tion began to fall as early as 1875. Since 1970, when traces of mercury were found in Lake Erie fish, the industry has been in severe crisis.

One of the best sections of the book is a discussion of work technology in the industry combined with one of the best and most illustrative sets of work photographs I have seen for any occupation. In this work world, fish houses operate as the retail/ wholesale centers, and in the post-war period, had controlled the ownership of the fishing fleet. Most of the fishermen interviewed were boat owners or operators; others were crewmen and still others moved up and down this fluid hierarchy. Their class position in the industry was not emphasized by the fishermen, or perhaps it was downplayed by the authors and subsumed, to a great extent, in a common trade identity.

Fishing has its skills. Highly valued by the fishermen were the skills needed to make and mend nets and to locate fish. Many of these skills, net-making for example, cannot simply be "picked up." They must be taught by someone, usually a relative or a sympathetic older fisherman. The authors provide some interesting examples of the passing on of these skills.

The book has a central chapter on the memories of retired fishermen who still strongly identify themselves as members of the trade. Their stories emphasize entry into the occupation, family ties to commercial fishing and the contrast between the past and the present. As with many retired workers, they point to a lost golden age — in this case, a golden age of fishing — a period of greater abundance of fish, purer water and stronger men.

While there are no Paul Bunyans or Joe Magarac legends among this group, there were references by some to fisherman heroes of the past. These were either men of great strength mixed with intelligence and kindness, or the "tough but fair" boss who drove his men but shared in their hard work, and gave aid to the poor. There were also a few negative figures whose stories were told primarily so that the tellers could distance themselves from the negative stereotype of the trade: a dirty, smelly alcoholic.

Danger, such as ice, rough water and fog is seen as a part of occupational identity and pride. Perhaps because of the small scale of the industry and the dominance of owner/operators, there does not seem to be much visible friction between workers demanding a safer workplace and owners resisting these additional costs. This is despite the fact that a number of stories involved owners exposing their workers to special dangers in order to boost their catch. This chapter is one which calls out for some additional minimal data. How does the accident rate in commercial fishing compare with such deadly jobs as coal mining or logging? Is it really a particularly dangerous occupation at all?

Lake Erie Fishermen has the strengths and weaknesses of a solid oral history. A good sense comes through of a group of men who define themselves by occupation, often by contrasting their job to that of others, and who take a defensive pride in their skills and lifestyle. On the other hand, dramatic entry points into the trade and colorful incidents are stressed, at the expense of a more balanced portrait of the occupation and especially of the latent class economic tensions. Some discussion of wages and other standard of living questions over time would certainly have strengthened the book; so would have a discussion of the relationship between the Portuguese and the native-born fisherman, especially since there were no persons of color interviewed (or perhaps present in the industry). Finally, the very small size of this occupation is an inherent limitation, although some of the study's insights might be tried out on larger, analogous groups, such as truck-drivers or workers in small-scale construction.

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From Monopoly to Competition: The Transformations of Alcoa

By George David Smith


B ECAUSE I grew up in Pittsburgh in a U.S. Steel family, my perspective on the city has always focused on steel mills. The gleaming aluminum structure of the Alcoa Building on Mellon Square made little special impression, but this attitude was hardly unusual in the 1960s and 1970s. The recent restructuring of the city's economy, however, has moved many of Pittsburgh's non-steel enterprises into the spotlight, and David Smith's fine study of Alcoa, the Aluminum Corporation of America, examines one of the most important of these. Although organized around questions that particularly interest business historians, From Monopoly to Competition is a highly readable history of Alcoa. Readers in the Steel City who know the history of local steel corporations will find the contrasting record of Alcoa to be a fascinating subject.

From Monopoly to Competition is a finely textured history of Alcoa organized in a chronological fashion with extended treatment of a number of themes. The story begins in 1886, when Charles Hall developed a method for smelting aluminum, then a rare metal. The Pittsburgh Reduction Company was organized in 1888 to exploit Hall's process and it erected a smelter on Smallman Street; a larger smelter was built in New Kensington in 1889. But the huge demand of Hall's process for electricity led the company to build a plant at Niagara Falls in 1893. Crucial support for this growth came from bankers Andrew W. and Richard Beatty Mellon, who made Pittsburgh Reduction the first in a string of successful industrial investments. By backing the company over the long term, the Mellons provided the necessary financial base for the young company, and aluminum became a
generations. The daughter speaks for her aunts, her mother; the son speaks for his father, as in "Reaganomics Comes to Pittsburgh" by Michael O'Connor:

My father's eyes say it, always.
Who ever thought that steel mills would be a thing of the past?
But they are
and it's here
all together
all alone
all at once.

