workers and the unions, but my dad and granddad never did. Despite their low wages and their gutted pensions, they were loyal and grateful to the company for the chance to better themselves in America. Neither of them finished high school, but by the time I was born they were wearing suits and ties to the mill and between them they managed to own and hold onto a home throughout the Depression, and nobody in my generation had to quit school to go to work.

Today most of our children have finished college and are well-launched. I feel like we are the fortunate survivors and beneficiaries of that painful process begun in 1892 by Granddad's generation and consummated in 1937 by Dad's. We owe a great debt to those who did not survive or benefit from the struggle themselves.

Much love,
Dick

RETHINKING THE HOMESTEAD LOCKOUT ON THE FOURTH OF JULY
by Paul Krause

ONE hundred years ago, in the summer of 1892, Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick initiated the most infamous labor dispute of industrializing America. After a decade-long struggle to unseat the trade unions that had effectively shared in the management of the Homestead Steel Works, Carnegie and Frick decided, as the latter put it, to finally "operate the plant ourselves." The Homestead Lockout began on 29 June, when Frick shut down the giant steelworks and announced, on Carnegie's orders, that the company would no longer employ any worker who carried a union card. In so doing, they challenged 3,800 steelworkers and their families. The workers responded by sealing off the mill — and the entire town — to prevent scab labor from resuming operations. Frick quickly moved to dispatch 300 agents from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to dislodge the workers. When the Pinkertons arrived by river barge in the early morning of 6 July, they were greeted by thousands of armed townspeople, prepared to die in defense of their rights.¹

In the violent day-long confrontation that followed, three Pinkertons and seven workers were killed; other steelworkers were seriously wounded in the attack. The death of the workers and the wounding of their colleagues touched all of the town's principal ethnic and occupational groups and underscored the extent to which this working community reflected an exceptional model of American unity. Indeed, the casualties constituted no less than a cross section of the town's population: Welshman John Morris and Irishman Thomas Weldon were highly skilled steelworkers; Silas Wain was an English mill hand; Henry Striegel, a German teamster; Peter Fares and Joseph Sotak, immigrant laborers from Slovakia; and Civil War veteran George Rutter, a "native-born" American.²

Five days after the "battle of the barges," on 11 July, Homestead's remarkable solidarity began to crumble when, at the request of Frick, Gov. Robert E. Pattison mobilized the entire Pennsylvania State Militia of 8,500 men to retake the mill and the town. By the end of the summer, state authorities, acting in cooperation with the Carnegie Steel Company, had brought more than 100 indictments against the leading steelworkers on charges of riot, conspiracy, murder, and treason. Only a few of the steelworkers were ever tried, and none was convicted, but the combined authority of the state and one of the largest manufacturing establishments in the

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world proved overwhelming. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW) held out in Homestead for a number of months still; its defeat in November signaled the virtual end of unionism in the steel industry until the 1930s. For the steelworkers who had led the resistance — notably, “Honest” John McLuckie, the burgess (mayor) of Homestead — Carnegie’s victory meant permanent banishment from employment in steel-making. In McLuckie’s case, Carnegie’s victory also meant exile from the country; he was last seen in 1901 in Mexico, working as a miner.

While the name John McLuckie, not to mention those of his colleagues who were killed in the lockout, has largely faded from public memory, the lockout itself, and especially the shoot-out between the workers and the Pinkertons, has occupied a prominent place in the historical consciousness of many Americans — particularly those connected with the steel industry. In Western Pennsylvania, the centennial of the Homestead Lockout is therefore being marked by a wide variety of activities. (see page 57)

In the wake of the collapse of the American steel industry in the 1980s, Pittsburghers might well question the relevance of commemorating an industrial dispute that occurred a century ago in an industry that for all intents and purposes no longer exists in the Monongahela Valley. The Homestead Works has itself been dismantled and the sister mills that once lined the Monongahela River are largely silent. Why, then, would anyone in Pittsburgh care to mark the occasion of the Homestead Lockout — particularly on the holiday weekend of July Fourth?

