinate forges and lodges for ratification. Before closing the meeting, further arrangements were made for the three unions to hold their 1876 conventions together in Pittsburgh during the first week of August. Each union would first meet separately to conclude business pertaining to its organization; then all three would meet in one joint session.

The unions' local organizations ratified this temporary agreement, held brief individual conventions, then officially united in Pittsburgh on August 3, 1876, declaring themselves the National Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers of the United States the next day.

Skilled ironworkers who were, or later became, leaders of the Sons, Heaters, and Roll Hands unions sought to prepare their memberships for coping with future conditions and, thus, nurtured the amalgamation movement. They believed that only unification of their three individual craft unions would end their weak bargaining position during strikes and improve the standard of living of their members. The advancement of workers in income and status through solidarity was the key idea of the Amalgamated Association. Appropriately, its constitution outlined three basic goals in its preamble: the re-establishment of a prosperous iron trade, job security, and the opportunity for workers' advancement through the improvement of their "moral, social and intellectual condition." These goals reflected more than a decade of internal and external struggles by American ironworkers and their unions.

In August 1867, Joseph Chiverton closed the United Sons' of Vulcan

59 AA, Constitution, 4-7 (1876). The committee consisted of David Plant, John Jarrett, James Penny, David Reese, and Benjamin Spangler. Although William Martin was secretary of the conference, the proceedings do not indicate whether he also served as secretary of the sub-committee, nor do they indicate who was secretary.
60 AA, Constitution, 7-11 (1876).
61 AA, Proceedings, 1876: 5-9; Heaters, Proceedings, 1876; Roll Hands, Proceedings, 1876.
62 AA, Constitution, preamble and art. 1 (1876); AA, Proceedings, 1876: 5-14, 19-20.
63 AA, Constitution, preamble (1876).
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convention with a warning to "Always remember that 'In Union there is strength.' And 'The knowledge of Union is power.' And that 'United we stand; divided we fall.'" Although spoken nearly a decade after the initial organization of ironworkers in the United States, these sentiments reaffirmed trade unionist beliefs of many men, particularly skilled ironworkers from the British Isles who were already familiar with the principles of trade unionism; for millmen, they generally became the watchword of unionism during the late nineteenth century.

The Amalgamated represented the concrete form of Chiverton's words. The goals of this new union represented both clearly defined, pragmatic economic ambitions and vague, social ideals. Never idle rhetoric, these goals evolved as the iron trades organized into individual unions in 1873 and increased in importance during the push for an amalgamation of the unions in 1874 and 1875. Both these goals and the early unions which promoted them represented a response to the depressed industrial conditions which existed during Grant's administration.

The first elected national leaders of the new Amalgamated Association guided union policy towards the achievement of these goals. Although these men often were already familiar with the principles of trade unionism and the problems of excessive craft consciousness, they continued to encounter adverse public opinion and craft rivalries which hindered the achievement of constitutionally defined objectives. Public distrust and petty craft jealousies plagued the Amalgamated for two more decades, demoralizing union leadership and eroding the rank and file's confidence in them. By the mid-1890s, after the Homestead Strikes of 1889 and 1892, and in the midst of another depression, cynicism replaced the optimism which guided union leaders in the 1870s. Leaders learned that neither economic pragmatism nor poorly defined social aspirations could completely emancipate them from "the domination of monopolists."

64 Vulcan Record, 1 (1867): 31.
JONES & LAUGHLIN FLOAT
BESSEMER CONVERTER — 1908

Photograph taken at Sesqui-centennial Parade through South Side, Pittsburgh. This was the second parade. The first started from the North Side and proceeded through Downtown. (From the recently acquired Frederick T. Gretton Papers in the Historical Society's Archives. Gretton was an English immigrant who worked as a chemist at the Jones & Laughlin South Side Works. He also enjoyed photography. Original also blurred in right corner.)