Tillie Olsen has taught us that the silencing of writers is one of the tragedies in the human drama. Work numbed our ancestors to the point of no words, or at least, to no words on a page or in a book that they could call their own. No words meant that they could never translate their lives into a universal art, unless their daughters and sons might do it for them; and so then, some did. Importantly, then, this anthology celebrates a first generation of poets whose work bears witness to the job/work of those silenced, and to their own job/work of summer jobs, early jobs, filler jobs in factories now gone. Writing it down, getting it right, makes the human document without which we cannot evaluate our lives, let alone plan social or personal futures.

That Working Classics has been conceived and birthed out of the so-called Rust Belt—nine of the contributors, in fact, currently live and work in Pittsburgh—speaks for the intensity of its authenticity. Oresick and Coles work in writing, publishing and teaching at the University of Pittsburgh; both have a strong affinity to the working-class and both have had formal educations which, until now, knew no anthologies like this one. When Oresick began college and found himself genuinely attracted to university culture, he began collecting poetry as a way of reaffirming his working-class roots. Around 1980, he met Coles, who was teaching working-class literature. This acquaintanceship marked the beginning of many fruitful exchanges, and their eventual collaboration on this anthology.

As rage and pain incise the pages of their anthology, so too do pleasure in accomplishment, pride in craft, and in several poems, including selections by Patricia Dobler and Kevin Rippin, the mysterious connections between sex, labor and power of the body. Rippin's "Belle's Body" and Dobler's "The Mill in Winter, 1939" are incandescent in their evocations of releases, traps and rhythms of physical labor.

Notable, too, is that for the first time we see the masterpieces of James Wright and Richard Hugo side by side, sharing their compelling subjects. Poems by

material for use in mass markets.

The new company struggled against competitors, patent suits, with the need to develop markets and to scale up the production process, and with numerous technical riddles. Solutions in these areas often established long-lasting patterns. For example, Pittsburgh Reduction helped companies substitute aluminum for traditional materials, watching closely to be sure that aluminum's reputation was not sullied. Perhaps more importantly, the company moved to control its raw material (bauxite), the refining of bauxite, and electric power for smelting. Always, the Mellons were involved in the growth of the company. The result was success in both the technological and business arenas. In 1907 the company was renamed the Aluminum Company of America; it was already one of the largest industrial firms in the country.

Smith chronicles these developments and the amazing growth of the company that followed for the next half century and beyond. The appearance of real research during and after World War I, the enormous expansion during the 1920s, and the contrasting difficulties the company faced during the Depression and World War II are treated, as is the spectacular growth of the 1950s, when Alcoa salesmen set out to cover the world in aluminum. In short, Alcoa was one of the most successful American businesses. Indeed, until 1946, the story of Alcoa was the story of aluminum in America, as the company exercised a complete monopoly over smelting and production. This situation changed only when the federal government sold wartime plants to Reynolds and Kaiser in the wake of an antitrust conviction handed down in 1945.

Since 1946, Alcoa has operated in a different world, first as the leading firm in an oligopolistic industry, and by the 1980s, in a more open international market. For a company used to calling its own tune, the changes proved wrenching at times. But the company continued to grow. It found markets as a supplier of aluminum for architectural components in large buildings; it played a leading role in the development of beverage containers. The company has not avoided the difficulties facing most American manufacturers in the 1970s and 1980s, but in contrast to the declining fortune of Pittsburgh's firms, Smith shows Alcoa tackling difficulties with some success. The story ends with the 1986 announcement by board chairperson Charles Parry that Alcoa had to diversify away from aluminum in order to survive, thereby marking another transformation for the firm.

Smith's narrative is organized around a number of recurring themes. Always part of Alcoa's history has been the question of technological change. The company's origins are a classic tale of the backyard inventor, but in the end, devel-
Philip Levine and Ed Ochester — veterans of the democratization of poetry in our times — appear alongside Tess Gallagher and Stephen Dunn, their stories by now part of the regional landscapes all Americans know.

Jim Daniels, Chris Llewellyn, Anthony Petrosky and Peter Oresick explore the sheer range of tones inside the industrial experience: the din of the physical labor contrasted with the icy silences and heated implosions of political abstraction. There is much richness here.