In the view of the steelworkers who labored in the Homestead Works a century ago, the Fourth of July held special significance. Many of George Rutter’s colleagues had joined him in the fight to preserve American “independence” in the Civil War, and many considered themselves, and indeed all American workers, to be the chief defenders of the nation’s most sacred political traditions. Immigrant workers, too, were inspired by the meaning of this most American of holidays. Only a few years earlier, shortly after a bitter coal strike in nearby Mt. Pleasant, where the workers had triumphantly defeated Frick, hundreds of recently arrived Slovaks led the parade for the Fourth bearing a banner that read: “Live forever the United States!” In Homestead, few workers were more outspoken on the subject of this tradition than John McLuckie. A long-time veteran of the labor movement, McLuckie was serving his second term as Homestead’s chief municipal officer at the time of the lockout. His dedication to the house of labor made him one of the most respected members of the community.

McLuckie often spoke for the workers of Homestead, and many newspaper reporters turned to him in the early days of July 1892 when they began putting together their stories on the meaning of Independence Day for the residents of the town. As McLuckie well knew, the steelworkers of Homestead and their families usually celebrated the holiday by picnicking in the
nearby woods, rowing on the Monongahela, or dancing in one of the many meeting halls in town. But this Fourth of July was different, according to McLuckie. "[We] can’t celebrate the Fourth until we know whether or not the Declaration of Independence is still in force in this country," he said. McLuckie, like his constituents, believed that the outcome of the lockout would determine whether or not independence or industrial despotism would rule in Homestead.  

To ensure that Homestead would remain independent, McLuckie and his colleagues on the workers’ Advisory Committee on 4 July increased the number of worker pickets from 350 to 1,000 and established a perimeter of lookout posts that encircled a five-mile area around the town. “Martial law prevails and every class of citizen is under the orders of the Advisory Committee,” one reporter noted. The Fourth was a quiet day that year in Homestead. Some women donned “holiday costumes” to visit with friends and neighbors, one reporter noted, and a handful of residents did set off a small fireworks display just after dusk. Two days later, McLuckie and his fellow townspeople met Carnegie’s challenge to the town’s independence at the battle of the barges, but ultimately they were no match for the owners and their allies in local and state government. Once the National Guard arrived, the company was able to resume operations. When the locked-out workers first saw smoke rising from the furnaces of the steel works, they responded, predictably enough, with anger: hundreds advanced toward the front gate of the mill and stopped only when the guardsmen stationed there drew their bayonets and wounded six. 

This abortive assault provoked the first of the workers’ many efforts to explain the violent turn that Homestead’s resistance had taken and to explain how such resistance grew from a thoughtful consideration of contemporary politics — and not from irrational impulses of a frenzied mob. And it is these explanations which are worthy of review a hundred years later.

James Boyce, a prominent member of the AAISW and a close friend to McLuckie, related the angry outburst to the steelworkers’ claim to unspecified rights in the mill. Those not involved in the struggle do not understand the workers’ position, Boyce said. “Most of us, expecting continuous employment here, have put our savings into homes, which will be lost if we are to be driven away from this town. The Carnegie mills were built up by us, the great profits of the concern were made by us. Our labor was expended for Scotch castles, and library advertising. We do not say that Carnegie... does not own the mill property, but we do say that we have some rights in it ourselves.” It was for this reason, Boyce said, that his co-workers had decided to prevent new men from going to work for Carnegie Steel and “stealing” the jobs. The workers in no way claimed that the mill was their possession, but they did possess their jobs, and they were adamant about maintaining them.

Boyce’s assertion underscored what was perceived by
many contemporary observers as the core issue of the lockout: the respective rights of workers and employers. Even before Boyce had sought to justify the defiant stand of the workers and their supporters, the daily press—universally shocked by the values embedded in Boyce’s formulation—recognized that the conflict at Homestead called into question fundamental principles of industrial society, in particular, the inviolate nature of the individual’s right to private property. As the Pittsburgh Post explained, “the Homestead mills belong to the Carnegie Company, and their right to put into those mills non-union workers if they should see proper to do so is undeniable. With such a movement, no one has any right...to interfere; and when such interference takes place, it is unjustifiable and lawless....” The workers' efforts to “stop the owners of the mills from doing with their property just as they please is wrong, altogether wrong, and without excuse or justification.” Ezra B. Taylor, a congressman from Ohio who served on the congressional committee that investigated the lockout, explained simply that in Homestead “there seems to be some queer ideas of the rights of property.”

The idea that the steelworkers, by virtue of their having worked in the Homestead mill, possessed rights in it, did seem queer to many Americans. But for Boyce and McLuckie, and for thousands of their colleagues, there was nothing at all queer about such an idea. (Indeed, on this point they could appeal to no less an authority than John Locke, a founding father of American political philosophy.) In the workers’ eyes, it was Andrew Carnegie who had subverted the rule of law by trampling communal rights in pursuit of individual privilege. And when the rights of one rich and powerful individual threatened the rights of the community, the very meaning of American independence was gravely at risk.

In the immediate aftermath of the riverfront battle, those who rose publicly to defend the workers by questioning the sanctity of private property rights were lonely voices; a prominent lawyer from Youngstown, Ohio, was clearly the most eloquent of these. As he explained, the rights claimed by the workers possessed a venerable heritage: it was in fact English common law that justified the privileging of public over private rights. Common law, the lawyer wrote, holds that “private right shall be subject and subservient to the public good.” Moreover, private property rights in particular are always subservient to the public good. “The stickler for property right would vehemently assert that he had the right to buy with his own money any lawful commodity on the market, and as much as he saw fit of it,” the lawyer noted. “Yet the common law very easily made it a crime to create a corner in the necessaries of life. And the law protects the weak against the strong.”

In the late nineteenth century, the steelworkers of Homestead were by no means alone in challenging the inviolability of individual property rights. Hundreds of thousands of urban and agricultural laborers succeeded, for a time, in carrying the assertion of public rights to the very center of a great national debate on the future of the country; this assertion was at the core of the Gilded Age labor movement and the Populist uprising of the 1880s. Indeed, from the days of the Puritan Saints onwards, successive generations of Americans have been plagued by the problem of how to balance the cherished rights of individual liberty, which we celebrate on July Fourth, with the obligation to protect the common good. This is an equally hallowed American tradition that we too often forget.

Seen in this light, James Boyce’s declaration that steelworkers had a claim to rights in the mill represents an effort to grapple with the perplexing problem of how to safeguard community interests in a polity which treasures individual liberty. (In the twentieth century, this problem has held compelling significance in the steel industry: in the 1970s and 80s, it was a bold affirmation of public rights that guided the efforts of community activists in Pittsburgh and Youngstown who sought to forestall the massive plant closings ordered by US Steel.) Boyce was asserting that all workers had a right to the means to make possible a competence—a sufficiency of means for living comfortably. By declaring that to this extent steelworkers owned their jobs, Boyce expressed the powerful ideas which had animated the post-Civil War labor movement in greater Pittsburgh through the early 1880s, ideas which had found safe haven in Homestead for a decade.

On 22 July 1892, John McLuckie and the workers’ committee issued “An Address to the Public” intended to clarify their position on the great issues of the dispute. While neither Frick nor Carnegie ever bothered to worry about the larger significance of the conflict at Homestead, the committee, in its “address” to the public, clearly had. In committee members’ eyes, it had been the ostensible right of private individuals to pursue personal gain that had led directly to “the phenomenon of industrial centralization” and its attendant concentration of “enormous and despotic power” in the hands of a few Americans. To counter this power, and to preserve the independence and liberty of all Americans, the steelworkers declared, it was necessary to assert over and against it the public right:

The most evident characteristic of our time and country is the phenomenon of industrial centralization, which is putting the control of each of our great national industries into the hands of one or a few men and giving these men an enormous and despotic power over the lives and the fortunes of their employees and subordinates—the great mass of the people; a power which eviscerates our national constitution and our common law and directly antagonizes the spirit of universal history in its worldwide struggle after lawful liberty—a power which, though expressed in terms of current speech as “The right of employers to manage their business to suit themselves,” is causing to mean in effect nothing less
Homestead Commemoration Events

Compiled by Russell W. Gibbons

THE centennial commemoration of the Homestead Strike will bring together the talents of Pittsburgh area writers, film-makers, playwrights, photographers and singers, and other participants from across North America. Listed below are some highlights. All the events of July 4-7, most of them in Homestead, are open to the public. Call 237-4554 for additional information.

Saturday, July 4 — Reunion of former Homestead Works employees will fold into traditional Independence Day ceremonies in the park opposite the Carnegie Library in Homestead. Also, the final performance of the play Steel City will be held in the library auditorium; the second act is about the battle between workers and Pinkerton guards hired to break the 1892 strike.