It must be pointed out here that the editors have focused primarily on the industrial places: factories and sweat shops, excluding poems about office and health care work. That choice accounts for the fact that less than a third of the selections are by women poets, an absence that calls attention to the fact that no representation of so-called pink collar work yet exists. While no anthology can do everything, I hope that a second edition of Working Classics narrows the gap.

The continuing industrialization of the smaller countries ought to ensure that Oresick’s and Coles’ anthology will be read internationally. It’s heartening to think that readers of poetry worldwide — in places where poetry is read, bought and collected in far greater quantity and with much greater interest than in our own country — might someday be carrying copies of Working Classics with them as they go about their work and the process of thinking about and changing that work.

Finally, there’s a sweet dignity and engraved-in-our-common-lives legacy about the book that means it’s going to last. Here in its entirety is James Wright’s “Honey”:

My father died at the age of eighty. One of the last things he did in his life was to call his fifty-eight-year-old son-in-law “honey.” One afternoon in the early 1930s, when I bloodied my head by pitching over a wall at the bottom of a hill and believed that the mere sight of my own blood was the tragic meaning of life, I heard my father offer to murder his future son-in-law. His son-in-law is my brother-in-law, whose name is Paul. These two grown men rose above me and knew that a human life is murder. They weren’t fighting about Paul’s love for my sister. They were fighting with each other because one strong man, the driver of a coal truck, was laid off from his work. They were both determined to live their lives, and so they glared at each other and said they were going to live, come hell or high water. High water is not trite in southern Ohio. Nothing is trite along a river. My father died a good death. To die a good death means to live one’s life. I don’t say a good life.

I say a life.

Smith follows closely the company’s attempts to build a foundation of technological knowledge and demonstrates how important this strategy was to Alcoa’s success. Another thread in Smith’s account involves business strategy and entrepreneurship. Here the story focuses on Alcoa’s managers, from Hall’s partners A. V. Davis and Alfred Hunt to such recent leaders as Frank Magee, Fritz Close, John Harper, and Charles Parry. Many of these men served for long spans of time, providing the basic continuity of purpose and corporate style that shaped Alcoa. The company remained a “family firm” with a highly informal management structure well into the century, despite the sweep of its operations. But since 1950, a major concern of corporate officials has been to develop organizational structures that meet the company’s needs. Smith makes clear, however, the fact that people create the structures of management.

As a final thread, Smith weaves into his history a number of company problems of a more topical nature. Many of them were long-lasting, such as labor-management relations, changing technology, changing markets, and the nature of research. This topical approach can be repetitious, with overlapping occasionally making it a little hard to follow events in time. But this is a minor criticism.

The most important of the themes Smith traces concerns antitrust and government/business relations. Alcoa was unique in surviving until 1946 without significant competition or regulation in its industry. But from 1910 until the late 1960s, Smith tells us, the company was almost constantly threatened with antitrust suits, federal investigations or congressional studies of monopoly. The company survived a lawsuit in 1911; the Federal Trade Commission studied Alcoa for eight years beginning in 1922; a trial from 1938 to 1940 ended with a finding that Alcoa was innocent of restraint of trade. In 1945, however, Judge Learned Hand reversed that verdict. During the war the government had financed Alcoa-built plants for defense, and with the Hand reversal, the government decided to sell plants to fledgling companies in order to establish competition in aluminum; it also placed Alcoa under the court’s supervision to protect those competitors. Kaiser and Reynolds, later Ormet and others, also received government subsidies. Only in 1958 did court supervision end, but government scrutiny continued through the 1960s. Clearly, antitrust considerations shaped every aspect of Alcoa’s history.

From Monopoly to Competition began as an internal study in 1983, but the project expanded into a full-blown historical narrative connected to the corporation’s centennial in 1988. Thus the author enjoyed the support and encouragement of Alcoa officials. Beneficial results of this
cooperation are the numerous charts, graphs and wonderful sets of statistics that the author provides. The other side of cooperation, however, concerns independence and editorial control, the traditional dilemma of business historians. Smith has skirted these shoals fairly well, identifying Alcoa's missteps even though he is sympathetic to the company. The book certainly serves the corporation's goal of understanding its history so that it can avoid being bound by tradition or falsely confident of historical strengths. At the same time, Smith has produced a model of contemporary business history that anyone interested in Alcoa or American business will find well worth reading.

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Page 16,17  Jewish Archives, Kaufmann Settlement Papers, HSWP  
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