Sunday, July 5 — The five unmarked graves among the seven workers and townspeople killed during the strike will be dedicated at Homestead and St. Mary’s Cemetery. A state Historical and Museum Commission historic marker will be dedicated near the site on the Monongahela River in Homestead where the Pinkerton guards landed during the strike.

Sunday evening, July 5 — Yale University historian David Montgomery and United Steelworkers of America President Lynn Williams will be keynote speakers at sessions of the Homestead Strike Symposium, the centerpiece of the commemoration, with its theme “Lessons and Reflections.”

Historian Paul Krause (his essay continues below), author of The Battle for Homestead, 1890-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel, will be among 13 scholars delivering papers at the symposium, all held at the Carnegie Library of Homestead. (The book is being published by the University of Pittsburgh Press to coincide with the commemoration.) Carnegie biographer Joseph Wall will be among the participants.

Tuesday, July 7 — A state historic market will be dedicated near the Bost Building on Eighth Avenue, the former hotel that served as headquarters for the strike committee and some 100 journalists who covered the strike.

• Throughout the commemoration, a major portion of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania’s museum exhibition, “Homestead: The Story of a Steel Town,” which showed for nearly two years at the Society in Oakland, will be in the Homestead Library foyer. Another collection of photographs about the mill and the community will also be presented in the library.

• The River Ran Red, a 240-page anthology compiled by a team of local researchers about the strike and its impact on the region, will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press to coincide with the commemoration.


than a right to manage the country to suit themselves.

The employees in the mill...at Homestead, Pa., have built there a town with its homes, its schools and its churches; have for many years been faithful co-workers with the company in the business of the mill; have invested thousands of dollars of their savings in said mill in the expectation of spending their lives in Homestead and of working in the mill during the period of their efficiency.

...Therefore, the committee desires to express to the public its firm belief that both the public and the employees aforesaid have equitable rights and interests in the said mill which cannot be modified or diverted without due process of law; that the employees have the right to continuous employment in the said mill...; that it is against public policy and subversive of the fundamental principles of American liberty that a whole community of workers should be denied employment....

The committee wish it known that we...demand of Congress and the State Legislature distinct assertion of the principle that the public has an interest in such concerns as that at Homestead....

Finally, we desire to state emphatically that as defenders of and petitioners for law and order, we pledge ourselves to refrain from violence and lawlessness, and that we rest our cause, which is the people’s cause — the cause of American liberty — against anarchy on the one hand and despotism on the other, with the courts, the legislatures and the public conscience.12

In the era immediately preceding Carnegie and the Homestead workers, it had seemed to many Americans that the nation afforded such vast opportunities for advancement to all its citizens that the dilemma which had stood at the heart of American political culture since colonial times — the conflict between individual and (continued on page 108)
community rights — did not, in fact, exist. Abraham Lincoln, perhaps more clearly than anyone, embodied this myth of universal self-advancement, and no less a critic than Alexis de Tocqueville maintained that the pursuit of “self interest rightly understood” would, somehow, enable Americans to maintain the proper balance between private and public right.¹³

Nonetheless, de Tocqueville, for all his apparent enthusiasm about the American Republic, harbored profound reservations about the future — not only for it, but for all democracies, where “personal interest” was bound to become “the principal if not the sole spring of men’s actions.” For, as he explained, no one could foretell precisely how “self interest rightly understood” would in fact be understood. He feared that secular democracy, unchecked by religious sanctions, would give full vent to the darkest expressions of selfishness.¹⁴

Had he been alive in 1892, de Tocqueville most certainly would have acknowledged that his worst fears had materialized — not only about self-interest, but also about a new industrial aristocracy. “I am of the opinion...,” de Tocqueville had written in 1840, “that the manufacturing aristocracy which is growing up under our eyes is one of the harshest that ever existed in the world.... The friends of democracy should keep their eyes anxiously fixed in this direction; for if ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again permeates into the world, it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter.”¹⁵

It is unlikely that McLuckie, Boyce, and the other steelworkers of Homestead knew the work of de Tocqueville. A familiarity with Democracy in America, however, was not required to see that by 1892 glaring inequalities had circumscribed the independence of most Americans and had defined the social and political landscape of the nation; a forceful aristocracy of “manufactures,” as de Tocqueville termed it, had come into being.

With their eyes “anxiously fixed” on democracy, the advisory committee declared that there must be no place for any new and seemingly “permanent inequality of conditions” in America: this was the central meaning of their “address,” a document that summed up the hopes and fears of America’s nineteenth-century labor movement. And while the address suggested no satisfactory means of protecting the rights of the public against the zealous assertion of private interest, it did call attention to this disturbingly modern dilemma. For this alone, there is reason enough, on the eve of its centennial, and on the eve of July Fourth, to reconsider the meaning of the Homestead Lockout of 1892. ■


² The Pinkertons who died were Thomas J. Connors, Edward A.R. Speer, and J.W. Kline. These findings are drawn principally from the July and August, 1892, issues of the following newspapers: Chicago Daily News, Chicago Tribune, Homestead Local News, National Labor Tribune, New York Herald, New York Sun, New York Times, New York Tribune, New York World, Pittsburgh Commercial-Gazette, Pittsburgh Dispatch, Pittsburgh Post, Pittsburgh Times, Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, and Youngstown Evening Vindicator. See, in particular: Chicago Tribune, 7 and 9 July 1892; New York Sun, 7 and 8 July 1892; New York Herald, 7, 8, and 9 July 1892; New York World, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 17 July 1892; Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, 7 and 8 July 1892; New York Tribune, 8 and 9 July 1892; Pittsburgh Commercial-Gazette, 7 July 1892; and Pittsburgh Post, 7 July 1892. Also see Burgoyne, Homestead Strike, 61, 65-66, 67, 73, 92-93, and 102, and Stowell, Fort Frick, 83-85, 86, 89, and 96.


⁵ Mount Pleasant Journal, as quoted in the National Labor Tribune, 10 July 1886; see also Narodné Noviny (Martin, Slovakia), 4 Feb. 1890. The brief sketch of McLuckie is drawn principally from: AAISW, Proceedings of the Annual Convention (1882), 788; National Labor Tribune, 28 Oct. 1876, 1 Apr., 8 and 15 July, and 18 Nov. 1882, and 12 May 1887; Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegram, 12 July 1889; Homestead Local News, 2 Jan. 1886, 6 Feb., and 1 Mar. 1890, and 23 Jan. and 12 Mar. 1892; Homestead Times, 13 Jan. 1883; House Report 2447, 98, and Burgoyne, Homestead Strike, 24. McLuckie was so popular that when he first ran for burgess in 1890, he received all but five of the 816 votes that were cast.
Rethinking the Homestead Lockout on the Fourth of July

6 This paragraph and the succeeding three are based largely on: Pittsburgh Commercial-Gazette, 4 July 1892; New York Herald, New York Sun, and Pittsburgh Commercial-Gazette, 5 July 1892; Burgoyne, Homestead Strike, 47-48 and 133-34; New York World, 14 July 1892; New York Sun, 15 July 1892; David, “Upheaval at Homestead,” 150; Stowell, Fort Frick, 137; and New York Sun, New York Herald, and Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, 16 July 1892.


8 The labor qualification to ownership, which derives chiefly from Locke’s Second Treatise of Government (1690), and the idea that labor is the source of all wealth, explicated by Adam Smith in The Wealth of Nations (1776), were fundamental tenets of nineteenth-century labor republicanism, the set of ideas around which the labor movement of the Gilded Age coalesced.

9 Youngstown Evening Vindicator, 11 July 1892, and Hogg, “Homestead Strike,” 184-86. Also of interest are: Harry Scheiber, “Public Rights and the Rule of Law in American Legal History,” California Law Review 72 (1984), 217-50, esp. 222-24; and Carol Rose, “The Comedy of the Commons: Custom, Commerce, and Inherently Public Property,” University of Chicago Law Review 53 (1986), 711-81. As Scheiber notes, American legal doctrine “has strongly suggested that some kinds of property should not be held exclusively in private hands, but should be open to the public or at least subject to what Roman law called the “jus publicum,” that is the “public right.””


12 The full text of the advisory committee’s “address” may be found in the National Labor Tribune, 30 July 1892, and the Pittsburgh Post, 23 July 1892.


14 de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 417-18. He warned: “It remains to be seen how each man will understand his personal interest. If the members of the community, as they become more equal, become more ignorant and coarse, it is difficult to foresee to what pitch of stupid excesses their selfishness may lead them; and no one can foretell into what disgrace and wretchedness they would plunge themselves lest they should have to sacrifice something of their own well-being to the prosperity of their fellow creatures.”

15 de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 454.